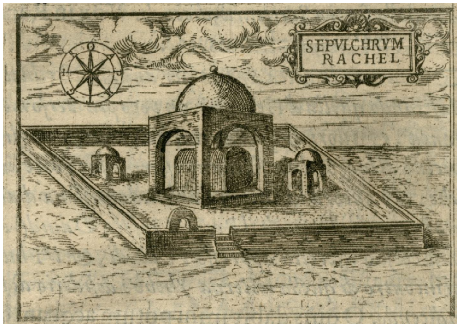


HALACHIC AND HASHKAFIC ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

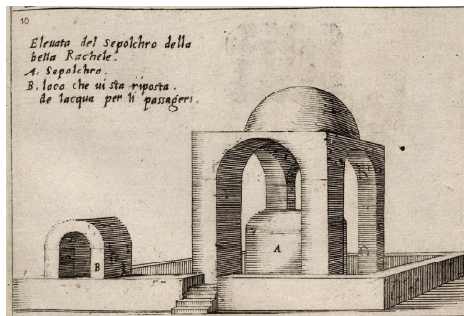
107 - KEVER RACHEL OU ISRAEL CENTER - FALL 2018

This week - 11 Cheshvan - is the traditional yahrzeit of Rachel Imeinu. Thousands flock to the kever, as they have for a thousand years (and probably longer). But there is also a well-known question as to the location of the kever which has been debated for almost as long. What is the evidence, and what are the halachic and hashkafic implications?

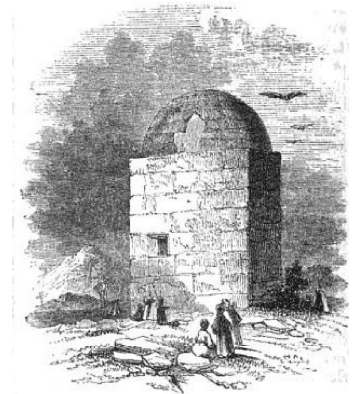
A] THE CHANGING FACE OF KEVER RACHEL



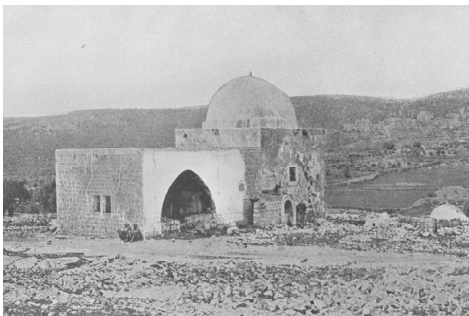
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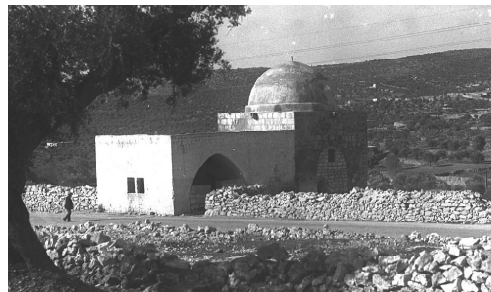
1610



1840



1894



1933



1978



The Burial Plot of the Montefiores, Ramsgate, England



2018

B] HISTORY OF KEVER RACHEL

pre 324	Referred to in Eusebius' Onomasticon ¹ .
333	Bordeaux Pilgrim mentions as 4 miles from Jerusalem.
500s	Efrata and Bet Lechem appear on the Madaba Map south of Yerushalayim.
late 600s	Marked with a pyramid.
1154	Mentioned by Muhammad al-Idrisi as a tomb is covered by twelve stones, with a vaulted dome above.
c1170	Binyamin of Tudela mentioned the tomb as made of 11 stones and a cupola resting on four columns and that the Jews that pass by carve their names upon the stones of the pillar.
c.1200	R. Petachia of Regensburg mentions seeing the tomb.
c. 1350	Mentioned by Christian pilgrims.
1421	Described as a mosque.
1483	Bernhard von Breidenbach of Mainz described women praying at the tomb and collecting stones to take home to ease their labour.
1495	Mujir al-Din al-'Ulaymi, Arab historian, described Qoubbeh Rāhīl (Dome of Rachel) on the road between Bethlehem and Bayt Jala and that the building is turned towards the Sakhrah (the rock inside the Dome of the Rock) and widely visited by pilgrims.
1615	Repaired by the Ottomans and transferred to exclusive Jewish use.
1650	R. Moshe Surait of Prague writes: "The tomb of Rachel the Righteous is at a distance of 1½ miles from Jerusalem, in the middle of the field, not far from Bethlehem, as it says in the Torah. On Passover and Lag B'Omer many people – men and women, young and old – go out to Rachel's Tomb on foot and on horseback. And many pray there, make petitions and dance around the tomb and eat and drink."
1788	Walls built to enclose the arches.
1825	Significant repairs made. ²
1828	Visited by Sir Moses Montefiore and his wife Judith, who was childless and deeply moved by the tomb.
1837	Severely damaged by the Galilee earthquake.
1839	Visited again by the Montefiores.
1841	Total renovation and refurbishment by Sir Moses Montefiore, although some reports say that the Jews did not have full access.
1845	Further extension by the Montefiores, including a Muslim prayer area.
1864	The Jews of Bombay donated to dig a well.
1869	Increased Christian interest in the site and rumors that there was to be a church built next door.
1875	R. Zvi Hirsch Kalischer bought land nearby intending to build a farming colony.
1912	The Ottomans permit the Jews to make some repairs but access is not given to the whole site.
1917	The British occupy Palestine and the Jews clean and whitewash without Muslim objection.
1920s	Tensions increased between the Jews, Muslims and British as to the use, upkeep and renovation of the site.
1948-67	Occupied by Jordan and Jews denied access. Expansion of the Muslim cemetery.
1967	Israel retook the tomb, which was placed under military administration. Levi Eshkol wanted it to be included in the municipal borders of Jerusalem. Moshe Dayan refused.
1995	Oslo Accords. Yitzchak Rabin originally intended Kever Rachel to be in Area A under Palestinian Authority control. Under pressure, he relented and it was kept in Area C under Israeli control. Palestinians now began to claim that the site was always an Arab mosque and denied the Jewish connection!!
1996	Site was heavily fortified.
2000	Attacked for 41 days during Second Intifada.
2001	50 Jews were trapped inside in fire-fight between IDF and Palestinian gunmen.
2010	Israel announced that Kever Rachel will be a National Jewish Heritage Site. This was opposed by Jordan and by the UN. UNESCO passed a resolution that acknowledged both the Jewish and Islamic significance of the site, describing the site as both Bilal ibn Rabah Mosque and as Rachel's Tomb.



