

A break in the home circle

Perhaps we who lead briefer and, at the same time, more stirring and varied lives, with rapid change and a multitude of interests to divide attention, cannot fully realize how the members of such a home circle as Abraham’s grew into each other, or how one out of such a circle would be missed. Through long unbroken periods they lived constantly together, and were everything to one another. Of society, except that of their own slaves, there was little or none. The round of easy occupations which made up their shepherd life left ample leisure for domestic converse. It was inevitable that their lives should grow together as if welded into one. Husband and wife, parent and child, must have moulded one another’s character to an extent hardly possible in other states of society. Stronger natures impressed themselves upon feebler ones. The older generation made that which succeeded it. The experiences and the teaching of the aged father created an unwritten family code, which ruled alike his son and his grandson. Each memorable incident in the family annals crystallized itself, no doubt, through constant repetition, and passed down with hardly any change of form as part of the family tradition. From such a close circle of relations the disappearance of one loved and familiar face would leave a blank never to be filled and scarcely ever to be forgotten. This must have been especially the case when death made its first breach in the family, and, at the ripe age of a hundred and twenty-seven years, Sarah, princess, wife, and mother, fell asleep. Her death made Abraham a lonely man. It broke the final link to his ancestral home. It robbed him of the only one who cherished with him a common memory of his father’s house and the happy days of youth. She alone was left of those who, sixty-two years before, had shared his venturous emigration from Haran. He was her senior by ten years; and her removal must have come to him like a warning that before him likewise there lay another emigration, more venturous than the last—one final journey into a land still farther off. (J. O. Dykes, D. D.)

Sarah's Death and Burial

Gen 23:1-2 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.

Notice that Sarah's age is given as 127 years old. She was 90 when Isaac was born, which means that at the time of her death (which took place after the offering of Isaac by several years, I suppose), Isaac was 37 years old.

We are told that Sarah died in Kirjath–arba, which is Hebron. Abraham even had to buy a cave in which to bury his dead in the very land that God had given to him. Why didn't he take Sarah somewhere else to bury her? It is because the hope they have of the future is in that land. As we move on down in this chapter, we will see that although there are the arrangements for a funeral, which is not very exciting or interesting and is perhaps even a little morbid to some, it is very important to see a great truth here. – McGee

Died at Hebron = alliance. The alliance with Abraham dissolved, and her eternal alliance with Abraham’s God, and one who was before Abraham Joh_8:58), now inaugurated. Happy are those who compose the bride—the Lamb’s wife; the day of death is with them the day of their

espousals. The alliances of earth, abandoned for a better and more lasting one. – Biblical Illustrator

Gen 23:3-4 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."

Abraham calls himself a stranger and a sojourner even in the Promised Land which God had promised to give to him.

THE BURIAL. "That I may bury my dead out of my sight." The object that once most pleased the eye must be put "out of sight," as a loathsome thing. Life, a fountain of beauty and attractiveness. How glorious that world must be where they die no more, and are never put out of sight. Those who die in the Lord, and are put out of sight, will presently be in sight for ever. The aged man before the grave of his wife. The parting is not for long. A few more steps, and he will be at home with his princess for ever. But with all this Christian hope, the loss of dear friends and the Sunderings of long companionships is painful. At such times may we be able to say, "Thy will be done." Learn:

1. *The great and good and best loved must die.*
2. *The earthly dissolution may be the beginning of our eternal union.*
3. *It is little the world can furnish us besides a place to lie down in at the end of the journey.*
4. *Happy are those who, being saved themselves, have a good hope of meeting those who are "not lost, but gone before." (J. C. Gray.) – Biblical Illustrator*

Gen 23:5-6 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."

This is a very generous offer made by the children of Heth who live in this land. They probably said to Abraham, "Just pick your burying spot in any of our sepulchers—that's it. We'd be delighted to have you." Abraham had made a tremendous impression. They call him "a mighty prince." This man's influence counted for something. – McGee

A burying-place

Constantine the Great, in order to reclaim a very worldly man, marked out, with a lance, a piece of ground the size of a human body, and then said, "If you could increase your possessions till you acquired the whole world, in a short time such a spot as this will be all you will have." – Biblical Illustrator

Gen 23:7-9 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."

The cave of Machpelah was the place Abraham chose, but he wanted to buy it; he wanted nothing given to him. In other words, until God gives him that land, he will buy what he needs and wants. So now he actually buys a burying place.

Again, I ask the question: Why didn't Abraham take Sarah somewhere else to bury her? He buried her here because it is the Promised Land, and the hope of the future is here. As you go through the Bible, you will find that there are two great hopes and two great purposes which God has. He has an earthly purpose, and He has a heavenly purpose. He has an earthly purpose; that is, this earth on which you and I live is going into eternity. It is going to be traded in on a new model. There will be a new heaven and a new earth. But there will be an earth, and it will be inhabited throughout eternity. This is the promise that God gave to Abraham and to those after him. God is not going to put this earth on which you and I live in the garbage can after He gets through with the program which He is carrying out today; nor is it going to be disposed of in a wrecking yard for old and battered cars. God is not going to get rid of it. He intends to trade it in on a new model. The new earth will go into eternity, and there will be people to inhabit it. This was the hope of Abraham. Abraham wanted to be buried in that land so that, when the resurrection came, he and Sarah would be raised in that land. He never knew how many were coming after him, but there are going to be literally millions raised from the dead. This is their hope. It is an earthly hope, and it will be realized.

