

THE GOLDMAN EDITION

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THE KOREN
TANAKH
OF THE LAND
OF ISRAEL

GENESIS • בראשית

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Page headers indicate book name and chapter number in Hebrew and in English

Articles are divided into color-coded categories with corresponding icons

Hebrew Tanakh text, in clear Koren font with vowels, punctuation, and cantillation marks

New English translation

Article verse number(s) and article title

Vibrant color images help bring the narrative to life

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Tanakh page

Author's initials appear after each article (see List of Contributors appendix)

Tanakh pages are read right to left honoring the authenticity of original Hebrew texts

Section introductions indicate significant themes in the biblical narrative

Highlighted text helps the reader understand a main point made in the section introduction

Section Introduction page

A section introduction occupies a full-page spread. The text reads from left to right across the spread, even though the page numbers go from right to left.



NEAR EAST

1:2 Pre-existence: void and desolate

The terms *tohu va-vohu* appear together only here and in Jeremiah 4:23, used as a depiction of the future destruction of Yehuda, in a passage that also mentions darkness (in that verse) and desert (v. 26). The two terms also appear as parallels in Isaiah 34:11. *Tohu* appears alone in other verses, always in the sense of uselessness, nothingness, or a wasteland or confusion (see, for example, Deut. 32:10; I Sam. 12:21; Is. 49:4; Ps. 107:40).

Mesopotamian texts do not describe the state of the cosmos before creation, with the exception of a Sumerian text mentioning darkness. At the inception of the

Babylonian creation epic, *Enuma Elish* (1:5), the primeval gods Apsu and Tiamat – both personifications of watery depths – “were mingling their waters together.” In ancient Egyptian texts, the time before creation is described by the phrase “before there were two things”; an era before boundaries and function were established, when nothing had yet been differentiated and brought into existence. In the Egyptian conception, this time was characterized by complete darkness and limitless waters, personified as the god Nun, whose name means “primeval waters.” After creation, the primeval realm still existed at the boundaries of the current world. For example, the underworld is described in the *Book of the Dead* as “utterly deep, utterly dark, utterly endless” (ch. 175).

Thus, although Genesis does not personify or deify the elements of darkness and water as did the pagan cultures of the ancient Near East, it refers to similar conceptions and uses analogous imagery. ■ ZR



➤ God of waters of chaos, Nun, lifts the barque of the sun god Ra into the sky at the beginning of time, 11th century BCE



NEAR EAST

1:2 The deep

The translation of *tehom* as “the deep” in this verse follows a long tradition in English renderings of the Bible, but it conceals something of major significance: the definite article “the” does not appear in the text. This suggests that Biblical Hebrew used the word “Deep” as a proper noun personifying the waters that covered the earth at the beginning of the creation story. Job 28:14 also does this: when asked where wisdom can be found, *tehom* says, “It is not in me!”

Though no other Hebrew word derives from it, the Semitic root *t h m*, meaning “ocean,” is clearly the source of *tehom*. Ugaritic dictionaries tell us plainly how the word is used in that language to mean “ocean” or “Ocean” – the sea personified as a god who plays a role in the story of cre-

ation. In Akkadian, the word is *tamtu*, but the root also produced a name: Tiamat, the ocean-goddess, is mentioned in the Akkadian *Enuma Elish* creation story. Tiamat was the mother of the gods, who was killed in battle and split in two (as the water in Genesis 1 is split by the firmament) by Marduk to create the world. In Genesis, of course, God has no rivals and, therefore, the splitting of the water is a planned act of God as part of creation.

One thing that Ugaritic, Akkadian, and Hebrew sources share is the idea that the primordial water had to be somehow overcome by force for humans to populate the land. In the Tanakh, those stories echo in Isaiah (e.g., 51:9–10), Psalms (89:9–10), and Job (26:12). Genesis 1 alludes to them in literary fashion to debunk the notion that creation involved a battle. When “God created the great sea creatures” (v. 21), knowledgeable Israelites would understand that Rahav, the mythical monster of the sea mentioned in the Isaiah, Psalms, and Job verses, was simply another of God’s creatures. ■ MC



➤ According to some scholars, Marduk (with thunderbolt) fighting Tiamat. Temple of Ninurta, Nimrud, 9th century BCE



NEAR EAST

1:26–30 The creation and role of humans in the ancient Near East

In most Mesopotamian sources of the 2nd millennium BCE, such as the Babylonian creation epic, humans were created from the blood of an evil god. Their purpose was to serve as slaves to the gods, providing them with food, drink, and housing (temples) so they could rest. Even if the gods created food for humans, it was in order for the humans to be able to provide for the gods, as in the Sumerian composition *Bird and Fish*. In Genesis, by contrast, God gives the Earth to humanity as a fiefdom, to “fill the earth and subdue it” and to “rule over” all living creatures. Since He is supernatural, God has no need of physical sustenance (e.g., Ps. 50:8–15).

