

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes

10-22-19

Genesis 23

The Death of Sarah - Verses 1-6

23 Sarah lived to be a hundred and twenty-seven years old. ² She died at Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her. ³ Then Abraham rose from beside his dead wife and spoke to the Hittites. He said, ⁴ "I am a foreigner and stranger among you. Sell me some property for a burial site here so I can bury my dead." ⁵ The Hittites replied to Abraham, ⁶ "Sir, listen to us. You are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will refuse you his tomb for burying your dead."

23:1 Sarah is the only woman whose age at death is included in the Scriptures (Genesis 23:1). She is also the only woman whose name God changed (Genesis 17:15). This notation of her age illustrates her importance. Isaac was 37 years old when his mother died. Abraham died at the age of 175 (Genesis 25:8), 38 years after Sarah.

23:1-4 In Abraham's day, death and burial were steeped in ritual and traditions. Failing to honor a dead person demonstrated the greatest possible lack of respect. An improper burial was the equivalent of a curse. Mourning was an essential part of the death ritual. Friends and relatives would cry loudly for the whole neighborhood to hear. Because there were no funeral homes or undertakers, these same friends and relatives would help prepare the body for burial, which usually would take place on the same day because of the warm climate.

23:4-6 Abraham was in a foreign land looking for a place to bury his wife. Strangers offered to help him because he was "a mighty prince," and they respected him. Although Abraham had not put down roots in the area, his reputation was above reproach. Those who invest their time and money in serving God often earn a pleasant return on their investment—a good reputation and the respect of others.

The Death of Sarah - Verses 7-15

⁷ Then Abraham rose and bowed down before the people of the land, the Hittites. ⁸ He said to them, "If you are willing to let me bury my dead, then listen to me and intercede with Ephron son of Zohar on my behalf ⁹ so he will sell me the cave of Machpelah, which belongs to him and is at the end of his field. Ask him to sell it to me for the full price as a burial site among you." ¹⁰ Ephron the Hittite was sitting among his people and he replied to Abraham in the hearing of all the Hittites who

had come to the gate of his city. ¹¹ "No, my lord," he said. "Listen to me; I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead." ¹² Again Abraham bowed down before the people of the land ¹³ and he said to Ephron in their hearing, "Listen to me, if you will. I will pay the price of the field. Accept it from me so I can bury my dead there." ¹⁴ Ephron answered Abraham, ¹⁵ "Listen to me, my lord; the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver, but what is that between you and me? Bury your dead."

23:10-15 The polite interchange between Abraham and Ephron was typical of bargaining at that time. Ephron graciously offered to give his land to Abraham at no charge; Abraham insisted on paying for it; Ephron politely mentioned the price but said, in effect, that it wasn't important; Abraham paid the 400 shekels of silver. Both men knew what was going on as they went through the bargaining process. If Abraham had accepted the land as a gift when it was offered, he would have insulted Ephron, who then would have rescinded his offer. Many Middle Eastern shopkeepers still follow this bargaining ritual with their customers.

The Death of Sarah- Verses 16-20

¹⁶ Abraham agreed to Ephron's terms and weighed out for him the price he had named in the hearing of the Hittites: four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weight current among the merchants. ¹⁷ So Ephron's field in Machpelah near Mamre—both the field and the cave in it, and all the trees within the borders of the field—was deeded ¹⁸ to Abraham as his property in the presence of all the Hittites who had come to the gate of the city. ¹⁹ Afterward Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre (which is at Hebron) in the land of Canaan. ²⁰ So the field and the cave in it were deeded to Abraham by the Hittites as a burial site.

23:16 Four hundred shekels of silver was a high price for the piece of property Abraham bought. The Hittites weren't thrilled about foreigners buying their property, so Abraham had little bargaining leverage. Ephron asked an outrageous price. The custom of the day was to ask double the fair market value of the land, fully expecting the buyer to offer half the stated price. Abraham, however, did not bargain. He simply paid the initial price. He was not trying to take anything he didn't deserve. Even though God had promised the land to Abraham, he did not just take it away from Ephron.

23:19-20 Isaac and Jacob as well as Abraham used this burial site. Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah were all buried here. Rachel's tomb was near Bethlehem. The time of death should be the time when the godly proclaim their faith most loudly in view of our hope in God's promises.