

Genesis 23 - The Death of Sarah; Purchase of Burial Lot; Burial of Sarah

II. Epilogue: Patriarchal history (Gen 11:10—50:26)

(1) Life of Abraham (Gen 11:10—25:11)

(B) Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12:1—25:11)

(c) Transition of covenant from Abraham to Isaac (Gen 22:20—25:11)

(ii) Death and burial of Sarah (23:1-20)

(a) Death of Sarah (23:1-2)

(b) Purchase of Sarah's burial lot (23:3-18)

(c) Burial of Sarah (23:19-20)

Genesis 23

(ii) Death and burial of Sarah (23:1-20)

1 Now Sarah lived 127 years; *these were* the years of the life of Sarah.

1 Now Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years; *these were* the years of the life of Sarah.

1 Sarah lived for 127 years. That's how long Sarah's life was.

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

- Sarah is the only woman in Scripture whose age is recorded with her death (~2028 BC). This indicates her special place in biblical history and to honor her as the mother of the Hebrew people.

— Abraham was 137 years old, and would go on to live another 38 years; Isaac was 37 years old

— Sarah is mentioned in Is 51:1-2; 1 Peter 3:5-6

2 Sarah died in Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan; and Abraham came in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.

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2 She died in Kiriath-arba (that is, in Hebron) in the land of Canaan. Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.

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.

- "...Hebron" - because of Abraham's connection with the area, Kirjatharba ("village of four") was later renamed Hebron ("friend"), because Abraham was a "friend of God" (Cf. Joshua 14:15; 15:13; 21:11; Judges 1:10)
- Sarah died in Hebron, but according to 21:33-34; 22:19, Abraham was living in Beersheba. Abraham and Sarah were either separated geographically at the time of her death, for some undisclosed reason, or they had moved from Beersheba back to Hebron at some point in the previous few years (the offering of Isaac was at approximately age 30)
- 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
- In burying Sarah, Abraham ignored his ancestry, not going back to Paddan Aram for her burial.

(b) Purchase of Sarah's burial lot (23:3-18)

- 3 Then Abraham arose from *mourning* before his dead, and spoke to the sons of Heth, saying,
- 3 Then Abraham rose from before his dead, and spoke to the sons of Heth, saying,
- 3 Then Abraham stood up from beside his dead wife and addressed the Hittites. He said,
- 3** And Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spake unto the sons of Heth, saying,
- 4 "I am a **stranger and a foreign resident** among you; **give** me a burial site among you so that I may bury my dead out of my sight."
- 4 "I am a stranger and a sojourner among you; give me a burial site among you that I may bury my dead out of my sight."
- 4 "I am an alien and an outsider among you. Give me a cemetery among you where I can bury my dead away from my presence."
- 4 I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a burying place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.
- "...a stranger and a foreign resident" - Abraham was given the Land by God; it was his Land, but he did not yet possess the Land. He will still a nomad and an alien.
- He didn't "own" on piece of the Land, not even enough to bury a body
- "...give" = "sell"
- 5 The sons of Heth answered Abraham, saying to him,

5 The sons of Heth answered Abraham, saying to him,
5 The Hittites responded to Abraham,
5 And the children of Heth answered Abraham, saying unto him,

6 "Hear us, my lord: you are a mighty prince among us; bury your dead in the choicest of our graves; none of us will refuse you his grave for burying your dead."

6 "Hear us, my lord, you are a mighty prince among us; bury your dead in the choicest of our graves; none of us will refuse you his grave for burying your dead."

6 "Listen to us, sir. You are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our burial tombs. None of us would refuse you his tomb for burying your dead."

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.

- The Hittites acknowledged Abraham's position among them

— Another example of the outworking of the Abrahamic Covenant: "thy name will be great"

7 So Abraham stood up and bowed to the people of the land, the sons of Heth.

7 So Abraham rose and bowed to the people of the land, the sons of Heth.

7 Abraham rose and bowed before the Hittites, the people of the land,

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

- Abraham followed the strict Middle East procedure where they negotiate slowly and respectfully

8 And he spoke with them, saying, "If you are willing to *let me* bury my dead out of my sight, listen to me, and plead with Ephron the son of Zohar for me,

8 And he spoke with them, saying, "If it is your wish *for me* to bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and approach Ephron the son of Zohar for me,

8 and addressed them, "If you are willing that I should bury my dead out of my sight, listen to me and make a request of Zohar's son Ephron on my behalf.

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 intreat for me to Ephron the son of Zohar,

9 that he may give me the cave of **Machpelah** which he owns, which is at the end of his field; for the full price let him give it to me in your presence for a burial site."

9 that he may give me the cave of Machpelah which he owns, which is at the end of his field; for the full price let him give it to me in your presence for a burial site."

9 Give me the cave of Machpelah that belongs to him, at the end of his field. He should sell it to me in your presence at full price for a burial site."