1. The earliest sources for Kever Rachel being specifically south of Yerushalayim are Christian. Matthew 2:18 connects the crying of Rachel with Bethlehem in the account of the slaughter of the innocents. However, most assume that this early Christian reference is based on much earlier Jewish roots.

2. Joseph Schwartz in his Descriptive Geography and Brief Historical Sketch of Palestine writes in 1850. "It was always believed that this stood over the grave of the beloved wife of Jacob. But about twenty-five years ago, when the structure needed some repairs, they were compelled to dig down at the foot of this monument; and it was then found that it was not erected over the cavity in which the grave of Rachel actually is; but at a little distance from the monument there was discovered an uncommonly deep cavern, the opening and direction of which was not precisely under the superstructure in question."

C] SOURCES IN TANACH**C1] PARASHAT VAYISHLACH**

1. (ו) וַיָּבֵא יַעֲקֹב לְיֹזֵה אֶשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן הוּא בֵּית-אֵל הוּא וְכָל-הָעַם אֲשֶׁר-עִמּוֹ: ... (טז) וַיִּסְעוּ מִבֵּית אֵל וַיְהִי-עוֹד כְּבֵרֶת-הָאָרֶץ לָבוֹא אֶפְרַתָּה וַתֵּלֶד רַחֵל וַתִּקְרַשׁ בְּלִדְתָּהּ: (יז) וַיְהִי בְהִקְשָׁתָהּ בְּלִדְתָּהּ וַתֵּלֶמֶד לָהּ הַמְיֻלָּדוֹת אֶל-תִּירְאֵי כִי-גַם-יָהּ לָךְ בֶּן: (יח) וַיְהִי בְצֵאת נַפְשָׁהּ כִּי מֵתָה וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בֶן-אוֹנִי וְאָבִיו קָרָא-לוֹ בְנֵימִין: (יט) וַתָּמָת רַחֵל וַתִּקְבֹּר בְּדֶרֶךְ אֶפְרַתָּה הוּא בֵּית לַחֶם: (כ) וַיִּצַּב יַעֲקֹב מִצְבָּה עַל-קִבְרֹתָהּ הוּא מִצְבַּת קִבְרֹת-רַחֵל עַד-הַיּוֹם: (כא) וַיִּסַּע יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּט אֶהְלֵה מִהַלְאָה לְמַגְדֹּל-עֵדָר:

בראשית פרק לה

The Chumash narrates how Yaakov moved gradually back from Padan Aram to Eretz Yisrael. There were many stops along the way, including Bet El. After the family left Bet El³ Rachel died in childbirth. This happened עוֹד כְּבֵרֶת-הָאָרֶץ לָבוֹא אֶפְרַתָּה. What does kivrat ha'aretz mean in this context? Rachel was then buried by the road to Efrata, which is Bet Lechem.

