

Background

Abraham-Sarah	Nachor-Milkah	
Isaac-Rebecca	Betuel	
Esav/Jacob	Rebecca	Laban
Twelve tribes		Leah/Rachel

Jacob's emotional relationship with Leah

1. Genesis 29:16-18

וַיֵּלֶכֶן שְׁתֵּי בָנוֹת שֵׁם הַגְּדֹלָה לְאָה וְשֵׁם הַקְּטָנָה רָחֵל: וְעֵינֵי לְאָה רַכּוֹת וְרָחֵל הָיְתָה יִפְתָּת־אָר וּיְפֶת מְרָאָה: וַיֵּאָהֵב יַעֲקֹב אֶת־רָחֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֶעֱבְדָּךְ שְׁבַע שָׁנִים בְּרָחֵל בְּתֻדָּה הַקְּטָנָה:

And Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. And the eyes of Leah were soft, and Rachel was of pretty features and pretty appearance. And Jacob loved Rachel, and he said, "I will work for you for seven years for Rachel, your younger daughter."

2. Genesis 29:22-27

וַיֹּאסֶף לָבוֹן אֶת־פְּלִיאָנְשֵׁי הַמָּקוֹם וַיַּעַשׂ מִשְׁתֶּה: וַיְהִי בַעֲרֵב וַיִּקַּח אֶת־לְאָה בִּתּוֹ וַיָּבֵא אֹתָהּ אֵלָיו וַיָּבֵא אֵלֶיהָ: וַיִּתֵּן לָבֹן לָהּ אֶת־זֹלְפָה שִׁפְחָתוֹ לְלְאָה בִּתּוֹ שִׁפְחָה: וַיְהִי בַבֶּקֶר וַהֲגִיהָ־הוּא לְאָה וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־לָבֹן מִה־זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ לִּי הֲלֹא בְרָחֵל עַבְדְּתִי עִמָּךְ וְלָמָּה רָמִיתָנִי: וַיֹּאמֶר לָבֹן לֹא־יַעֲשֶׂה כֵן בְּמָקוֹמִנוּ לְתַת הַצְּעִירָה לְפָנֵי הַבְּכִירָה: מִלֵּא שְׁבַע זֹאת וְנִתְּנָה לָךְ גַּם־אֶת־זֹאת בְּעַבְדָּה אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲבֹד עִמָּדִי עוֹד שְׁבַע־שָׁנִים אַחֲרוֹת:

And Laban gathered all of the local people, and he made a feast. And that evening, and he took his daughter Leah and he brought her to [Jacob], and he came to her. And Laban gave her his maid Zilpah, to his daughter Leah as a maid. And it was in the morning, and behold, she was Leah. And he said to Laban, "What is this, that you have done to me?! Did I not work with you for Rachel? Why have you deceived me?!"

And Laban said, "Thus shall not be done in our place, to give the younger before the elder. Complete this week, and we will give you also this one, for the work you shall do with me for another seven years."

3. Genesis 29:28-30

וַיַּעַשׂ יַעֲקֹב כֵּן וַיִּמְלֵא שְׁבַע זֹאת וַיִּתְּנֶהָ־לוֹ אֶת־רָחֵל בִּתּוֹ לֹא־שָׂה: וַיִּתֵּן לָבֹן לְרָחֵל בִּתּוֹ אֶת־בִּלְהָה שִׁפְחָתוֹ לָהּ לְשִׁפְחָה: וַיָּבֵא גַם אֶל־רָחֵל וַיֵּאָהֵב גַּם־אֶת־רָחֵל מִלְּאָה וַיַּעֲבֹד עִמּוֹ עוֹד שְׁבַע־שָׁנִים אַחֲרוֹת:

And Jacob did this, and he completed that week, and [Laban] gave him his daughter Rachel, to him as a wife. And Laban gave his daughter Rachel his maid Bilhah, to her as a maid. And he also came to Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and he worked for [Laban] for another seven years.

4. Genesis 29:31

וַיֵּרָא ד' כִּי־שָׂנְאוֹהָ לְאָה וַיִּפְתַּח אֶת־רַחְמָהּ וְרָחֵל עֲקָרָה:

And G-d saw that Leah was hated, and He opened her womb. And Rachel was childless.

