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Genesis 23

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Genesis 23.

Topics.

- Sarah dies at Kiriath-arba and Abraham mourns and to weeps for her.
- The Hittites call Abraham a Prince and offer him a tomb to bury Sarah.
- Abraham asks the Hittites to ask Ephron to give him the cave of Machpelah.
- Ephron the Hittite gives Abraham a cave to bury Sarah.
- Abraham weighs out four hundred shekels of silver for Ephron.
- Abraham buries Sarah in a cave in Hebron in the land of Canaan.

FOR INFORMATION: concerning people, places and the meaning of words see the title: "Map Locations and People of the Bible," and the title: "Bible Dictionary" on Website Menu.

The previous chapter: in chapter twenty two the focus was upon God telling Abraham to offer Isaac for a burnt offering and that He would provide a lamb for the offering; Abraham laying Isaac on the altar and taking a knife to slaughter his son; the angel of the LORD stopping him and Abraham calling the place, the LORD will provide. The chapter ended by saying Milcah had given birth to eight children by Nahor Abraham's brother.

GENESIS 23:1-2

1

Sarah Dies at Kiriath-arba and Abraham Weeps for Her.

- **Genesis 23:1-2:** Sarah lived 127 years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. ²And Sarah died at Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.

Kiriath-arba: (v2) is in Hebron in the land of Canaan, Arba is called the father of Anak

- They gave them Kiriath-arba (Arba being the father of Anak), that is Hebron, in the hill country of Judah, along with the pasturelands around it. (Josh. 21:11).

Kiriath-arba is of the Anakim (or Bene Anak), a tall or gigantic tribe who were subsequently dispossessed by Caleb.

- They went up into the Negeb and came to Hebron. Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the descendants of Anak, were there. (Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) (Num. 13:22) --- NOW GO TO VERSE TWENTY-EIGHT --- ²⁸However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there --- NOW GO TO VERSE THIRTY-THREE --- ³³And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them. (Num. 21:22-33).

Though Abraham had a residence in Hebron (also called Mamre) and kept up a connection with it he had been absent from it for sometime. The previous chapter ended with Abraham living at Beersheba (Gen. 22:19) which means that Abraham went to mourn for Sarah from Beer-sheba or from some field where he had cattle pasturing. This chapter comes immediately after the account of Abraham offering up Isaac (Gen. 22). Sarah is the only woman whose years of her life are numbered in Scripture and the age at death is mentioned in the Bible. This is a unique honour no doubt given to her because she was:

- The wife of Abraham and the mother of the promised seed. (Genesis 17:15-16) (Gen. 17:19) (Gen. 21:1-12)
- The ancestress of the Hebrew race and esteemed and honoured mother of the Hebrew people. (Isaiah 51:2).
- The mother of all the faithful (1 Peter 3:6).

Isaac was born when Sarah his mother was s ninety years of age and now at her death, she is one hundred and twenty-seven which means Isaac would have been thirty-seven years of age. Sarah the mother of the faithful comes to an end in this mortal world, but will be raised to an eternal world where sin and death, vanity and sorrow cannot enter. This is the great blessing of those who endure in faith even death cannot part them from their love and union with Christ. Those who we most love and even our own bodies, which we so care for, must soon become broken lumps of clays and be buried out of sight. To be adorned with such heavenly grace and glory we should set aside all earthly attachments and pleasures that have the potential to destroy or rob us of our faith and set our heart upon seeking those things that are pleasing to God and that bring a good testimony to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We must determine within to set our heart and mind as Abraham did upon following the Lord in faithfulness.

GENESIS 23:3-6

The Hittites Offer Abraham a Tomb to Bury Sarah.

- **Genesis 23:3-6:** And Abraham rose up from before his dead and said to the Hittites, ⁴"I am a sojourner and foreigner among you; give me property among you for a burying place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight." ⁵The Hittites (the children of Heth in KJV) answered Abraham, ⁶"Hear us, my lord; you are a prince of God among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will withhold from you his tomb to hinder you from burying your dead."

2

Hittites: were a tribe amongst the Canaanites and some of the earliest traders and merchants in the land. Travellers would bring their wares to the towns or dwellings of the purchasers and the purchaser would weigh out a measure of precious metals that the product being sold was valued at and the transaction would be made.

It appears that Abraham was on his knees weeping: over the lifeless body of Sarah his loved wife and after some time rises up and tells the Hittites that because he is a foreigner and sojourner amongst them, meaning he is a stranger and visitor, not a Hittite; but a traveller he therefore owns no burial-ground. Eastern people were always provided with family burying-places; but Abraham's life of faith and his pilgrim state had prevented him acquiring even a foot's length of land for a possession (Ac 7:5). Stephen in the New Testament wrote:

- The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, ³and said to him, 'Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.' ⁴Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living. ⁵Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot's length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child. (Acts 7:5).