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"

- Abraham is not requesting a gift...he is willing to pay for the cave; in fact, he is willing to pay top dollar (full value)

10 Now Ephron was sitting among the sons of Heth; and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham so that the sons of Heth heard, that is, all who entered the gate of his city, saying,

10 Now Ephron was sitting among the sons of Heth; and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the sons of Heth; *even* of all who went in at the gate of his city, saying,

10 Now since Ephron the Hittite had taken a seat there among the Hittites, he responded publicly to Abraham where the Hittites and everyone who was entering the gate of his city could hear him:

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,

- 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. He also had possession and use of the well he dug at Beersheba.

- 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

11 "No, my lord, listen to me; I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. In the presence of the sons of my people I give it to you; bury your dead."

11 "No, my lord, hear me; I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. In the presence of the sons of my people I give it to you; bury your dead."

11 "No, sir. Listen to me! I'll give you the field, and I'll give you the cave that's in it. I give it to you publicly, in the sight of my people. Bury your dead."

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.

- Abraham only wanted to purchase the cave; Ephron is offering the field along with the cave

- This was a public sale; the Hittites and Abraham negotiated in public and the deal was agreed to in public

- Ephron sat in a position of authority

- This is where business transactions took place, in the presence of witnesses

- Ephron appears to be offering the burial place to Abraham for free, but that was not really the case. This is how negotiations were done in the Middle East at that time.

12 And Abraham bowed before the people of the land.

12 And Abraham bowed before the people of the land.

12 Abraham bowed before the people of the land

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

13 But he spoke to Ephron so that the people of the land heard, saying, "If you will only please listen to me; I will give the price of the field, accept *it* from me so that I may bury my dead there."

13 He spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying, "If you will only please listen to me; I will give the price of the field, accept *it* from me that I may bury my dead there."

13 and then addressed Ephron so all the people of the land could hear him: "Please listen to me! I'm willing to pay the price of the field. Accept it from me, so I may bury my dead there."

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 for free from these people (Cf. 14:21-24)

- It was important at that time 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 (v4), his hope was in the Land

14 Then Ephron answered Abraham, saying to him,

14 Then Ephron answered Abraham, saying to him,

14 So Ephron answered Abraham,

14 And Ephron answered Abraham, saying unto him,

15 "My lord, listen to me: *a plot of* land worth four hundred shekels of silver—**what is that between me and you?** So bury your dead."

15 "My lord, listen to me; a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between me and you? So bury your dead."

15 "Sir, listen to me! The land is worth 400 shekels of silver, but what's that between us? You may bury your dead."

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.

- "...what is that between me and you?" - Ephron implies that 400 shekels was not too high of a price

— However, this was a highly inflated price, as the average cost was four shekels per acre at the time

— At 400 shekels, it was about 40 shekels per acre

— It was common for an initial asking price to be high, then negotiate it down

16 Abraham listened to Ephron; and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver which he had named in the presence of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, *currency* acceptable to a merchant.

16 Abraham listened to Ephron; and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver which he had named in the hearing of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, commercial standard.

16 Abraham agreed with Ephron, so he weighed out to Ephron the money to which he had agreed publicly while the Hittites were listening: 400 shekels of silver at the current merchant rate.

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.

- Though Abraham did not originally want the whole field, he was willing to take it at a high price (400 shekels of silver) to get the cave

— He went against the custom of negotiating down the high offering price and instead was willing to pay the full asking price

— 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); Rachel was the exception (35:19)

- In later years it became a Muslim possession and a mosque was built over it

17 So Ephron's field, which was in Machpelah, which faced Mamre, the field and the cave which was in it, and all the trees which were in the field, that were within all the confines of its border, were deeded over

17 So Ephron's field, which was in Machpelah, which faced Mamre, the field and cave which was in it, and all the trees which were in the field, that were within all the confines of its border, were deeded over

17 That's how Ephron's field in Machpelah, east of Mamre—the field, the cave that was in it, and all the trees that were within the boundaries of the field—came to be deeded

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

- Records the inclusions and boundaries of the purchased property

18 to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the sons of Heth, before all who entered the gate of his city.

18 to Abraham for a possession in the presence of the sons of Heth, before all who went in at the gate of his city.

18 to Abraham in the presence of all the Hittites and everyone who was entering the city gate.

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.

- The sale was legalized in front of witnesses

The reason Ephron did not want to sell only the cave is that he would still be obligated to render feudal services (taxes). Therefore, by getting rid of all of it, the whole unit, that would free him from paying feudal responsibilities (taxes) to the king for that section. As part of the deed, he also mentioned the trees, and the mention of trees is characteristic of Hittite business documents. It all fits well into the second millennium BC.

(c) Burial of Sarah (23:19-20)

19 After this, Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave of the field of Machpelah facing Mamre (that is, Hebron), in the land of Canaan.

19 After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field at Machpelah facing Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan.

19 After this, Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave at the field of Machpelah, east of Mamre (that is, in Hebron) in the land of Canaan.

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.

20 So the field and the cave that was in it were deeded over to Abraham for a burial site by the sons of Heth.

20 So the field and the cave that is in it, were deeded over to Abraham for a burial site by the sons of Heth.

20 And so the field with its cave was deeded by the Hittites to Abraham as a burial site.

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.