Three different approaches

5. Genesis 31:14-16

וַתַּעַן רָחֵל וְלְאָה וַתֹּאמְרֵנָה לּוֹ הַעוֹד לָנוּ חֶלֶק וְנַחֲלָה בְּבֵית אָבִינוּ: הֲלוֹא נִכְרִיּוֹת נָחַשְׁבָנוּ לּוֹ כִּי מִכְרָנוּ וַיֹּאכֵל גַּם־אֶכּוֹל אֶת־כֶּסֶפֵנוּ: כִּי כָל־הָעֶשֶׂר אֲשֶׁר הִצִּיל אֱלֹקִים מֵאֲבִינוּ לָנוּ הוּא וְלִכְנִינּוּ וְעַתָּה כָּל אֲשֶׁר אָמַר אֱלֹקִים אֵלֶיךָ עָשָׂה:

And Rachel and Leah answered, and they said to him: Do we have a share and portion in our father's house anymore? He thinks of us as strangers, for he has sold us, and he has also eaten our money. For all of the wealth that G-d has saved from our father belongs to us and to our children. Now, do all that G-d has told you.

6. Talmud, Bava Batra 123a

"וירא ד' כי שנואה לאה" - מאי 'שנואה'? אילימא שנואה ממש, אפשר בגנות בהמה טמאה לא דבר הכתוב (בראשית ז:ח), בגנות צדיקים דבר הכתוב! אלא ראה הקב"ה ששנואין מעשה עשו בפניה, "ויפתח את רחמה".

"And G-d saw that Leah was hated" – What is "hated"? If it means "hated" literally, could that be? Regarding non-kosher animals Genesis 7:8 did not speak of their disgrace, would the text then speak of the disgrace of the righteous?! Rather, G-d saw that the deeds of Esav were hateful in her eyes, "And He opened her womb."

7. Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 71:2

"כי שנואה לאה" שעשתה כמעשה השנואים, שהיתה אומרת להנשא לשונא, שכך היו התנאים שיהא גדול נושא לגדולה והקטן נושא לקטנה, והיתה בוכה ואומרת "יהי רצון שלא אפול בחלקו של רשע."

"That Leah was hated" – For she acted like those who are hated. She said she was going to be wedded to the hateful one, for these were the conditions, that the elder should wed the elder and the younger should wed the younger. She cried and said, "May it be [G-d's] will that I not fall to the portion of the wicked one."

8. Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 71:2

"א"ר הונא קשה היא התפלה שביטלה את הגזירה, ולא עוד אלא שקדמה לאחותה! והיו הכל סונטין בה: מפרשי ימים היו סונטין בה, מהלכי דרכים היו סונטין בה, אף הגתיות מאחורי הקורים היו סונטין בה, והיו אומרים "לאה זו אין סתרה כגלויה, נראה צדיקת ואינה צדיקת, אילו היתה צדיקת לא היתה מרמה באחותה."

Rav Huna said: Prayer is so strong that it cancels the [evil] decree; not only this, but she even preceded her sister! And all shamed her: Sailors shamed her, wayfarers shamed her, even those who sat in wells behind the weaving boards shamed her, saying, "This Leah is not the same in secret as she is in the open. She appears to be righteous, and she is not righteous. If she were righteous, she would not have plotted against her sister."

9. Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 70:19

בצפרא "והנה היא לאה" - אמר לה, "מה רמייתא בת רמאה, לאו בליליא הוה קרינא 'רחל' ואת ענית לי?!", אמרה ליה, "אית ספר דלית ליה תלמידים? לא כך היה צווח לך אבוך 'עשו' ואת עני ליה?"

In the morning, "And behold, she was Leah" – He said to her, "Plotter, daughter of a plotter, at night did I not call 'Rachel' and you answered me?!" She said to him, "Is there a teacher without students? Didn't your father similarly call to you 'Esav', and you answered him?"

G-d's Answer

10. Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 71:2

ר' חנין בשם ר' שמואל בר ר' יצחק אמר כיון שראה אבינו יעקב מעשים שרימה לאה באחותה נתן דעתו לגרשה. וכיון שפקדה הקב"ה בבנים אמר 'לאמן של אלו אני מגרש?'

Rabbi Chanin cited Rabbi Shemuel son of Rabbi Yitzchak: When our father Jacob saw the actions with which Leah plotted against her sister, he decided to divorce her. But when G-d answered her with children, he said, "Will I divorce the mother of these children?"

11. Genesis 30:14-15

וילך ראובן בימי קציר-חטים וימצא דודאים בשדה ויבא אתם אל-לאה אמו ותאמר רחל אל-לאה תנינינא לי מדודאי בנגד: ותאמר לה המעט קחתך את-אישי ולקחת גם את-דודאי בני ותאמר רחל לכן ישכב עמך הלילה תחת דודאי בנגד:

And Reuven went during the wheat harvest, and he found mandrakes in the field and he brought them to his mother Leah. And Rachel said to Leah: Please give me from your son's mandrakes.

And [Leah] said to her: Is it a small thing, that you took my husband, and now you will take my son's mandrakes?

And Rachel said: Therefore, he will lie with you tonight, in exchange for your son's mandrakes.