

Genesis

Chapter 23



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Theme: Death and burial of Sarah

Torah Class: Just as Genesis 22 was the climax of Abraham's life and divine purpose, so Chapter 23 pulls some loose ends together and transitions us from Abraham to Isaac.

The first loose end is to bring closure to the life of the very first Hebrew matriarch, Sarah; she was 127 years old when she died. Hebrew tradition is that the trauma she suffered over her only son, Isaac's, experience on Mt. Moriah destroyed the health of this aged woman. I think it is not too hard for the mothers here to identify with Sarah's experience. Imagine, unable to have children, God finally gives you one in your old age. But, now, your husband informs you that God has asked for your child's life. All Sarah could do was sit and grieve as the days went by waiting for her husband to return, but without her only son. Hebrew tradition also says Abraham was 138 years old when his beloved Sarah died.

From a scholarly viewpoint, Sarah's death is important because it provides some details of the very first death and burial of a Hebrew. And, we find that Abraham and Sarah were living in Hebron when she expired, so it is natural that Abraham would want to entomb her there. It is key to remember, that as of this point in time, God's promise of a land set aside for Abraham had not come to fruition, nor would it for another 5-6 centuries. Abraham used the land of others.....lived in a land governed by others.....and didn't possess any territory at all. It is ironic that the only piece of real estate Abraham would ever be able to call his own was a cave to use as a tomb for his beloved wife, later himself, and eventually his children and a grandchild, Jacob, as well.

All three of the great Patriarchs of the Bible are buried in Hebron.....now a territory given over to Israel's enemy, the Palestinians. I strongly suspect that David's choice of Hebron as his first capital city when he became King of Judah had much to do with the awesome reverence associated with the burial place of the founders of the nation of Israel.¹

Be Obedient: The death of a princess (Gen. 23:1–20)

Sarah had been a good wife to Abraham and a good mother to Isaac. Yes, she had her faults, as we all do; but God called her a princess (Gen. 17:15) and listed her with the heroes and heroines of faith (Heb. 11:11). The Apostle Peter named her as a good example for Christian wives to follow (1 Peter 3:1–6), and Paul used her to illustrate the grace of God in the life of the believer (Gal. 4:21–31).

Abraham's tears (Gen. 23:1–2). How often in my pastoral ministry I have heard well-meaning but ignorant people say to grieving friends or relatives, "Now, don't cry!" That is very poor counsel, for God made us with the ability to weep; and He expects us to cry. Even Jesus wept (John 11:35). Grieving is one of God's gifts to help heal broken hearts when people we love are taken from us in death. Paul did not tell the Thessalonian Christians not to weep; he cautioned them not to sorrow "as others who have no hope" (1 Thes. 4:13–18). The grief of a believer should be different from that of an unbeliever.

Abraham loved his wife, and her death was a painful experience for him. He showed his love and his grief by his weeping. These are the first recorded tears in the Bible, and

¹ Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

tears will not end until God wipes them away in glory (Rev. 21:4). Even though he was a man of faith, Abraham did not feel that his tears were an evidence of unbelief.

Sarah died in faith (Heb. 11:11, 13), so Abraham knew that she was in the Lord's care. In the Old Testament, very little was revealed about the afterlife; but God's people knew that God would receive them when they died (Ps. 73:24).

The late Vance Havner had a wife named Sarah. Shortly after her untimely death, I was with Dr. Havner at the Moody Bible Institute, and I shared my condolences with him.

"I'm sorry to hear you lost your wife," I said to him when we met in the dining room.

He smiled and replied, "Son, when you know where something is, *you haven't lost it.*"

For the believer, to be "absent from the body" means to be "present with the Lord" (Phil. 1:21–23; 2 Cor. 5:1–8); so Christians do not approach death with fear. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord...that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them" (Rev. 14:13).

The death of the wicked is vividly described in Job 18, and what a fearful picture it is! When the wicked die, it is like putting out a light (18:5–6), trapping an animal or a bird (18:7–10), catching a criminal (18:11–14), or uprooting a tree (18:15–21). What a difference it makes when you know Jesus Christ as your Savior and as "the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25–26; 2 Tim. 1:10).

