

Genesis 23: The Death of Sarah

I. Death

- A. *23:1 Sarah lived a hundred and twenty-seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. 2 And Sarah died at Kiriatharba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan; and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.*
- B. The last chapter we left Abraham in Beer-sheba. At some point he must have moved back into Canaan for it is there that she dies.
- C. Isaac at this time would have been in his mid thirties. Abraham would have been 137 years old
- D. The Mourning of the dead involved much ceremony and ostentation:
1. *2 Sam 1:11 Then David took hold on his clothes, and rent them; and likewise all the men that were with him: And they mourned, and wept, and fasted until even, for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the LORD, and for the house of Israel; because they were fallen by the sword.*
 2. *2 Sam 13:31 Then the king arose, and tare his garments, and lay on the earth; and all his servants stood by with their clothes rent.*

II. Dealings -

- A. *3 And Abraham rose up from before his dead, and said to the Hittites, 4 "I am a stranger and a sojourner among you; give me property among you for a burying place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight." 5 The Hittites answered Abraham, 6 "Hear us, my lord; you are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our sepulchres; none of us will withhold from you his sepulchre, or hinder you from burying your dead." 7 Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land. 8 And he said to them, "If you are willing that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and entreat for me Ephron the son of Zohar, 9 that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he owns; it is at the end of his field. For the full price let him give it to me in your presence as a possession for a burying place." 10 Now Ephron was sitting among the Hittites; and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, of all who went in at the gate of his city, 11 "No, my lord, hear me; I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it; in the presence of the sons of my people I give it to you; bury your dead." 12 Then Abraham bowed down before the people of the land. 13 And he said to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, "But if you will, hear me; I will give the price of the field; accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there." 14 Ephron answered Abraham, 15 "My lord, listen to me; a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between you and me? Bury your*

dead." 16 Abraham agreed with Ephron; and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver which he had named in the hearing of the Hittites, four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weights current among the merchants. 17 So the field of Ephron in Machpelah, which was to the east of Mamre, the field with the cave which was in it and all the trees that were in the field, throughout its whole area, was made over 18 to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the Hittites, before all who went in at the gate of his city. 19 After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah east of Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. 20 The field and the cave that is in it were made over to Abraham as a possession for a burying place by the Hittites.

- B. Abraham's purchase of a burial plot indicates two things:
 - 1. He expects, according to God's promise to one day inhabit the land in accord with God's promise.
 - 2. He does not do so now but is a *stranger and a sojourner among you*. Thus he insists on purchasing the cave and the land.
- C. Abraham is thus still semi-nomadic, dwelling on the land but without proprietary rights.
- D. The Hittites regard Abraham as *a mighty prince among us*. This is a consistent feature of Abraham's life: he is well regarded by all the "pagans" in the land.
- E. With typical oriental courtesy Abraham indicates he wishes to buy a cave in which to bury Sarah. Ephron the owner indicates as was typical his wish to sell the whole field rather than a portion of it. He also says he will give it to Abraham. That was not usual of course and once again underscores the high regard in which Abraham was held among the locals.
- F. Abraham insists on paying and the price is set at 400 shekels.
- G. *what is that between you and me?* - this same phrase was used by Jesus when Mary his mother asked regarding the wine. We can discuss in class the meaning of this Jewish idiom.