

## The Deaths of Rachel and Isaac

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain that the drink offering Jacob offered to the Lord was pleasing to the Lord because it showed his submission to the Lord. In this topic, we will learn about the consequences of the sin of Reuben and the deaths of Rachel and Isaac.

Genesis 35:16-20 says, “Then they journeyed from Bethel. And when there was but a little distance to go to Ephrath, Rachel labored *in childbirth*, and she had hard labor. Now it came to pass, when she was in hard labor, that the midwife said to her, ‘Do not fear; you will have this son also.’ And so it was, as her soul was departing (for she died), that she called his name Ben-Oni; but his father called him Benjamin. So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that *is*, Bethlehem). And Jacob set a pillar on her grave, which *is* the pillar of Rachel’s grave to this day.” After spending a period of time in Bethel, Jacob and his family continued their journey toward the place where Esau lived, because Jacob had promised Esau that he would visit him.

When Joseph had been born to Rachel, she had said, in Genesis 30:24, “So she called his name Joseph, and said, ‘The LORD shall add to me another son.’” She had become pregnant a second time and when they were near Ephrath went into labor for childbirth. In her case, she had hard labor. That meant it was a difficult labor and we see what happened as a result. The midwife said to Rachel, “‘Do not fear; you will have this son also.’” The midwife was right and the baby was born. However, the hard labor led to the death of Rachel, as we see that she died. In her last recorded words, Rachel gave the name “Ben-Oni” to the baby which means *son of my sorrow*. However, we see that Jacob named his final son “Benjamin” which means *son of my right hand*. Since Benjamin was several years younger than any of the other brothers, he had the opportunity to spend more time with Jacob while the other brothers were taking care of the flocks. The name of the place where she died was close to Ephrath. Ephrath is another name for Bethlehem. “Ephrath” means *place of fruitfulness* while “Bethlehem” means *house of bread*.

Jacob set up a pillar on the grave of Rachel. That pillar was still there at the time Moses wrote the book of Genesis. That meant the people of Israel saw that grave after they conquered the land of Canaan. 1 Samuel 10:2 says, “‘...When you have departed from me today, you will find two men by Rachel’s tomb in the territory of Benjamin at Zelzah; and they will say to you, ‘The donkeys which you went to look for have been found. And now your father has ceased caring about the donkeys and is worrying about you, saying, ‘What shall I do about my son?’”’” Here, we see that after the people of Israel conquered the land of Canaan several hundred years later, they were still aware of the place where Rachel was buried.

Genesis 35:21-26 says, “Then Israel journeyed and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder. And it happened, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father’s concubine; and Israel heard *about it*. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve: the sons of Leah *were* Reuben, Jacob’s firstborn, and Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun; the sons of Rachel *were* Joseph and Benjamin; the sons of Bilhah, Rachel’s maidservant, *were* Dan and

Naphtali; and the sons of Zilpah, Leah's maidservant, *were* Gad and Asher. These *were* the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Padan Aram." The tower of Eder was a shepherd's watchtower near Bethlehem and means *the tower of the flock*. During the time of the Bible, it was common to build watchtowers near the vineyards or near the places where the flocks of sheep would often be taken to find grassy fields. As a result, this is an example of such a tower. This type of tower was mentioned many years later, as Micah 4:8 says, "...And you, O tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, to you shall it come, even the former dominion shall come, the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem."

While Israel was in the area of this tower, we see "...that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine..." One of the things we see in the Bible is that the Lord does not hide the sins of any individual. Instead, the Lord showed the long-term consequences of those sins. Here, we see that Reuben committed fornication with Bilhah, the concubine of his father. Bilhah was the maidservant of Rachel. When Rachel did not have children during the early years of her marriage to Jacob, she said to Jacob, in Genesis 30:3-5, "So she said, 'Here is my maid Bilhah; go in to her, and she will bear *a child* on my knees, that I also may have children by her.' Then she gave him Bilhah her maid as wife, and Jacob went in to her. And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son." Then, Genesis 30:7 adds, "And Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son." In these verses, we see that those two sons were Dan and Naphtali. Jacob heard about the fact that Reuben had gone into Bilhah and lay with her.

