

Burial = Faith and Baptism

Read Ephesians 2:11-22. As you read the accounts of the patriarchs, can you see how God is creating a new humanity (Eph.2:15b)?

Genesis 22:20-24

20 Some time later Abraham was told, "Milcah is also a mother; she has borne sons to your brother Nahor: 21 Uz the firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel (the father of Aram), 22 Kesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph and Bethuel." 23 Bethuel became the father of **Rebekah**. Milcah bore these eight sons to Abraham's brother Nahor. 24 His concubine, whose name was Reumah, also had sons: Tebah, Gaham, Tahash and Maacah.

Genesis 23

The Death of Sarah / the Purchase of a Plot

[Taken from www.bible.org: This article gives a good sense of the importance of this event.]

For Abraham the purchase of the cave of Machpelah was an expression of his faith in God. The writer to the Hebrews alluded to this when he wrote:

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them ([Hebrews 11:13-16](#)).

By determining that Sarah, and later he and his descendants, would be buried in Canaan, Abraham "staked his claim" in the land which God had promised. The land where he would be buried was to be the homeland of his descendants. The place that God had promised him was the place where he must be buried.

Jeremiah expressed a similar faith when he purchased the field of Anathoth ([Jeremiah 32:6ff](#)). While God was to judge His people for their sins by driving them out of the promised land, so He would bring them back when they repented. The purchase of the field of Anathoth evidenced Jeremiah's conviction that God would do as He had promised ([Jeremiah 32:9-15](#)).

Abraham's purchase not only exemplified his hope for a better country, a heavenly one ([Hebrews 11:16](#)), it also involved him more deeply in the present world in which he lived as a stranger and sojourner. Sojourners didn't own property, but now Abraham did, of necessity. Strangers and sojourners do not have as great an involvement or obligation as do citizens and property owners. Abraham's purchase gave him a "dual citizenship," so to speak. Let me suggest how this was so.

We are told that according to Hittite law Abraham would not have been obligated to the king had he only purchased the cave at Machpelah rather than the field and the cave.²⁰⁰ By acquiring property as he did, Abraham thus deepened his commitment of faith in God but also extended his worldly obligations. I think this is significant. In his first epistle Peter instructs Christians on their attitude and conduct toward this present world in light of the fact that we are strangers and pilgrims:

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation. Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king ([1 Peter 2:11-17](#)).

Christians are citizens in two worlds, not just one. While our inheritance is in heaven, "imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away" ([1 Peter 1:4](#)), we have obligations in this present world. We must submit to earthly authorities and institutions ([1 Peter 2:11ff](#)). We must also obey the laws of the land and pay our taxes ([Romans 13:1-7](#)).

Christians have often been accused of being "so heavenly minded, they are of no earthly good." If I understand the Bible correctly, our heavenly mind is what makes us useful in the present. Abraham lived in the present in the light of the future. His future inheritance did not lessen his present obligations; it established his priorities. The fact that he would inherit the land of Canaan and "possess the gates of his enemies" ([Genesis 22:17](#)) did not mean he would be kept from purchasing property and bowing before constituted authority (cf. 23:7,12) and this at the very gates of those whom God would later put under his authority (15:20).

Abraham's purchase of a burial plot provided Israel with roots in the promised land. Jacob, who died in Egypt, was buried in the cave which Abraham purchased ([Genesis 50:1-14](#)). When the Israelites were freed from Egyptian bondage, where else would they return but to their fatherland?

Interestingly, the land of Canaan had not yet been possessed when this book (Genesis) was written. But those who received it from the hand of Moses were those who looked forward to its conquest. None other than Caleb was given the privilege of taking the land which Abraham had purchased as an "earnest of his inheritance" (cf. [Joshua 14:13](#)). What motivation this story must have provided for the armies of Israel as they marched into Canaan to possess it!

For men today this event out of ancient biblical history has numerous implications:

(1) It indicates that in the Old Testament as well as in the New the grave is the symbol of hope to a true believer in God. The cave of Machpelah stood for centuries as a monument to the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The empty tomb of our Lord guarantees the Christian that the grave is not our final resting place but an abode for the body until Christ returns for His own ([1 Corinthians 15](#); [1 Thessalonians 4](#)).