In the Upper Room, our Lord said this to His disciples who were schooled in the Old Testament and who had the Old Testament hope: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (Joh_14:1-3). He is speaking of the New Jerusalem which He is preparing today and which is the place to which the church will go. The New Jerusalem will be the eternal abode of the church. This teaching was brand-new to the disciples, and I am afraid that it is brand-new to a great many Christians. God never told Abraham that He would take him away from this earth to heaven. Rather, He kept telling him, "I am going to give you this land." Abraham believed God, and that was the reason that he wanted Sarah buried in that land. It became the place for him to bury his dead. He intended to be buried there, and he is buried there.

The exact location of Abraham's burying place is at Hebron, about twenty miles south of Jerusalem. When we made a trip there, we visited the Moslem mosque which is built over that spot. Frankly, on our entire trip through that land, I never felt uncomfortable or even a little afraid, except at Hebron. We had been warned to be very careful in Hebron, that there was a great deal of antagonism toward tourists and, actually, toward everyone who did not belong there. Of course, they allowed us to visit the mosque because it meant tourist dollars. After we went in, we looked through a little hole in the floor and down into the cave where Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah are all supposed to be buried. (Rachel is buried at Bethlehem.) These folk are all buried in Israel because of their hope of being raised from the dead in that land. It is an earthly hope. Our hope as New Testament believers is a

heavenly hope. I trust that that is clear to you so that you can understand why this burial was so important to Abraham at this particular time.

Abraham now makes a deal to buy the cave. Notice the transaction: - McGee

Gen 23:10-12 Now Ephron dwelt among the sons of Heth; and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the presence of the sons of Heth, all who entered at the gate of his city, saying, "No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field and the cave that is in it; I give it to you in the presence of the sons of my people. I give it to you. Bury your dead!" Then Abraham bowed himself down before the people of the land;

Notice Abraham and the generosity of these people and of this man Ephron in particular. They certainly were polite in that day. We have the impression that these were cavemen who carried clubs around ready to club each other. If Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the other Old Testament saints—even the men who are mentioned in this chapter—were in Los Angeles today and could go back and report to their folk, I think they would say, “Do you know that our offspring are a bunch of cavemen? They're highly uncivilized! They are rude and crude and a disgrace.” I think they would say that of us, but we have the advantage that we can talk about them. It is interesting to note how polite they are. “And Abraham bowed down himself before the people of the land.” - McGee

Gen 23:13-16 and he spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying, "If you will give it, please hear me. I will give you money for the field; take it from me and I will bury my dead there." And Ephron answered Abraham, saying to him, "My lord, listen to me; the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver. What is that between you and me? So bury your dead." And Abraham listened to Ephron; and Abraham weighed out the silver for Ephron which he had named in the hearing of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, currency of the merchants.

Abraham bargained with the Hittite inhabitants of Hebron for the purchase of the cave of Machpelah as a burial place—his only purchase of real estate during his long life of pilgrimage. The passage gives a priceless description of the bargaining that is so typical in Eastern lands. At first, the Hittites suggested that Abraham choose any one of their burial places. With overflowing courtesy, Abraham refused and insisted on paying full price for a cave owned by Ephron. At first Ephron offered not just the cave but the entire field as an outright gift, but Abraham understood that this was just a polite gesture. The owner really had no intention of giving it away. When Abraham countered by insisting on his desire to purchase it, Ephron suggested a price of four hundred shekels of silver, pretending that this was a great bargain. Actually it was an extortionate price, and ordinarily the buyer would have continued to haggle. So, it was a surprise to everyone when Abraham agreed to Ephron's first asking price. Abraham didn't want to be indebted to an unbeliever, and neither should we. – Believers Bible Commentary

That is, Abraham paid for the field and cave in the legal tender of that day.

What does the US Constitution say about money?

From Article I, Section 8, there is “Congress shall have Power...to coin Money, regulate the Value thereof, and of foreign Coin.” And from Section 10, “no state...shall make any Thing but gold and silver Coin a Tender in Payment of Debts.”

Gen 23:17-20 So the field of Ephron which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field and the cave which was in it, and all the trees that were in the field, which were within all the surrounding borders, were deeded to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the sons of Heth, before all who went in at the gate of his city. And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah, before Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. So the field and the cave that is in it were deeded to Abraham by the sons of Heth as property for a burial place.

Apparently, this place is where the mosque is built at Hebron today. It is considered either the second or third most important mosque in the world of Islam. They have many mosques in Cairo and other places, and the ones I have seen are absolutely beautiful. The most important one, of course, would be at Mecca. I am not sure whether the one at Hebron or the one at Jerusalem would be number two, but the other would then be number three. You can see how important this is, because the Arabs all trace their lineage back to Abraham.

II. THE GRAVE. (Biblical Illustrator)

1. A cave. We are of the earth, earthy. Dust, and must return to dust.

2. Purchased. Abraham selected one that would receive his own remains. (“The family meeting-place” is an epitaph at Pere la Chaise.) Men sometimes think more of their sepulchres than of death; and make greater preparation for the temporary repose of the body than the eternal rest of the soul. It was all that Abraham purchased of the promised land. The country was given to the living. The promised land of heaven for the living is a free gift, and there will be no bargaining for graves there. Man sells a place for the dead, God gives a home for the living.