

# CHAPTER 23

## INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS 23

This chapter treats of the age, death, and funeral of Sarah, and the place of her interment: of her age, (<sup><01201></sup>Genesis 23:1); of her death, (<sup><01212></sup>Genesis 23:2); of the motion Abraham made to the sons of Heth, to obtain a burial place among them, (<sup><01213></sup>Genesis 23:3,4); of the answer of them to him, giving him leave to bury in any of their sepulchres, (<sup><01215></sup>Genesis 23:5,6); of a second motion of his to them, to use their interest with Ephron the Hittite, to let him have the cave of Machpelah for the above purpose, (<sup><01217></sup>Genesis 23:7-9); of Ephron's consent unto it, (<sup><01230></sup>Genesis 23:10,11); of the purchase Abraham made of it for four hundred shekels of silver, (<sup><01232></sup>Genesis 23:12-16); and of its being secured unto him, which he interred Sarah his wife, (<sup><01237></sup>Genesis 23:17-20).

**Ver. 1.** *And Sarah was an hundred and seven and twenty years old*, etc.]

This following immediately upon the account of the offering up of Isaac, led many of the Jewish writers to conclude, that Isaac was when thirty seven years of age, as he must be when Sarah his mother was one hundred and twenty seven, for he was born when she was ninety years of age; but this seems not to be observed on that account, but to give the sum of her age at her death, since it follows:

*[these were] the years of the life of Sarah*; who, as it is remarked by many interpreters, is the only woman the years of whose life are reckoned up in Scripture.

**Ver. 2.** *And Sarah died in Kirjatharba*, etc.] Which was so called, either, as Jarchi says, from the four Anakims or giants that dwelt here, (<sup><06413></sup>Joshua 15:13); or else, as the same writer observes, from the four couple buried here, Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah; but then it must be so called by anticipation; rather, as Aben Ezra thinks, it had its name from Arba, a great man among the Anakims, and the father of Anak, (<sup><06415></sup>Joshua 14:15); though some take it to be a Tetrapolls, a city consisting of four parts; but be it as it will, here Abraham and Sarah

were at the time of her death; when they removed from Beersheba hither is not said:

*the same [is] Hebron, in the land of Canaan*; so it was afterwards called: here Abraham and Sarah had lived many years ago, (see <sup><0138></sup>Genesis 13:18); and hither they returned, and here they ended their days and were buried:

*and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her*; Aben Ezra observes, that, when Sarah died, Abraham was in another place, and therefore is said to come to mourn for her; and the Targum of Jonathan is,

“and Abraham came from the mount of worship (Moriah), and found that she was dead, and he sat down to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her.”

Others <sup>f1290</sup> report, that, upon hearing of the offering up of Isaac, she swooned away and died. But the meaning is, that he came from his own tent to Sarah’s, (see <sup><0247></sup>Genesis 24:67), where her corpse was, to indulge his passion of grief and sorrow for her; which, in a moderate way, was lawful, and what natural affection and conjugal relation obliged him to. The Hebrews <sup>f1291</sup> observe, that, in the word for “weep”, one of the letters is lesser than usual, and which they think denotes, that his weeping for her was not excessive, but little; but both phrases put together seem to denote that his sorrow was very great; and the one perhaps may refer to his private, and the other to his public mourning for her, according to the custom of those times.

**Ver. 3.** *And Abraham stood up from before his dead*, etc.] The corpse of Sarah, by which he sat pensive and mourning, perhaps upon the ground, as was the custom of mourners, (<sup><8013></sup>Job 1:13); where having sat awhile, he rose up and went out of the tent, to provide for the funeral of his wife as became him:

*and spake unto the sons of Heth*; the descendants of Heth the son of Canaan, (see <sup><0105></sup>Genesis 10:15); who were at this time the inhabitants and proprietors of that part of the land where Abraham now was: saying; as follows:

**Ver. 4.** *I [am] a stranger and a sojourner with you*, etc.] Not a native of the place, only dwelt as a sojourner among them for a time; but had not so

much as a foot of ground he could call his own, and consequently had no place to inter his dead:

*give me a possession of a buryingplace with you*; not that he desired it as a free gift, but that he might be allowed to make a purchase of a piece of ground to bury his dead in; so the Targum of Jonathan,

“sell me a possession,” etc.

(<sup>-0239</sup>Genesis 23:9); and this he was the rather desirous of, not only because it was according to the rules of humanity, and the general custom of all nations, to provide for the burial of their dead; but he was willing to have such a place in the land of Canaan for this purpose, to strengthen his faith and the faith of his posterity, and to animate their hope and expectation of being one day put into the possession of it; hence the patriarchs in later times, as Jacob and Joseph, were desirous of having their bones laid there:

*that I may bury my dead out of my sight*; for, though Sarah was a very lovely person in her life, and greatly desirable by Abraham, yet death had changed her countenance and was turning her into corruption, which rendered her unpleasant, and began to make her loathsome; so that there was a necessity of removing her out of his sight, who before had been so very agreeable to him; and this is the case of the dearest relation and friend at death.

