

“SHOWING RESPECT FOR THE DEAD”

GENESIS 23:1-20

Pastor Keith E. Gephart

INTRODUCTION

“When I die, I don’t care what you do with my bones!”

“Don’t spend any money on the dead.”

“Don’t waste a great deal of time and attention.”

“Don’t weep or mourn for the dead.”

“Burn my body and scatter my ashes.”

Do you realize that all of these statements are non-Christian in value.

Why do you think that God put this chapter into the Bible? [Compare also Genesis 50—Jacob’s burial]

ABRAHAM’S PURCHASE OF A BURIAL SITE FOR SARAH HAS IMPORTANT IMPLICATIONS FOR TIME AND ETERNITY.

I. THE PROBLEMS BEHIND THE TRANSACTION (1-4)

A. Sarah’s death (1-2)

- Isaac was 27 years old by this time.
- It was in “the land of Canaan” where she died—very much still a heathen place! (also v. 19)
- Notice the proper “mourning” by Abraham.

B. The Lack of property (3-4); Needed a burial site.

C. Abraham’s position—Still a “stranger”—sojourner—among them (v. 4); yet living in Canaan for 62 years!

D. The heathen were still owners of the land. Still a “stranger”—sojourner—among them (v. 4); yet living in Canaan for 62 years!

II. THE PROPRIETY OF THE TRANSACTION

A. On Abraham’s part

1. Respectful (vv. 7, 12—“bowed to the people of the land, the sons of Heth”)

- There is no place for rudeness even though wicked and ungodly.
- He did not manifest a superior attitude.

2. Request for mediation (v. 8)

- Doesn’t assume their obligation to oblige.
- Please speak to Ephron, son of Zohar.

3. Offer of a fair price (v. 9)

- No begging
- Specific location in mind—cave of Machpelah, which he owns
- At the end of his field—a reasonable place not inconveniencing Ephron.
- “Full price”; cf. v. 13 also
- Possession of a burial place—transfer of ownership

4. Common Ground—“agreeable”—if it is your wish

5. Accurate Price—“weighing silver,” “according to the merchant” (v. 16); 400 shekels of silver (15, 16)

- Abraham did not want to be beholding to worldly and unsaved people.
- God had already given the land to him—yet he humbled himself here.
- 400 shekels was about 160 ounces or 10 pounds of silver!

B. On the Part of the Hittites

1. Respectful (vv. 6, 11)—“my lord”=“sir”

- Also, “If you will only please listen to me” (v. 13)

- “accept it from me” (13)
- 2. Complimentary—“prince of God” or “mighty prince” (v. 6)
- 3. Generosity (v. 6, 11)
 - “Choicest of our graves (6)
 - None of us will refuse you his grave for burying your dead.”
 - Notice the respect Abraham had with these people!
 - Ephron, among them, offered both the grave and the land—the field also (11).
 - “What is that between me and you?” (15)
 - Maybe giving over his feudal obligations also.
- C. On the part of both
 1. A public assembly
 - “in the midst of” (v. 9)
 - “in the presence of” (v. 11, 18)
 - “in the hearing of” (v. 10, v. 13)
 2. Legal Representation—at the city gate (vv. 10, 18)
 3. Proper recording and transfer (vv. 17, 20—“stood over to Abraham; i.e. “deeded over, ratified”)
 - Specific location—in Machpelah, facing Mamre, (i.e. Hebron). (17, 19)
 - Important details—Field and the cave; all the trees in the field, within its confines (17)

III. THE PURPOSE OF THE TRANSACTION

- A. His love for his wife—respect shown for her
- B. Faith in fulfillment of God’s promises of the land to Israel
- C. Resurrection of the body some day
- D. Future hope for both Sarah and Abraham

See Hebrews 11:13-16.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS AS FAR AS BURIAL PRACTICES TODAY?