

"Sarah's death and burial" describes the events of this chapter, but the significance is more in the faith of Abraham which these events reveal.

I. *The event of Sarah's death (23:1-2)* sets the scene for this chapter.

Although Sarah now passes off the scene in Genesis, she is none-the-less an important figure in Biblical history, being the only woman in the Bible whose age at death is given and one of "the holy women of the past who put their hope in God" (1 Peter 3:5).

She was, of course, important to Abraham as well, having had a long, largely harmonious marriage and being the type of wife that Peter could lift up as a model for women today to follow (1 Peter 3:1-6).

Abraham mourned his loss of Sarah. We, too, may grieve at our own losses, but should not sorrow like those who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). We have hope for fellow believers who have passed away and we need not mourn for them.

II. *Negotiations for a burial place (23:3-16)* point to the significance of this chapter.

1. *Historical backgrounds*

It was important for people of the Mid-East to be buried in their own land. Consider, for example, Jacob's request (Gen 47:29-30; 49:29-32; 50), Joseph's instructions (Gen 50:25; Josh 24:32), Ruth's statement of commitment to Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17), the burial of the kings and the notable exceptions of Jehoram and Joash (2 Chronicles 21:20; 24:25), the special burial of Jehoiada (2 Chr 24:16), and the punishment of the man of God from Judah (1 Kings 13:22).

Hittite law also enlightens us to the purchase of the land with the cave, since land possession unless totally sold or gifted required continued feudal service to the king.

2. *Observations concerning the negotiations*

Abraham considered himself an alien and a stranger among the people of the land, yet he wanted to purchase a burial place there. He understood this land to be the future home for him and his descendants, the land that belonged to him by the promise of God.

Abraham asked to buy a cave but had to settle for the cave and the land which joined it. One word, "give", is variously translated "give", "sell" and "buy", and probably throughout this passage means "give in exchange for". Abraham was not asking for the cave as a gift (cf. v 9) and Ephron was not offering the cave and the adjoining land freely. Ephron probably did not want the continued responsibility of feudal service.

The price of 400 shekels of silver was probably highly overpriced since records of that time period would indicate an average price of 4 shekels per acre and a maximum of 40 shekels for a prime garden. Ephron did not offer a fair price which confirms the conclusion that he had not offered a free gift to Abraham. Abraham, on the other hand, was serious enough about the purchase to accept the high price.

3. *Significance in light of God's Word*

Earlier we find repeated records of God's promise to Abraham concerning the land (Genesis 12:7; 13:15; 15:7, 18; 17:8). Although "an alien and stranger" among the people, Abraham understood this land of Canaan to be his home and the future possession of his descendants. He demonstrated his faith in God by buying a burial place for Sarah in Canaan.

Hebrews 11:11-16 gives us yet further insight into the significance of this passage. The phrase "aliens and strangers" in verse 13 ties to Abraham and Genesis 23:4, since no one else in Genesis is recorded as having called themselves "aliens and strangers". Abraham could have turned to Ur, but chose not to, because he was looking for a country of his own (Hebr 11:14-15).

On the surface that new country was Canaan, the land of promise. The commitment to stay in Canaan is seen in Abraham in his refusal to allow Isaac to go to Ur (24: 6) and Jacob's understanding of Canaan as his "own homeland" (Gen 30:25), even after 20 years in Mesopotamia.

Thinking deeper, there is even greater significance here. Abraham's trust in God extended beyond being an earthly recipient of God's blessing. He never saw the fulfillment and knew that his offspring would be enslaved and mistreated in a foreign country 400 years before receiving the land promised. Such a trust in God is an indication that God is more important than any earthly possession.

Abraham's intent on getting a burial place in Canaan demonstrated his faith in God and his commitment to God.

III. *Acquisition of the land and Sarah's burial (23:17-20)* conclude the report.

The importance of this legal and fully attested acquisition seems to be highlighted by the repetition of the fact in verse 20. More than Sarah's burial, it was Abraham's choice to acquire burial land officially in Canaan that demonstrated his faith in God.

Our faith in God changes how we mourn for beloved, fellow-believers who die. Neither their death nor our life separates us from God's love (Romans 8:38-39).

Our faith in God makes God more important than any earthly possession. Being with God becomes our greatest desire as was the Apostle Paul's.

Our faith in God's promises for the future encourages us to invest our treasure (time, possessions, our very lives) in heaven where Christ is.

God's promise is that His children will be with Him eternally. We look forward to our home with Him.