What does the grave mean to you, my friend? Is it the end or only the beginning? Your relationship to the God of Abraham and to His Son, Jesus Christ, makes the difference.

(2) Where we invest our money demonstrates where we plan to spend our future. One of the five men martyred for his faith in Ecuador, Jim Elliot, once said: "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." Abraham believed that God's promises were true. His investment in Canaan was the best purchase he ever made. In New Testament terminology he "laid up his treasures in heaven" ([Matthew 6:19-20](#)). The way we spend our money indicates the reality of our faith.

(3) The covenant of God should be the basis for our actions and decisions. Abraham's faith was in God, but it was not a nebulous, groundless faith. He believed in the covenant which God had made and had often reiterated. It was Abraham's faith in God's ability to keep His covenant which prompted his purchase of the plot where he was to be buried.

Often times people ask why we remember the Lord's table every week. The answer is at least two-fold. First, this is what our Lord commanded and the early church practiced ([Luke 22:14-20](#); [1 Corinthians 11](#):23ff; Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7). Second, this is a weekly reminder of the covenant which our Lord has made with us—the new covenant in His blood ([Luke 22:20](#)). Our actions and decisions should be governed by the assurance that this covenant will be fully realized in the life of the believer. That, my friend, is something to be reminded of frequently.

(4) The burial of a loved one is a significant opportunity for a Christian to publicly express his faith. Frequently we are told that the purchase of the burial plot was done before the eyes of the sons of Heth (23:3,7,9,10, etc.). The significance of Abraham's actions did not pass these Canaanites by. They knew him as a "prince of God."

The occasion of the death of a loved one should always be viewed as an opportunity for Christian witness. What we say at such times is very important, but let us not forget that what we do is also vital. Abraham's deeds in chapter 23 are as significant as his declarations.

While what I have to say at this point is only inferential at best, I believe it to be true. There is a very real need to balance two factors. Twice Abraham spoke of burying his dead "out of his sight" (23:4,8). The body of a deceased saint is not to be venerated or treated as some kind of sacred object. The dead body is only the shell in which the soul has abided. The body must be laid aside, out of sight. Some would do well to consider this.

On the other hand, the body is that which God has fashioned ([Psalm 139:13-16](#)), it has served as the "temple of the Holy Spirit" ([1 Corinthians 6:15, 19-20](#)); it will be raised again and be transformed incorruptible ([1 Corinthians 15:35-49](#)). Because of this the body should not be disposed of in such a way as to disregard the value it has been given by its Creator.

While we may decry the "high cost of death," let me suggest that some may overreact to burial costs in such a way as to affect their Christian testimony. Unbelievers, who see no life after death, no resurrection, may well dispose of the body as cheaply and irreverently as possible. The Christian should give serious thought to this, however.

I do not think that Abraham was extravagant in the burial of his wife, but neither do I believe that he sought a bargain basement burial. Most scholars suspect the price of that plot was high.²⁰¹ Abraham did not bargain over the price. He did not, excuse the expression, "Jew Ephron down." The motivation of Abraham as well as his moderation should be considered in relationship to funerals. While our faith does not need frills nor our consciences silver-inlaid coffins, we must be careful not to reflect the values of a decadent society as we bury our dead.

- † In considering the flow of ideas up to this point, why was there such emphasis placed on this event?
- † Why the attention to detail?
- † Why the emphasis on legality of the transaction?
- † Abraham's purchase of Sarah's grave is another essential and poignant expression of his faith in God's promise / oath [that which He swears by Himself] to fulfill His covenantal promise.
- † Burial in the promised land was a very significant expression of faith for Abraham and his descendants. Equally important is our own baptism into Christ's burial; only through suffering, death, and burial can we ever experience resurrection.
- † DISCUSSION: What does burial mean for us? How can we live and experience this primary expression of faith and discipleship?

Genesis 24

How a Bride was sought, chosen, and brought to the Bridegroom

Isaac and Rebekah : The Word become Flesh Receives His Bride and is Comforted

- † ...placing the hand under the thigh (proximity of private parts) signified swearing by the man's lineage.
- † ...you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living, but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac."