2. ז וַיִּסְעוּ מִבֵּית אֵל וַיְהִי עוֹד כְּבֵרֶת אָרֶץ - א"ר אליעזר בן יעקב בשעה שהארץ חלולה ככברה והבר מצוי. רבנן אמרי כבר הבר מצוי ועונת הגשמים עברה ועדיין השרב לא בא

בראשית רבה (וילנא) פרשת וישלח פרשה פב סימן ז

Chazal understood that עוֹד כְּבֵרֶת אָרֶץ is a reference to WHEN Rachel died. Kivrat ha'aretz here means that the land was cracked and full of holes. R. Eliezer understands that this is in the fall, before the rains when there is a lot of grain in the barns. The Rabbanan understands that this is in the spring after the rains before the intense heat of the summer.⁴

3. אמר לו שמא מה שלא הכנסת אותה לקבורה שמא עונת גשמים הייתה? אמר לו לאו. בעוד כברת ארץ לבוא אפרתה - בין פסח לעצרת היה, בזמן שהארץ מנופה והולכת ובאה ככברה שיכולים להלוד

פסיקתא רבתי (איש שלום) פיסקא ג - ביום השמיני

Both these positions receive support in Chazal. Here they explicitly say that Rachel died between Pesach and Shavuot.

4. בנימין נולד בי"א במרחשון ...

ילקוט שמעוני תורה פרשת שמות [המתחיל ברמו קסב]

Here the Midrash lists the birth dates of all the shevatim and Binyamin is on 11 Cheshvan.

5. (לג) ותלד רחל בלילה בן ותקרא שמו בן עניי כי הקשתה בלידתה, ואביו קרא שמו בנימין, באחד עשר לחודש השמיני בשנת אחת לשבוע השישי ליובל ההוא. (לד) ותמת שם רחל ותקבר בארץ אפרתה היא בית לחם, ויצב יעקב מצבה על קבר רחל בדרך על קברה.

ספר היובלים לבג-לד

Much earlier than the previous midrash, the Book of Jubilees⁵ records the death of Rachel as 11 Cheshvan.

6. (טז) כְּבֵרֶת הָאָרֶץ - מִנְחָם פִּירֵשׁ: לְשׁוֹן 'כְּבִיר' - רְצוּי, מִכֶּלֶךְ רַב. וְאִגְדָּה: בְּזִמְנֵן שֶׁהָאָרֶץ חֲלוּלָה וּמוֹקֶצֶת כְּכִזְרָה שֶׁכִּיר מְלוּי, כִּסְתוּי עֵבֶר, וְהִשְׁרֵב עֵדִיין לֹא צָא. וְאִין זֶה פְּשׁוּטוֹ שֶׁל מִקְרָא. שֶׁכִּירִי בְּנֵעֵמֵן מְלִינוּ (מ"ב: ה"ט) וַיִּלְךְ מִאֶמֶן כְּבֵרֶת-אָרֶץ. וְאוֹמֵר אֲנִי שְׂכוּחַ שֶׁם מִדַּת קִרְקַע כְּמוֹ מִכֶּלֶךְ פְּרָסָה אֹו יוֹתֵר, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאֵתָּה אֹוֹמֵר (ישעיה ה':) מְדַדְיָ] כְּרָס, (לעיל לג:י"ט) חֲלָקֶת [כ]שְׁלֵרָה, כִּךְ בְּמִהְלֵךְ אָדָם נוֹתֵן שֶׁם מִדָּה 'כְּבֵרֶת אָרֶץ':

רש"י בראשית לה:טז

Rashi quotes the explanations of Chazal concerning the reference to the time of year⁶, but considers that they are not pshat in the verse. Rashi gives two pshatim in the verse - (i) from Menachem ben Seruk (10C Spain) - that ke-brat ha'aretz means a long distance from Efrata. The other which is his own preferred pshat is that kivrat ha'aretz means a short distance of something over a parsā (=4 mil) - a 72 minute walk⁷, or around 4 km.

3. The question is how far did they travel from Bet El before she died?

4. Either way the midrashic point is that the weather was pleasant and Yaakov was not prevented from taking Rachel to burial in Chevron due to the heat or rain. Rather, he was instructed by God to bury Rachel by the road.

5. A pseudapigraphal work written in Eretz Yisrael during the Second Temple period. Although excluded from the canon of Tanach, it did serve as the basis for some later midrashim.

6. Which he interestingly quotes as the position of the Rabbanan - that Rachel died in the spring!

7. Da'at Mikra ibid writes that the 'brat ha'aretz' was an ancient international measure from the Accadian *berqaqqai* - (brat karka) which was the length it takes to walk 2 hours.

C2] PARASHAT VAYECHI

7. (ז) וַאֲנִי בָבֹאִי מִפְּדוֹן מִתְּהָ עָלַי רָחֵל בְּאֶרֶץ פְּנֵעַן בְּדֶרֶךְ בְּעוֹד כְּבַרְת־אֶרֶץ לְבֵא אֶפְרַתָּה וְאֶקְבְּרָהּ שָׁם בְּדֶרֶךְ אֶפְרַת הוּא בֵּית לַחֵם:

בראשית מח:ז

Later, when Ya'akov asks Yosef to bury him in Chevron, he mentions to him that he buried Rachel on the road to Efrat/Bet Lechem, again mentioning that it was 'kivrat erez' on the way to Efrata.