In the ancient Near East, an image could have one of three purposes:

1. an idol represented a deity – once an idol was consecrated, this physical image of the deity was thought to contain his spirit or essence.
2. a king’s sculpted image would be depicted in monuments to be placed in lands that his army had conquered;
3. the king was understood as the image of a god. For example, among Egyptian pharaohs, the name Tutankhamun means “the living image of (the god) Amun,” and Thutmose IV was designated “the likeness of Re.” A Mesopotamian salutation states, “the king, my lord, is the very image of Bel.”



In ancient Near Eastern literature, the only text that has been discovered which mentions a god creating humanity in his image is the Egyptian *Instruction of Merikare*, which speaks of the sun god’s relationship to humans (see

☛ Thutmose IV, granite statue, Médamoud, early 14th century BCE

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ
 כְּדִמוֹתֵנוּ וַיְרִדוּ בְדִגְתַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל־הָאָרֶץ
 וּבְכָל־הַרְמֵשׁ הָרֹמֵשׁ עַל־הָאָרֶץ: וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם
 בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּעֵלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם: וַיְבָרֶךְ
 אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ
 וּכְבֹשֶׂה וַיְרִדוּ בְדִגְתַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל־חַיַּה הַרְמֵשֶׁת עַל־
 הָאָרֶץ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה נֹתְתִי לָכֶם אֶת־כָּל־עֵשֶׂב וְזֶרַע זֶרַע
 אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־הָאָרֶץ וְאֶת־כָּל־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ פְרִיעֵץ זֶרַע
 זֶרַע לָכֶם יְהִי־הֵיאָה לְאֹכְלָהּ: וְלִכְל־חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ וְלִכְל־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם
 וְלִכְל וְרֹמֵשׁ עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ נַפֵּשׁ חַיָּה אֶת־כָּל־יֶרֶק עֵשֶׂב

- 26 that it was good. Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, our likeness, that they may rule over the fish of the sea and the flying creatures of the heavens, the cattle and all the earth, and every living creature that moves upon the earth.” So God created humankind in His image: in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them, saying, “Be fertile and multiply. Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea, and the flying creatures of the heavens, and every living thing that moves upon the earth.” Then God said, “I give you all these seed-bearing plants on the face of the earth and every tree with seed-bearing fruit. They shall be yours to eat. And to all the beasts of the earth and birds of the heavens and everything that crawls over the earth and has within it living spirit – I give

“Creation in the ancient Near East” at the beginning of this chapter): “They are his images, who came from his body.” The reference to humans as the product of the god’s body emphasizes his physical nature.

The Mesopotamian *Epic of Atrahasis* illustrates the gods’ opposition to human overpopulation, to the extent that they send plagues, drought, and famine to diminish humanity’s numbers. In contrast, God blesses people to “be fertile and multiply” and “fill the earth.”

Verse 26 of the epic states, “Let us make humankind in our image, our likeness, that they may rule over” the earth and all living creatures. The implication is that humans are made to be rulers in God’s image. As

God is metaphysical, any image of God must point to a non-physical quality, such as virtue; God is the best possible ruler, so humans also have to be good rulers. That explains why the Genesis creation story alone, out of the entire ancient Near East literature, portrays humans as ideally created to be vegetarians (v. 29). After all, good rulers do not eat their subjects! It is not until the end of the flood story that humanity is permitted by God to eat animals (9:2–3).