Abraham's testimony (Gen. 23:3–6). We cannot mourn over our dead forever; there comes a time when we must accept what has happened, face life, and fulfill our obligations to both the living and the dead. Because he was not a citizen of the land (Heb. 11:13), Abraham had to request a place to bury his wife. The truth was that Abraham owned the whole land. God had given it to him, but there was no way he could convince his neighbors of that.

Like Abraham, God's people today are "pilgrims and strangers" in this present world (1 Peter 1:1; 2:11). We live in "tents" (2 Cor. 5:1–8) which one day will be taken down when we move to glory. When Paul wrote "the time of my departure is at hand" (2 Tim. 4:6), he used a military word that meant "to take down a tent and move on." Our present body is temporary, but one day we will receive a glorified body like the body that Jesus Christ now has in heaven (Phil. 3:20–21; 1 John 3:1–3).

The men of the land called Abraham "a mighty prince" (Gen. 23:6), which in the Hebrew is "a prince with God." He had a good testimony among them, and they respected him. Even though this world is not our home, we must be careful as pilgrims and strangers to have a good witness to those who are outside the faith (1 Thes. 4:12; Col. 4:5; 1 Peter 2:11ff). These Hittites did not worship Abraham's God, but they respected Abraham and his faith. In fact, they offered him the use of one of their own tombs (Gen. 23:6); but Abraham refused.

It is a wonderful thing in a time of sorrow when the child of God has a strong witness to the lost. There is a natural sorrow that everyone expects us to manifest, but there is also a supernatural grace that God gives so that we might have joy in the midst of sorrow. The unsaved can tell the difference, and this gives us opportunity for sharing the good news of the Gospel.

Abraham's tact (Gen. 23:7–16). In the East in that day, most business transactions were carried on at the city gate (23:10) with the people as witnesses (23:7). Arriving at a final price for a piece of property usually involved a great deal of bargaining and deferential politeness that sometimes covered up greed and intrigue. But Abraham was open and

honest in his request: He wanted to buy the cave of Machpelah from Ephron, who was in the crowd at the time.

Following the custom of the East, Ephron offered to give Abraham not only the cave but the whole field in which the cave was located. Of course, this was only a clever maneuver on his part; for he had no intentions of giving away a valuable piece of property, especially to a man as wealthy as Abraham. But Ephron's reply gave Abraham two pieces of information: Ephron was willing to sell, but he wanted to sell the whole field and not just the cave.

Ephron had Abraham in a corner, and he knew it. Sarah had to be buried soon, and Ephron had the only piece of property that met Abraham's needs. So, Abraham agreed to buy both the cave and the field even before Ephron named the price. That is really living by faith! Ephron's price was far too much, but Abraham paid it and claimed the property for himself.

In Acts 7:15–16, Stephen seems to contradict the Genesis record by saying that Abraham bought the property from Hamor and it was located in Shechem rather than Hebron (Gen. 23:19). But surely two different burial places are in view here. It is likely that Abraham bought a second burial plot from Hamor in Shechem and that Jacob had to buy it back years later (33:18–19). Since Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob moved about quite a bit, it would be difficult for the residents of the land to keep track of them and their family real estate.

In our business dealings with the people of the world, we must be careful to maintain honesty and integrity and to put our witness for the Lord ahead of monetary gain. Abraham knew that Ephron had him trapped and that it was foolish to haggle over the price, as much as Easterners love to do it.

Abraham's tomb (Gen. 23:17–20). The key phrase in the chapter, used seven times, is “bury my [the, thy] dead.” Even though Sarah was gone, Abraham showed respect for her body and wanted to give it a proper burial. This is the pattern for God's people throughout the Scriptures. Neither the Old Testament Jews nor the New Testament Christians cremated their dead. Rather, they washed the body, wrapped it in clean cloth with spices, and placed it in the ground or in a tomb. While there may be some situations when cremation is the better way to dispose of the body, for the most part, Christians prefer burial. This is the way our Lord's body was handled after His death (Matt. 27:57–61), and Paul seems to teach burial in 1 Corinthians 15:35–46.

When Abraham purchased the cave of Machpelah for a tomb, he was making a statement of faith to all who were there. He did not take Sarah back to their former home in Ur but buried her in the land God had given him and his descendants. He did not ignore the body but gave it a proper burial *in view of the promised resurrection*. When God saves us, He saves the whole person, not just “the soul.” The body has a future, and burial bears witness to our faith in the return of Christ and the resurrection of the body.