8. **כברת ארץ** - מדת ארץ. והם אלפים אמה כמות תחום שבת, כדברי רבי משה דדרשן. ואונקלוס תרגם "כרוב ארעא" - כדי שטור חרישת יום [כארץ]. ואומר אני שכיב להם קצב שכיו קורין אותו כדי מחרישה אחת קרויאיד"א (charuede) זלע"ז [מלוא מחרשה] ...

רש"י שם

Here, Rashi brings two more opinions about what **כברת ארץ** could mean: (i) R. Moshe HaDarsan understands that it is a short distance of around 2000 amot - around an 18 minute walk. (ii) Unkelos understands that it the amount of land that a plowman could plow in a day - a much longer distance!

As such, based on an initial reading of the verses in Chumash it is clear that Rachel was buried on the road to Efrata/Bet Lechem, but there appears to be a fundamental disagreement on whether it was a short distance from Bet Lechem or a long one!

C3] YIRMEYAHU - KOL BERAMA

9. **ואקברה שם** - ולא הולכתיח אפילו לבית לחם להכניסה לארץ. וידעתי שיש זלזך עלי תרעומת. אזל דע לך שעל פי הדבור קצרתיה שם שתחא לעזרה לבניה כשיגלה אותם נצוראדן. והיו עוזרים דרך שם יאלת רחל על קברה וזוכה ומצקשת עליהם רחמים. שנאמר (ירמיה לא:יד) **קול צרמיה נשמע' [....] רחל מצפיה על צניה וגו'**

ירמיהו בראשית מח:ז

Rashi quotes the midrashic source that Rachel HAD to be buried by the side of the road so that she could cry for her children leaving for exile.

10. (יד) **כֹּה אָמַר ה'** קוֹל צְרֵמָה נִשְׁמַע נְהַל בְּכִי תַמְרוּרִים רָחֵל מִבְּכָה עַל-בְּנֵיהָ מֵאֲנָה לְהַנְחֵם עַל-בְּנֵיהָ כִּי אֵינֶנּוּ: ס (טו) **כֹּה אָמַר ה'** מִנְעִי קוֹלְךָ מִבְּכִי וְעֵינַיךָ מִדְּמָעָה כִּי יֵשׁ שֹׁכֵר לְפַעֲלֶתְךָ נְאֻם-ה' וְשָׁבוּ מֵאֶרֶץ אוֹיֵב: טז) וְיִשְׁתַּקְוָה לְאַחֲרֵיתֶךָ נְאֻם-ה' וְשָׁבוּ בְנֵים לְגִבּוֹלָם: ס

ירמיהו פרק י

The famous verses of Yirmiyahu read that a voice is heard in Rama - is this the voice of Rachel crying for her children?

- Rama is mentioned a number of times in Nevi'im and is usually a reference to Rama Binyamin⁹ or Rama in the Harei Efraim¹⁰. Rama is clearly North of Yerushalayim¹¹ and there is no town called Rama anywhere close to Efrat or Beit Lechem.
- This appears to be evidence that Rachel is buried to the NORTH of Yerushalayim and not near Bet Lechem!

C4] SHMUEL

11. (א) וַיִּקַּח שְׂמוּאֵל אֶת-פֶּדֶה הַשֶּׁמֶן וַיִּצַק עַל-רֹאשׁוֹ וַיִּשְׁקָהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר הֲלוֹא כִּי-מִשְׁחָךְ ה' עַל-נַחֲלֹתָי לְנָגִיד: (ב) בְּלַכְתְּךָ הַיּוֹם מֵעַמְדִי וּמִצֵּאתַי שְׁנֵי אַנְשִׁים עִם-קִבְרַת רָחֵל בְּגִבּוֹל בְּנִימֹן בְּצִלְצַח וְאָמְרוּ אֵלַיךָ נִמְצְאוּ הָאֲתָנוֹת אֲשֶׁר הִלַּכְתָּ לְבַקֵּשׁ וְהִנֵּה נָטַשׁ אֲבִלְךָ אֶת-דְּבָרֵי הָאֲתָנוֹת וְדָאָג לָכֶם לְאֹמֶר מִה אֲעֲשֶׂה לְבָנַי: (ג) וְחִלַּפְתָּ מִשָּׁם וְהִלַּאָה וּבֵאתָ עַד-אֵלוֹן תְּבוֹר וּמִצֵּאָה שָׁם שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים עֹלִים אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים בֵּית-אֵל אֶחָד נִשְׂא שְׁלֹשָׁה גְדִיִּים וְאֶחָד נִשְׂא שְׁלֹשֶׁת כְּפָרוֹת לָחֵם וְאֶחָד נִשְׂא נֶבֶל-יָינוֹ: (ד) וְשָׂאֲלוּ לָךְ לְשָׁלוֹם וְנָתַנוּ לָךְ שְׁתֵּי-לָחֵם וְלִקְחָתָּ מִיָּדָם: (ה) אַחֲרַי כֹּן תָּבוֹא גִבְעַת הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר-שָׁם נִצְבִי פְלִשְׁתִּים וַיְהִי כְּבֹאֲךָ שָׁם הָעִיר וּפְגַעְתָּ חָבֵל נְבִיאִים יִרְדָּם מִהַבְּמָה וּלְפָנֵיהֶם גִּבַּל וְתָף וְחִלְלִל וְכִזְּוֹר וְהִמָּה מִתְנַבְּאִים: (ו) וְצִלְחָה עֲלֶיךָ יוֹם ה' וְהִתְנַבֵּית עִמָּם וְנִהַפְכָתָ לְאִישׁ אַחֲרָ:

שמואל א פרק י

Shmuel anoints Shaul and then sends him to meet certain key people and ultimately to join a band of nevi'im.

