

NOON BIBLE STUDY: GENESIS 23

GENESIS 23:1-2 - SARAH DIES

IN A SAD MOMENT MARKING AN END OF AN ERA, ABRAHAM'S WIFE SARAH DIES. SHE DIED AT THE AGE OF 127 AND IS THE ONLY WOMAN IN THE BIBLE WHOSE EXACT AGE AT DEATH IS GIVEN. CERTAINLY WE KNOW THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THAT DETAIL. SARAH HAD 37 YEARS WITH HER SON ISAAC WHO WAS BORN WHEN SHE WAS 90.

SARAH LIVED A FULL AND GOOD LIFE. SHE WAS ABRAHAM'S CLOSEST COMPANION. SHE JOURNEYED WITH HIM AWAY FROM HIS FAMILY IN UR TO THE FOREIGN LAND OF CANAAN. SHE HEARD AND WAITED FOR THE PROMISES GOD HAD MADE TO ABRAHAM. SHE WALKED WITH HIM FROM PLACE TO PLACE AS THEY SOJOURNED. THIS INCLUDED "INTERESTING" STOPS IN EGYPT AND GERAR WHERE SHE WAS "GIVEN" TO PHARAOH AND ABIMELECH. IT WAS HER IDEA TO GIVE HAGAR TO ABRAHAM TO SPEED UP THE WHOLE FATHER OF MANY NATIONS PROCESS AND THAT CHOICE AFFECTED HER YEARS LATER AS HER SERVANT TURNED SURROGATE MOCKED HER EVEN AFTER ISAAC WAS BORN.

SARAH HAD SOME GREAT MOMENTS AND SOME BAD ONES TOO. YET, LIKE ABRAHAM, THE INCLUSION OF BOTH HER FAITHFULNESS AND HER FLAWS IS EVIDENCE OF GOD'S GRACE AND GOODNESS TOWARDS HUMANITY.

IN FACT, SARAH IS HELD IN SCRIPTURE AS A MODEL WIFE AND WOMAN OF FAITH:

1 PETER 3:3-6 NLT - DON'T BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE OUTWARD BEAUTY OF FANCY HAIRSTYLES, EXPENSIVE JEWELRY, OR BEAUTIFUL CLOTHES. **4** YOU SHOULD CLOTHE YOURSELVES INSTEAD WITH THE BEAUTY THAT COMES FROM WITHIN, THE UNFADING BEAUTY OF A GENTLE AND QUIET SPIRIT, WHICH IS SO PRECIOUS TO GOD. **5** THIS IS HOW THE HOLY WOMEN OF OLD MADE THEMSELVES BEAUTIFUL. THEY TRUSTED GOD AND ACCEPTED THE AUTHORITY OF THEIR HUSBANDS. **6** FOR INSTANCE, SARAH OBEYED HER HUSBAND, ABRAHAM, AND CALLED HIM HER MASTER. YOU ARE HER DAUGHTERS WHEN YOU DO WHAT IS RIGHT WITHOUT FEAR OF WHAT YOUR HUSBANDS MIGHT DO.

AND WITH HER DEATH, MOURNING ABRAHAM NOW LOOKS TO HONOR HER WITH NOT ONLY A BURIAL, BUT A PLACE FOR THEIR FAMILY TO REST IN PEACE.

GENESIS 23:3-7 - ABRAHAM SEEKS TO BURY SARAH

V. 3 - "SONS OF HETH" (NASB) ARE ALSO KNOWN AS THE HITITES (SEE ESV, NIV ETC)

ABRAHAM APPROACHES THE PEOPLE OF KIRIATH-ARBA (HEBRON) ABOUT BURYING HIS WIFE IN THEIR LAND. ABRAHAM DESCRIBES HIMSELF AS "A STRANGER AND SOJOURNER AMONG YOU." EVEN THOUGH HE'S BEEN LIVING IN THE LAND FOR DECADES, HE STILL CONFESSES THIS ABOUT HIMSELF. THIS IS A MAN WHO HAS THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT FLOWING THROUGH HIS BODY.

THE PEOPLE OF THE LAND NOT ONLY AGREE TO GIVE HIM SOME OF THE CHOICE LAND, BUT CONFESS THAT ABRAHAM IS A "MIGHTY PRINCE AMONG US" (V. 6). ABRAHAM CALLS HIMSELF A PILGRIM, THE PEOPLE LOOK AT HIM AS A PRINCE. THIS PHRASE "MIGHTY PRINCE (NASB)"

IS LITERALLY THE WORDS "GOD PRINCE" OR "PRINCE OF GOD" (*ELOHIM NASI*). WHAT A REPUTATION TO HAVE! AND IN HONOR, ABRAHAM BOWS BEFORE THIS PEOPLE.

