

## **Genesis 23 – Death and Burial of Sarah**

There are three main things happening in this chapter:

- 1) giving honor to Sarah
- 2) the Hittites trying to keep Abraham from his inheritance (not that they necessarily knew about his covenant with God) and
- 3) the ultimate triumph of Abraham and the covenant over the Hittites.

### **1. Giving honor to Sarah**

Sarah is honored in several ways in this chapter:

- 1) her age is given and is the only woman so honored;
- 2) there are lots of details given;
- 3) Abraham is described as coming to mourn (custom) and to weep (genuine display) (Wesley)
- 4) a special place is selected and bought for her burial

### **2. The Hittites try to keep Abraham from having the burial ground as an inheritance.**

Abraham identifies himself as a stranger and a wanderer in the land and the Hittites try, ever so politely, to keep him that way.

First, when he asks to buy a place to bury Sarah they offer him a grave among their own. This would let Abraham be associated with one of their families, but wouldn't give him the same status as a property owner and the next time they needed to bury somebody the negotiations would have to start all over again.

Second, when he refuses that, the fellow tries to give him the cave, along with the field. A gift like this, although it now includes more than Abraham asked for, is still inferior to actually possessing the land and wouldn't give him the status of a permanent landowner.

Abraham isn't interested in this. That's why he addresses the leaders of the town or clan or tribe and not just Ephron; something as big as a transfer of an ancestral land wasn't a decision of the individual but a matter for everyone to be a part of.

Third, the most that Abraham can get out of them is a **מִקְנָה** (miqnah) verse 18, when what he'd asked for was an **אֲחֻזָּה** ('achuzzah), verses 4 and 9.

An **אֲחֻזָּה** ('achuzzah) was "a field of possession," land that was considered ancestral lands and was passed down from generation to generation forever.

On the other hand, a **מִקְנָה** (miqnah) was a possessed field, land that had been purchased for use recently. The legal status was more than that of a gift, but much less than a field of possession.

To put it in more modern terms, although they went through the rituals of property purchase (counting the trees, checking the borders, weighing out the money in the city gate with witnesses), basically Abraham was leasing the use of the burial cave more than purchasing land and the status of a landowner, a lot like people lease out their farms or used to sell their tobacco poundage.

### **3. The promise of the triumph of Abraham and the covenant over the Hittites.**

Remember, God has already given this land to Abraham, so in trying to keep him from purchasing a piece of it, the Hittites are in effect trying to thwart the plan of God, not a good idea.

We're not told that they did this as an intentional assault on God or that they were ever judged or punished for it, but still once God has said that something will happen it will happen.

Notice the last verse in the chapter, the field and the cave is described as a field of possession, an **אֲחֻזָּה** ('achuzzah).

Remember the version of the account we have was written at least 400 years after Abraham and maybe longer than that because we don't know how many other times what Moses wrote was edited or had explanatory notes added, such as in verse two, where both the old and new names of the place Sarah died are given.

So here's the sense of the words that we're supposed to get from the story:

**narrator in earlier chapters:** God told Abraham that he'd have the whole territory as an 'achuzzah

**Abraham:** Let me buy an 'achuzzah"

**Sons of Heth:** You can't have one, we'll give you a miqnah

**Abraham:** I don't want to give me a miqnah, let me buy an 'achuzzah.

**Sons of Heth:** You can't have one, we'll sell you a miqnah

**Abraham:** All right, I'll buy a miqnah

**narrator 600 years later:** They finished the deal and it was an 'achuzzah

### **Genesis – Chapter 24**

About two to three years have passed since chapter 23.

Abraham decides that Isaac is old enough to get married, since he's about 39-40 years old.

You already know the story and by the end of the chapter the servant's told most of it twice and there's not much to elaborate on about it, so we'll just look at a few items that might be of interest:

### **Hand under the thigh:**

Abraham has his household steward, perhaps still Eliezer of Damascus, reach under his thigh, which was a way of making a solemn oath.

(Hopefully, you wouldn't let somebody reach under your thigh and touch your private parts without there being some sort of solemn oath involved.)

### **Abraham's promise for the journey**

The servant isn't going on the journey on his own. Abraham promises him that "God's Angel" will go before him and will "prosper his journey."

We'll find that the children of Israel will be promised the same thing before entering the promised land, but they don't believe it as much as the servant does.

This servant has faith, prays for success, praises God for the success and testifies to it when he tells his story. Some see the main preachable point of the whole account the ease of the servant's task because of his faith, prayers and presence and because God's Angel went with him and he was doing the will and work of God.

