

## Abraham Wanted to Buy a Burial Place for Sarah

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand that God will allow tests to come into their lives to help them in their spiritual growth. We saw a real example of that testing in the lives of Abraham and Isaac. In this topic, we will see what happened when Sarah died.

In Genesis 23:1-4, we read, “Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years; *these were* the years of the life of Sarah. So Sarah died in Kirjath Arba (that *is*, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. Then Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spoke to the sons of Heth, saying, ‘I *am* a foreigner and a visitor among you. Give me property for a burial place among you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.’” Sarah is the only woman in the Bible whose age at death is mentioned, as we see that she was a hundred and twenty-seven years old. This means that Isaac was thirty-seven at the time Sarah died. Genesis 21:12-13 says, “But God said to Abraham, ‘Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called. Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he *is* your seed.’” These verses show the importance of Sarah as the mother of Isaac. In addition, it is also a reminder that Sarah was past the age of childbearing at the time of the birth of Isaac.

Sarah died in Hebron (formerly known as Kirjath Arba or city of Arba). This place was about half-way between Jerusalem and Beersheba. Abraham had built an altar at this place many years earlier. 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.” This city was near a large grove of terebinth trees owned by Mamre. Here, we see that Abraham had returned to this area after spending a period of time in the area of Beersheba. Genesis 49:29-31 shows us that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would all be buried in the same place. Those verses say, “Then he charged them and said to them: ‘I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that *is* in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in 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 as a possession for a burial place. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah.’” Hebron later became an important city in Israel, as it is mentioned seventy-one times in the Old Testament.

We will see in the rest of this chapter how this became a burial place for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In his mourning and sorrow, Abraham went and spoke to the sons of Heth. Heth was a son of Canaan, as Genesis 10:15 says, “Canaan begot Sidon his firstborn, and Heth...” In these verses, we see that Abraham made the following request to the sons of Heth: “I am a foreigner and a visitor among you. Give me property for a burial place among you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.” Abraham wanted to purchase a piece of land from the descendants of Heth so he could bury Sarah. At this point, Abraham did not even have enough land in Canaan for a burial place. He realized that, as a foreigner and visitor, he had to purchase land from the people of the area in order to have a place where he could bury Sarah. He had picked out a place that he wanted to purchase, but he had to make an agreement with the people of the land to buy that land from the owner.

Genesis 23:5-6 tells us the answer that Abraham received. Those verses say, “And the sons of Heth

answered Abraham, saying to him, ‘Hear us, my lord: You *are* a mighty prince among us; bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places. None of us will withhold from you his burial place, that you may bury your dead.’” By this answer, the sons of Heth showed that they had developed a real respect for Abraham, even though he was from a different country. We see that they recognized him as a mighty prince. The word translated “mighty” is used more than twenty-six hundred times in the Old Testament. In over twenty-three hundred of those uses, it speaks of God, especially in titles. In just the first chapter of Genesis, it is used over thirty times to speak of God as the creator of heaven and earth and everything on the earth. Genesis 17:8 says, “‘Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.’” In this verse, we see that God said He would be the God of the descendants of Abraham. In Genesis 28:13, we read, “And behold, the Lord stood above it and said: ‘I *am* the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants.’” Here, the Lord told Jacob that He was the God of Abraham and Isaac.

The word “prince” is translated by such words as *prince, captain, chief, or ruler*. As a result, the use of this title by the sons of Heth showed that they recognized that God was with Abraham. It also shows that they had a high respect of Abraham, as a leader, even though he was from a foreign land. As a result, they invited Abraham to choose one of their choicest burial places as the place to bury Sarah. They said that none of them would refuse to sell that piece of property to Abraham so he would have a burial place for Sarah and later other family members as we saw earlier in Genesis 49. Three generations: Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Leah and Jacob were all buried in the cave that Abraham purchased that day.

The fact that the leaders of the sons of Heth had great respect for Abraham allowed them to speak for all of the people when they said that no one would withhold the land that Abraham chose to purchase as a burial place for his family. They wanted to make certain that Abraham had the property for a proper burial. Genesis 23:7-9 says, “Then Abraham stood up and bowed himself to the people of the land, the sons of Heth. And he spoke with them, saying, ‘If it is your wish that I bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and meet with Ephron the son of Zohar for me, that he may give me the cave of Machpelah which he has, which *is* at the end of his field. Let him give it to me at the full price, as property for a burial place among you.’” Abraham already knew what piece of land he would like for a burial place, so when the sons of Heth said they would not withhold any piece of land, Abraham told them which piece of land he would like to buy.

Abraham then made his request of the leaders of the sons of Heth. He began by returning the respect that the leaders had shown to him when they called him a mighty prince. We see that Abraham stood up and bowed to the leaders of the sons of Heth as a show of his respect for them. Abraham had earlier shown this same respect when the Lord and two angels came to visit him. Genesis 18:2-3 says, “So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw *them*, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, and said, ‘My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant.’” In that situation, Abraham had shown his respect for the Lord by bowing himself to the ground. Here, Abraham showed his respect for the leaders of the people of the land by bowing himself.

After showing respect, Abraham went on to make his request. Abraham asked the leaders to speak to Ephron on his behalf. Abraham wanted them to request of Ephron, “that he may give me the cave of Machpelah which he has, which is at the end of his field.” The name of this cave means *double* or *portion*. The words of Abraham indicate that he did not personally know Ephron, so he wanted the leaders to meet with Ephron and speak to him on behalf of Abraham. This indicates that Abraham wanted to do whatever was proper in making the arrangements for a burial place for Sarah.

Abraham just asked for permission to buy the cave that was at the end

of the field of Ephron. However, we will see that Ephron said he would sell the cave with the entire field.

Abraham also said he would pay Ephron the full price for the cave. In this way, Abraham made it clear that he was not going to try and bargain with Ephron over the price of the cave. He wanted to treat Ephron fairly by giving him the full price so there would not be any misunderstanding or disagreement. In this way, Abraham showed us the importance of being fair with others when asking them to sell anything to us. Philippians 2:14-15 says, “Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.” These verses show us that we are to be a witness to the world by the way we deal with others. Abraham wanted to provide such an example even though he was in sorrow at the loss of his wife. As a result, he was ready to pay the full price requested. This gives us an example of how to shine as lights in the world.

We also want to provide an example to our physical and spiritual children of how to shine as a light for the Lord in a world around us that is filled with sin. Matthew 5:16 says, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” The men of Heth had seen the works of Abraham and they had come to respect him as a mighty prince. We want to help our children learn that they will be respected by the world around them as their lives reflect the light of the Lord. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children earn the respect of others by their lives.