It must be pointed out, however, that resurrection is not “reconstruction.” God will not reassemble the dust of the body and restore the body to its previous state. God promises us a new body! In 1 Corinthians 15:35–38, Paul makes it clear that there is *continuity* but not *identity* between the old body and the new body.

He illustrated this miracle with the planting of a seed. The seed dies and decays, but from it comes a beautiful flower or some grain. There is continuity but not identity: The

same seed does not come out of the ground, but what came out came from the seed that was planted. Christian burial bears witness that we believe in a future resurrection.

When you get to the end of Genesis, you find that Abraham's tomb is quite full. Sarah was buried there, and then Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah (Gen. 49:29–31); and then Jacob joined them (50:13). Genesis ends with a full tomb, but the four Gospels end with an *empty* tomb! Jesus has conquered death and taken away its sting (1 Cor. 15:55–58). Because of His victory, we need not fear death or the grave.

Abraham owned the whole land, but the only piece of property that was legally his was *a tomb*. If the Lord Jesus does not return to take us to heaven, *the only piece of property each of us will own in this world will be a plot in the cemetery!* We will take nothing with us; we will leave it all behind (1 Tim. 6:7). But, if we are investing in things eternal, we can send it ahead (Matt. 6:19–34). If we live by faith, then we can die by faith; and when you die by faith, you have a wonderful future.

In November 1858, missionary John Paton landed in the New Hebrides to establish a ministry among the people. On February 12, 1859, his wife gave birth to a son; and on March 3, his wife died. Seventeen days later, the baby died. "But for Jesus and the fellowship He gave me there," said Paton, "I must have gone mad and died beside that lonely grave." But we do not sorrow as those who have no hope! We have been born again "to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3, NKJV), and we are "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).²

Genesis 23:1

And Sarah was an hundred and seven and twenty years old: *these were the years of the life of Sarah.*

It should be noted that Sarah is the only woman whose age, death, and burial are distinctly noted, probably a point of honor, to do honor to the venerable mother of the Hebrew people. She has been deemed worthy of higher honor, for St. Paul, Galatians 4:22, 23, makes her a type of the Church of Christ; and her faith in the accomplishment of God's promise, that she should have a son, when all natural probabilities were against it, is particularly celebrated in the Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 11:11. Sarah was about ninety-one years old when Isaac was born, and she lived thirty-six years after, and saw him grown up to man's estate. Sarah's conception of Isaac was supernatural; she had passed the age and circumstances in which it was possible, naturally speaking, to have a child; therefore she laughed when the promise was given, knowing that the thing was impossible, because it had ceased to be with her after the manner of women.

(Gal 4:22-23) ²²*For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman.*

²³*But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.*

²Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1991). *Be obedient* (Ge 23:1). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

(Heb. 11:11) *Through faith also Sarah herself received when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.*

Chumash; Classic Question: Why is the word “years repeated three times? In the original scripture it is written “Sarah’s lifetime was (*a total of*) one hundred years, twenty years and seven years. The years of Sarah’s life (*were all equally good*).

Rashi: The reason that the word “years” is written after every number is to inform you that every number has its own message. When [Sarah] was one hundred years old, she was like a twenty year old regarding sin; Just like a person of twenty has not sinned – for one is not liable for punishment [by the Heavenly court below the age of twenty] – likewise, when she was one hundred years old, she was without sin. And when she was twenty, she was like a seven year old with regard to beauty.

Midrash: The verse states, “God knows the days of the perfect ones, and their inheritance shall be forever” (Ps 37:18) – just like their days are perfect, their years are perfect too. At twenty, she (Sarah) was as beautiful as at seven. At one hundred, she was as free from sin as at twenty.³

Genesis 23:2

And Sarah died in Kirjatharba; the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan: and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her.

[Kirjatharba] Literally in the city of the four.

