

EXPOSITION OF GENESIS

Message #53

Genesis 23:1-20

Faith does not become strong when it is passively enjoying life, but when it is actively facing adverse circumstances. As we come to this passage, we come to a critical point in Abraham's life when he must face the death of his wife Sarah. **The death of Sarah is the dominant theme of this chapter because it opens with a focus on her death and ends with a focus on her burial.** Abraham and Sarah had been together for 100 years. We know when Sarah left Ur with Abraham that she was 65 years old, 10 years younger than Abraham - Genesis 12:4, so she has been gone from her homeland for 62 years - 127 minus 65. If we assume she married Abraham when in her twenties, they have been married at least 100 years. She had been Abraham's companion in life, his lover, his friend. She was at Abraham's side in good times and bad. She recognized that he was a special man of God and of course she was the mother of his son. We know from I Peter 3:4-6 that she was a gentle, quiet, respectful, submissive woman and you don't replace a godly woman with this kind of class. This was a big loss to Abraham - his dear wife was gone. Not only was her death a major test of faith, but now he is forced to make a decision concerning where he should bury her in view of the fact that God promised He would give him the promised land.

ABRAHAMIC FAITH CONTINUES TO OBEY AND BELIEVE GOD WILL FULFILL HIS PROMISES EVEN WHEN FACED WITH ADVERSE CIRCUMSTANCES LIKE THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE.

Abrahamic faith does not run away, it does not quit, it does not give up, it keeps trusting God.

PART #1 - The faithful believer is forced to face the death of his spouse. 23:1-2

Fact #1 - Sarah's age at death. 23:1

Sarah is the only woman in Scripture whose age at death is stated. This shows how important a woman she was. Sarah was 127 years old when she died, but she did eventually die because death is an Adamic curse that sooner or later will catch up to the best of saints.

Fact #2 - Sarah's place of death. 23:2a

The word "Kiriath" means a city and the word "arba" means a giant or four. This was the old name of the city before it was named Hebron, which had been named after a great warrior or giant warrior whose name was Arba (Joshua 14:15; 15:13; 21:11). Arba was the father of the Anakim giants. The stress is that Sarah died here, as Dr. Hughes said, in "the heart of the promised land" (Genesis, *Beginning & Blessing*, p. 308).

Fact #3 - Sarah's impact at death. 23:2b

Life was not all roses for Abraham in obeying God - 1) He had to give up his home land; 2) He had to give up Lot ; 3) He had to give up Ishmael; 4) He had to give up Sarah. Abraham loved Sarah and even though there had been some moments of strain in the relationship (i.e. 21:11); he was a hurting man when she died. The Hebrew word "mourn" indicates that Abraham suffered great emotional grief to the point of lamenting, wailing and even beating his breast

(Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 592). The word “weep” indicates that Abraham was shedding tears to the extent that you could hear the sound of them falling (Ibid., p.119). Abraham was a hurting man and Scripture says it took months before Isaac was comforted in view of his mother’s death (Genesis 24:67).

PART #2 - The faithful believer is forced to choose where to bury his spouse. 23:3-18

When a loved one suddenly dies, you are forced to make funeral decisions at a very emotional time. This is a critical moment for an emotional Abraham and the decision boils down to this - do we go back to our former place of life and relatives (Genesis 22:20-24) to bury Sarah or do we believe God will one day give us this land of Canaan and bury her here?

Response #1 - The request of Abraham. 23:3-4

The “sons of Heth” were Canaanites in that they were descendants of Canaan and Hittites in that they were of Heth (Genesis 10:15). When Sarah died Abraham was in this land surrounded by Canaanites and Hebron was controlled by these sons of Heth. When Abraham makes a request for a burial spot, he refers to himself as a “stranger” and “sojourner.” These nouns have both physical and spiritual application. The word “stranger” describes a foreigner who is living out of his own country. The word “sojourner” describes one who is not a naturalized citizen. What this means is at the present time Abraham had no legal right to any of this Hittite land. Abraham’s request for a burial sight is based on the belief that someday, this land would be the land he could call home. We know from Hebrews 11:8 that Abraham viewed himself as a spiritual stranger and sojourner as well.

Response #2 - The response of the Canaanites. 23:5-6

The Canaanites offered Abraham the choice of any land he wanted. In fact, the Hebrew words “a mighty prince” literally read “a prince of Elohim” which indicates they recognize Abraham holds a royal position in the family of God.

Response #3 - The reaction of Abraham. 23:7-9

Abraham was a humble man and the fact that he “bowed” to the Canaanites demonstrates that he treated others with dignity, respect, esteem and honor. The cave of Machpelah was located in the end of a field owned by Ephron, the son of Zohar. Ephron was a Hittite, and Abraham was willing to pay full price for this property.