The Hittites (the children of Heth in KJV) (v5) answer Abraham, notice the transition from the Hittites to a single speaker. It appears that a man who was respected and recognized amongst the Hittites as a chief amongst them speaks for them all.

My lord: (v6) the speaker of the Hittites refers to Abraham as his lord and as a prince of God among the Hittites.

This shines a brilliant spotlight upon the good testimony Abraham had amongst heathen people, the title, lord is a title of esteem and respect it is the same as us today referring to someone as Sir.

Prince of God: (v6) the title, "Prince of God," is the highest title that could be given to anyone who walks with God and this title is given to Abraham by those who worship other gods. Two reasons for their very high opinion of Abraham would be:

1. He had great wealth and livestock and was a man of great power and authority who appeared to live like a prince having servants under him.
2. By his faith they recognised that God's calling and favour was upon him.

They looked up to Abraham with esteem and honour and viewed him as a great man devoted and faithful to God, yet he looked upon himself as a stranger and a sojourner. We should all pray that our neighbours would view us in the same light the Hittites viewed Abraham.

Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs: (v5) it was common for each family to have their own distinct sepulchre to bury their dead in. Here again is a great honour bestowed not only upon Abraham, but also upon Sarah, no matter what tomb Abraham chose or whose tomb it was or how grand and magnificent it may have been no one would prevent him from burying Sarah in it.

GENESIS 23:7-9

Abraham asks Hittites to ask Ephron for the Cave of Machpelah.

- **Genesis 23:7-9:** Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land (the children of Heth in KJV). ⁸And he said to them, "If you are willing that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me and entreat for me Ephron the son of Zohar, ⁹that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he owns; it is at the end of his field. For the full price let him give it to me in your presence as property for a burying place."

The sons of Heth: (v7) the Hittites were descendants of Heth, the second son of Canaan (Gen. 10:15) the youngest son of Ham a son of Noah. They are mentioned over and over in the Bible as one of the most powerful empires in the ancient times. In the Book of Genesis, they are declared to be one of the twelve Canaanite nations dwelling in the land of Canaan the land promised to the Israelites. That is why God commanded the Israelites to eradicate them. But they were not destroyed and still dwell in southern Palestine and around Jerusalem with the Hebrews. The great Hittite Empire flourished and was centered in what is now Turkey, but it also had colonies in various places.

Ephron the son of Zohar: (v8) was a well-respected wealthy Hittite.

The cave of Machpelah: (v8) the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron is one of the holiest places in the Land of Israel. It is the burial place that Abraham purchased for his family after Sarah died (Gen. 23:8-17). Later Isaac and Ishmael buried Abraham there (Gen. 25:9). Eventually Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebekah and Leah were all buried in this Cave of Machpelah. These are considered the patriarchs and matriarchs of the Jewish people. The only one who is missing is Rachel (wife of Jacob), who was buried near Bethlehem where she died in childbirth. The building over the tomb is truly amazing in its dimensions, complexity and antiquity. Huge walls built by Herod the Great 2,000 years ago surround it, while the interior is a combination of medieval architecture, Arabesque décor from later centuries, and from synagogues founded after the re-establishment of the Jewish community in this region following the 1967 Six Day War.

In one corner of the largest hall, with its house-like tomb markers for Isaac and Rebecca, a cupola stands over a small opening into the actual Cave of Machpelah. Another, smaller room contains the tombs of Abraham and Sarah, and across an open courtyard are those of Jacob and Leah. Abraham greatly appreciating the good will of the Hittites humbles himself before them with a bow and asks them to speak to Ephron and tell him that he will pay the full price for the cave of Machpelah. It should be highlighted here that conversation between Abraham and the Hittites is spoken with the utmost courtesy on both sides.

Bury my dead out of my sight: (v8) our bodies and those most dear to us are destined to decay and if left would be devoured by beasts of prey or become offensive by putrefaction, because of this, their corpse must be removed from our sight, meaning they must be buried. To bury or cover it with earth was a more practical and natural process than burning, since wood was hard to find in desert areas, and in bushland there would be the danger of a fire spreading, especially since water was scarce, and therefore burying was the more common way of hiding the body out of sight.

- By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return. (Gen. 3:19).

The transaction now is between Abraham and Ephron.

GENESIS 23:10-13

Ephron the Hittite gives Abraham a Cave to Bury Sarah.

- **Genesis 23:10-13:** Now Ephron was sitting among the Hittites, and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, of all who went in at the gate of his city, ¹¹"No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. In the sight of the sons of my people I give it to you. Bury your dead." ¹²Then Abraham bowed down before the people of the land. ¹³And he said to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, "But if you will, hear me: I give the price of the field. Accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there."