Some suppose this place was called the city of the four because it was the burial place of Adam, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; others, because according to the opinion of the rabbis, Eve was buried there, with Sarah, Rebekah, and Leah. But it seems possible that its name is from a Canaanite, one of the Anakim, probably called Arba (for the text, Joshua 14:14, does not actually say this was his name), who was the chief of the four brothers who dwelt there; the names of the others being Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai. See Judges 1:10. These three were destroyed by the tribe of Judah; probably the other had been previously dead.

Hebron’s association with the name Kiriath Arba (“village of four”) is unclear, but it may also be related to either the joining of four villages into a single settlement or the convergence of roads at the site.

Sarah passed away, leaving Abraham bowed in grief. His love for her had been genuine and tender. She was to him “the princess.” In his sorrow Abraham revealed something of the dignity of soul that characterizes a strong man of God: besides wailing and otherwise loudly manifesting his grief, he broke forth into weeping. The Hebrew words for *mourn* and *weep* carry both ideas.

³ Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

[Abraham came to mourn for Sarah] From verse 19 of the preceding chapter it appears that Abraham had settled at Beer-sheba; and here we find that Sarah died at Hebron, which was about twenty-four miles distant from Beersheba. For the convenience of feeding his numerous flocks, Abraham had probably several places of temporary residence, and particularly one at Beer-sheba, and another at Hebron; and it is likely that while he sojourned at Beersheba, Sarah died at Hebron; and his coming to mourn and weep for her signifies his coming from the former to the latter place on the news of her death.

Chumash; Classic Question: What caused Sarah's Death?

Rashi: The account of Sarah's passing was recorded after the binding of Yitzchak, because through hearing the news of the Akeida, that her son was prepared for slaughter and was almost slaughtered, her soul flew out of her, and she died.

Biuray Maharay: A person reported to Sarah that he son had been prepared for slaughter, and planned on telling her straightaway that he was saved at the last minute. However, before he had the chance to tell her the good news, "her soul flew away."⁴

Genesis 23:3

And Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spake unto the sons of Heth, saying,

[Abraham stood up from before his dead] He had probably sat on the ground some days in token of sorrow, as the custom then was, (see Tobit 2:12, 13; Isaiah 47:1; and Genesis 37:35); and when this time was finished he arose and began to treat about a burying place.

The Hittites had their principal center in Anatolia (modern Turkey). But there were some enclaves of Hittites (sons of Heth) in Canaan (see 15:20), and the region of Hebron was apparently one of them. It was with Hittites that Abraham negotiated to buy a burial spot for his beloved wife Sarah.

Genesis 23:4

I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a buryingplace with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.

[I am a stranger and a sojourner] It appears from Hebrews 11:13-16; 1 Peter 2:11; Psalm 39:12, that these words refer more to the state of his mind than of his body. He felt that he had no certain dwelling place, and was seeking by faith a city that had foundations. Abraham calls himself a stranger and a sojourner even in the Promised Land which God had promised to give to him.

⁴ Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

No contradiction with Genesis 33:19. Jacob bought a place for an altar, not to bury the dead. There were about eighty years between the time of the purchase of Abraham and that of Jacob. If it was the same purchase, Jacob did it to avoid trouble when he came back to Canaan. Cp. Genesis 50:13; Joshua 24:32.

Ramban, “I am a stranger and sojourner with you” It was customary for them to have separate burial grounds for each family and one burial ground for the internment of all strangers. Now Abraham said to the children of Heth: “I am a stranger from another land and have not inherited a burial ground in this land from my ancestors. Now I am a sojourner with you since I have desired to dwell in this land. Therefore give me a burying-place for an everlasting possession just as one of you.” However, since Abraham used the word “*t’nu* (give), [which has the same root as *matanah*,” (gift)], they suspected that he desired it from them as a gift. They therefore answered him: “You are not regarded by us as a stranger or sojourner. Rather, you are a king. G-d has made you king over us, and we and our land are subservient to you. Take any burial ground you desire, and bury your dead there. It shall be unto you a possession of a burial-place forever since no one of us shall withhold it from you.”⁵

Genesis 23:5

And the children of Heth answered Abraham, saying unto him,

Genesis 23:6

Hear us, my lord: thou art a mighty prince among us: in the choice of our sepulchres bury thy dead; none of us shall withhold from thee his sepulchre, but that thou mayest bury thy dead.

