

Life Group Discussion Questions

Week 23: February 21-28

Genesis 23

In Genesis chapter 23, we see the only piece of the Promised Land that Abraham legally purchased. It was a burial site for his beloved wife, Sarah. While she wasn't perfect, Scripture describes Sarah as an example for us to look to and follow (Is. 51:1-2; 1 Peter 3:6). Sarah is the only woman in the Bible whose age is recorded at the time of her death. However, it has been over 30 years since we last heard about Sarah in chapter 21. She was conspicuously absent from the previous chapter when Abraham almost killed their son. Genesis 23 teaches us practical lessons about faith and hope in times of grief.

Read Genesis 23:1-20

1. How old was Sarah when she died? (23:1)

2. Where did Sarah die in verse 2? How did Abraham respond?

This is the first time the term “weep” is used in the Bible.

3. What did Abraham want from the Hittites? (23:3-4)

The word for “Hittites” is literally “sons of Heth.” Heth was one of the sons of Canaan mentioned in Genesis 10:15. Abraham comes humbly before the sons of Heth, recognizing that even though God has promised the land to his descendants, he doesn't legally own any land. Paul Kissling writes,

Abraham acknowledges that his residence is only temporary. He is an "alien" (גֵר, *gēr*) and a "sojourner" (תּוֹשָׁב, *tōšāb*), both terms implying transitory residence. With such a social status he has no inherited or other rights to the land. He therefore asks for the opportunity to buy a burial site that would become his permanent possession.¹

4. How did the Hittites respond to Abraham's request in verse 6?

5. How did the Hittites describe Abraham in verse 6?

The term “mighty prince” literally means “prince of God.”

6. How did Abraham show humility and respect to the Hittites? (23:7 & 12)

7. Why did Abraham want the sons of Hittites to intercede with Ephron? (23:8-9)

Abraham had a specific cave in mind that he wanted to own as a permanent burial site for his family. This was so important to Abraham that he was willing to bypass the cultural practice of haggling and pay the “full price.” The Cave of Machpelah would serve as a reminder to God's people not only of the patriarchs and matriarchs, but also of the promises God made to Abraham. Dennis Prager notes,

This cave has enormous biblical and Jewish significance. The three patriarchs and three of the four matriarchs (all but Rachel) are buried in this cave. The final words spoken by Jacob before he died in Egypt were a request that his sons bury him in this cave. “After the Western Wall, it has remained throughout history the most sacred monument of the Jewish people” (Sarna).²

8. According to verses 10 and 18, where was this discussion taking place?

In the Ancient Near East, the city gate was like the courthouse or town hall. It was the place where leaders of the city would come and hear disputes and ratify legal transactions.

9. What did Ephron offer to Abraham in verse 11?

10. What did Abraham offer to Ephron in verse 13?

11. How much did Ephron say that the land was worth in verse 15?

12. How did Abraham respond to Ephron in verse 16?

¹ Paul Kissling, *The College Press NIV Commentary: Genesis Volume 2* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2009), 204.

² Dennis Prager, *The Rational Bible: Genesis* (Washington, DC: Regnery Faith, 2019), 265.

James Smith observes,

Hittite law codes may explain why Ephron was insisting on the sale of the entire field. If Abraham owned the whole field he would have to assume the Hittite tax (called *ilku*) obligations. Ephron set the price of the land at four hundred shekels of silver. Judging by the real estate contracts recovered from Mesopotamia, this was an exorbitant price. Ephron probably expected Abraham to haggle in typical Oriental fashion. Abraham, however, did not quibble over the price. No amount was too great for a proper burial place for his beloved wife. He weighed out publicly the shekels in the currency of the merchants which would have been accepted by all peoples of the region.³

13. How does verse 17 describe the land Abraham purchased?

This verse may be a quote from the legal description carved on the clay tablet that would serve as the deed to the land. Deeds from the Ancient Near East often included descriptions about the trees on the property.

14. What information is repeated in verses 19 and 20?

The Bible leaves no room for doubt concerning the legal purchase of this property from the Hittites. Smith shows how this was yet another time when Abraham's faith was being tested. He writes,

Though he had spent much of his life outside the Promised Land, he was finally able to bury his wife in Canaan. This the text twice emphasizes (23:2, 19). Even in his hour of grief, however, his faith was being tested. Sixty years earlier he had received the promise that the land of Canaan would be his. Yet he did not own a plot of ground suitable to bury a loved one. Abraham was forced to purchase from a pagan, land that in reality already belonged to him.⁴

15. What promises of God give you hope in times of grief?

16. How can you honor your loved ones this week?

³ James Smith, *The Pentateuch* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1996), 167.

Sermon Notes 2/21/21

“By Promise and Purchase”

How should we respond to Genesis chapter 23?

1. _____ the memory of God's people.
Genesis 23:1-2
1 Thessalonians 4:13-14
2. Be _____ the world, but not _____ the world.
Genesis 23:3-6
John 17:15-17
3. _____ in the Kingdom of God.
Genesis 23:16
Matthew 13:44-46
4. Be prepared for _____.
Genesis 23:20
Hebrews 9:27-28



The Cave of Machpelah in Hebron

⁴ Smith, 167.