8. Unkelos inverts the consonants, understanding it to be a metathesis: כברת ~ כרבת

9. See Yehoshua 18:25 where Rama appears as one of the cities in the area of Binyamin. In Shoftim 4:5 Devora sits in judgment between Rama and Bet El. In Shoftim 19:13 Rema is listed as near Giva in the story of the pilegish, which also happens in Binyamin. In Shmuel Alef 19:22 David runs to hide with and Shmuel where he lives in Rama. Shmuel is then buried in Rama - Shmuel Alef 25:1.

10. In Shmuel Alef 1:1.

11. And is sometimes associate with the Arab town of Al-Ram, which is just north-east of Beit Hanina, north of Neve Yaakov and south of Qalandiya.

The first rendezvous is with 'two men at Kever Rachel on the border of Binyamin in Tzeltzach'. The other places he has to go - Bet El and Giva¹² - are also in Binyamin.

- This also appears to be explicit evidence that Rachel is buried to the NORTH of Yerushalayim and not near Bet Lechem!

D] MIDRASHIC SOURCES

12. ותמת רחל ותקבר בדרך אפרת - מה ראה אבינו יעקב לקבור את רחל בדרך אפרת? אלא צפה יעקב אבינו שהגליות עתידות לעבור שם לפיכך קברה שם כדי שתהא מבקשת עליהם רחמים. הה"ד קול ברמה נשמע נהי בכי תמרורים רחל מבכה על בניה

ירמיהו רבה (וילנא) פרשת וישלח פרשה פב סימן י

A famous midrash says that Rachel was buried on the road to Efrat so that when the exiles were marched out to Galut Bavel they would pass Kever Rachel and she would daven for them.

- The route from Yerushalayim¹³ to exile in Bavel is NORTH and would only pass Kever Rachel if the burial place was north of the city.

13. הדבר אשר יהיה אל ירמיהו מאת ה' אחר שלח אתו לבווארצון רב טבחים מן הרמה בקחתו אתו והוא אסור באזקים בתוך כל גלות ירושלים ויהודה המגלים בבבל:

ירמיהו מ"א

In fact, Sefer Yirmiyahu confirms that the exiles were kept in a transit camp in Rama on their way to galut!

14. תמת רחל ותקבר בדרך אפרת היא בית לחם - רבי מאיר אומר בחלקו של בנימן בנה מתה שנאמר (בראשית מ"ז: ו) וַאֲנִי בָבֶלָא מִפְּדֹן מֵתָה עָלַי רַחֵל בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן בְּדֶרֶךְ בְּעוֹד כְּבַרְת אֶרֶץ לְבַא אֶפְרַתָּה. ואין אפרתה אלא בית לחם שנאמר (מיכה ה"א) וְאַתָּה בֵּית לָחֶם אֶפְרַתָּה.

ספרי דברים פרשת וזאת הברכה פיסקא שנב

Chazal also state in the Sifrei that Rachel was buried in the territory of Binyamin - in Beit Lechem! This is very strange since Beit Lechem~Efrata is clearly in the territory of Yehuda

15. ואתה בית לחם אפרתה צעיר להיות באלפי יהודה

מיכה ה"א

..... which is an explicit verse in Micha.

E] WHERE IS EFRAT?¹⁴

16. (א) כה אמר ה' אלי הלוך וקנית לך אזור פשתים ושמיתו על מתניך ובמים לא תבאהו: (ב) וַאֲקַנְהָ אֶת הָאֲזוֹר כְּדָבַר ה' וְאָשֵׁם עַל מֹתְנֵי: ס (ג) וַיְהִי דְבַר ה' אֵלַי שְׁנִית לְאֹמֹר: (ד) קח את האזור אשר קנית אשר על מתניך וקום לך פרתה וטמנהו שם בנקיק השלע: (ה) ואלך ואתמנהו בפרת כאשר צוה ה' אותי: (ו) ויהי מקץ ימים רבים ויאמר ה' אלי קום לך פרתה וקח משם את האזור אשר צויתך לטמנו שם: (ז) ואלך פרתה ואחפר ואקח את האזור מן המקום אשר טמנתיו שמה ויהנה נשחת האזור לא יצלח לכל: פ

ירמיהו יג

A possible clue¹⁵ may come from Yirmiyahu, who was told by God to buy a linen belt and hide it in the rocks by 'Prat', come home, and then go back to find it some time later.

