GENESIS 23

Sarah Dies

1 Sarah lived to be 127 years old. These were the years of her life. 2 She died in Kirjath Arba. (This is
known as Hebron in the land of Canaan.) Then Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.
3 So he got up from mourning over his dead and spoke to the sons of Heth.

He said, 4 "I am a foreigner[i] and a temporary resident[ii] with you. Sell[iii] me some land for a burial site among you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight."

5 And the children of Heth answered Abraham. They said to him, 6 "Hear us, my lord. You are a prince of God among us. Bury your dead in the best of our tombs. None of us will withhold his tomb from you so that you can bury your dead."[iv]

7 So Abraham stood up and bowed himself to the people of the land,[v] even to the children of Heth. 8 He communed with them, saying, "Since you are willing[vi] to let me bury my dead out of my sight, please[vii] do this. Intercede for me with Ephron, the son of Zohar. 9 Ask him to give me the cave[viii] of Machpelah, which he has at the end of his field. Ask him if he will sell[ix] it to me for as much money as it is worth for a possession of a burying place among you."

10 Now Ephron dwelt among the children of Heth. Then Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the audience of the children of Heth, even of all that went in at the gate of his city. He said, 11 "No, my lord! Hear me. I will sell you the field with the cave[x] that is in it. I sell it to you. I sell it to you in the presence of the sons of my people. Bury your dead."

12 Then Abraham bowed down before the people of the land.[xi] 13 He spoke to Ephron in the audience of the people of the land. He said, "But if you will give it to me, I ask you to hear me. I will give you money for the field. Take it, and I will bury my dead there."

14 Then Ephron answered Abraham. He said to him, 15 "My lord, hear me. The land is worth four hundred[xii] shekels of silver. But what is that between me and you? Therefore, bury your dead."

16 After Abraham listened to Ephron, he weighed out the silver Ephron had named in the audience of the sons of Heth, 400 shekels of silver, current money used by the merchants.[xiii] 17 Abraham bought[xiv] the field of Ephron, which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre. He also bought the field, the cave which was in it, and all the trees within the borders around the field. 18 Abraham took possession of the property in the presence of the children of Heth, 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 Machpelah before Mamre. This is Hebron in the land of Canaan. 20 Abraham bought the field and the cave that is in it from[xv] the sons of Heth. He used it as a burial site.

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[i] The Hebrew גֵּר (*geyr*) refers to a sojourner — an outsider temporarily living among Israelites who receives protection under the law and is often included in ethical commands. This status implies peaceful presence and some integration, though not full covenant inclusion. In contrast, נָכְרִי (*nawch-ree*) identifies a foreign national, usually outside the covenant; זוּר (*zoor*) conveys estrangement or religious/moral opposition; and תּוֹשָׁב (*to-shawv*) describes a resident alien with limited rights and no covenant standing.

[ii] The Hebrew תּוֹשָׁב (*to-shawv*) refers to a resident alien — someone living in the land of Israel without full covenant rights. The *to-shawv* may share in daily life but is excluded from certain religious privileges, such as eating the Passover. Related terms include גֵּר (*geyr*), a sojourner who receives legal protection and ethical consideration; נָכְרִי

(*nawch-ree*), a foreigner from another nation, often viewed as outside the covenant; and זוּר (*zoor*), an estranged outsider, frequently with religious or moral distance.

[iii] Hebrew word נָתַן (*naw-tahn*) means give. It can also mean sell by "giving over."

[iv] They didn't say "yes" or "no." They are somewhat hostile to the foreigner.

[v] Abraham realizes what is going on and bows before them again. He is being very polite in the face of hostility. He uses this to set up his next request.

[vi] The Hebrew נֶפֶשׁ (*neh-fehsh*) has a wide range of meanings. Its #1 definition in the KJV is "soul." It refers to one's life force or breath. Sometimes, it refers to a person as a living being. It can refer to a person's emotions or desires. Here, the context is the public buying of land at the city gates. It refers to their common business decision to sell the land.

[vii] The Hebrew שְׁמַע literally means hear or listen. Here, Abraham's use of the verb carries a polite, requestive force, functioning as an appeal or entreaty to the Hittites. Thus, it is best rendered contextually as "please do this," capturing the sense of respectful urging rather than simple auditory perception.

[viii] Abraham only wants the cave as a place to bury his wife.

[ix] The Hebrew נָתַן (*naw-tahn*) means give. It can also mean sell by "giving over."

[x] They do not want to sell the land to a foreigner. His counter-offer is a polite way of not accepting a foreigner. Since he doesn't want to sell the cave, he enlarges the offer. I suspect he thought Abraham would shrug his shoulders and leave.

[xi] Abraham continues being very polite in the face of hostility. He is not backing down. He wants the cave.

[xii] This is way more than the field is worth. Ephron is in essence insulting Abraham, the foreigner.

[xiii] Ephron got a really good deal by swindling the foreigner. Money speaks louder than prejudice.

[xiv] Hebrew קוּם (*koom*) means "to arise, perform, stand, be established." It also describes the legal confirmation or establishment of property ownership. In transactional contexts it refers to property being legally secured or transferred to a new owner. Here the term indicates that the field was formally established as Abraham's possession following the negotiated payment.

[xv] The Hebrew מֵאֵת is a Mem-**Aleph**-**Tav**. The letter Mem represents waters. So, Mem-**Aleph**-**Tav** represents covenant judgment flowing from God to Abraham through the sons of Heth. See the article "The **Aleph**-**Tav**."