

# Sarah's Death and Burial

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If we are wondering what effect the encounter Abraham had with God in the previous chapter made on him, we can perhaps see some indication in this chapter. See that Abraham describes himself as "a stranger and a sojourner" (vs. 4). Read Heb. 11:13-16 to see how it describes people who speak in this way.

- What does the Hebrews passage suggest that Abraham meant when he used those words?
- What evidence does this provide of the effect on Abraham of his encounter with God in Genesis 22?

## **Read: Genesis 23:1-20**

*[1] Sarah lived a hundred and twenty-seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah.*

*[2] And Sarah died at Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan; and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.*

*[3] And Abraham rose up from before his dead, and said to the Hittites,*

*[4] "I am a stranger and a sojourner among you; give me property among you for a burying place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight."*

*[5] The Hittites answered Abraham,*

*[6] "Hear us, my lord; you are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our sepulchres; none of us will withhold from you his sepulchre, or hinder you from burying your dead."*

*[7] Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land.*

*[8] And he said to them, "If you are willing that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and entreat for me Ephron the son of Zohar,*

*[9] that he may give me the cave of Mach-pelah, which he owns; it is at the end of his field. For the full price let him give it to me in your presence as a possession for a burying place."*

*[10] Now Ephron was sitting among the Hittites; and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, of all who went in at the gate of his city,*

*[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] Then Abraham bowed down before the people of the land.*

*[13] And he said to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, "But if you will, hear me; I will give the price of the field; accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there."*

*[14] Ephron answered Abraham,*

*[15] "My lord, listen to me; a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between you and me? Bury your dead."*

*[16] Abraham agreed with Ephron; and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver which he had named in the hearing of the Hittites, four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weights current among the merchants.*

*[17] So the field of Ephron in Mach-pe'lah, which was to the east of Mamre, the field with the cave which was in it and all the trees that were in the field, throughout its whole area, was made over*

*[18] to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the Hittites, before all who went in at the gate of his city.*

*[19] After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Mach-pe'lah east of Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan.*

*[20] The field and the cave that is in it were made over to Abraham as a possession for a burying place by the Hittites.*

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## I. OUR TRUE HOMELAND

*"I am a stranger and a sojourner among you . . ."*

The passage in Hebrews suggests that Abraham describes himself as a "stranger and sojourner" not because he has left his home in Haran (vs. 15) but because he has set his heart and mind on a heavenly home, a "better country."

This is a profound statement, because it suggests that Abraham's encounter with God on Mt. Moriah has given his life a completely new perspective.

He understands that his true homeland is where God is, in the city that "He has prepared for them" (vs. 16). People who have this orientation are pleasing to God, and He is "not ashamed to be called their God."

To be able to think this way demonstrates a thorough detachment from this world and a complete focus on life with God.

- That, of course, is the reason for the tests God sends into our lives.

Although the test God gave Abraham was incredibly difficult, as soon as he set out on the road with Isaac, his transformation began. When it was complete, all that really mattered to him was beholding the face of God - the beatific vision.

- The suffering has turned to glory.

## Reflections on Abraham’s Life

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Sometimes when we read about God asking Abraham to offer up Isaac, we become fearful of what God might ask of us. We shudder to think of being put through such a frightening test.

Has that happened to you while learning about Abraham’s life? If so, speak directly to Him about it now. Tell Him exactly how fearful this makes you feel. The tests that come to us from God usually ask us not to kill our children but to drive a knife through whatever impedes our growth in holiness and happiness.

- Ask God to give you the grace you need to be like Abraham, who kept his eyes fixed on God and held nothing back.

### *A. Abraham’s Eyes Were Set on his Heavenly Homeland*

By the end of his life, Abraham became a man whose eyes were set on his heavenly homeland. He did not expect to find perfect happiness in Canaan or anywhere on earth.

This is what we call the theological virtue of "hope." Think about how hope liberates us from trying to squeeze perfect happiness out of temporal life – we want our mates, our jobs, our friends and family, the Church to make us perfectly happy. They can't.

- Examine your life to see if you have misplaced your hope for happiness.
- Can you be set free?

- Ask Father Abraham to pray for you.

### *B. God’s Love for Man*

The story of Abraham's life is a story packed with meaning.

- It includes examples of faith, prayer, and sacrifice.
- It contains many lessons for those who, like Abraham, live their lives by putting their faith in God.
- Yet perhaps the greatest significance of the story of Abraham is that it is the story of God in love with man.

From the earliest chapters of Genesis, we have traced the evidence of God's profound love for the human creatures that bear His image and likeness. The rebellion of Adam and Eve not only did not conquer God's love, it actually became an occasion for Him to demonstrate its depth and breadth and height.

- For not only did God love humans when they behaved; He even loved them when they sinned. How?

He gave them promises to live by and punishments to purify them. Over and over again, God bent down to reorganize and restore the family life that was shattered in Eden.

- First, He promised to defeat His enemy through human beings [Gen. 3:15].
- Then, in Genesis 12, He promised to create, from one man, a whole nation that would belong to Him.
- Through that nation, He planned to reverse the curse of Eden into universal blessing.

