

Introduction

A few weeks ago we looked at celebrating the milestones in our lives. One of those milestones was the birth of Isaac. Then, Abraham threw a big party and celebrated the day he was weaned. The following week we looked at working through the conflicts in our lives. Life is not lived only on the mountain tops. Life is full of mountain top experiences and valleys. In Psalm 23:4, David said, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.” David had many mountaintop experiences in his life, but he also walked through the shadow of death. His comfort in those times was that God was with him.

In Ecclesiastes 3, Solomon wrote, “*There is an appointed time for everything. And there is an appointed time for every event under heaven. A time to give birth and a time to die.... A time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance.*” In Genesis 18:14, God told Abraham and Sarah that Isaac would be born at the appointed time the following year. In today’s passage, it is the appointed time for Sarah to die. In Psalm 139:16, “*Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.*” David knew that before he was even born God had already written down the days ordained for him.

Solomon also wrote that there is a time to weep and a time to laugh. When Isaac was born, they laughed. Isaac’s name means laughter. Sarah said that everyone was going to laugh when they heard that she had given Abraham a son in his old age. She was no spring chicken herself, having Isaac at the age of 90. They celebrated and laughed when Isaac was born. In today’s text, Sarah dies. It is the time to weep. Abraham went in to Sarah’s tent and mourned and wept. There is an appointed time for everything, for every event under heaven.

In today’s text, Sarah dies and Abraham mourns her death. Then, he is faced with what to do with her body. He decides to buy a certain field that has a cave in it. He negotiates a price for the field and cave and buys it. Then, after obtaining the deed to the property, he buried Sarah.

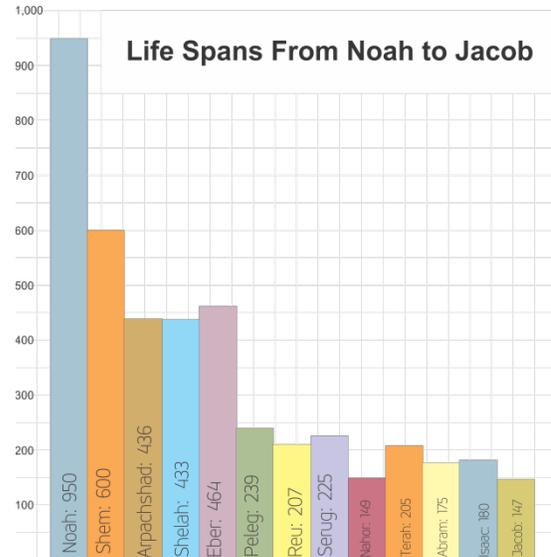
1. **Death and Mourning of Sarah** (Gen 23:1-2)
2. **Abraham Purchases The Burial Plot** (Gen 23:3-18)
3. **Abraham Buries Sarah** (Gen 23:19-20)

1. **Death and Mourning of Sarah** (Gen 23:1-2)

(Gen 23:1-2) “Now Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. {2} Sarah died in Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan; and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.”

Sarah lived to be one hundred and twenty-seven years of age, and she died in Hebron, in the land of Canaan. Abram and Sarai were first introduced in Genesis 11. In Genesis 12, the Lord told Abram to leave his family and go to a land that He would show him. Abram was 75 at that time and Sarah was 65. So, at this point, Sarah has been married at least 62 years. Depending on how old she was when she got married, they may have been married for over 110 years. So, when Abraham goes in to mourn for Sarah, this has been his wife, companion, best friend, and soul mate for a long time.

In Genesis 6:3, the Lord told Noah that He was not going to strive with man forever. He put a limit on the lifespan of man of 120 years. Noah lived to be 950 years. His oldest son lived to be 600 years old. Terah, who was Abraham's and Sarah's father, lived to be 205 years of age. There has been a gradual decline in the lifespans since the Lord said He would limit the age that men lived. Sarah lived to be 127, which is just over the limit that God set. So, she lived a good, long life, but by their standard at the time, her lifespan was shorter. Today, in 2018, the lifespan of Americans is 78.7 years, which was a drop from last year. Experts say the decrease in lifespan is due to opioid overdoses, alcohol abuse, diabetes, and suicide. The average lifespan of men in the U.S. is 77 and for women it is 81.



(Gen 6:3) “Then the LORD said, ‘My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.’”