GENESIS 23:8-12 - ABRAHAM HAS A PARTICULAR PLACE IN MIND

ABRAHAM IS GRATEFUL THAT THE PEOPLE ARE WILLING TO RESPOND TO HIS REQUEST. ABRAHAM FOLLOWS UP WITH A MORE SPECIFIC REQUEST. ABRAHAM ASKS THE ELDERS IF THEY WOULD BE WILLING TO ASK EPHRON, THE SON OF ZOHAR, FOR THE CAVE OF MACHPELAH, WHICH IS LOCATED ON LAND HE OWNS.

EPHRON, WHO HAPPENS TO BE SITTING AT THE GATE (THE PLACE WHERE CITY OFFICIALS AND ELDERS WOULD OFTEN MEET FOR MATTERS OF STATE) AND NOT ONLY AGREES TO ALLOW ABRAHAM TO HAVE THE LAND FOR HIS BURIAL PLACE, BUT OFFERS TO GIVE IT TO ABRAHAM AT NO CHARGE! ABRAHAM HUMBLY BOWS LOW BEFORE THE PEOPLE FOR A SECOND TIME.

GENESIS 23:13-16 - ABRAHAM WANTS TO BUY THE CAVE

EVEN THOUGH EPHRON OFFERS TO GIVE ABRAHAM THE CAVE, ABRAHAM INSISTS ON BUYING IT FROM HIM. EPHRON'S ASKING PRICE IS 400 SHEKELS OF SILVER. IT'S UNCLEAR EXACTLY WHAT THAT UNIT OF MEASURE MEANT AT THAT TIME, BUT IT SEEMS TO BE A SIGNIFICANT PRICE TAG. WITHOUT HESITATION, ABRAHAM BUYS THE LAND.

WHY DO YOU THINK ABRAHAM WANTS TO BUY THE LAND AND NOT JUST ACCEPT IT AS A GIFT?

THERE ARE A FEW THINGS THAT COULD BE HAPPENING HERE. FIRST, WE HAVE ALREADY READ THAT ABRAHAM WAS DETERMINED TO NOT ENTANGLE HIMSELF IN THE AFFAIRS OF HIS NEIGHBORS. WAY BACK IN GENESIS 14, WE READ THAT ABRAHAM DIDN'T WANT TO ACCEPT ANY REWARDS OFFERED TO HIM BY THE KINGS HE RESCUED. THE TEXT SAID:

GENESIS 14:22-23 NLT - ABRAM REPLIED TO THE KING OF SODOM, "I SOLEMNLY SWEAR TO THE LORD, GOD MOST HIGH, CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, THAT I WILL NOT TAKE SO MUCH AS A SINGLE THREAD OR SANDAL THONG FROM WHAT BELONGS TO YOU. OTHERWISE YOU MIGHT SAY, 'I AM THE ONE WHO MADE ABRAM RICH.'"

PERHAPS A SIMILAR THING IS HAPPENING HERE. SECONDLY, BY HANDLING THIS MATTER LEGALLY AND PUBLICALLY, IT WOULD ENSURE THAT THIS DEAL WAS OFFICIAL AND BINDING. A PRIVATE GIFTING OR BACKROOM DEAL COULD HAVE BEEN DISPUTED LATER BY EPHRON'S DESCENDANTS. *"WE DON'T REMEMBER OUR FATHER TELLING US HE GAVE THIS TO YOU! WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO PROVE THAT THIS LAND IS YOURS ABRAHAM!?"* SO THAT IS TAKEN OFF THE TABLE BY THIS PUBLIC SALE. ABRAHAM'S INTENTIONS ARE TO NOT ONLY USE THIS CAVE FOR SARAH'S BURIAL BUT FOR HIS OWN, AND HIS SONS AFTER HIM. (THAT IN FACT, IS EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENS.)

GENESIS 23:17-20 - ABRAHAM TAKES POSSESSION OF THE LAND

THE READING OF THESE VERSES SOUND VERY MUCH LIKE A LEGAL DEED WE WOULD FIND IN OUR CITY CLERK'S OFFICES TODAY. IT DESCRIBES THE LAND, THE BOUNDARY, AND THE PARTIES INVOLVED. THIS WAS AN OFFICIAL AND BINDING EXCHANGE. ONCE THE BUSINESS IS DONE, ABRAHAM IS ABLE TO BURY SARAH AT LAST.

IN THESE FINAL VERSES WE SEE WHY ABRAHAM WANTED THIS PLACE FOR SARAH AND HIS FAMILY. VERSE 17 DESCRIBES THE LOCATION LIKE THIS: "THE FIELD AND CAVE AND ALL THE SURROUNDING TREES THAT WAS EPHRON'S FIELD, WHICH WAS IN MACHPELAH, WHICH

FACED MAMRE." SARAH'S BODY IS GOING TO BE BURIED IN A CAVE WHICH IS IN A FIELD WHICH FACES MAMRE. DO YOU REMEMBER MAMRE?