Abraham’s purchase of a burial cave “near Mamre” (v. 19; cf. 13:18; 14:13; 18:1) was occasioned by the death of Sarah, who lived to be 127. (*Isaac was 37 at the time, 17:17.*)

Chrysostom: Abraham Had Sufficient Riches In His Attitude: Sarah’s death was the occasion for the patriarch’s first instance of acquiring land. Sacred Scripture in fact shows us in every case the patriarch’s virtue, in that he passed all his time as an alien and a nomad. And it mentions this latest item for us to learn that the man who enjoyed so much assistance from on high, who had become so famous and had increased in number to such a vast multitude, could not call a place his own, unlike many people today, who give all their attention to acquiring land, whole towns and great wealth beyond telling.⁶

⁵ Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

⁶ Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, IntersVarsity Press

Genesis 23:7

And Abraham stood up, and bowed himself to the people of the land, *even* to the children of Heth.

Genesis 23:8

And he communed with them, saying, If it be your mind that I should bury my dead out of my sight; hear me, and entreat for me to Ephron the son of Zohar,

[**Entreat for me to Ephron**] Abraham had already seen the cave and field, and finding to whom they belonged, and that they would answer his purpose, came to the gate of Hebron, where the elders of the people sat to administer justice, etc., and where bargains and sales were made and witnessed, and having addressed himself to the elders, among whom Ephron was, though it appears he was not personally known to Abraham, he begged them to use their influence with the owner of the cave and field to sell it to him, that it might serve him and his family for a place of sepulture.

Genesis 23:9

That he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he hath, which *is* in the end of his field; for as much money as it is worth he shall give it me for a possession of a buryingplace amongst you.

[**Machpelah**] = the “double case.” The Hebrew word *machpelah* (H4375)) means “double.” Perhaps it was a double cave. It still exists inside a massive wall, which must have been built before the Christian era. It is one of the holiest shrines of the Mohammedan world. Neither Jew nor Christian is permitted to enter it.

Chumash: The Cave of Machpeilah: It is not disputed amongst the commentators that the word Machpeilah means “double,” but we do see a difference of opinion about what the “double” refers to. In the current story, the term Machpeilah is mentioned three times, each with a different connotation:

1. “His Cave of Machpeilah, which is at the end of his field” (v.9). This suggest that the cave was called Machpeilah.
2. “The field of Efron which was in Machpeilah” (v.17). This suggest that the area was called Machpeilah.
3. “The cave in the field of Machpeilah” (v.19). This suggests that some other quality in the field besides the cave gave it the name Machpeilah.

The latter two verses strongly suggest that it was not the cave which was called Machpeilah, but some other local feature.⁷

⁷ Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

Ramban: “That he may give me” The intent of this is “that he may give it to me in such a way that I will consider it as a gift (even) if I will buy it from him for its full value.” It is for this reason that Abraham did not mention the word “selling.”⁸

Genesis 23:10

And Ephron dwelt among the children of Heth: and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the audience of the children of Heth, *even* of all that went in at the gate of his city, saying,

[And Ephron dwelt among the children of Heth] And Ephron, *yosheb*, was sitting among the children of Heth, but, as was before conjectured, was personally unknown to Abraham; he therefore answered for himself, making a free tender of the field, etc., to Abraham, in the presence of all the people, which amounted to a legal conveyance of the whole property to the patriarch.

When Abraham bought this cave, he was renouncing Paddan Aram, that is, NW Mesopotamia (cf. 25:20). Canaan was now Abraham’s new native land. There would never be a return to Mesopotamia. But interestingly the only part of the Promised Land Abraham himself ever received he bought, and that was a burial cave. This first property of the patriarchs— a cave—bound them to the Promised Land. This was a real “occupation” of the land. Later patriarchs would also die and be buried with their ancestors in Canaan. It may also be noted that the settlements in the land of Israel today were purchased from the Arabs at inflated prices.

[at the gate of his city] Interesting how many times legal actions take place at the city gate. This is where the city council sat, where legal actions could be witnessed. Lot at the gate Gen 19:1; Boaz at the gate Ruth 4:1. Where men of authority conducted their business.

