

Genesis 23 | Live and Die in Faith

Felipe A. Chamy

We humans are hopers by nature. Hope motivates, energizes, and drives us. It is natural to us to look ahead and long for any good things that we foresee. That is how God made us. It was always in his plan that we, his embodied rational creatures, should live our lives in this world looking forward to, and preparing for, something even better than we have known already.
(Packer 2014, Finishing our Course with Joy)

Structure

1. Abraham Mourns Sarah (Gen 23:1–2)
2. Abraham Buys a Burial Place (Gen 23:3–18)
 - a. Abraham Begins Negotiations with the Hittites (Gen 23:3–9)
 - b. Abraham Makes a Deal with Ephron the Hittite (Gen 23:10–16)
 - c. Abraham Receives the Land as a Burial Plot (Gen 23:17–18)
3. Abraham Buries Sarah (Gen 23:19–20)

Notes

- God’s promises to Abraham still shape the narrative:

I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, ¹⁸and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice” (Gen 22:17–18; cf. 12:1–3).

- Right before, the Lord spares Isaac’s life (Gen 22). Right after, Abraham secures a wife for Isaac (24). Lastly, Abraham dies (25). Descendants—Land—Descendants—Land.
- Note how much time has lapsed! About 30 years have passed since God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Sarah was 127 when she died; Abraham was then about 137 years old.
- “I am a sojourner and foreigner among you” (v. 4).
- Abraham was considered a “prince of God” (v. 5)
- “The flattery in v. 6 was an inducement to remain a landless dependant” (Kidner 2019).
- The interaction with Ephron reminds us of Gen 14, when Abraham did not want to receive anything from the King of Sodom, “lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich’” (14:23). Here it is less explicit, but the motivation may be similar.
- Four hundred shekels of silver: Abraham agrees to what appears to be a substantial price (Jer 32:9). Later in Genesis, Joseph as a slave is valued at 20 shekels (37:28).
- This is a fully legal contract, witnessed by the Hittites at the city’s gates. This was the way they “signed” contracts. “It was usual for transactions requiring public approval to take place at the entrance to the settlement (Ruth 4:1–11)” (NIVBTSB).
- Also, of course, It’s the Lord giving Abraham the land.

- Abraham buries Sarah in the cave (Gen 23:19), where he is later buried with Isaac, Jacob, Rebekah, and Leah (Gen 25:9; 35:27–29; 49:31; 50:13).

Implications

- Live and die in faith as aliens in this world; “Long obedience in the same direction” (Eugene Peterson).
- “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil 3:20; cf. 1:27).

Still another idea in this narrative can be seen in the book of Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 32:6–15, on the eve of the Babylonian captivity, Jeremiah’s trust in God’s promise of the land was expressed in his purchase of a parcel of land. Though the people would soon be removed from the land in captivity, Jeremiah purchased a plot of ground because he was confident that they would one day return and enjoy the good land God had given them. The writer of Genesis appears to have a similar idea in mind in the picture of Abraham in chapter 23. He purchased only a portion of the land which would someday belong to his seed. In this small purchase was embodied the hope in God’s promise that one day in the future it would all belong to him and his seed (Sailhamer 1995).

⁹ By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God ... ¹³ These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland” (Hebrews 11).

- How does faith affect the way we live and die?
 - Humility
 - Holiness
 - Hope
 - Integrity
 - Opportunity
 - Availability
 - Discipleship