Our text says that Abraham went in. I think that Abraham and Sarah lived in separate tents, so he went into her tent where her body was laying. He went in to mourn and to weep. Abraham was grieving the loss of his wife and best friend. Grieving is a process and this was merely the beginning of the grieving process. Sometimes it only takes a few weeks or months. Sometimes it takes years. In Deuteronomy 34:5-8, Moses died and God buried him. It says that they mourned and wept for thirty days. That time of mourning may have lasted thirty days, but the time of personal grieving probably lasted much longer.

Weeping is part of the mourning process. Most medical experts say there are five stages of mourning. The stages include Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. The grieving process is affected by how the death occurred, (was it sudden or expected), your belief system and view on death, and how much support you get from others. One thing that almost everyone agrees upon is that the best thing someone can do for a person who is grieving is simply be there with them.

In John 11, Lazarus had died. Mary, Martha and those around them were all weeping over the loss of their brother. When Jesus saw them weeping, He was moved in spirit and troubled. Even though Jesus knew that He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead, he was still troubled and moved in Spirit. Then, it says, “Jesus wept.” The Jews who saw Jesus weeping said, “See how He loved him!” Mourning and weeping over the death of a person that you love is normal. Abraham loved Sarah and it was only natural for him to go in and mourn and weep for her.

(John 11:33-36) “When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, {34} and said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to Him, “Lord, come and see.” {35} Jesus wept. {36} So the Jews were saying, ‘See how He loved him!’”

2. Abraham Purchases The Burial Plot (Gen 23:3-18)

(Gen 23:3-18) "Then Abraham rose from before his dead, and spoke to the sons of Heth, saying, {4} "I am a stranger and a sojourner among you; give me a burial site among you that I may bury my dead out of my sight." {5} The sons of Heth answered Abraham, saying to him, {6} "Hear us, my lord, you are a mighty prince among us; bury your dead in the choicest of our graves; none of us will refuse you his grave for burying your dead." {7} So Abraham rose and bowed to the people of the land, the sons of Heth. {8} And he spoke with them, saying, "If it is your wish for me to bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and approach Ephron the son of Zohar for me, {9} that he may give me the cave of Machpelah which he owns, which is at the end of his field; for the full price let him give it to me in your presence for a burial site." {10} Now Ephron was sitting among the sons of Heth; and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the sons of Heth; even of all who went in at the gate of his city, saying, {11} "No, my lord, hear me; I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. In the presence of the sons of my people I give it to you; bury your dead." {12} And Abraham bowed before the people of the land. {13} He spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying, "If you will only please listen to me; I will give the price of the field, accept it from me that I may bury my dead there." {14} Then Ephron answered Abraham, saying to him, {15} "My lord, listen to me; a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between me and you? So bury your dead." {16} Abraham listened to Ephron; and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver which he had named in the hearing of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, commercial standard. {17} So Ephron's field, which was in Machpelah, which faced Mamre, the field and cave which was in it, and all the trees which were in the field, that were within all the confines of its border, were deeded over {18} to Abraham for a possession in the presence of the sons of Heth, before all who went in at the gate of his city."

Abraham's wife is dead and he cannot leave her in her tent. He must bury her. The common practice at that time was to bury your dead. This is the second time in the Bible that the term, bury has come up. In Genesis 15:15, God told Abraham that he would go to his fathers in peace, and "be buried at a good old age." There was not a command in Scripture to be buried, but it is regarded in Scripture as a good thing. Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 6:3-4 that "*If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, however many they be, but his soul is not satisfied with good things and he does not even have a proper burial, then I say, 'Better the miscarriage than he, for it comes in futility and goes into obscurity; and its name is covered in obscurity.'*" The theme of Ecclesiastes is life under the sun without God is vanity. Solomon is saying that a man who lives his life in vanity and does not have a good burial is a bad thing. We need to live our lives with purpose, and we need to celebrate and honor the lives of the deceased with a good burial.

All through the Old Testament and New Testament we find the practice was to bury the bodies of the dead. One of the few exceptions to this was the death of Saul (1 Samuel 31:11-13). The valiant men of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, and they took the body of Saul and his sons and burned them. Then, they buried the remaining bones and fasted for seven days. So, Saul was cremated and the remains were buried. In Moses' case, God buried him, and no one knew the place that God buried him. This was an exception. To this day, Jews are not permitted to be cremated. They must be buried.