### *C. The Hound of Heaven*

The context for comprehending the significance of Abraham's story is the initiative and action of God in pursuit of human beings. His call to Abram in Genesis 12 begins a detailed, engaging account of how one ordinary human being, a creature of flesh and blood like us, is singled out by God to be transformed from sinner to saint.

- The story of his life is the first extended account we have of intimacy between God and man. It is a story of God's love from beginning to end.

Yes, even at the end, when God asks Abraham to give up, to put to death, that which gives his life its only true meaning, He is acting out of passionate love for him.

How can that be?

God knows that in losing our lives, we find them. He knew that in Eden. He knew that on Moriah. He knew it on Calvary.

- The source of perfect human happiness is perfect obedience to God, even if it costs us everything.

What began as intimations of God's love in the early chapters of Genesis are confirmed and ratified in the life of Abraham. Stooping down to call Abram out of Haran to follow Him to a new country, God demonstrates His condescension to undeserving humankind.

- Through the details of Abraham's story - faith, missteps, miracles, and weakness - we see how relentless His love is.

***The culmination of this courtship takes place on Moriah, when God rewards the perfect obedience of Abraham with an oath that will affect the rest of human history, until the end of time.***

- ***All of God's blessings in the world, from the time of Abraham, can be traced back to this oath.***

God’s mercies to Israel, the nation that came from the loins of Abraham, were the result not of the worthiness of Israel but of the promise He had made to Abraham on Moriah (Ex. 32:11-14; Ps. 51:1-4).

- When Mary sings exultantly of God's work in her [the Magnificat], she sees it as a fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham (Luke 1:54-55).

*He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
as he spoke to our fathers,  
to Abraham and to his posterity forever."*

It is ironic, isn't it, that people sometimes suggest that God in the Old Testament is full of wrath, and that it is in the New Testament that we see Him as a God of love. Don't believe it for a minute.

The story of Abraham is the story of God's powerful love for mortals like us, which searches us out and elevates us to unthinkable heights.

Father Abraham, pray for us to live always in the joy of God's indestructible love.

# God Prepares His Family for Nationhood

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### *A. Blueprint for Salvation History*

The first half of Genesis is packed full of information about our beginnings and containing what amounts to a blueprint for the rest of salvation history.

- God's promise to Abraham would unfold in stages over time; through covenants made with Moses and David, and
- would finally be fulfilled in the New Covenant of Jesus Christ.

It takes the rest of the Bible to accomplish this, but all the seeds are planted in God's covenant with Abraham. The time between Abraham and Moses is a time of incubation; the future nation of Israel lies nascent in the family of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The remainder of Genesis concerns itself with the germination of this seed, and its development to the point where it is ready - both in size and spirit - to be made into a nation.

Like all germinations, it is a quiet time. Gone is the bustle of the preceding chapters. Individual stories are fleshed out and we see in Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph various aspects of living by faith. They are stewards of the Covenant. God reveals Himself from time to time and re-confirms his promises but no real changes are made to His promise.

Throughout the story His hand can be seen in the background, moving in concert with men to achieve His plan.

In order for Israel to become a nation, what now is a family of three people must grow to enough people to conquer and fill the land of Canaan. It will take several hundred years to get to that point.

For now, Genesis slows down to a narrative showing how the nation of Israel was founded on Isaac's second son Jacob (renamed Israel) and his 12 sons and their families.

We move with the budding chosen people into a time of waiting. The pace will be slower but it gives us an opportunity to look at individual lives lived within the

context of the Covenant Promises and to see how God molds them even as He makes them partners in His plan.

## Isaac: The Blessing Passed Down

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Last week we read what is surely the climax of the book of Genesis. Everything has been leading up to the moment when Abraham throws himself on God's mercy and does the unthinkable:

- in obedience to God, he offers on an altar his only son,
- the very son God promised to build a nation from and use to bless the world.

The trial is too painful, and the outcome too glorious, for us to take in all at once. "At last!" we cry; someone has stepped up to the plate. A son of Adam has stood fast on the Word of God against claims of the Enemy; he has believed God's promises against all evidence to the contrary; he has obeyed to the point of giving up something more important to him than life itself.

No wonder James says that Abraham "was called God's friend" (Jas. 2:23).

### *A. Abraham: God's Friend!*

Don't miss the significance of those words. Do you remember what happened as a result of the Fall?

- Adam and Eve lost God's friendship.
- In Abraham we see that friendship restored.
- Things are starting to turn around.

In chapter 24, the focus shifts away from Abraham and rests briefly on his son Isaac, who by this time is 40 years old.

### *B. Isaac*

Isaac is the original "son of the promise," and must have been deeply affected by his experience on Mt. Moriah.

- What is he like, we wonder?
- Does he know God as Abraham does?
- How will he fare in his role as covenant-keeper or steward of the promise?

The sacred author is less interested in these things than we are. Isaac's role in God's plan seems to be limited to being a willing sacrifice and then faithfully passing on the covenant blessings: even though he lives to be 180, the narration of the next 10 chapters focuses on his son Jacob, who will father the 12 tribes of Israel.