The Torah here presents a revolutionary idea: while in Mesopotamia only the king is made in the image of a deity, in Genesis the image of God as ruler is at the essence of every human being – a democratization of humanity unlike anything else known in the world. ■ JU

וְאֵךְ אֶת־דַּמְכֶם לְנַפְשֵׁיכֶם אֲדַרְשׁ מִיַּד כָּל־חַיָּה אֲדַרְשֶׁנּוּ וּמִיַּד
הָאָדָם מִיַּד אִישׁ אֲחִיו אֲדַרְשׁ אֶת־נַפְשׁ הָאָדָם: שִׁפְךָ דַּם הָאָדָם
בְּאָדָם דָּמוֹ יִשְׁפָךְ בַּיּוֹם אֱלֹהִים עֹשֶׂה אֶת־הָאָדָם: וְאַתֶּם
חֲמִישִׁי פָרוּ וּרְבוּ שִׂרְעוּ בָאָרֶץ וּרְבוּ־בָהּ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים
אֶל־נֹחַ וְאֶל־בָּנָיו אִתּוֹ לֵאמֹר: וְאֲנִי הֲנִי מְקִים אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם
וְאֶת־זֶרְעֵכֶם אַחֲרֵיכֶם: וְאֵת כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר אִתְּכֶם בְּעוֹף
בְּבִהֵמָה וּבְכָל־חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ אִתְּכֶם מִכָּל יֵצְאֵי הַתְּבֵה לְכָל חַיַּת

And for your own lifeblood I will demand account; I will demand it from every wild beast. For human life I will demand account, of every man toward his fellow man: One who sheds the blood of man – by man shall his blood be shed, for in God’s image man was made. As for you, be fertile and multiply, abound on earth and become many on it.” Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: “I – I am about to establish My covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you – the birds, the animals, and all the wild beasts of earth that are with you,



NEAR EAST

9:8–17 God’s eternal covenant with life on Earth

No similar divine promise or treaty exists in the other ancient flood stories known to us. Indeed, no record has ever been found of another ancient Near Eastern civilization mentioning a god making a treaty with a human, in any context. Also, “eternal” treaties are rare, even between kings. The most famous of these was between the Hittite Hattushili and the Egyptian Ramesses II (1259 BCE, fifteen years after the battle of Kadesh). On the other hand, God’s “eternal treaty” described here is followed by several others later in the Tanakh: with the Israelites (Gen. 17:4; Ex. 31:16; Lev. 24:8; etc.), with the priests (Num. 25:12–13), and with David (II Sam. 23:5; see “An eternal covenant” on page 374 in the Samuel volume of this series).

Of particular interest is the reference to the rainbow in this passage – literally, “the

bow in the cloud(s)” (vv. 13, 14, 16). “Bow” here, and in other biblical passages, refers to the archer’s bow, often a symbol of the hunter or warrior in the ancient Near East. In the *Enuma Elish Epic*, after the god Marduk’s defeat of Tiamat, the great god Anu places Marduk’s bow in the heavens (as a star or constellation; VI:82–90), presumably as an eternal sign of his victory. In the Ugaritic *Tale of Aqhat*, the god of crafts, Kotharu wa-Khasis, gives a bow to the human hero, Dan’el, who gives it to his son, Aqhat. The war and huntress-goddess Anat covets the bow, although Aqhat will not give it to her at any price. She has Aqhat murdered, but the bow is accidentally broken and she mourns its loss.

In imagery reminiscent of the flood, God’s bow is mentioned in Habakkuk 3:9–11, where it appears as a symbol of God fighting on behalf of Yehuda. In Lamenta-

tions 2:4 and 3:12, it is the opposite. In our passage, as Ramban comments (to v. 12), God places His bow in the sky as a symbol of His treaty of peace. That positioning of God’s bow fits the idea of it hanging at rest, facing upward – no longer positioned to shoot destruction down at the world.

In verses 15 and 16, God promises to remember this eternal covenant whenever He sees the rainbow. In contrast, in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* flood story, the goddess Ishtar lifts up her necklace of jewels fashioned for her by Anu, and vows never to forget the devastation of the flood. As Nahum Sarna pointed out, Ishtar’s “oath is not accompanied by any promise or assurance about mankind’s future, and it issues from the lips of that member of the Mesopotamian pantheon most notorious for perfidy.”

