

## Abraham Buried His Wife in the Cave of Machpelah

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to earn the respect of others by the way we deal with them. This is a key, even if they fail to return that same respect in the way they deal with us. In our topic today, we will see that Ephron agreed to sell Abraham more than he had requested.

In Genesis 23:10-13, we read, “Now Ephron dwelt among the sons of Heth; and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the presence of the sons of Heth, all who entered at the gate of his city, saying, ‘No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field and the cave that *is* in it; I give it to you in the presence of the sons of my people. I give it to you. Bury your dead!’ Then Abraham bowed himself down before the people of the land; and he spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying, ‘If you *will give it*, please hear me. I will give you money for the field; take *it* from me and I will bury my dead there.’” We see that Ephron was a Hittite (another name for the sons of Heth). The Hittites are mentioned forty-eight times in the Old Testament.

Ephron gave Abraham his answer at the gate of the city. In that time, the elders of the city would meet at the gate of the city to make their decisions. Most cities only had one gate in and out of the city, so everyone had to go in and out of that gate to get from their homes to their fields. That was why the gate was the place where the elders of the city met to make their decisions. We see that when Ephron gave his answer to Abraham, the sons of Heth were gathered at the gate, and any of the others who were passing in or out of the gate could also stand to listen and hear the decisions that were made at the gate. This is illustrated in Ruth 4:1-2, where we read, “Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there; and behold, the close relative of whom Boaz had spoken came by. So Boaz said, ‘Come aside, friend, sit down here.’ So he came aside and sat down. And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, ‘Sit down here.’ So they sat down.”

Ephron told Abraham in the presence of the elders of the city that he would sell the cave, but he also wanted to sell much more than the cave. That is why he said, “I give you the field and the cave that is in it.” The field in front of the cave was worth very little because most of that area lacks water, so only a small amount of grass that the cattle and sheep could eat would grow there. However, by selling both the field and the cave, Ephron knew that he could make the price for the land much higher. In addition, that meant that Abraham would be the one who would have to pay the taxes on the land, instead of Ephron. He told Abraham that he could bury his dead in the cave.

However, Abraham wanted to complete the purchase of the cave and field before he buried Sarah. Even though he was a stranger and a foreigner in the land, he realized that a person could charge much more money if the dead had already been buried. Abraham wanted to complete the purchase while all of the witnesses were there. As a result, Abraham said that he would give the price of the field as well as the cave. He told Ephron that he would bury his dead as soon as Ephron received the price of the land and cave from him. Then, Genesis 23:14-16 says, “And Ephron answered Abraham, saying to him, ‘My lord, listen to me; the land *is worth* four hundred shekels of silver. What *is* that between you and me? So bury your dead.’ And Abraham listened to Ephron; and Abraham weighed out the silver for Ephron which he had named in the hearing of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, currency of the merchants.”

Here, we see that Ephron immediately gave Abraham a price that he said the land and the cave were worth. He said the cave and the field were worth four hundred shekels of silver. A shekel was a little less than a half ounce of silver. As a result, the price that he set for his field and the cave would have been about two hundred ounces of silver. That was probably much more than the land was actually worth. At the same time, Ephron tried to make it sound like it was a very small amount when he said, “What is that between you and me?” Many times, people in the funeral business try to make money from the sorrow and grief for a family member or other relative that has died. This may have been exactly what Ephron was doing by what he said. That would explain why he just encouraged Abraham to go and bury his dead and they could determine a final price at a later time.

Instead, we see that Abraham made the decision to immediately pay the money while the witnesses were there to witness that Abraham had paid the price for the field and cave. We read that Abraham weighed out the four hundred shekels of silver. That was the price that Ephron had named in the hearing of the sons of Heth, so Abraham immediately weighed out four hundred shekels of silver. The merchants or people who bought and sold goods to other people had scales and weights to weigh what they sold. As a result, all of the people sitting at the gate of the city recognized that Abraham had paid the exact price that Ephron had requested.

Abraham had come into the land of Canaan when he was seventy-five years old. Genesis 12:4 says, “So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram *was* seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.” We have seen that Sarah was ten years younger than Abraham, which meant that Sarah was sixty-five at the time they came into the land of Canaan. Then, Genesis 23:1 says, “Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years; *these were* the years of the life of Sarah.” This meant that Abraham and Sarah had lived in the land of Canaan for sixty-two years before Sarah died. For that entire period of time, they had not owned one square foot of land in the land of Canaan. Now, Abraham had finally purchased some land as a burial place for Sarah. It would still be approximately five hundred additional years before the nation of Israel would take possession of the entire land.

Abraham gave a great example of what it means to walk by faith. Hebrews 11:8-10 says, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.” These verses point out the fact that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived in tents all through their time in the land of Canaan, because they were looking for a city that would be eternal, instead of a city that would only exist for a period of years on this earth.

After the land had been purchased, and witnessed by the sons of Heth, we go on to read that only then did Abraham bury his wife. Genesis 23:17-20 says, “So the field of Ephron which *was* in Machpelah, which *was* before Mamre, the field and the cave which *was* in it, and all the trees that *were* in the field, which *were* within all the surrounding borders, were deeded to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the sons of Heth, before all who went in at the gate of his city. And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah, before Mamre (that *is*, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. So the field and the cave that *is* in it were deeded to Abraham by the sons of Heth as property for a burial place.” Here, we see a description of everything that was deeded to Abraham along with the land.

That deed included the field of Ephron, as well as the cave of Machpelah at the end of the field. It also included all of the trees that were in the field and that surrounded the field. These also became the official possession of Abraham in the presence of all of the witnesses that had gathered together at the gate of the city. It was only after this transfer of the property to Abraham was complete that Abraham went and buried Sarah. She was buried in the cave which stood at the end of the field of Machpelah. At that time, this was located near a city named Mamre. However, the name of that city was later changed and became known as the city of Hebron.

This field and cave were deeded to Abraham as a burial place. We see that this was the place where Abraham was later buried. Genesis 25:8-10 says, “Then Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people. And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, the field which Abraham purchased from the sons of Heth. There Abraham was buried, and Sarah his wife.” This later became the place where Isaac lived during the final years of his life. Genesis 35:27-29 says, “Then Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kirjath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had dwelt. Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years. So Isaac breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people, being old and full of days. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.”

The final words of Jacob also refer to this place. Genesis 49:29-33 says, “Then he charged them and said to them: ‘I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite as a possession for a burial place. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah. The field and the cave that is there were purchased from the sons of Heth.’ And when Jacob had finished commanding his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.” Here, we see that this piece of property became a very important part of the history of Israel. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain why the purchase of this land became such an important event that it is mentioned several times in the Bible. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand the importance of the cave of Machpelah.