4

All who went in at the gate of his city: (v10) this does not mean that Ephron actually owned the city or that he was the king or head of it, but that he was born in the city or that it was the city where he lived, however it is clear he was a well-respected and wealthy citizen.

Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham: (v10) (the children of Heth in KJV) it was common for business transactions to be negotiated at the gate of the city. Every free-born citizen had a right to be present, and matters were settled by common consent. As Ephron was the owner of the cave, his approval was necessary, and this Abraham treats as a favour and therefore asks Ephron's fellow-citizens to intercede on his behalf. It appears that Ephron was sitting amongst the people gathered at the gate and after listening to the chief speaker and any others, who may have spoken, hears his name mentioned and rises from amongst the assembly and responds to Abraham's request. But before he says anything, he honours and esteems Abraham by introducing himself with the words, "My lord," and then tells him he will not only give him the field, but will also give him the cave in it. Abraham responds by humbling himself before Ephron and the people (i.e., he bowed down) and tells him that he will not take it as a gift, but pay the full price for it, and then humbly asks Ephron to accept his offer. Following are four possible reasons Abraham may have desired to pay full price:

1. In the same way that Abraham did not take the gifts from the king of Sodom, because he did not want the king to say that he had made Abraham rich, likewise it may have been that he did not want to give Ephron the Hittite any opportunity to boast how he had given this great prince the tomb for his loved wife to be buried in.

2. Abraham did not want to forever be or feel indebted to Ephron for giving him such a great gift.
3. Abraham wanted to make sure his loved wife's tomb was legally secure throughout all generations and that no one at any time would have any rights to it.
4. Abraham was well able to pay for the field and therefore would not take advantage of Ephron's generosity.

GENESIS 23:14-16

Abraham Weighs Out Four Hundred Shekels of Silver for Ephron.

- **Genesis 23:14-16:** Ephron answered Abraham, ¹⁵"My lord, listen to me: a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between you and me? Bury your dead."
¹⁶Abraham listened to Ephron, and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver that he had named in the hearing of the Hittites, four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weights current among the merchants.

Shekel: the early way of trading between two parties and paying for a service or product that one was selling and the other needed was to barter something that matched the value of what was being sold. Overtime this way of trading gradually led to the use of using precious metals as a medium of exchange. These metals would be weighed and paid in the presence of assembled witnesses. Even today the practice of weighing money, which is often in lumps or rings each being stamped with their weight, is still common in many parts of the East; and almost all merchants at the gates (or the bazaar) has their scales at their side. However, this method of exchange was later replaced by the more convenient use of coins of a fixed weight and known value. Ephron again addresses Abraham as, "My lord," and tells him that the land was worth four hundred shekels of silver. The words, "What is that between you and me?" Show that both Abraham and Ephron were wealthy men, since this expression carries the idea that compared to their wealth the loss of four hundred shekels of silver won't even be noticed. Abraham weighs out the silver according to the weights current among the merchants and pays Ephron the four hundred shekels of silver in the sight and hearing of the assembled Hittites. There was no legal document draw up during these ancient early years, this is why the transaction was done publicly in front of witnesses, the witnesses made the deed binding.

GENESIS 23:17-20

Abraham Buries Sarah in a Cave in Hebron in the Land of Canaan.

- **Genesis 23:17-20:** So the field of Ephron in Mach-pelah, which was to the east of Mamre, the field with the cave that was in it and all the trees that were in the field, throughout its whole area, was made over (were made sure in KJV) ¹⁸to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the Hittites, before all who went in at the gate of his city. ¹⁹After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Mach-pelah east of Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. ²⁰The field and the cave that is in it were made over to Abraham as property for a burying place by the Hittites.

All the trees that were in the field, throughout its whole area: (v17) shows that this field that Ephron sold to Abraham which was in Machpelah by Mamre at Hebron was most likely a beautiful area of lush green fertile land covered with trees that kept it cool in the hot summer months. It was also in the area where Abraham built an altar to the LORD and had camped for sometime. (Gen. 13:18).

The field, throughout its whole area, was made over: (v17) (were made sure in KJV) means that it legally came into the hands of Abraham and out of the hands of Ephron and the Hittites.

The transaction was confirmed and made sure by the many witnesses, the cave, the field and all that was upon it now belonged to Abraham and no other. After Abraham had secured the sale of the cave in the field of Mach-pelah east of Mamre (Hebron) in the land of Canaan and the Hittites gave it over to him as his property he buried Sarah his wife in the cave.

NOTE: this field and cave that Abraham purchased and buried Sarah in was the only piece of the land that Abraham possessed in Canaan, it is also the first property purchased of the chosen race in the Promised Land.

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.

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