The preparation for burial varied. We have no record of Abraham preparing the body of Sarah before burying her. The Egyptians at that time embalmed the bodies before burying them. In Genesis 50:26, when Joseph died, he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt (Genesis 50:26). We do not have any other records of people being embalmed. By the time the New Testament came around, it was common practice for the Jews to wrap the dead body with spices before burying them. In John 19:40, after Jesus had been crucified, *“they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.”* Our account today does not mention any specific preparations that Abraham may have made, or if Sarah was placed in a coffin before being buried. All we know is that Abraham was going to bury Sarah, and he needed a place to bury her.

So, Abraham went to the sons of Heth, and asked them for a place to bury Sarah. Abraham told them he was a stranger and a sojourner in the land, and asked them for a burial site to bury his dead out of his sight. The sons of Heth called Abraham a mighty prince among us. The Hebrew says that they called him a prince of God. The Hebrew word for God, Elohim, is used. The English Standard Version translates it correctly. They understood that Abraham was God’s servant. They understood that He was connected to God. It is my prayer that when people see me, or any of us that they recognize that we are sons of God. Jesus said in John 13:35, *“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”* John said in 1 John 3:10, *“By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.”* By living uprightly and loving our brother, people will know that we are children of God. The sons of Heth knew that Abraham lived uprightly, and his life was a light to those around. May we, the members of Connection Church, be a light to those around us. May we be full of love and live uprightly.

In verses seven and twelve, it says that Abraham rose and bowed before the people. Even though they had just called him a prince of God, Abraham was humble and respectful to those around him. He honored others by bowing before them. Paul wrote in the New Testament for us to walk in humility. If we want to have excellent relationships with other people, we have to learn to walk in humility. If we want to have an excellent relationship with God, we must walk humbly. In Micah 6:8, God says there are three things that He requires of us: to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with Him. Abraham walked humbly with God and with others.

The sons of Heth told him to bury his dead in the choicest grave. Abraham had obviously given it some thought and he asked for the cave of Machpelah that Ephron owned. Ephron was there and offered the cave for free. Abraham did not want the cave for free; he wanted to buy it. He did not want permission; he wanted the legal rights to the property. Furthermore, he did not want to negotiate a lower price. He said that he wanted to pay the full price of the land. I grew up in the Middle East and we bargained for everything. It was part of the culture. Even though I live in America, I am always asking for a better deal. When I bought the keyboard, I asked the store if that was the best price they could give. They checked with the management and gave another 10% off. I grew up bargaining. Even though that was there culture, Abraham did not try to bargain for a lower price. He insisted on paying the full price.

Ephron stated a price of 400 shekels of silver. Various scholars put the value at different amounts. A shekel of silver is 0.5 ounces. Today’s market value of silver (9/8/18) is \$14.27 per ounce, so that would put the value of the land at \$2,854.00. Many scholars use a labor

equivalency to find the value of the 400 shekels. A laborer was paid one denarius per day for his labor, and there are four denarii in a shekel. So, a shekel was worth four day's labor, or 400 shekels would be about 1,600 days of labor. If we said that a laborer today makes \$10/hour, that would make the value of the land at \$128,000. So, the value that scholars give vary between \$2,854.00 and \$128,000.00.

In verse eight we find that they were sitting at the gate. Abraham had this meeting with the sons of Heth at the city gate. The elders of the city would sit at the city gate, and that is where all legal proceedings were held. All trials were held at the city gate. When Boaz went to redeem Ruth, he met with the closest relative at the city gate. Abraham met with them at the city gate because he wanted to do a legal transaction.

So, Abraham weighed out 400 shekels of silver in the presence of everyone there at the gate and gave it to Ephron. We read in verses 17-18, "So Ephron's field, which was in Machpelah, which faced Mamre, the field and cave which was in it, and all the trees which were in the field, that were within all the confines of its border, were deeded over to Abraham for a possession in the presence of the sons of Heth, before all who went in at the gate of his city." Abraham received a property deed for the field and cave that was in it.

3. Abraham Buries Sarah (Gen 23:19-20)

(Gen 23:19-20) "After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field at Machpelah facing Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. {20} So the field and the cave that is in it, were deeded over to Abraham for a burial site by the sons of Heth."

After Abraham had purchased the property and had full legal rights, he then buried his wife in the cave that he had bought. Abraham did things the right way.