### **Servant isn't to take Isaac back to homeland.**

The servant is forbidden to take Isaac back to the homeland because Abraham's promise is in looking forward, not in going back.

### **Ten Camels**

That's one way to demonstrate the wealth of your master. Camels were a luxury item in this time, and notice that the text points out that these were just ten of all camels that he had. And those camels would've needed drivers and maybe even some other servants to help guard the treasures. It'd be a little like going to the senior prom and picking your date up in a fleet of limousines. In the words of C.W. McCall, "It looks like we got us a convoy," even though it probably wasn't in the dark on the moon or the sixth of June.

By the way, the mention of camels was once used to prove that Abraham wasn't true because people didn't think that camels had even been domesticated during his time. As usually happens if you wait long enough, subsequent archeological finds proved that camels were used during his time.

### **"Rollin', rollin', rollin' Though the streams are swollen Keep them doggies rollin' Rawhide" (and it probably was, too.)**

The text says that he went to Mesopotamia to the city of Nahor. According to the commentaries, Nahor was a settlement near Haran. The word translated as Mesopotamia means "the land between the two rivers. It's supposed to have been about a 500 mile trip.

### **Watering Camels**

You've heard all your lives how Rebekah's watering the camels showed what a good person she

was because it would've taken so much work So I didn't even bother to look up how much a camel drank after a 500 mile journey, even though we all know that Tim's going to ask.

She also invites the servant to stay at their home and since he brought other servants who aren't named in the story because they're not important to it, then she's being extra hospitable. Sadly, this chapter is one of the few times we'll get a very favorable reading of Rebekah (or Isaac, for that matter).

### **Laban comes a'runnin'**

Laban, Rebekah's brother gets excited when he sees the visitors. He gets especially excited when he sees the gold jewelry that his sister is wearing and welcomes the men and invites them in and beds down the camels and washes their feet. He sounds like a nice fellow, but as we'll see in subsequent chapters, he may have been just impressed with the display of wealth and hopeful of getting in on it. Or he could be a nice fellow who changes over the 40 or so years when we see him again.

### **Where's the Beef-theul!**

We're given a little foretaste of the type of relationship that Isaac and Rebekah will have in their older days. Her father, Betheul, should be the leader of the family. He should have greeted the visitor and asked the questions, but he's only mentioned once when he and Laban are said to have asked something. (Some commentators, including Josephus, say that her father Betheul is actually dead and that's why he's not in the story and this Betheul is another brother, but let's humor me)

In verse 55 it's Laban and her mother who want her to stay with them longer and it's Rebekah who decides that they'll leave sooner. All of these things should have been the role of Betheul. Maybe he's sick, or maybe he's real old, but he is a passive character who has turned over decisions and leadership to others in the family.

We'll see the same type of family dynamics later on when Isaac is old and blind and contemplating his death years before it happens and Rebekah takes charge to get Jacob to trick his father. We'll see a similar passive lack of parental leadership out of Jacob, Eli and even King David.

### **Speak neither good nor bad**

This sounds like a strange reaction. The servant didn't have any trouble speaking good of it as he praised God for his interaction. Betheul and Laban acknowledged that God was in the events but didn't seem to have much of a reaction, they just said "There she is. Take her and go." Of course, years later God will warn Laban to not speak either good or bad of Jacob but to let him go in peace, so maybe this is nothing more than a foreshadowing of that.

### **Mother's Tent**

What a happy ending to the story. It's a shame things won't stay that happy for them down through the years, but as Jed said, "Many a man's lost his best friend by marrying her."

### **Let's back up a minute**

Let's look back at verses 12-14: We've had lots of people talk to God and angels and offer sacrifices in these first 22 chapters, but this is the first recorded prayer!

Lots of folks must have prayed in the previous chapters, as far back as Genesis 4 that "men began to call upon the name of the Lord" in the days of Enos, son of Seth, but this is the first one that was written down.

This prayer is a request from the servant that he be shown which of the women that Isaac is to marry, with some pretty specific conditions that'll have to be met. It sounds a lot like Gideon's fleece or even the bargaining prayer of Jacob when he's running for his life.

In other words, it's a prayer for the will of God to be revealed.

We considered week before last how we could discern if we or a project we wanted to do was in the will of God, if it were God prompting us or just our own wild hair.

This prayer is probably not one that we would want to model our prayers after, as we'll see later. There's more to consider with this, but that's another book and this is the end of chapter 24.



