

## The Death of Sarah Genesis Chapter 23

If you are new or visiting; a special warm welcome to you. We trust you enjoy your time with us.

Today we will be having communion. If it is your practice to participate in this we welcome you to join with us in celebrating the Lord's Supper. If this is not your custom or if you are unsure of what to do please just pass the emblems (bread and wine) to the person next to you.

This chapter deals with the death of Sarah. She is the only woman in the Bible whose age at death is recorded! It appears that Abraham had moved back to Hebron for that is where Sarah died. We are not told how she died but Abraham showed the normal human reaction of grief for one who he loved.

Abraham's father and family were buried back in "the old country" in Mesopotamia but by deciding to buy a burying place in Canaan, Abraham was declaring that his future was here in this land where God had promised him an inheritance. He had lived among the Hittites (sons of Heth) for many years before going to Beersheba before Isaac was born. In the 19th century, many criticized Biblical accuracy because of the detailed mention of this unheard of nation of Hittites. But absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. The first evidence of the Hittites was found in Northern Syria in 1884 when clay tablets with a new cuneiform language were found. It was not until 1906 that excavations in Hattusa in central Turkey proved that this nation really existed. Furthermore, the descriptions of the transactions described here are consistent with what is known of this culture.

In meeting with the Hittites, Abraham acknowledges that he is "an alien and stranger" among them echoing the commentary of Hebrews 11:9-16 and encouraging us to live similar lives in this foreign world (1 Peter 2:11-12). Although Abraham had been promised the land for his descendants, this burial ground was the only piece he was to own. The Hittites acknowledged Abraham as a "mighty prince" among them. The Hebrew word used translated "mighty" is the word "elohiyim", most commonly used as a name of God. We can conclude that Abraham's neighbours considered him as the Prince of God.

In all the subsequent negotiations, that are consistent with the Hittite culture, Abraham complies with their processes and remains humble (rose up and bowed down). The negotiations occurred at the city gate and were a series of requests and response until a settlement price was decided and given before witnesses. It became the burial site for not only Sarah, but also Abraham (25:9), Isaac (35:27,29), Rebekah and Leah (49:30,31) and Jacob (50:13) were buried in the cave at Machpelah.

Although Sarah's story is overshadowed by that of Abraham, there are lessons we can learn from her.

**Beauty** – This got Abraham into difficulties on 2 occasions when he felt threatened by those around him. Sarah agreed to his deception but God intervened on both occasions. (See Proverbs 31:30)

**Barren** – This was her greatest sorrow. Children are a blessing from the Lord and in her culture, barrenness was a curse. When God's promises did not fit her timing, she tried her own resources. Ultimately, it is God who opens and closes the womb (Gen 20:18, 30:22, 1 Sam 1:6)

**Bitter** – Sadly, things turned sour after her suggestion that her Egyptian maid bear an heir to Abraham. Sometimes our schemes backfire and cause us grief and bitterness. Later when she did have a son, she became bitter again, demanding that Ishmael leave.

**Birth** – Against all hope, Sarah is made to laugh by bearing a son in her old age. This was her greatest joy. It came in God's time and for 37 years, she watched him grow.

**Behaviour** – The apostle Peter (1 Peter 3:1-6) presents Sarah as an example of the behaviour of godly women in the past. He notes the difference between outward beauty that fades and the unfading inner beauty that is of great worth in God's sight. Peter particularly commends her obedient submission to Abraham calling him "master" (Gen 18:12). She followed him as he left Ur to go to an unknown place. Even when Abraham was wrong, she obeyed him. Her obedience to him under God is given as an example of godly behaviour for all women (See 1 Cor 11:3). Women are considered daughters of Sarah if they do what is right and are not "frightened by any terror".

Chapters 22-24 illustrate 3 types of "tests of faith" that Abraham faced and we also face today.

---

## **A Test of Obedience God's revelation – His Word Ch 22**

Last week we saw what many consider the greatest test of faith that Abraham (or anyone) could ever face: the giving up of his promised and only son Isaac on an altar of sacrifice. Abraham was foreshadowing what God would do on that same mountain some 2000 years later with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. This was a test of obedience to God's word and we are told that Abraham obeyed, believing that God would raise Isaac back to life. Not many of us are faced with such a dramatic test of obedience... or are we tested but don't see it. We do not know how God spoke to Abraham, but we do know how he speaks to us today. It is through his Word, the Bible. How do you and I respond? Do we only obey if it suits or when we can fully understand what God is doing? Is that true obedience? A test of obedience is when we move out in faith, not understanding the reasoning why God says it but we willingly submit in faith to what he says in his word without question.

## **A Test of Trust Our situation – Circumstances Ch 23**

As anyone would, Abraham was devastated by the death of his beloved Sarah. After more than 60 years together, Sarah had died. How did Abraham react? We are not told a lot but he did negotiate a burial plot for her. This is a test of faith that we all face at some stage of our lives. Loved ones die, we question God's timing and we may even doubt the goodness of God. It is natural to grieve. Even Jesus wept at a graveside (John 11:35). Our separation from a parent, spouse or close friend can test our trust in a loving God. Can we, in our grief, still give thanks? (1 Thess 5:18) Note that we are told to give thanks in the situation, not for the situation. And while we may question God's timing, we ultimately trust that what he allows is for reasons beyond our understanding.

Death is an enemy, brought about when sin was introduced through Satan to the first man and woman. It was their decision to disobey what God had said that caused the subsequent heart-ache for them and all generations since. Our faith may be shaken by the unexpected death of a loved one, but can we say like Job "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. May the name of the Lord be praised" (Job 1:21) Such grief, although asking questions, will strengthen faith.

Reactions to death of a loved one vary. Ezekiel was ordered not to lament for his wife when she died. Samuel's death caused national mourning. Jesus challenged a potential follower who wanted to bury his father first to "let the dead bury their own dead" in Luke 9:60. This is not an injunction to avoid attending funerals but a call to set priorities, especially if you are going to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. As Christians, we believe Jesus conquered death at the cross, as proven by his resurrection. So death is not the end but a doorway into the presence of God. Grief and mourning are appropriate, but eventually we move on in faith, knowing those who have gone before are not only examples of faith (Heb 11) but witnesses to our faith (Heb 12:1-3).

Next week we will look at Chapter 24 - **A Test of Wisdom**. How we make our choices and accept the consequences of the decision. How we make our choices can be a test of faith.

### **Lessons for today**

1. Would my neighbours think of me as "God's prince" in my dealings with them?
2. Am I a "daughter of Sarah", developing inward beauty, honouring my husband, doing good?
3. Is God testing my obedience to his revealed Word or am I resisting his call on my life?
4. Is God testing my trust in some difficult circumstances I am facing?