The divine covenant with Noah and his descendants, confirmed for all time by the beautiful appearance of the rainbow, addressed human concern for the preservation of the species in the face of natural disasters. Unlike ancient Near Eastern polytheists, the Israelites knew that whatever catastrophes may occur will be temporary and limited; life will go on afterward. Thus, Genesis brought hope to humanity. ■ JU



Kadesh treaty fragment, Hittite copy in Akkadian, Hattusa, 1269 BCE

Map of Abraham in the Land of Israel

MEDITERRANEAN SEA



יְהוָה וְאֶת־פְּרֻעַת נְגָעִים גְּדֹלִים וְאֶת־בֵּיתוֹ עַל־דְּבַר שְׂרַי אִשְׁת׃
 אַבְרָם׃ וַיִּקְרָא פְּרֻעַת לְאַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר מִה־זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ לִּי לָמָּה
 לֹא־הִגַּדְתָּ לִּי כִּי אִשְׁתְּךָ הִוא׃ לָמָּה אָמַרְתָּ אֲחֹתִי הִוא וְאַקַּח
 אֶתָּה לִּי לְאִשָּׁה וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה אִשְׁתְּךָ קַח וְלֵךְ׃ וַיֵּצֵא עָלָיו פְּרֻעַת

the LORD struck Pharaoh and his household with terrible afflictions because of Avram’s wife Sarai. Pharaoh summoned Avram and said, “What have you done to me? Why did you not tell me she was your wife? Why did you say ‘She is my sister,’ so that I took her as a wife? Now – here is your wife. Take her. Go.” Pharaoh gave orders to his men about him, and they sent him on his way, together with his wife and all that



NEAR EAST

12:16 Domestication of camels

Camels are mentioned in the list of livestock in this verse, and also play a prominent role in several other stories in Genesis. Camels were domesticated for a variety of resources, including their meat and milk, but above all, their ability to carry goods and people long distances across arid landscapes.

The appearance of camels in Genesis is dismissed by some as anachronistic, because of the claim that the widespread use of camels did not begin until the end of the 2nd millennium BCE, and that they came into general use as domestic beasts of burden only in the 1st millennium BCE.

It is important to realize that the camel’s natural habitat lies outside of the normal range of archaeologists, who concentrate on more densely populated areas. The one-humped dromedary, as opposed to the two-hump Bactrian camel, is the type most likely found in the Genesis narratives, although the Hebrew *gamal* (like the Akkadian *gammalu*) is ambiguous.

Several kinds of evidence suggest that the mention of camels in the Genesis narrative

does, in fact, accurately reflect the reality during Avraham’s lifetime (ca. early 2nd millennium BCE):

- References to the one-humped dromedary appear in lexical texts from Emar and Ugarit (both in Syria) dating from the Middle Babylonian period (1500–1000 BCE), but some scholars assume that these lists reflect a tradition that goes back to the early 2nd millennium BCE. The Akkadian term for dromedary, *ibilu*, is found in texts dating to the Old Babylonian period (1894–1595 BCE).
- Examples of dromedaries are found in Mesopotamian art from the 3rd millennium or even earlier, with definite signs of domestication, such as a rider, harness, and saddle, depicted.
- On the island of Umm an-Nar near Abu Dhabi, two hundred camel bone fragments were found, belonging to the first half of the 3rd millennium BCE, as were depictions of dromedaries at the site. Scholars assume this reflects the first steps toward domestication.
- The importation of Arabian spices, such as myrrh and frankincense, to Egypt in the 3rd millennium BCE suggests that camels were already in use, because donkey caravans (the primary means of transport in the Levant), could not have handled such long-distance trips through the desert.
- Artistic representations of camels date from the First Dynasty in Egypt and are interspersed throughout the 2nd mil-

lennium. These include clay figurines of camels, an ointment vessel in the form of a recumbent dromedary, and a rock carving showing a man leading a dromedary by a rope.

- Further evidence of early domestication is provided by a camel-hair rope almost a meter (approximately 39 inches) in length, dated to the Third or Fourth Egyptian Dynasty (2650–2494 BCE).

Therefore, multiple lines of textual and artistic evidence testify to the exploitation of the domesticated camel as far back as the 3rd millennium BCE. Furthermore, the Genesis narratives do not necessarily portray the camel in common use. It informs us that Avraham’s great wealth included camels and that he later sent his servant with camels to obtain a bride for his son, perhaps in order to convey an impression of great prosperity.