We see one of the consequences of that sin, in Genesis 49:3-4, when Jacob spoke about what would happen to his sons in the future. Those verses say, "'Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity and the excellency of power. Unstable as water, you shall not excel, because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled *it*—he went up to my couch.'" Here, we see that Jacob said Reuben would not excel, even though he was the first son of Jacob. In the following verses, we also see the consequences for Simeon and Levi because of the fact that they killed all of the men of the city of Shechem. Genesis 49:5-7 says, "'Simeon and Levi *are* brothers; instruments of cruelty *are in* their dwelling place. Let not my soul enter their council; let not my honor be united to their assembly; for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they hamstrung an ox. Cursed *be* their anger, for *it is* fierce; and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.'" Here, we see that the consequence of their sin was the fact that they would be scattered because of their anger and wrath. The Lord shows that sin always has consequences. We are then given the names of all of the sons of Jacob.

Genesis 35:27-29 says, "Then Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kirjath Arba (that *is*, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had dwelt. Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years. So Isaac breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people, *being* old and full of days. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him." Isaac had planned to give the blessing to Esau many years earlier because he had thought that he would soon die. Instead, Jacob had deceived his father and received the blessing with the result that Esau planned to kill Jacob. That was the reason why Jacob had been forced to flee to the city of Haran in the land of Padan Aram. Instead of dying at that time, we see that Isaac continued to live for many years after that time. Genesis 25:26 says, "Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob. Isaac *was* sixty years old when she bore them." This verse tells us that Isaac was sixty years old when Esau and Jacob were born. As a result, Jacob and Esau were

one hundred and twenty years old when their father died.

The fact that Rebekah is not mentioned after Jacob came back to the land probably meant that she had died while Jacob was in Haran. In his travels, Jacob finally came to the place where his father lived. Mamre was the name of a large grove of terebinth trees. Genesis 13:18 says, “Then Abram moved *his* tent, and went and dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre, which *are* in Hebron, and built an altar there to the LORD.” The city was already called Hebron during the time of Abraham. However, Kirjath Arba was another name that was given to Hebron during the time that the Israelites were in the land of Egypt. Joshua 14:15 says, “And the name of Hebron formerly was Kirjath Arba (*Arba* was the greatest man among the Anakim). Then the land had rest from war.” Here, we see that the reason for the name change was due to the fact that Arba was the greatest man among the Anakim. Once Israel conquered the land, the city became known as Hebron again.

Isaac breathed his last breath when he was 180 years old. This meant that Isaac lived for many years after Jacob had come back into the land of Canaan. Instead of dying soon after he gave the blessing, the Lord gave Isaac many more years for his life. The phrase “gathered unto his people” is used several times in the Old Testament to talk about death. This is illustrated in Genesis 49:33, where it says, “And when Jacob had finished commanding his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.” However, an earlier verse in that chapter gives an even greater significance to that phrase. Genesis 49:10 says, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him *shall be* the obedience of the people.” This is an Old Testament prophecy about the coming of Christ. This phrase “gathered unto his people” may point to that future resurrection. This phrase is also used of Moses and Aaron, in Deuteronomy 32:49-50, where we read, “Go up this mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo, which *is* in the land of Moab, across from Jericho; view the land of Canaan, which I give to the children of Israel as a possession; and die on the mountain which you ascend, and be gathered to your people, just as Aaron your brother died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his people...” At various places in the Old Testament, we see that this hope of a future resurrection was understood in the Old Testament by those who followed the Lord.

We read that Isaac was old and full of days when he died. He had lived a long and full life. We also see that both Jacob and Esau were there to bury him. By this statement, we see that the brothers were together again at the time they buried their father. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain the hope that we have for the future, which is found in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain these things.