Ramban: Ephron by way of good conduct or trickery, [possible hoping to receive a higher price for the larger transaction], said that he would give him the field and the cave which was in it since it would be unbecoming for such an honorable person to own the cave as a possession for a burial-place while the field belonged to another. Abraham rejoiced at this suggestion and he purchased it in its entirety for the price that Ephron mentioned.⁹

⁸ Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

⁹ Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

Genesis 23:11

Nay, my lord, hear me: the field give I thee, and the cave that is therein, I give it thee; in the presence of the sons of my people give I it thee: bury thy dead.

Ramban: “In the presence of the sons of my people” The intent thereof is to state: “Behold, all the people are present, and they are knowledgeable witnesses to the sale. Therefore do not fear denial or retraction, and so bury thy dead from now on, for it is yours and I cannot retract.” But Abraham did not do so for even after he paid its full value in silver he first took symbolic legal possession of the field and the cave. He established them as his possession in the presence of the people of the city, and all those who came in at the gate of the city, the merchants and the residents who happened to be there, and after that he buried her.¹⁰

Genesis 23:12

And Abraham bowed down himself before the people of the land.

Genesis 23:13

And he spake unto Ephron in the audience of the people of the land, saying, But if thou wilt give it, I pray thee, hear me: I will give thee money for the field; take it of me, and I will bury my dead there.

The point of this event was to ensure that the cave and field would be Abraham’s possession. He was not presumptuous. In faith he bought the land, taking nothing from these people (cf. 14:21-24). It was important then where people buried their dead; burial was to be done in their native land. Thus there was no going back. Though Abraham was an alien and a stranger among the people (23:4), his hope was in the land.

[**If thou wilt give it**] Instead of, if thou wilt give it, we should read, But if thou wilt sell it, I will give thee money for the field; *keseph*, silver, not coined money, for it is not probable that any such was then in use.

Genesis 23:14

And Ephron answered Abraham, saying unto him,

Genesis 23:15

My lord, hearken unto me: the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver; what is that betwixt me and thee? bury therefore thy dead.

[**The land is worth four hundred shekels of silver**] Though the words is worth are not in the text, yet they are necessarily expressed here to adapt the Hebrew to the idiom of our tongue.

¹⁰ Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

[*what is that betwixt me and thee?*] Question 44. Next question is in Genesis 24:5.

Genesis 23:16

And Abraham hearkened unto Ephron; and Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in the audience of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current *money* with the merchant.

In this legal transaction Abraham wanted to purchase only the cave owned by Ephron, but Ephron wanted to sell the whole field. When Ephron said he would give the field and the cave (three times in v. 11), he did not mean it was free. This was bedouin bargaining—giving for giving. Though Abraham did not want the whole field, he was willing to take it at a high price (400 shekels of silver) to get the cave. The transaction was then finalized in the presence of all the Hittites at the city gate, the place of legal and business dealings. In this double cave was buried not only Sarah but also Abraham (25:9), Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and Jacob and Leah (49:29-31; 50:13). In later years it became a Moslem possession and a mosque was built over it.

Hittite Law: If you sold part of your property you still had to pay taxes on all of it. If you sold all of it you were exempt.

The polite interchange between Abraham and Ephron was typical of bargaining at that time. Ephron graciously offered to give his land to Abraham at no charge; Abraham insisted on paying for it; Ephron politely mentioned the price but said, in effect, that it wasn't important; Abraham paid the 400 shekels of silver. Both men knew what was going on as they went through the bargaining process. If Abraham had accepted the land as a gift when it was offered, he would have insulted Ephron, who then would have rescinded his offer. Many Middle Eastern shopkeepers still follow this ritual with their customers.

Genesis 23:17

And the field of Ephron, which *was* in Machpelah, which *was* before Mamre, the field, and the cave which *was* therein, and all the trees that *were* in the field, that *were* in all the borders round about, were made sure

[**All the trees that were in the field**] It is possible that all these were specified in the agreement.

Genesis 23:18

Unto Abraham for a possession in the presence of the children of Heth, before all that went in at the gate of his city.

Genesis 23:19

And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre: the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan.

[after this, Abraham buried Sarah] Sarah was laid to rest on the same day the property was purchased, according to custom.

Years later, Abraham would be buried in the same cave (25:10).

Not only *Sarah*, but Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, Leah, and Jacob were buried there (see 25:9; 49:31; 50:13). The site of the cave has been identified with two caves, one above the other, beneath the great mosque in the center of modern Hebron.

