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The Birth of Benjamin and the Death of Rachel

35: 16-20

No sooner had **Ya'akov** finished burying Deborah, Rebekah's nurse (**35:8**), than **he** had to bury **Rachel**. **Then**, after fulfilling **Jacob's** vow, **they moved on from Bethel, and while they were** on the road to Bethlehem, **his** beloved **Rachel died in childbirth (35:16a)**. The family was now complete with the **birth of Benjamin**. Interestingly enough, eleven of **Jacob's** twelve sons were born outside the Promised Land in Paddan Aram.

According to **First Samuel 10:2** she died on the border of **Benjamin** and **Zelzah**. And we know from **First Samuel 7:17** that **Samuel** lived up in **Ramah**, a Benjaminite city. Therefore, **Rachel's** burial place was in the city of **Ramah, which is north of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 31:15)**. The site that tour guides point to as **Rachel's tomb** on the outskirts of **Bethlehem, which is south of Jerusalem**, is not the actual location of **Rachel's** tomb. **The rabbis follow tradition and teach that Rachel's tomb is south of Yerushalayim in Beit-Lechem.**



In **Ramah**, on the road to **Bethlehem**, **Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty (35:16b)**. **Rachel** must have been over one hundred years old by this time. **And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth**, at the point of greatest pain, **the midwife** tried to encourage **her** by saying: **Don't be afraid, for you have another son.**

Fifteen years earlier, **she** had prayed for **another son** when **Joseph** was born. Finally, **she** became pregnant again, but it cost **Rachel her** life. **As she breathed her last, for she was dying, she named her son Ben-Oni**, which means *the son of my sorrow (the word for sorrow and birth pangs are synonymous), because he is causing her death*. **But his father** renamed **him Benjamin**, which means *the son of my right hand or son of my strength (35:17-18)*. From the start of his life **Benjamin** had two things that set **him** apart from **his** brothers. First, **he** was the only **son** born in the Promised Land, and secondly, **he** was the only **son** named by **his father**.

Jacob's love for **Rachel** was timeless. Many years afterwards, **her** death was still fresh in **his** mind. On **his** deathbed, when **he** was preparing to bless **his** sons, **he** remembered that **he** had buried **her** with great sorrow (48:7). **So Rachel died and was buried in Ramah, north of Jerusalem (35:19)**. **Over her tomb Ya'akov set up a pillar, and Moses** comments that the **pillar** that marked **Rachel's tomb** was visible even until his time (35:20). **To this Samuel referred when he sent Sha'ul home after anointing him (First Samuel 10:2)**. It might have been visible during **Jeremiah's** day as the Jews were being taken into the Babylonian captivity. But it is no longer visible today, which is why the location of **the tomb** has been lost and misplaced in **Beit-Lechem**.

The birth of **Benjamin** also points forward to the **Yosef** narrative (**Chapters 37-50**), and ultimately to the fuller story of the nation of Isra'el. As such, **Chapter 35** serves as a transition from the patriarchal period of Abraham, Isaac and **Jacob**, to the beginnings of the people of Isra'el.⁵³⁹