Avraham and Yaakov were both wealthy semi-nomadic pastoralists who traveled to and from Upper Mesopotamia, thus their use of camels was exceptional rather than usual. Ephraim Speiser observes that “the camel may have come into limited use at an earlier time, but required centuries before it ceased to be a luxury.” Thus, the Genesis account accords with the available evidence; there is no legitimate reason for some academics to reject them as inauthentic or anachronistic. ■ EG



Dromedary camel, Sahara desert, Morocco



NEAR EAST

23:15 Four hundred shekels of silver

Trade in the ancient Near East was facilitated by assigning values to weighed amounts of precious metals. This changed during the Persian period, when coins were introduced. The shekel is the Hebrew form of the Assyrian *siqlu* (based on the Semitic root for weighing), equivalent to the Sumerian *gin*.

In a paper published during the preparation of this volume, researchers determined that the earliest time that silver was used for commercial transactions was in the Middle Bronze Age, in the 17th to 16th century BCE. Previously, scholars assumed that silver was not used for exchange until the Iron Age, in the 11th century BCE. When analyzing silver found in hoards discovered in Megiddo, Gezer, Tell el-Ajjul, and Shilo, the authors of the paper determined that the silver originated from Anatolia or Greece – there are no known silver mines in the Levant – indicating extensive trade with those regions at the time. Silver was not used for day-to-day transactions. Rather, it was the currency exchanged for large purchases, such as the land purchase here. The new analysis reported in 2023 reflects a reality at the time of Avraham that silver was used as a means of exchange for transactions such as this one.

The shekel had varying values depending on the era and region. From Judahite inscribed stone weights, it can be determined that during the period of the monarchy a shekel weighed approximately 11 grams (almost 0.4 ounces). The Mesopotamian shekel, which is what Avraham would have been familiar with, weighed about 8.3–8.5 grams (approximately 0.29 ounces), resulting in 400 shekels being equivalent to about 3.4 kilograms (7.5 pounds) of silver. This is a conservative figure based on the range of shekel values, which could reach double this amount. Even at the low end of

בְּתוֹכְכֶם לְאַחֲזֵת קֶבֶד: וְעֶפְרוֹן יָשָׁב בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי־חֵת וַיַּעַן עֶפְרוֹן
 הַחֵתִי אֶת־אַבְרָהָם בְּאָזְנוֹ בְּנֵי־חֵת לְכָל בְּאֵי שְׁעָרֵירוֹ לֵאמֹר:
 לֹא־אֲדֹנָי שְׂמַעְנִי הַשְּׂדֵה נָתַתִּי לָךְ וְהַמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ לָךְ נָתַתִּיהָ
 לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי־עַמִּי נָתַתִּיהָ לָךְ קֶבֶד מֵתֶךָ: וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַבְרָהָם לִפְנֵי
 עַם־הָאָרֶץ: וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל־עֶפְרוֹן בְּאָזְנוֹ עַם־הָאָרֶץ לֵאמֹר אַךְ
 אִם־אַתָּה לוֹ שְׂמַעְנִי נָתַתִּי כֶסֶף הַשְּׂדֵה קַח מִמֶּנִּי וְאֶקְבְּרָה אֶת־
 מֵתִי שָׁמָּה: וַיַּעַן עֶפְרוֹן אֶת־אַבְרָהָם לֵאמֹר לוֹ: אֲדֹנָי שְׂמַעְנִי
 אֲרִץ אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שֶׁקֶל־כֶּסֶף בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ מִה־הוּא וְאֶת־מֵתֶךָ
 קֶבֶר: וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָהָם אֶל־עֶפְרוֹן וַיִּשְׁקַל אַבְרָהָם לְעֶפְרוֹן אֶת־

- 10 burial site in your midst.” Efron was sitting among the Hittites. Efron the Hittite answered Avraham in the hearing of all the
- 11 Hittites who had come to the city gate. He said, “No, my lord, hear me. I give you the field and I give you the cave that is in it. In the presence of my people, I give it to you. Bury your
- 12 dead.” Avraham bowed down again before the people of the
- 13 land and said to Efron in their hearing, “Please, would that you would hear me. I give you the money for the field. Take
- 14 it from me so that I can bury my dead there.” Efron answered
- 15 Avraham and said to him, “My lord, hear me. A piece of land worth four hundred silver shekel – what is that between you
- 16 and me? Bury your dead.” Avraham heard Efron.⁴⁸ He weighed out for him the price he had mentioned in the