(Gen. 25:8-10) ⁸*Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people. ⁹And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre; ¹⁰The field which Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife.*

(Gen. 49:28-33) ²⁸*All these are the twelve tribes of Israel: and this is it that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them. ²⁹And he charged them, and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, ³⁰In the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a buryingplace. ³¹There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah. ³²The purchase of the field and of the cave that is therein was from the children of Heth. ³³And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.*

(Gen. 50:13) *For his sons carried him into the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham bought with the field for a possession of a buryingplace of Ephron the Hittite, before Mamre.*

Ramban: “In the land of Canaan” In my opinion, the reason for the verses is only to mention that this was the land of Canaan, not the land of the Philistines. Moreover, his wife died and was buried in the inheritance of the Eternal. Further, Scripture wanted to inform us of the place of the burial of the patriarchs since we are obligated to honor the burial place of our holy ancestors.¹¹

Genesis 23:20

And the field, and the cave that is therein, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession of a buryingplace by the sons of Heth.

Torah Class: While the bargaining session we have read between Abraham and Ephron seems quaint if not humorous.....Ephron obviously being a leader among the people called Hittites who ruled over this area..... ancient records reveal very good legal reasons that the deal Abraham was pursuing for this Cave of Machpelah as a tomb for he and his wife, took the course it did.

The issue was this: in modern terms, Abraham and his clan were resident aliens in Canaan. It was typical of that day that foreigners could NOT purchase land. Land was everything; for a family to lose its land was a catastrophe. For a family to sell its land to a foreigner was an abomination. Yet, it did occur and it was legal.

However, HOW the land was acquired was very important. For instance, had Abraham accepted it as a gift, not only would that have been insulting to the Hittites that he would do such a thing, but it likely would have been challenged in the years to come by someone claiming that it was wrong to sell land to a resident alien in the first place. So, Abraham could not accept Ephron’s offer of the cave as a gift. Yet, Abraham also had to be very careful in his bargaining for it; because if he bought it at a price that did not seem fair to later generations, that was reason enough to take the land back.

Therefore, Abraham dickered around until Ephron set the price before Abraham was forced to make an offer. The price.....400 shekels of silver.....was high. But, by Abraham graciously insisting that he is happy to pay full price, he took away most legal challenges that could have led to having that land taken away from him or his descendants sometime in the future.

Burial spots were terribly important to the ancients; and, I dare say, burial sites still bear enormous significance even among our own modern societies. So, this entire process took place before many of the town’s citizens.....Hittite citizens..... so they could be witnesses to the transfer of ownership of that cave from Ephron to Abraham.¹²

History, God’s People—Biblical history centers on significant moments for God’s people rather than for international relationships. Sarah’s death gave opportunity for Abraham to gain legal deed to a piece of land in the Promised Land. Thus God’s promise of land (12:7) began to be fulfilled.¹³

¹¹ Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

¹² Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

¹³ Disciple’s Study Bible Notes

Book of Jasher Chapter 23

88 And Abraham sought for Sarah, and could not find her, and he made inquiries concerning her, and they said unto him, She went as far as Hebron to seek you both where you had gone, for thus was she informed.

89 And Abraham and Isaac went to her to Hebron, and when they found that she was dead they lifted up their voices and wept bitterly over her; and Isaac fell upon his mother's face and wept over her, and he said, O my mother, my mother, how hast thou left me, and where hast thou gone? O how, how hast thou left me!

90 And Abraham and Isaac wept greatly and all their servants wept with them on account of Sarah, and they mourned over her a great and heavy mourning.

CHAPTER 24

1 And the life of Sarah was one hundred and twenty-seven years, and Sarah died; and Abraham rose up from before his dead to seek a burial place to bury his wife Sarah; and he went and spoke to the children of Heth, the inhabitants of the land, saying,

2 I am a stranger and a sojourner with you in your land; give me a possession of a burial place in your land, that I may bury my dead from before me.

3 And the children of Heth said unto Abraham, behold the land is before thee, in the choice of our sepulchers bury thy dead, for no man shall withhold thee from burying thy dead.

4 And Abraham said unto them, If you are agreeable to this go and entreat for me to Ephron, the son of Zochar, requesting that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which is in the end of his field, and I will purchase it of him for whatever he desire for it.

