

The Life of Abraham

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[0 : 00] If you have a Bible, you might turn to Genesis chapter 23. So there's some church Bibles at the back if you'd like to follow along with the reading and also as we go through the text, just so that you're staying in touch.

Sometimes it can be confusing or complicated as we go through books that aren't familiar to us or chapters that aren't familiar. So I'd really encourage you if you have a Bible or a phone with a Bible app to get one and to follow along as we read.

So we're going to start from Genesis 23, reading from verse 1. Down to the end of the chapter.

Sarah lived to be 127 years old.

She died at Kiriath Arba, that is Hebron, in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her. Then Abraham rose from beside his dead wife and spoke to the Hittites.

He said, I'm a foreigner and stranger among you. Sell me some property for a burial site so that I can bury my dead. The Hittites replied to Abraham, Sir, listen to us, you're a mighty prince among us.

[1 : 03] Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will refuse you his tomb for burying your dead. Then Abraham rose and bowed down before the people of the land, the Hittites.

He said to them, If you're willing to let me bury my dead, then listen to me and intercede with Ephron, son of Zohar, on my behalf, so that he will sell me the cave of Machpelah, which belongs to him and is at the end of his field.

Ask him to sell it to me for the full price as a burial site among you. Ephron the Hittite was sitting among his people and he replied to Abraham in the hearing of all the Hittites who had come to the gate of his city.

No, my lord, he said, Listen to me. I give you the field and I give you the cave that is in it. I give it to you in the presence of my people.

Bury your dead. Again Abraham bowed down before the people of the land and he said to Ephron in their hearing, Listen to me if you will. I will pay the price of the field.

[2 : 06] Accept it from me so that I can bury my dead there. Ephron answered Abraham, Listen to me, my lord. The land is worth 400 shekels of silver, but what is that between you and me?

Bury your dead. Well, Abraham agreed to Ephron's terms and weighed out for him the price he had named in the hearing of the Hittites, 400 shekels of silver, according to the weight current among the merchants.

So Ephron's field in Machpelah near Mamre, both the field and the cave in it, and all the trees within the borders of the field, was legally made over to Abraham as his property in the presence of all the Hittites who had come to the gate of the city.

Afterwards, Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre, which is at Hebron in the land of Canaan. So the field and the cave in it were legally made over to Abraham by the Hittites as a burial site.

We're going to stop the reading just there, and let's pause to pray and ask for God's help as we look at His Word. Lord, we just thank You for Your Word. We pray that by Your Spirit You would open our eyes and our hearts so that You would speak to us, that You would encourage us and challenge us as we hear Your voice.

[3 : 31] We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. So we're coming to the end of another installment of Genesis. The season finale, again, of our next section of Genesis is coming to an end, and we're faced with death.

We've journeyed through Genesis in this section with Abraham and Sarah, but now one of the main characters has died.

I don't know about you, but I like happy endings. I like movies or TV shows that wrap things up nicely, where the heroes win and the bad guys are defeated.

And if one of the heroes dies, well, that's not a very happy ending. Well, if you're watching a movie or TV show, if it ends in death, it's usually not the end.

There's usually another film coming out to follow up, or another series that's coming which will explain everything. Well, I love Lord of the Rings, and at the end of the first movie, one of the main characters dies.

[4 : 46] Spoiler alert. It's been out long enough that if you don't know, then you probably won't watch it at this stage. It's a very sad ending. One of the brave, valiant characters who is fighting for his friends, he dies.

And the story there ends with death. But there is more to come. That's not the end. There are more movies and story to follow. And today we are faced at the end of our section with the death of Sarah.

One of the heroes of faith that we see in the New Testament, listed among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. And she dies. But it's not the end.

We're only at the beginning of God's wonderful story of salvation. So firstly this morning, I want to say that we are faced with the reality that death affects everyone.

No one is immune to death. We start into this passage, and we are immediately faced with death. Verse 2, She died.

[6 : 08] Sarah, Abraham's wife, his lifelong partner, had died at the age of 127. Abraham and Sarah had set off together from Haran to begin this journey of faith with its many detours, its ups and downs, its promises, its disappointments.

Now Abraham must continue alone. And Sarah was a woman of faith. A number of times throughout the rest of Scripture, we're encouraged to look at Sarah and her life.