17. (ה) בפרת - אלל נכר פרת

מצודת דוד ירמיהו יג:ה

The classic commentators explain that 'Prat' is the river Euphrates.

12. Giva - or the biblical Givat Shaul - is associated with Tel El-Ful, now famous for being the site of the half-finished palace built by King Hussein of Jordan in the mid 1960s and abandoned after the 1967 war. The modern Jerusalem suburb of Givat Shaul is totally unconnected and is named after Sefardi Chief Rabbi Yaakov Shaul Elyashar who died in 1906 - the year of purchase of the land on which Givat Shaul was built.

13. Although exiles coming from the south eg Chevron would pass by Beit Lechem - see below.

14. There is a debate as to whether the name should be Efrat or Efrata. The road signs for modern Efrat do not agree on this!

15. As set out in an excellent article on Kever Rachel by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom in his book 'Between the Lines of the Bible - Genesis' 2nd ed p.210. See also <https://torah.org/torah-portion/mikra-5774-vayechi/?printversion=1>

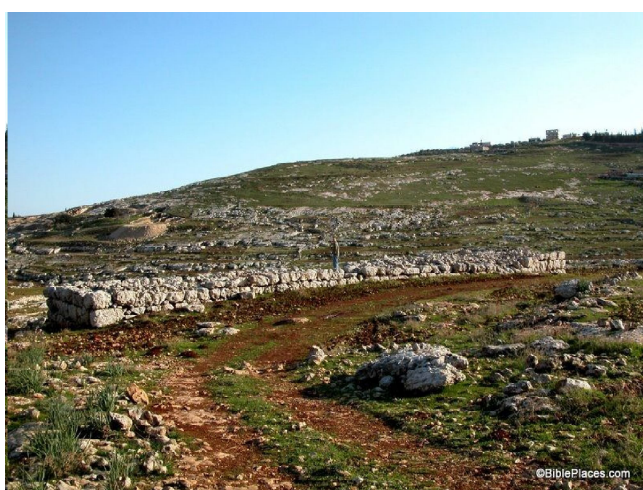
- This is however problematic since Yirmiyahu lived in Anatot, just north of Yerushalayim and the Euphrates is around 800+ km away - around a 2 week journey in each direction. That would be 8 weeks of travel, which is possible but unlikely!
- Also, many parts of the the River Euphrates are not rocky.
- A much more likely solution is that 'Prat' is Nachal Prat¹⁶ which is a very short distance from Yirmiyahu's home in Anatot!¹⁷ It is also rocky.
- This could be the location of Efrat in the story of Rachel's death. There is also a town in Binyamin called Hapara¹⁸. But it is still not close to Bet Lechem!
- In fact there are a number of towns in Eretz Yisrael called Bet Lechem¹⁹. The town south of Yerushalayim is usually called 'Bet Lechem Yehuda'²⁰. In the story of Rachel it is simply called 'Bet Lechem'. In fact, in Nechemia 7:26, which lists the return of the exiles to towns in Binyamin, there is a 'Bet Lechem', between Givon and Anatot!

All of these sources indicate a possible Northern Site for Kever Rachel. Is there a candidate in archeology?

F] QUBUR BANI ISRA'IL

Around 3 miles WNW of Ein-Fara were 5²¹ identical stone structures which the locals call 'Qubur Bani Isra'il' - the 'graves of the children of Israel'²². These date from the time of the Avot, whereas there is no²³ archeological evidence of settlement from that time in the Southern Area of Beit Lechem Yehuda until the time of David.

The French archeologist, Charles Simon Clermont-Ganneau (1846-1923) and later the Irish archeologist Robert Stewart Macalister Robert Alexander (1870-1950) suggested Qubur Bani Isra'il as a possible site for Kever Rachel.²⁴



16. Also know as Ein-Fara.
 17. This is the suggestion of Da'at Mikra on Yirmiyahu 13.
 18. Yehoshua 18:23
 19. Used for a town rich in wheat and barley. See Yehoshua 19:15 for Beit Lechem in the North of Israel.
 20. Eg in Shoftim 17 and 19. See also Shmuel Alef 17:12 where David is called איש אֶפְרַתִּי הַזֶּה מִבֵּית לָחֶם יְהוּדָה
 21. There are now 4. One was removed as part of the construction of Route 437 which is the Ramala by-pass road which comes out at the Yishuv of Adam (or Geva Binyamin). Qubur Bani Isra'il is just south of that Yishuv.
 22. Rabbi Etshalom quotes Prof. Yoel Elizur who asked a local Arab why it was called that and he shrugged and said that his grandfather called it that, as did his grandfather before.
 23. At least not yet!
 24. Although this is a short distance from the main road heading south from Bet El (now Route 60), Rabbi Etshalom quotes Nogah Hareuveni who suggests that this also could fit well with the pesukim. Yaakov pulled off the main road 'kivrat aretz' - a short distance to the lush valley of Nachal Prat to enable Rachel to give birth, and buried her there.