**Ver. 5.** *And the children of Heth answered Abraham*, etc.] In a very civil and respectful manner:

*saying unto him*, as follows:

**Ver. 6.** *Hear us, my lord*, etc.] One of them spake in the name of the rest, who calls Abraham not “our lord”, but “my lord”; addressing him very honourably, and desires he would hear what he had to say on the behalf of others with himself; “hear us”, representing not the body of the common people, but the princes among them, the heads of their families:

*thou [art] a mighty prince amongst us*; though he was pleased to call himself a stranger and a sojourner, yet they had an high opinion of him, as a person of great wealth and substance, and of great power and authority; and who lived like a prince, and was a potent one, having a large train of servants under him: or, “a prince of God”<sup>f1292</sup>, as it may be rendered; one raised up to grandeur and dignity by him; with whom he was, find in whose

sight he had favour, and was very grateful and acceptable; and by whom he was highly honoured, and had in great esteem as a friend of his:

*in the choice of our sepulchres bury thy dead*; as they had many, every family a distinct sepulchre for itself, they made offer of them to him, to bury his dead in the choicest of them, the most grand and magnificent, or in which of them soever he pleased; which was very kind, generous, and respectful:

*none of us shall withhold from thee his sepulchre, but that thou mayest bury thy dead*; there is not a man among us but what has such a regard for thee, that he will not deny thee the use of his sepulchre to bury thy dead in; and therefore need not scruple to make use of any that may be judged most proper and convenient: no doubt the speaker full well knew the mind of those in whose name he addressed Abraham.

**Ver. 7.** *And Abraham stood up*, etc.] For, having made his speech to the children of Heth, he sat down waiting for an answer; or rather perhaps they obliged him to sit down, out of reverence to so great a personage; and when they had done speaking, he rose up:

*and bowed himself to the people of the land*; the principal of them, in token of the grateful sense he had of the honour they had done him, and of the great civility with which they had used him:

*[even] to the children of Heth*; this seems to be added to distinguish them from the common people, and as an explanation of the preceding clause; (see Gill on “<sup>0123B</sup>Genesis 23:3”).

**Ver. 8.** *And he communed with them*, etc.] Entered into a discourse and conversation with them upon the above subject:

*saying, if it be your mind that I should bury my dead out of my sight*; that is, in some place belonging to them, otherwise they could have no objection to the burying of his wife anywhere else: if now what they had said were not spoken in a complaisant way, but it was their real mind and will, and they were sincere and hearty in it, and very desirous of obliging him with a place among them for the interment of his dead; then he had this favour to ask of them:

*hear me, and entreat for me to Ephron the son of Zohar*; a principal man among the Hittites, who had a field and a cave in it, near where Abraham

dwelt, and very convenient for him, and for this purpose of his now under consideration: this man seems to be present at this time, as appears from (<sup>-0230</sup>Genesis 23:10); but Abraham did not think fit to address him himself, lest he should not so well and so easily succeed; and therefore entreats the princes of Heth to unite in a request to Ephron for the favour after mentioned, which he supposed they would not be backward to, if they were hearty in this affair; and, if Ephron was present, as he seems to be, it was a very handsome, honourable, and modest address to him through his brethren, which he could not with any politeness well withstand. The request follows:

**Ver. 9.** *That he may, give me the cave of Machpelah, which he hath, which [is] in the end of his field,* etc.] The Targum of Jonathan renders it, “the double cave”, and so do the Septuagint and Vulgate Latin versions; and, according to Aben Ezra and Ben Melech, it was so called because there was a cave within a cave in it; and, as Jarchi thinks, because it was a house and chamber over it <sup>f1293</sup> or, as he adds, because it was fit for couples, for two corpses to be laid in it; and the Jews say <sup>f1294</sup>, here Adam and Eve were buried, which made Abraham so desirous of having it for a buryingplace: but it seems rather to be the proper name of a place, and indeed of a tract of land, in which the field and the cave in the corner of it lay, and which all belonged to Ephron; for both the field and the cave in it are distinguished from Machpelah, in which they were, and that from them, (<sup>-0237</sup>Genesis 23:17); and it is highly probable, that this cave was never made use of before for such a purpose as it was now sought for, since Abraham did not think fit to accept of the offer made him of any of their sepulchres; and chose rather that his dead should not lie with them, but in a separate place, though among them, they being Heathens and idolaters, and unacquainted with the resurrection of the dead, and would have no part in the first resurrection, which Abraham believed and hoped for;

*for as much money as it is worth he shall give it me, for a possession of a buryingplace amongst you;* or, “for full money” <sup>f1295</sup>, that which is full weight, for money was paid by weight in those times, as appears from (<sup>-0236</sup>Genesis 23:16); or for the full price and value of it: for, as Abraham did not desire to have it as a free gift, so neither at an under price; he was very willing to give the full worth of it; he did not ask it with any covetous view, or to encroach upon them.