Go through this chapter to identify (underline, highlight, circle) all that revealed Christ and His Church.

... 6 "Make sure that you do not take my son back there," Abraham said. 7 "The LORD, the God of heaven, who brought me out of my father's household and my native land and who spoke to me and promised me on oath, saying, 'To your offspring I will give this land'-he will send his angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son from there. 8 If the woman is unwilling to come back with you, then you will be released from this oath of mine. Only do not take my son back there." 9 So the servant put his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham and swore an oath to him concerning this matter.

15 Before he had finished praying, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder. She was **the daughter of Bethuel (means "House of God")** son of Milcah (means "counsel"), who was the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor. 16 The girl was very beautiful, a virgin; no man had ever lain with her. She went down to the spring, filled her jar and came up again.

19 After she had given him a drink, she said, **"I'll draw water for your camels too, until they have finished drinking."** 20 **So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, ran back to the well to draw more water, and drew enough for all his camels.** 21 Without saying a word, the man watched her closely to learn whether or not the LORD had made his journey successful.

- ✠ What did this show about her character?
- ✠ What does this teach us about the Church, Jesus' bride?

Then he asked, "Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?"

24 She answered him, **"I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son that Milcah bore to Nahor."** 25 And she added, **"We have plenty of straw and fodder, as well as room for you to spend the night."**

- ✠ What is the significance of her family's identity?
- ✠ What can we conclude from all the things she said and did for Abraham's servant?

26 Then the man bowed down and worshiped the LORD, 27 saying, "Praise be to the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master. As for me, the LORD has led me on the journey to the house of my master's relatives."

- ✠ **The servant's faith had come to fulfillment through this experience. When Rebekah revealed her father's identity, he bowed his head and worshipped.**
- ✠ **Note he had called God the God of his master Abraham. Now he referred to Him as Lord.**

... 50 Laban and Bethuel answered, **"This is from the LORD;** we can say nothing to you one way or the other. 51 Here is Rebekah; take her and go, and let her become the wife of your master's son, as the LORD has directed."

- ✠ **Laban's household knew the Lord. This was why it was essential that Abraham send his servant to his brother's household.**

... 57 Then they said, "Let's call the girl and ask her about it." 58 So they called Rebekah and asked her, "Will you go with this man?"

"**I will go,**" she said.

59 So they sent their sister Rebekah on her way, along with her nurse and Abraham's servant and his men.

60 And they blessed Rebekah and said to her,

**"Our sister, may you increase to thousands upon thousands;
may your offspring possess the gates of their enemies."**

62 Now Isaac had come from Beer Lahai Roi, for he was living in the Negev. 63 He went out to the field one evening to meditate, and as he looked up, he saw camels approaching. 64 Rebekah also looked up and saw Isaac. She got down from her camel 65 and asked the servant, **"Who is that man in the field coming to meet us?"**

"He is my master," the servant answered. So she took her veil and covered herself.

66 Then the servant told Isaac all he had done. **67 Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted** after his mother's death.

- † This is the primary event of Isaac's life. Why did the Holy Spirit choose this to focus on? Once again, considering context and flow of ideas, what is the significance of this chapter's contents?
- † Abraham had instilled in his servant the transcendent purpose and most highly significant mission of getting the one who would partner with Isaac through whom God would fulfill His promise of innumerable descendants.
- † What implications can we draw about Abraham's servant and his entire household?
- † How much impact did Abraham impact his servants and household?
- † V.15 "...before he finished praying..."
- † What observations can we make about Rebekah?
- † This event was filled with worship; though it may go without saying, God's confirmation always produces praise and adoration.
- † God comforted Isaac by the marriage to Rebekah. Likewise, God comforts His people by the marriage of His Son and His Bride, the Church. Oneness with God is the only true comfort which can strengthen our bones when we are in sorrow and despair over deep loss.
- † DISCUSSION: If we're in right fellowship with God, what should be our understanding about marriage? What is the significant role of the man? What is the significance of the Man? How important is it to honor the covenant of marriage?
- † Through the ultimate marriage, what is God showing and proving to the nations on earth and in heaven?