Through her journey, we see mistakes along the way, just like we see with Abraham. But she was a woman of faith. We hear about her faith in Hebrews 11, where it says, And by faith, even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful, who had made the promise.

God worked through Sarah to start the family through whom God would bring about his rescue plan. But death comes to everyone.

Even the great men and women of faith who are recorded in Scripture, death touches us all. Death touches us all. Nothing can stop it.

[7 : 36] And it's not right. It's not right. death is not right. The very beginning of Genesis shows us exactly the kind of world that God had made and exactly what had happened that caused it to collapse into chaos.

Death is not what God intended. Death is out of sync with God's design. And it affects everyone. Friends, family members, neighbors, colleagues, we all experience death of someone we know. And one day, we will all face death ourselves. This is the reality of this world because of our rebellion against God.

Death is here. And here we finish our section. This chapter is about death. death. Whether we are followers of Jesus or we don't want anything to do with Him, death is coming.

Well, in the midst of grief, what do we do? And that's the second thing that we see. In the midst of grief, I want to encourage you to trust in God's promises. Abraham here had lost his wife.

[9 : 01] And what does he do? He grieves. He mourns. He weeps. And it's right to do that. It's right to grieve. It's right to be filled with sorrow.

Jesus Himself wept at the death of one of His friends. But in the midst of grief, we can trust in God's promises. Abraham was trusting in God's promises.

We see in the midst of grief what Abraham does. Verse 3. Then Abraham rose from beside his dead wife and spoke to the Hittites.

He said, I'm a foreigner and stranger among you. Sell me some property for a burial site here so that I can bury my dead. In the midst of grief, Abraham sets out to bury his wife.

It's very common, isn't it, to hear that people are brought back to their homeland to be buried. Maybe there's a place where the family goes to bury their dead.

[10:11] Well, this was very common in ancient times as well where there would be a family place, a family plot, where they would return to bury their dead. But notice here, Abraham doesn't return to his homeland.

He doesn't journey back to Haran or to Ur of the Chaldeans. He sets out to find a tomb for Sarah in this new land, this foreign land, but most importantly, this promised land.

He is in the land that had been promised to his offspring by God. And he is trusting in God's promise that this land is going to be the land of his descendants.

And so, he sets out to secure a place in the promised land to bury his wife Sarah and where he himself can be buried. And so begins this back and forth between Abraham and the Hittites as he seeks to secure some land.

We'll look at that process in just a second. But there's one particular place that Abraham has his eye on. He has been searching on daf.ie and he's found that perfect spot.

[11:29] It has trees, it has a field, and it has this beautiful cave that would be perfect for his family, for his Sarah. The cave of Machpelah near Mamre in the land of Canaan.

Now, I want you to take note of that cave because as we go through the rest of Genesis in the future, as you read through it yourself, this is a very important place.

You'll see that this tomb is so important to each of the generations after Abraham. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, none of these generations saw the land coming to them as God had promised.

But this tomb was a focus of their hope. In the midst of their grief, they had this tomb as a focus for their hope.

Abraham was trusting in God's promise that he would provide this land to his offspring. This would be their homeland, even though it wasn't his own land now.

[12:39] In the midst of grief, Abraham was trusting God's promise. This was the land God would give to his descendants, and so this was the place that he would bury his wife, not in his own land and where he too would be buried.

So for us, in the midst of our grief, as we experience death, as death touches our lives, we also need to trust in God's promise.

We will all experience loss and sorrow and grief in our lives. And it's in those times where we need to desperately hold on to God's promise.

Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph, they may have had this tomb as a focus of their hope where their bones would be brought and laid to rest. That this was a focus of the promise of God. Well, we also have a tomb as the focus of our hope. Only this one is empty. It's not filled with the bones of the ancestors of the past.

[13:49] It's the empty tomb of Jesus. The death and the resurrection of Jesus changes everything. It means that life isn't just what we see here and now so that when it ends, we are filled with despair and hopelessness.

No. Because Jesus was raised, there is more. And the more is that we can have everlasting life with God.

That if we belong to Jesus, we also will be raised to life. God offers us incredible hope hope that even though we are affected by death and touched in lots of different situations, we're invited into eternal life.

and so when someone who loves the Lord passes away, we will grieve and miss them deeply, but it's in the sure hope that they will actually be raised to life again.