5 And Ephron dwelt among the children of Heth, and they went and called for him, and he came before Abraham, and Ephron said unto Abraham, Behold all thou requirest thy servant will do; and Abraham said, No, but I will buy the cave and the field which thou hast for value, In order that it may be for a possession of a burial place for ever.

6 And Ephron answered and said, Behold the field and the cave are before thee, give whatever thou desirest; and Abraham said, Only at full value will I buy it from thy hand, and from the hands of those that go in at the gate of thy city, and from the hand of thy seed for ever.

7 And Ephron and all his brethren heard this, and Abraham weighed to Ephron four hundred shekels of silver in the hands of Ephron and in the hands of all his brethren; and Abraham wrote this transaction, and he wrote it and testified it with four witnesses.

8 And these are the names of the witnesses, Amigal son of Abishna the Hittite, Adichorom son of Ashunach the Hivite, Abdon son of Achiram the Gomerite, Bakdil the son of Abudish the Zidonite.

9 And Abraham took the book of the purchase, and placed it in his treasures, and these are the words that Abraham wrote in the book, namely:

10 That the cave and the field Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite, and from his seed, and from those that go out of his city, and from their seed for ever, are to be a purchase to Abraham and to his seed and to those that go forth from his loins, for a

possession of a burial place for ever; and he put a signet to it and testified it with witnesses.

11 And the field and the cave that was in it and all that place were made sure unto Abraham and unto his seed after him, from the children of Heth; behold it is before Mamre in Hebron, which is in the land of Canaan.

12 And after this Abraham buried his wife Sarah there, and that place and all its boundary became to Abraham and unto his seed for a possession of a burial place.

13 And Abraham buried Sarah with pomp as observed at the interment of kings, and she was buried in very fine and beautiful garments.

14 And at her bier was Shem, his sons Eber and Abimelech, together with Anar, Ashcol and Mamre, and all the grandees of the land followed her bier.

15 And the days of Sarah were one hundred and twenty-seven years and she died, and Abraham made a great and heavy mourning, and he performed the rites of mourning for seven days.

16 And all the inhabitants of the land comforted Abraham and Isaac his son on account of Sarah.

17 And when the days of their mourning passed by Abraham sent away his son Isaac, and he went to the house of Shem and Eber, to learn the ways of the Lord and his instructions, and Abraham remained there three years.

18 At that time Abraham rose up with all his servants, and they went and returned homeward to Beersheba, and Abraham and all his servants remained in Beersheba.

19 And at the revolution of the year Abimelech king of the Philistines died in that year; he was one hundred and ninety-three years old at his death; and Abraham went with his people to the land of the Philistines, and they comforted the whole household and all his servants, and he then turned and went home.

20 And it was after the death of Abimelech that the people of Gerar took Benmalich his son, and he was only twelve years old, and they made him lying in the place of his father.

21 And they called his name Abimelech after the name of his father, for thus was it their custom to do in Gerar, and Abimelech reigned instead of Abimelech his father, and he sat upon his throne.

22 And Lot the son of Haran also died in those days, in the thirty-ninth year of the life of Isaac, and all the days that Lot lived were one hundred and forty years and he died.

23 And these are the children of Lot, that were born to him by his daughters, the name of the first born was Moab, and the name of the second was Benami.

24 And the two sons of Lot went and took themselves wives from the land of Canaan, and they bare children to them, and the children of Moab were Ed, Mayon, Tarsus, and Kanvil, four sons, these are fathers to the children of Moab unto this day.

25 And all the families of the children of Lot went to dwell wherever they should light upon, for they were fruitful and increased abundantly.

26 And they went and built themselves cities in the land where they dwelt, and they called the names of the cities which they built after their own names.

27 And Nahor the son of Terah, brother to Abraham, died in those days in the fortieth year of the life of Isaac, and all the days of Nahor were one hundred and seventy-two years and he died and was buried in Haran.

28 And when Abraham heard that his brother was dead he grieved sadly, and he mourned over his brother many days.¹⁴

¹⁴ The Book of Jasher, Faithfully Translated 1840, Hebrew to English, J.H.Perry & Co, Salt Lake City UT