48 | Avraham discerned Efron’s real intention: that he be paid the specified amount.

shekel values, this sum is a large amount of money considering the average wage was ten shekels a year (see “A thousand pieces of silver” on page 127). ■ ZR

Hacksilber (silver hoard), Tel el-Ajjul, Aza, 17th century BCE





GEOGRAPHY

35:20 Raḥel's grave

There are two main candidates for the site of Raḥel's grave. The traditional site is Kubbet Raḥil (Arabic for "Raḥel's tomb"), located at the edge of modern-day Beit Leḥem. The tradition of identifying this as the location of Raḥel's grave goes back to at least the 4th century CE, as it is mentioned by both Eusebius and Jerome. However, no remains found at the tomb site date earlier than the Roman period.

Another possibility is the site known as "Qubur Bani Israil" – Arabic for "the tomb of the sons of Israel" – which is located 4 kilometers (2.5 miles) east of biblical Rama. Archaeologically, it comprises a complex of five megalithic structures – probably tombs – that likely date to the Middle Bronze Age based on similarities with structures from this period and the existence of Middle Bronze Age occupation at nearby sites (e.g., Hizme/biblical Azmavet). The central and largest megalithic tomb was known as Qubur Um Bani Um Israil, which is Arabic for "the tomb of the mother of the sons of Israel." Upon discovering this site in the late 19th century, many scholars began to identify it with Raḥel's tomb.

The biblical record is unclear about the issue. Verse 16 states that Raḥel died giving birth to Binyamin while on the way from Beit El to Efrat/Beit Leḥem. Some commentators place the grave at the point of departure, closer to Beit El in the north, while others place it near the destination, fitting the traditional site near Efrat/Beit Leḥem.

Noted biblical historian Aaron Demsky has

delineated a number of textual and linguistic arguments for the location of Raḥel's grave in the territory of Binyamin. I Samuel 10:2 reports that Raḥel's grave was "on the border of Binyamin." Also, the prophet Yirmeyahu poetically portrays "Raḥel weeping for her children" in Rama (Jer. 31:14), who had been exiled after the Assyrian destruction of the Kingdom of Israel. The exiles would have been traveling north toward the road to Assyria, passing Beit El, and not south passing by Efrat/Beit Leḥem. Furthermore, locating Binyamin's birth near Beit El would connect him to the land his tribe would later possess (Josh. 18:21–28), rather than near Beit Leḥem, in the tribal portion of Yehuda.

Linguistically, among the traditional commentators, there is a difference of opinion about the meaning of the words *kivrat haaretz* in verse 16. The grammarian Menahem ben Saruq as well as Ibn Ezra, Targum Yerushalmi, and Rashbam interpret it as denoting a long distance. However, Rashi and many other traditional commentators state the opposite, based on the use of the term in II Kings 5:19.

According to Assyriologist Benno Landsberger, *kivrat haaretz* is cognate with the Akkadian *kima beru*, which reflects a distance, either of astronomy, where it is large, or when qualified, as in *ber qaqqari*, equivalent to "a *beru* of land," where it is short – this is exactly the phrase used in the Torah.

But what is it a short distance from? In the Tanakh and in general, roads in the land of Israel are named after their destination. Verse 20 states that "Raḥel died and was buried on the road to [*derekh*] Efrat." If *kivrat haaretz* in verse 16 describes a short distance, then the verses can be interpreted to indicate a location close to the departure point near Beit El on the road to Efrat. Some researchers propose that there was another town called Efrat in the territory of Binyamin, near Naḥal Prat (Efrat?). In the book of Ruth, Beit Leḥem is usually qualified as "Beit Leḥem Yehuda" to distinguish it from another Beit Leḥem in Binyamin (Ezra 2:21; Neh. 7:26). Others read *derekh Efrat* as indicating a location close to the Efrat in Yehuda, associating it with the road's destination.

Thus, the two potential locations for the grave are based on different readings of this verse. Whether the northern site of Qubur Bani Israil is actually the grave of Raḥel or an unidentified site nearby, most evidence suggests a site in the tribal territory of Binyamin. Alternatively, reading the verses such that the grave is a short distance from Efrat would put the grave at modern-day Raḥel's grave, where it has been commemorated since Byzantine times. ■ ZR, DAA



➤ Qubur Bani Israil, aerial view from the southeast