G] SUPPORT FOR THE TRADITIONAL SOUTHERN LOCATION**G1] RESPONSES TO THE ARGUMENTS FOR THE NORTHERN SOLUTION****(a) Shmuel's instructions to Shaul**

18. **בלכתך היום מעמדי וגו' בצלצח** - היכן מצינו שנקברה רחל בגבול בנימין בצלצח? והלא לא נקברה אלא בבית לחם חלקו של יהודה! שנ' ותמת רחל ותקבר בדרך אפרת, ואין אפרת אלו חלקו של יהודה שנ' ואתה בית לחם אפרתה צעיר להיות באלפי יהודה. אלא אמר לו עכשיו שאני מדבר עמך הנם על קבורת רחל. אתה הולך והן באין ומוצא אתה אותן בגבול בנימין בצלצח.

תוספתא מסכת סוטה (ליברמן) פרק יא הלכה יג

Chazal in the Tosefta already raise the question of the pesukim in Shmuel that appear to explicitly state that Kever Rachel is in Binyamin, whereas Bet-Lechem~Efrata is clearly in Yehuda! The answer is that Shmuel was telling Shaul that the men he needs to meet are currently (during their conversation) at Kever Rachel south of Yerushalayim, but will meet him later at Tziltzach in Binyamin.²⁵

19. (ב) **עם קבורת רחל בגבול בנימין** - והלא קבורת רחל בגבול יהודה צדית לחם!?! חלל עכשיו הם בקבורת רחל וכשתפגע זהם תמלאם בגבול בנימין צלצח. כך שנויה בתוספתא דסוטה.

רש"י שמואל א' יב

Rashi brings this Tosefta in his commentary on Shmuel.

(b) Kol BeRama

20. (יד) **כִּדְנוֹן אָמַר יְיָ קוֹלָא בְרוּם עֲלֵמָא אֲשֵׁתְמַע בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל דְּבָכָן וּמִתְאַנְחֵן בְּתַר יְרֵמְיָהּ נְבִיאָא כִּד שְׁלַח יְתִיבָה נְבוּזַרְאֲדָן**

תרגום יונתן נביאים ירמיהו לא"י

With regards to the proof from 'kol beRama' (above) the Targum Yonatan translates it as not being a place at all! It means that the voice of the Jewish people²⁶ crying over the exile of Yirmiyahu²⁷ ascends on high to the heavens! Rashi also bring this explanation on the verse.²⁸

• Another midrash in Sefer HaYashar says that Yosef stopped at Kever Rachel on his way to slavery in Egypt and Rachel is crying is for her son Yosef.²⁹ However, Yosef would be unlikely to take the route past Bet Lechem, since he was picked up by the Midyanim in the midbar and would have been taken down the Jordan Valley - Derech HaMelech - and then across to the Mediterranean coast.

(c) Rachel is buried in Binyamin

R' Meir could be suggesting that the borders of Binyamin expand as far South as Beit Lechem Yehuda.³⁰

(d) The exiles pass Rachel's tomb as they leave Eretz Yisrael

• The midrash may be projecting³¹ the experiences of the Second Churban into the First. After the defeat of Bar Kochba, Hadrian had Jewish captives taken to the slave-market in Chevron.³² They would have been marched past Kever Rachel south of Yerushalayim.

21. **ואקברה שם** - שגלוי וצפוי לפניו שסוף בית המקדש עתיד ליחרב ובניו עתידים לצאת בגולה. והם הולכין אצל אבות ומבקשים מהם שיתפללו עליהם ואינם מועילין להם. וכיון שהם הולכין בדרך הם באין ומחבקין קבורת רחל והיא עומדת ומבקשת רחמים מן הקדוש ברוך הוא

פסיקתא רבתי (איש שלום) פיסקא ג - ביום השמיני

This reading is supported by a Midrash that explains that the Jewish exiles FIRST went to Chevron and only when they saw that the Avot could not help them, they stopped on the way past Kever Rachel to daven.

25. Rabbi Etshalom quotes Professor Yoel Elitzur who brings a lengthy literary analysis which support this reading as a good pshat in the verses. Prof. Elitzur is a strong supporter of the traditional site for Kever Rachel and rejects the arguments for the Northern system.

26. Even if it means the voice of Rachel, she could still be buried south of Yerushalayim, but the sound of her weeping reaches Rama - see Ramban below who brings this explanation.

27. As noted above, Rama was a Babylonian army transit camp to deport the Jewish exiles.

28. Two pshat problems with this are (i) the word 'rama' is never used elsewhere to refer to the heavens; (ii) if it meant 'the heavens' it should have been written 'barama'; 'beRama' definitely indicates the name of a place.

29. Rav Yaakov Medan analysis this position in his essay *מות רחל וקבורתה* available at:

<https://www.etzion.org.il/he/%D7%A4%D7%A8%D7%A9%D7%AA-%D7%95%D7%99%D7%97%D7%99-%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%A8%D7%97%D7%9C-%D7%95%D7%A7%D7%91%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%AA%D7%94>

30. For a more academic analysis which proposes essentially the same solution see <https://www.rimtyer.com/2010/11/09/where-is-rachels-tomb-the-biblical-perspective/>

31. In a common midrashic style which projects the events of the present into the narrative of the Tanach. See for example the P'tichta to Eicha Rabba #24.