GENESIS 13:14-18 14 - THE LORD SAID TO ABRAM, AFTER LOT HAD SEPARATED FROM HIM, "NOW LIFT UP YOUR EYES AND LOOK FROM THE PLACE WHERE YOU ARE, NORTHWARD AND SOUTHWARD AND EASTWARD AND WESTWARD; 15 FOR ALL THE LAND WHICH YOU SEE, I WILL GIVE IT TO YOU AND TO YOUR DESCENDANTS FOREVER. 16 "I WILL MAKE YOUR DESCENDANTS AS THE DUST OF THE EARTH, SO THAT IF ANYONE CAN NUMBER THE DUST OF THE EARTH, THEN YOUR DESCENDANTS CAN ALSO BE NUMBERED. 17 "ARISE, WALK ABOUT THE LAND THROUGH ITS LENGTH AND BREADTH; FOR I WILL GIVE IT TO YOU." 18 THEN ABRAM MOVED HIS TENT AND CAME AND DWELT **BY THE OAKS OF MAMRE, WHICH ARE IN HEBRON**, AND THERE HE BUILT AN ALTAR TO THE LORD.

GENESIS 17:1-8 - NOW WHEN ABRAM WAS NINETY-NINE YEARS OLD, THE LORD APPEARED TO ABRAM AND SAID TO HIM, "I AM GOD ALMIGHTY; WALK BEFORE ME, AND BE BLAMELESS. 2 "I WILL ESTABLISH MY COVENANT BETWEEN ME AND YOU, AND I WILL MULTIPLY YOU EXCEEDINGLY." 3 ABRAM FELL ON HIS FACE, AND GOD TALKED WITH HIM, SAYING, 4 "AS FOR ME, BEHOLD, MY COVENANT IS WITH YOU, AND YOU WILL BE THE FATHER OF A MULTITUDE OF NATIONS. 5 "NO LONGER SHALL YOUR NAME BE CALLED ABRAM, BUT YOUR NAME SHALL BE ABRAHAM; FOR I WILL MAKE YOU THE FATHER OF A MULTITUDE OF NATIONS. 6 "I WILL MAKE YOU EXCEEDINGLY FRUITFUL, AND I WILL MAKE NATIONS OF YOU, AND KINGS WILL COME FORTH FROM YOU. 7 "I WILL ESTABLISH MY COVENANT BETWEEN ME AND YOU AND YOUR DESCENDANTS AFTER YOU THROUGHOUT THEIR GENERATIONS FOR AN EVERLASTING COVENANT, TO BE GOD TO YOU AND TO YOUR DESCENDANTS AFTER YOU. 8 "I WILL GIVE TO YOU AND TO YOUR DESCENDANTS AFTER YOU, THE LAND OF YOUR SOJOURNINGS, ALL THE LAND OF CANAAN, FOR AN EVERLASTING POSSESSION; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD."

GENESIS 17:15-16 - THEN GOD SAID TO ABRAHAM, "AS FOR SARAI YOUR WIFE, YOU SHALL NOT CALL HER NAME SARAI, BUT SARAH SHALL BE HER NAME. 16 "I WILL BLESS HER, AND INDEED I WILL GIVE YOU A SON BY HER. THEN I WILL BLESS HER, AND SHE SHALL BE A MOTHER OF NATIONS; KINGS OF PEOPLES WILL COME FROM HER."

GENESIS 18:1 - NOW THE LORD APPEARED TO HIM BY THE **OAKS OF MAMRE**, WHILE HE WAS SITTING AT THE TENT DOOR IN THE HEAT OF THE DAY.

ABRAHAM HAS COME BACK TO THE PLACE WHERE GOD FIRST APPEARED TO HIM, WHERE THE COVENANT PROMISES WERE MADE. WHERE THE PROMISE OF SARAH BEARING A SON WAS FIRST SPOKEN. AND THIS WILL BE THE VERY PLACE WHERE SARAH WAS BE LAID TO REST, LITERALLY IN THE PLACE THAT "FACED MAMRE".

AND WITH THAT, A BRIEF, 20 VERSE CHAPTER IN GENESIS, WHICH AT FIRST GLANCE SEEMS TO BE SORT OF LIFELESS, ENDS. BUT SOMETHING IS HAPPENING QUIETLY HERE THAT WE HAVE TO HEAR. ABRAHAM'S WIFE, THE PROMISED "MOTHER OF NATIONS" HAS DIED. AND HE'S MOURNING THIS LOSS. BUT EVEN IN SORROW, ABRAHAM REMAINS FIXED ON THE PROMISES OF GOD.