**Ver. 10.** *And Ephron dwelt among the children of Heth*, etc.] Or “sat”<sup>f1296</sup> among them, in the present assembly of them; and, according to Jarchi, as their president for the time on this occasion; but if so, Abraham would have directed his speech to him: however, he was upon the spot, as appears from what follows,

*and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the audience of the children of Heth*; he rose up in the assembly upon the mention of his name, and in the hearing of the rest of the princes gave an answer himself to Abraham’s request:

*[even] of all that went in at the gates of his city*; the city of Kirjatharba, afterwards called Hebron, (<sup>402XP</sup>Genesis 23:2), where he was born, or however where he now lived; and perhaps it, or the greater part of it, was his possession and property: it was now at one of the gates of this city, where the assembly of the princes was held; it being usual to hold assemblies on any business, or courts of judicature, in such places, they being public, where multitudes resorted, or were continually passing and repassing, and so had the opportunity of hearing, and of being witnesses:

*saying*; as follows:

**Ver. 11.** *Nay, my lord, hear me*, etc.] Or not so, my lord, as Aben Ezra paraphrases it; not that he denied his request entirely, or refused him the cave at any rate, but that he should not buy it of him, he would give it to him, and therefore he desires he would hear what he had to say further:

*the field give I thee, and the cave that [is] therein I give it thee*; which was more than Abraham asked to purchase; he only desired to have the cave, which lay in one corner of the field, but Ephron proposes both to give him the cave, and the field also:

*in the presence of the sons of my people give I it thee*; both field and cave; three times he says, “I give it thee”, to show that he freely gave it, and that Abraham was welcome to it, and for the confirmation of the grant:

*bury thy dead*; in the cave, at once, immediately, without any more ado.

**Ver. 12.** *And Abraham bowed down himself before the people of the land*.] Showing hereby great respect, and giving much honour both to them and Ephron; and signifying that he had something to say, and desired audience of them, and humbly submitted to them what he should say.

**Ver. 13.** *And he spake unto Ephron in the audience of the people of the land,* etc.] He addressed himself to Ephron who spoke last, with an audible voice, so that all could hear him:

*saying, but if thou [wilt give it], I pray thee, hear me;* the words are very concise, and in the original text are only “if thou”, and differently supplied; by some, “if thou art he”<sup>f1297</sup>, Ephron, whom it is supposed Abraham knew not by face, or that he was present; which is not likely, since Abraham had lived in those parts now so as to be well known himself, and must know his neighbours; and had lived formerly here, and could not but know so great a prince as Ephron, whose city he dwelt in. The Targum of Jonathan is,

“if thou art willing to do me a kindness, hear me;”

it will be taken as a favour to admit me to speak once more, and to grant what shall be desired. Others read the words thus,

“if thou wilt hear me, or I pray thee hear me, or if thou, if (I say) thou wilt hear me”<sup>f1298</sup>.”

then follows his proposal,

*I will give thee the money for the field;* Abraham did not choose to receive it as a free gift, but to make a purchase of it, that it might be sure to him and his posterity; for though Ephron was now in this generous mood, he might change his mind, or hereafter upbraid Abraham with it, should he fall out with him, or his posterity might claim it again, and dispute his right to it:

*take [it] of me:* the purchase money, the full worth of the field:

*and I will bury my dead there,* or “then will I bury”, etc.<sup>f1299</sup>; and not before.

**Ver. 14.** *And Ephron answered Abraham, saying unto him.*] The following words:

**Ver. 15.** *My lord, hearken unto me,* etc.] Since it is your mind to buy the field, and not receive it as a gift, then hear what I have to say as to the value of it:

*the land [is worth] four hundred shekels of silver;* which, reckoning a shekel at two shillings and sixpence, comes to fifty pounds of our money;

*what [is] that betwixt thee and me?* between two persons so rich, the sum was trifling and inconsiderable, whether the one paid it, and the other received it, or not; or between two such friends it was not worth speaking of, it was no matter whether it was paid or not: or else the sense is, between us both it is honestly worth so much; it is a good bargain, and must be owned to be so, what is it? the sum is so small, and it is so clearly the worth of it, that there needs no more to be said about it:

*bury therefore thy dead:* in it, and give thyself no more trouble and concern about it.