32. See the translation of early Church father and historian Jerome to Yirmiyahu 31.

- R. Yaakov Medan makes a number of other suggestions as to the nature of Rachel's crying:
 - it may refer to the taking of captives down to Egypt via Bet Lechem in Yirmiyahu 41 after the assassination of Gedaliah ben Achikam.
 - it may refer to the exile of Bnei Rachel - Efraim, Menashe and Binyamin - after the Churban of Mishkan Shilo by the Pelishtim.
 - it may refer to the exile of the 10 tribes - often collectively called Efraim - by Ashur.
 - there may also be a resonance of the episode of the Pilegish Begivah and the consequent destruction of most of shevet Binyamin.

G2] THE RAMBAN

22. ואקברה שם בדרך - כלומר בדרך אשר יעזרו זה צניח מתה ושם קברתיה לטובתם. כי היא לא מתה בדרך רק ברמה שהיא עיר צארן צנימין ושם נקברה

רמב"ן בראשית מח:ז

The Ramban (in the first edition of his commentary written in Spain) clearly understands that Rachel was buried north of Yerushalayim in Rama in Binyamin.

23. (טז) כבדת ארץ - זה כחצתי תחילה, ועכשיו שזכיתי וצאתי אני לירושלם, שצח לאל הטוב והמטיב, ראיתי צעיני שאין מן קבורת רחל לבית לחם אפילו מיל. והנה הוכחש הפירוש הזה וכן ראיתי שאין קבורה ברמה ולא קרוב לה. אבל הרמה אשר לצנימין רחוק ממנה כחצבע פרסאות, והרמה אשר צהר אפרים (ש"א א:ב) רחוק ממנה יותר משני ימים! על כן אני אומר שהכתוב שאומר קול ברמה נשמע מליאה כדרך משל, לאמר כי היתה רחל לועקת בקול גדול ומספד מר עד שנשמע הקול למרחוק ברמה שהיא צראש הבר לצנה צנימין. כי איננו שם והיא חרבה מהם. לא נאמר בכתוב 'ברמה רחל מצבה על צניה', אבל אמר כי שם נשמע הקול: ונראה צעיני כי קברה יעקב בדרך ולא הכניסה לעיר בית לחם יהודה הקרובה שם, לפי שלפה צרוח הקודש שצית לחם אפרתה יהיה ליהודה ולא ראה לקברה רק בגבול צנה צנימין. והדרך אשר המלצה זה קרובה לבית אל בגבול צנימין. וכך אמרו בספרי (אח"כ הברכה לג:יא) בחלקו של צנימין מתה כדאיתא צפרשת וזאת הצרכה. וראיתי ליונתן בן עוזיאל שהוא מרגיש בזה ואמר 'קל צרום עלמא אשתמע' וחרגם כל הכתוב על כנסת ישראל:

רמב"ן בראשית לה:טז

But after he moved to Eretz Yisrael, he changed his understanding based on the mesorah of the site south of Yerushalayim. He then readdressed the proofs and shows how they can support the Southern location.

G3] CONCLUSIONS

- We have a mesora of well over a thousand years (possibly over two thousand!) that the burial place of Rachel is south of Jerusalem.
- Even though there are indications in the text that the actual burial place is north of Jerusalem, these have not been discovered recently, but have been known about and discussed since the time of Chazal. There are answers to all of the points raised, although some level of textual uncertainty remains.
- The alternative site of Kever Rachel north of Yerushalayim is interesting, and plausible, but ultimately highly speculative. Even though it is accepted by many archeologists as a working hypothesis, it is rejected by all major Jewish thinkers.

H] DOES IT MATTER WHERE RACHEL IS ACTUALLY BURIED?

- Probably not! The purpose of davening at a kever is to connect with God in the zechut of the tzadik. This can be done in any place. Even if people are asking Rachel to intervene on their behalf with God (which is itself potentially problematic) this does not need to be done next to the actual grave.
- More importantly, even if the actual place of Rachels burial is in the northern location, the reality of thousands of years of Jewish prayers and tears at the traditional site gives it enormous kedusha.³³ This is the site at which we connect to the zechut of Rachel Imeinu and, as such, it is perhaps even more important than the actual spot which may contain her remains.

I] OTHER HALACHIC AND HASHKAFIC CONCERNS

- The appropriate way to daven at a kever and concerns of doresh el hametim.³⁴
- Issues of davening and learning near to a kever and loeg lerash.
- Whether Cohanim may visit the graves of tzaddikim.
- The custom of the red thread at Kever Rachel.
- Women visiting a grave when niddah.

33. I have heard this idea in the name of Rav Amital and also Rav Mordechai Eliyahu.

34. See <http://rabbimanning.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Davening-at-Kivrei-Avot.pdf> and <http://rabbimanning.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Davening-at-Kivrei-Avot.mp3>