Maybe we don't think about this too much. Maybe you don't think, maybe you think about death sometimes, but if you love the Lord and follow Him, do you think, yes, I'll die, but I'm actually going to be raised to life again.

[15:12] That's real. That if you love the Lord, we believe and know that we will be raised back to life.

That means that death is not the end, that death is only temporary. Remember, I like happy endings. Death is not the end.

what amazing hope is offered to us that for those that believe in Jesus, that He was raised from the dead, so we too will also be raised.

In the midst of grief, let us turn to the promise and the invitation to eternal life with God. So, in the midst of grief, trust in God's promises.

The third thing I want to say is act with integrity. Act with integrity. And we're going to look at this process that Abraham goes through to get the land and to get the tomb.

[16:22] We see him acting with integrity as he purchases the land. He was conducting himself with integrity. He wasn't being beholden to anyone. No one had a claim on Abraham.

Abraham. So, let's scan again through these verses because there's quite the back and forth. So, let's pick it up again in verse 8. He said to them, I don't know it to me for the full price as a burial site among you.

I don't know if you've bought land or property before. How many of us went in asking, please, can I buy your property at the full price? I don't know about that.

Well, Abraham did. Verse 10, Ephron the Hittite was sitting there and he said, no, my Lord, listen to me. I give you the field and I give you the cave that's in it.

I give it to you in the presence of my people. Verse 12, again, Abraham bowed down before the people of the land and he said to Ephron in their hearing, listen to me. If you will, I will pay the price of the land.

[17:34] Accept it from me so that I can bury my dead. Okay, hold on, Abraham. You'll go out to buy some property and here this lovely, generous local says, you don't need to buy it. Have the land and bury your dead.

Well, we've already seen in Abraham that he would be beholden to anyone. We saw in Genesis earlier when the king of Sodom said, take these riches.

He said, no, I'm not taking anything. I don't want you to be able to say, I made Abraham rich. We see him acting with integrity.

Let's keep going. When Ephron answered him in verse 15, listen to me, my lord, the land is worth 400 shekels of silver, but what's that between you and me?

Bury your dead. Well, now Ephron lets it slip. He lets the full price slip. And as it's understood, that's quite a high price. Verse 16, Abraham agreed.

[18:35] He agreed to Ephron's terms. He weighed out for him the price, 400 shekels of silver, according to the weight current among the merchants. Abraham said, I have it. I have my opportunity to not be given favors by any of the locals.

This is my land, no one can claim it back. No one can say, oh, that was a gift to Abraham, but he's gone now, so that land can return to us. This process seems quite foreign to us.

This back and forth in this culture, set at the city gate, haggling about price. Abraham is offered any tomb, but he says, I want to pay full price for this one specific tomb.

He's acting with integrity as he goes through this process. He was going to get this land fair and square. No one would be able to claim it back and say, my father sold him this land or he gave him this land, therefore I can claim it back.

He acted with integrity even though a gift of that proportion would have been very tempting. In the midst of grief, who wants to work about money stuff and purchases of property and funeral arrangements?

[19:50] So he bought the land, even at a higher price than may have been expected by the Hittites. It was then his land and it was for his descendants after him.

Well, it can certainly be a complicated process when you want to buy property in Ireland today. There's lots of hoops you have to jump through, lots of boxes to tick, and it may be tempting to exaggerate or to cut corners or leave out some information to get a better outcome.

It's not just property. There are lots of situations in our lives where we may be tempted to exaggerate, where we are tempted to cut corners, tempted to leave out information so that we might get a better outcome.

Maybe it's a work situation that if I exaggerate the work that I've done or the results that I've had or the reasons for them, maybe then I'll get that promotion.

Or if I leave out some relevant information when I'm talking to my parents, well, I won't get into as much trouble, or maybe any trouble, and they'll just leave me alone.

[21:03] As people who love the Lord and follow Him, we must act with integrity. We want to act in ways that honor God in all that we do.

In work, in school, at home, with our friends, we want all that we do to be honoring to God. I sometimes think a good test for this is, would we be happy to continue doing what we were doing if Jesus walked into the room where we were, and He saw what we had been watching or what we'd

been reading, what we'd been listening to, or the conversation we'd been having, the action we had been taking.

Well, if we wouldn't be happy, we should stop. We need to act with integrity as people who trust in God's promises.