But before we discuss his son, Jacob/Israel, we will look at the circumstances of Isaac's marriage to Rebekah;

- the birth of and conflict between their sons Jacob and Esau;
- and incidents in Isaac's life that mirror Abraham's experience.

Through it all, it is apparent that God is working - however subtly - to achieve His plan.

**Read: Genesis 24 to the end.**

*[1] Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things.*

*[2] And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his house, who had charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh,*

*[3] and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell,*

*[4] but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac."*

*[5] The servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land; must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?"*

*[6] Abraham said to him, "See to it that you do not take my son back there.*

*[7] The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and swore to me, 'To your descendants I will give this land,' he will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there.*

*[8] But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there."*

*[9] So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter.*

## Isaac and Rebekah

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The servant Abraham entrusts with finding a bride for Isaac is probably Eliezer of Damascus, mentioned in Gen. 15:2. By asking him to put his hand under Abraham's thigh, Abraham was binding him in a strong and solemn oath to follow his directions exactly.

- What are Abraham's chief concerns in sending his servant to his relatives?
- Which of these concerns is to take precedence, should the woman be unwilling to return with the servant?

Abraham has two concerns:

- He wants Isaac to marry a woman from his own family as opposed to one from among the local Canaanites; and
- He does not want Isaac to leave the Promised Land.

He is emphatic about this latter point, even going so far as to release his servant from his oath if the woman he finds is unwilling to leave her home and go to Isaac in Canaan.

Abraham apparently does not want to take the risk that Isaac will be tempted to remain in his family's natural homeland and thereby forestall the fulfillment of God's promise to give them Canaan, even if it means not getting the wife he prefers.

### *C. Qualities of Isaac’s Bride*

What does this show about the character of the woman Abraham would like to find as a wife for Isaac?

Abraham not only wants a wife for his son from his own family, he wants one who will be willing to leave her homeland. Abraham seems to understand that God's call to leave everything and follow Him, to "[make] his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country," as Paul says in Hebrews 11:9, is not just for him but for his son also.

The promise will not be fulfilled immediately, and not only Isaac but his wife as well will need to be able to live in hope, looking forward to the future.

The fact that Abraham releases Eliezer from the promise should the woman be unwilling to return with him, is evidence that Abraham has complete trust in God to keep His word.

Isaac obviously needs a suitable wife if he is to have children in fulfillment of God's promise, but Abraham will not force the issue. He believes God will send an angel to prepare the way for Eliezer; if that doesn't work out, God will find another way.

## II. MEETING WITH REBEKAH

*[10] Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, taking all sorts of choice gifts from his master; and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor.*

*[11] And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening, the time when women go out to draw water.*

*[12] And he said, "O LORD, God of my master Abraham, grant me success today, I pray thee, and show steadfast love to my master Abraham.*

*[13] Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water.*

*[14] Let the maiden to whom I shall say, 'Pray let down your jar that I may drink,' and who shall say, 'Drink, and I will water your camels' -- let her be the one whom thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac. By this I shall know that thou hast shown steadfast love to my master."*

*[15] Before he had done speaking, behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out with her water jar upon her shoulder.*

*[16] The maiden was very fair to look upon, a virgin, whom no man had known. She went down to the spring, and filled her jar, and came up.*

*[17] Then the servant ran to meet her, and said, "Pray give me a little water to drink from your jar."*

*[18] She said, "Drink, my lord"; and she quickly let down her jar upon her*

*hand, and gave him a drink.*

*[19] When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw for your camels also, until they have done drinking."*

*[20] So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels.*

*[21] The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the LORD had prospered his journey or not.*

*[22] When the camels had done drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing a half shekel, and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold shekels,*

*[23] and said, "Tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father's house for us to lodge in?"*

*[24] She said to him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor."*

*[25] She added, "We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in."*

*[26] The man bowed his head and worshiped the LORD,*

*[27] and said, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the LORD has led me in the way to the house of my master's kinsmen."*

#### ***D. God is Guiding Events***

Before Eliezer had even finished praying that God would guide him by sending a girl who offers to water his camels, God sent Rebekah to him.

No wonder Eliezer "bowed and worshiped the Lord" and praised him, for the very first woman he laid eyes on after praying not only did what he asked of God, but she also was Abraham's grand-niece and a beautiful, eligible young woman at that.

God's hand in the matter is confirmed by Laban and Bethuel when they offer Rebekah to Eliezer, saying "let her become the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has directed (vs.51).

### *E. Rebekah’s Character*

The granddaughter of Abraham's brother Nahor, Rebekah has not only the requisite modesty and virtue of a potential bride; she is beautiful, thoughtful, and hospitable.

She works quickly, is eager to help, and goes beyond what is expected to make others comfortable.

God chose her to be mother of the man who would be Israel - Jacob, the father of the 12 tribes of Israel - as surely as he chose Abraham and Isaac, to play a part in carrying out His purposes.

In the same way, God chooses each one of us. St. Paul says that "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10)."

And Jesus told his disciples that they did not choose him, "but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide (Jn. 15:16)."

We are called into God's family that we might share in God's nature, in the fruitfulness of His love, and in His work.

## Summary

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## Questions

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## Preparation for Week #19

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