About eighteen years ago a man in Georgia that ran a ministry heard that I had put my property up for sale, and he came to our house to look at the property. He asked if he could walk the property, and I told him to help himself. When he came back he told me that this was his property. He said that God promised to give him whatever land he walked on. He misquoted and misapplied Genesis 13:17, which says, "*Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you.*" This was a promise to Abraham, not a general promise to all of us. I told the man that the property belonged to me, and if he wanted to buy the property, he could pay me for the land, and I would give him the deed to the property. Then, the property would become his. I don't think he appreciated what I told him.

Several years ago here in New Mexico, a certain pastor was telling us about how he bought the house that he lived in. He said that when he went and looked at a house, the Holy Spirit told him it was his house. So, he went and changed the locks on the house, as if it was already his house. In his mind, it was already his house. After hearing his story, I gently corrected him, and told him that it was not his house until he had closed on the house, paid the seller, and obtained the deed to the property. I told him that he should not have done anything to the house until after he closed on it. That is what Abraham did. He negotiated a fair price, had a legal closing at the city gate, obtained the deed, and then he went and buried Sarah.

The burial site of Sarah became a cemetery for others. When Abraham died, his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah with his wife, Sarah (Genesis 25:9-10). In Genesis 49:30-32, we find that Isaac, Rebekah, Leah, and Jacob were all buried at that site. Today, there is a large rectangular building over the cave of Machpelah. There is a mosque over the site today, and it is known as the Mosque of Ibrahim, and also as the Sanctuary of Ibrahim. The Muslims revere Abraham, as the father of Ishmael. Today, there is an entrance for Muslims and another one for Jews and others to use. The cave is also known as the Cave of the Patriarchs.

Conclusion and Applications

In our passage today we have looked at the death of Sarah, and how Abraham mourned and grieved over her. Then, he had to deal with all the burial preparations, which included finding a place for her to be buried. After negotiating a price with the sons of Heth, he purchased the field and cave of Machpelah for 400 shekels. It was a legal transaction and he obtained a deed to the property. Then, he buried Sarah there. There are lots of things going on when a death occurs. People are grieving over the loss, and at the same time, there are lots of decisions and funeral arrangements that must be made.

As we come to a close today, I want to end with Ecclesiastes 7:2, which says, *“It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, because that is the end of every man, and the living takes it to heart.”* Solomon said this because death causes us to reflect on the meaning and purpose of life. People are more open and receptive to the gospel message at particular times, and this is one of those occasions. Earlier we saw in Ecclesiastes that life without God is vanity. Abraham and Sarah knew God. They walked with God. They were in a covenant relationship with God. What about you? Do you know the Lord? Are you in a covenant relationship with Him? Jesus died on the cross to forgive us of our sins and to enter into a covenant relationship with God through His blood. The best preparation that you can make for physical death is to receive Christ into your life. He will give your life meaning and purpose, because He created you with purpose. If you would like to receive Jesus into your life, Romans 10:9-10 says that you must do things. First, you must believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead. Second, you must confess Jesus as Lord. If you believe and want to confess Him as Lord this morning, simply pray this. *“Jesus, I do believe that you died for my sins and were raised from the dead. I ask You to come into my life, and I confess You as my Lord this morning.”*

Our applications today are going to be handled by Karla Barela. She is an Advanced Planning Representative with French’s Funeral Homes. She is going to share with us a little bit about the current process that people go through when a death occurs, and have not made previous arrangements. This is the position Abraham was in. Second, she will share some things that people can take care of in advance, which is the position that Ishmael and Isaac were in when Abraham died. A grave site had already been purchased. Third, I have asked her to answer any questions that you may have. Death is something that all of us will face. We will have to take care of the details for some of our loved ones, and eventually, some of our loved ones will have to take care of those details when our appointed time has come.

Introduction (Ps 23:4, Eccl 3:1-2, Gen 18:14, Ps 139:16)

- 1. Death and Mourning of Sarah** (Gen 23:1-2, Gen 11:26-32, 12:1-5, 6:3, Deut 34:5-8, John 11:33-36)

- 2. Abraham Purchases The Burial Plot** (Gen 23:3-18, 15:15, 1 Sam 31:11-13, Gen 50:26, John 13:34-35, 1 John 3:10)

- 3. Abraham Buries Sarah** (Gen 23:19-20, 13:17, 25:9-10, 49:30-32, 50:12-15)

Conclusion and Applications