We see Abraham acting in a way that wouldn't have any claim on him. He wanted to do this fair and square. And God brings a life of great blessing to those who walk in His ways.

Psalm 1 reminds us that blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on His law day and night.

[22 : 31] That person is like a tree planted by streams of water which yield its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither, whatever they do, prosper.

So let's act with integrity as we live out our lives for the Lord. The last thing I want to say for this morning is relax.

God is faithful to His promises. Let's relax. We see the transaction is complete.

Verse 17 to 19. So Ephron's field in Machpelah near Mamre, both the field and the cave and the trees within the border of the field, they were legally made over to Abraham as his property.

Verse 19. Afterwards, Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre, which is at Hebron in the land of Canaan.

[23 : 34] the field and the cave and all the trees were now Abraham's and He buried His wife Sarah there. God had now provided Abraham with a part, a sliver of the land that was promised.

Part of the promised land now belonged to Abraham, even if it was just a tiny part. God's promise was beginning to get worked out, even if it would not be realized for Abraham's descendants for many generations to come.

God is faithful to His promises. He was not going to fail, even though at times it may have seemed impossible.

Here, for Abraham, when God had promised this land to His offspring, he didn't even have a place in that very land to bury his wife. But God opened this door for him to purchase this plot.

To enter into that promise of God, Abraham was experiencing God's promise right there and then, but also not yet.

[24 : 53] It was a very tiny sliver of what was to come. Abraham did not need to worry. He didn't need to stress. He could relax because God is faithful to His promises.

So this morning, as we think about life, as we see all that's going on around us, in us, and outside of us, relax.

God is faithful to His promises. Sometimes we have something small in anticipation of something greater, don't we?

When you get engaged, there is a small little ring, which is like the promise for the future. We're going to get married, and it is happening.

This is real. This is actually happening, but you're not married yet. It's a reality now, but also not yet.

[25 : 58] Or when you discover that you're expecting a baby, you go to your first scan, and you see this tiny baby on the screen, maybe get a photo of this beautiful little life.

There is a now that you are parents, maybe for the first time, maybe many times, that there is a little life there already, but there's a not yet, because you're waiting for the baby to arrive.

Well, we are experiencing a similar feeling to Abraham, because we are also experiencing God's promises as now, and not yet. The kingdom of God arrived with Jesus coming, and was confirmed and guaranteed by his death and resurrection, resurrection, and so by faith, we enter into God's kingdom, into his family, right now.

We can experience the blessing of God right now. We enjoy fellowship with him and with his people right now.

God's promise has been fulfilled, but we also have a not yet. God has more in store for us. Jesus has promised to return and to bring all those who love him to be with him forever in the new creation.

[27 : 25] God's promise of life in his presence forever is still to come. Ultimate and perfect peace, fullness of joy, it's in the future, but there is no doubt.

We can relax because God is faithful to his promises. We see that with the land. Abraham received this sliver of land, but he was a foreigner and stranger.

Hebrews 11 again reminds us of these heroes of faith, and in verse 9 it says, by faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country.

He lived in tents as did Isaac and Jacob who were heirs with him of the same promise, for he was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God.

Abraham lived in tents, but he was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and designer and builder is God. God. So we too are strangers and foreigners living in this world because this is not our forever home.

[28 : 47] We look forward to our forever home with God in the world that he is preparing for us and will one day reveal. And there is no doubt God is faithful to his promises so we can relax.

We can let him do what he does, trust him, and live for him. Let's pray for his help as we seek to do that.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are mighty and powerful to be faithful to your promises.

That you don't promise things that you cannot keep or tempt us or tantalize us with things that we would love.

Lord, what you say is true and we can trust in it. Lord, let that just overwhelm us with peace, with rest, and being able to fall back into you and know that you're at work.

Lord, as we look around us and as we see things not going our way, as we see death encroaching on us, as we see death all around us, Lord, help us to trust your promises, to trust you in the midst of grief, and to act in ways that you would have us live and serve you.

[30 : 14] So, Lord, we pray for your help. We pray for your blessing. Pray that your spirit would be working in us to help us to do these things. Give us a deep peace and love for you, knowing that you're in control and that you're always faithful to your promise.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to sing as we close our time together a song that reminds us of God's goodness and faithfulness to us.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.