**Ver. 16.** *And Abraham hearkened unto Ephron,* etc.] He agreed at once to give him the sum proposed, judging it to be a moderate price between man and man, and he was satisfied with it, and well content to pay him the money:

*and Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver:* for in those times money had no mark or stamp upon it to show its value, and therefore was not told by pieces, but weighed, by which its full worth was known; and that Ephron might have his whole and just demand, the silver was weighed to him:

*which he had named, in the audience of the sons of Heth;* who were witnesses of the bargain, of the price set by Ephron, and of the payment of it by Abraham:

*four hundred shekels of silver:* the sum before mentioned, (<sup>02315</sup>Genesis 23:15):

*current [money] with the merchant;* such as was used by merchants in buying and selling; such as they would receive, who knew the value of it, and were careful not to take any that was bad; wherefore such as would pass, with them would go anywhere, was current money; how all this is consistent with what Stephen says; (see Gill on <sup>44716</sup>Acts 7:16”).

**Ver. 17.** *And the field of Ephron, which [was] in Machpelah,* etc.] This clearly shows that Machpelah is the proper name of a place or tract of ground, and not an appellative, or to be rendered the double cave, since a field could never be said to be in a cave: and yet some have been so stupid, as Vatablus observes, as to render the words,

“the field of Ephron, which was in the double cave,”



whereas, on the contrary, the cave was in that field; and so the Vulgate version, to better sense, though not agreeably to the Hebrew text,

“the field of Ephron, in which was the double cave:”

*which [was] before Mamre*; or over against it, the place where Abraham dwelt, which was in Hebron, (<sup><0138></sup>Genesis 13:18 18:1);

*the field, and the cave which [was] therein, and all the trees that [were] in the field, that [were] in all the borders round about, were made sure*; or “rose”, or “stood up” <sup>f1300</sup>. Jarchi thinks the reason of this phrase, or way of speaking, is, because this field, with all belonging to it, came into the hands of a greater person; out of the hands of a private man into the hands of a king; and so Abraham indeed is called by some Heathen writers <sup>f1301</sup>; but Aben Ezra and Ben Melech much better interpret it,

“it was confirmed and stood;”

that is, it was ensured to him, and remained with him, even that, and all upon it and in it, throughout the whole circumference of it.

**Ver. 18.** *Unto Abraham for a possession*, etc.] To be enjoyed by him and his for ever, as his own property, being purchased by his money:

*in the presence of the children of Heth*; they being witnesses of the bargain, and of the payment of the money by Abraham, and of the surrender of the field unto him, for his own use:

*before all that went in at the gates of his city*; not of Abraham’s city, for he had none, but of Ephron’s city, which was Hebron, (see <sup><0230></sup>Genesis 23:10); these are either the same with the children of Heth, and so the clause is added by way of explanation, and including all the inhabitants of the place; or else different from them, they intending the princes of the people that composed the assembly Abraham addressed, and these the common people, the inhabitants of the place. Aben Ezra takes them to be the travellers that passed and repassed through the gates of the city: however, the design of the expression is to show in what a public manner this affair was transacted, and that the field was made as firm and as sure to Abraham as it could well be, no writings on such occasion being used so early.

**Ver. 19.** *And after this*, etc.] After this affair was over, the bargain struck, the money paid, and possession secured:

*Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah, before Mamre*; and here he himself was buried, and also Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Leah, (~~1020~~Genesis 25:9,10 49:29,30 50:13). Benjamin of Tudela <sup>f1302</sup> says, in his time (who lived in the latter end of the twelfth century), in the field of Machpelah was a city or town, and in it a large temple called Saint Abraham, where were shown the sepulchres of the six persons before mentioned, and inscriptions over each of them, showing whose they were; and that at the end of the field was the house of Abraham, and before the house a fountain, and no other was suffered to be built there in honour to Abraham:

*the same [is] Hebron in the land of Canaan*; that is, Mamre is the same place which afterwards was called Hebron, a city in the land of Canaan, in the tribe of Judah, about twenty two miles from Jerusalem to the south, and was one of the cities of refuge. Hebron has the title of Hhaleah, i.e. the chosen or beloved, among the Arabs, where the (Maggarel Mamra) cave of Mamre or Machpelah is still shown, and is always lighted up with lamps, and held in extraordinary veneration by the Mahometans <sup>f1303</sup>.

**Ver. 20.** *And the field, and the cave that is therein, was made sure to Abraham for a possession of a buryingplace, by the sons of Heth.*] Who were witnesses of the transaction between Abraham and Ephron; and this was further made sure by Sarah's being buried in it, which was taking possession of it, for the use for which it was bought; and was a pledge and earnest of the future possession of the land of Canaan by the seed of Abraham: this was the first piece of ground in it possessed by Abraham and his seed; and it being called the possession of a buryingplace, shows that there is no contradiction between this and what Stephen says, (~~405~~Acts 7:5); he had a possession to bury in, but not to live upon; not any ground of his own to till and sow, or build upon.