GENESIS 23 IS THE FIRST RECORDING OF A BURIAL IN ALL OF THE BIBLE. AND IN THIS MOMENT, ABRAHAM NOT ONLY EMBRACES THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MAMRE, THE PLACE WHERE HE MET THE LORD, BUT HE IS ALSO LOOKING TOWARDS THE ULTIMATE FULFILMENT OF THE FULL PROMISE GOD HAS MADE.

WE SHOULDN'T BE NAIVE TO THINK THAT GOD HAS BROUGHT HIS WORD TO ABRAHAM TO PASS. HE HASN'T. ABRAHAM IS OLD, HIS WIFE IS NOW GONE AND HE HAS ONE KID, ISAAC. THAT'S A FAR CRY FROM SAND OF THE SEASHORE AND STARS OF THE SKY. HE CONFESSES TO BE A STRANGER IN THE LAND, WHICH IS A FAR CRY FROM "POSSESSING THE GATES OF HIS ENEMIES." BUT, THERE IS MOVEMENT HERE WE HAVE TO SEE.

IN GENESIS 23 ABRAHAM MAKES A DEAL WITH EPHRON TO BUY THE FIELD IN MACHPELAH. AT FIRST GLANCE THIS HAPPENS BECAUSE IT SERVES THE PURPOSE OF BURYING HIS WIFE. BUT WITH THIS ACT, WHICH THIS PURCHASE, ABRAHAM, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE ENTIRE STORY OF ABRAHAM OWNS A PIECE OF THE LAND FOR HIMSELF. UP UNTIL NOW, HE'S BEEN MOVING FROM PLACE TO PLACE, SETTING UP TENT AFTER TENT. AND THOUGH HE'S NOT GOING TO EVER LIVE IN THIS FIELD - THIS FIELD IS ABRAHAM'S.

DO YOU SEE WHAT IS HAPPENING HERE? IT LOOKS LIKE THE STORY IS COMING TO CLOSE AND YET THE STORY OF ABRAHAM, THE FATHER OF MANY NATIONS, WHO HAS BEEN PROMISED TO INHERIT THE LAND IS JUST BEGINNING. ONE SON, ONE FIELD. SEEMS TO THE OUTSIDER TO BE VERY INSIGNIFICANT, BUT TO THOSE OF US WHO ARE FOLLOWING ALONG WITH THE STORY, WE ARE REJOICING - IF WE ARE WATCHING AND LISTENING. AND AS LONG AS THERE IS A SON AND A FIELD, THERE'S HOPE.

AND IN THIS MOMENT, WE ARE REMINDED ABOUT OUR LIVES TODAY. SO MUCH OF WHAT WE HOPE FOR IS NOT SEEN. OUR LONGING FOR THIS WORLD TO BE MADE NEW IS JUST A LONGING. IN SOME PLACES IN OUR WORLD AND IN THIS AGE, THINGS AREN'T GETTING BETTER, THEY ARE GETTING WORSE. PEOPLE ARE DYING, EVIL PEOPLE ARE THRIVING AND WITH EACH DAY WE'RE CLOSER TO OUR OWN BURIAL. YET, IF OUR HEARTS ARE DISCOURAGED AND ANXIOUS OR OVERWHELMED, THEN WE SURELY HAVE FORGOTTEN ABOUT HOPE. HOPE ISN'T WHAT WE SEE, IT'S WHAT WE ARE WAITING FOR. FAITH IS WHAT WE HAVE NOW, LOVE IS HOW WE LIVE NOW, BUT HOPE, HOPE IS THAT WHICH IS TO COME.

AND SO ABRAHAM BURIES HIS WIFE IN HIS OWN LITTLE ACRE, BUT HE DOES IT IN HOPE. AND THEN THE NEXT DAY (IN THE NEXT CHAPTER) HE'S GOING TO GO GET HIS SON A WIFE. ABRAHAM OWNS A FIELD AND A CAVE AND HAS A SON, BUT WHAT WE HAS MORE THAN THAT IS HOPE - HOPE ROOTED IN THE FAITHFUL GOD, WHO DOESN'T ALWAYS WORK ACCORDING TO OUR PLAN AND SCHEDULE BUT WHO IS ALWAYS AT WORK AND CAN BE COUNTED ON AND HOPED IN.

SO ABRAHAM HAS ONE SON AND HE HAS ONE FIELD BUT HE HAS HOPE. HE'S A STRANGER STILL IN HIS LAND, BUT HE HAS HOPE. HIS WIFE IS BURIED, BUT HE HAS HOPE. AND EACH DAY AS HE WALKS WITH GOD, HE MOVES CLOSER TO THAT DAY WHEN HIS HOPE WILL NO LONGER BE HOPE BUT IT WILL BE HIS LIFE.

WALK ON CHILD OF GOD, WITH HOPE IN YOUR GOD.