

## **The Life of Abraham**

### **The Fruitfulness of Faith – Learning to rest, Genesis 23-25**

*[The New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Welcome to our final talk in the series, 'The Life of Abraham'. We will look at chapters 23 - 25 in Genesis which outline the closing years of this remarkable man of faith. The great faith chapter, Hebrews 11, devotes about a quarter of the verses to Abraham and his wife Sarah. In the book of Genesis almost a third of the chapters cover the life of Abraham along with his wife Sarah.

The talk title is in the form of a couplet, The Fruitfulness of Faith – Learning to rest. In our chapters we have the following major considerations:

- The death of Sarah and the purchase of a suitable burial place, chapter 23.
- A bride for Isaac, chapter 24.
- Abraham's new wife, chapter 25:1-4.
- The death of Abraham and his burial, chapter 25:5-10.

There are almost one hundred verses to consider in the three chapters of our talk. It will not be possible to read or comment upon every verse. Therefore, after this broadcast please find time to read the Scriptures and possibly listen again or read the transcript from our website, ([www.truthfortoday.org.uk](http://www.truthfortoday.org.uk)).

#### **The death of Sarah (Genesis 23:1-2).**

Let us read chapter 23 verses 1 – 2,

"Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. So, Sarah died in Kirjath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her."

Sarah had married Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees and had accompanied her husband through many high and low points in their lives together. This included the long wait for the son God had promised. Now Sarah dies at the good old age of 127. It appears that Abraham was not with Sarah when she died. We know from earlier scriptures in Genesis that Abraham was an extremely wealthy man and of great standing among the people of the land. So, it is not entirely surprising that his vast business interests would take him away from Sarah, but he returns to mourn, weep and bury Sarah his wife. However, Abraham needs a suitable burial place. For this family it is the first death in the land of Canaan. Abraham and his family are mainly nomadic; they own no land although God has promised Abraham that his descendants will inherit the whole land of Canaan, but not yet.

## **The purchase of a suitable burial place (Genesis 23:3-20).**

Let us read the remainder of chapter 23,

"Then Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spoke to the sons of Heth, saying, I am a foreigner and a visitor among you. Give me property for a burial place among you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight. And the sons of Heth answered Abraham, saying to him, Hear us, my lord: you are a mighty prince among us; bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places. None of us will withhold from you his burial place, that you may bury your dead. Then Abraham stood up and bowed himself to the people of the land, the sons of Heth. And he spoke with them, saying, If it is your wish that I bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and meet with Ephron the son of Zohar for me, that he may give me the cave of Machpelah which he has, which is at the end of his field. Let him give it to me at the full price, as property for a burial place among you. Now Ephron dwelt among the sons of Heth; and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the presence of the sons of Heth, all who entered at the gate of his city, saying, No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field and the cave that is in it; I give it to you in the presence of the sons of my people. I give it to you. Bury your dead! Then Abraham bowed himself down before the people of the land; and he spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying, If you will give it, please hear me. I will give you money for the field; take it from me and I will bury my dead there. And Ephron answered Abraham, saying to him, My lord, listen to me; the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver. What is that between you and me? So, bury your dead. And Abraham listened to Ephron; and Abraham weighed out the silver for Ephron which he had named in the hearing of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, currency of the merchants. So the field of Ephron which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field and the cave which was in it, and all the trees that were in the field, which were within all the surrounding borders, were deeded to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the sons of Heth, before all who went in at the gate of his city. And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah, before Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. So, the field and the cave that is in it were deeded to Abraham by the sons of Heth as property for a burial place."

This is a long drawn out negotiation to purchase a field which contains a cave suitable as a burial place for Sarah. During this conversation Abraham is referred to as a lord and as a mighty prince, indicating that he is recognised as a person of authority, power and wealth. In these negotiations honour is also important. So, we have the land being offered freely and Abraham insisting on paying. Eventually the price is paid, and all concerned are happy with the outcome. God promised the whole land to Abraham and his descendants, but for the moment a tiny piece of land now belongs to him and his descendants, the nation of Israel. Abraham is now able to bury Sarah with dignity in land that he owns, a permanent possession.

When Jesus was taken down from the cross by Joseph and Nicodemus, He was buried in a borrowed tomb. So different for the Saviour who is both Lord of all and Creator, not just this world, but of the whole universe. The words of Hilda M. Day's hymn capture the thought that the Saviour had no place in this world.

No room for the Saviour at Bethlehem's inn,  
only a cattle shed;  
no room on this earth for the dear Son of God,  
nowhere to lay His head.

Only a cross did they give to my Lord,  
only a borrowed tomb.  
Today He is seeking a place in your heart-  
will you still say to Him, 'No room'?

O Lord, in my heart there's a welcome for You:  
gladly I now would say,  
Come in, precious Saviour, my heart and my life  
both shall be yours today.  
Long have You waited and long knocked in vain  
outside my heart's closed door:  
so, cleanse me from sin, then, my Lord, enter in  
and live there for evermore.

### **A bride for Isaac (Genesis 24).**

This is a very long chapter and, as mentioned earlier we will not be able to read and comment upon every verse. The main character in the chapter is the un-named servant. The servant has many godly qualities which make him suitable for the task of seeking a bride for Isaac.

- He is trustworthy.
- He makes preparation for the task.
- He is dependent upon the LORD God.
- He fully declares his purpose.
- He gives great gifts.
- He wants no hindrance to his mission.
- He delivers the bride to Isaac.

Let us read the first nine verses of this chapter,

"Now Abraham was old, well advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. So Abraham said to the oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had, 'Please, put your hand under my thigh, and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; but you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac.' And the servant said to him, 'Perhaps the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I take your son back to the land from which you came?' But Abraham said to him, 'Beware that you do not take my son back there. The LORD God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my family, and who spoke to me and swore to me, saying, 'To your descendants I give this land,' He will send His angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. And if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be released from this oath; only do not take my son back there.' So, the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter."

Three years have passed since the death of Sarah and Abraham comes to a decision that he must have a suitable wife for his son, Isaac. Abraham is old and maybe concerned to see his son married and settled. In the verses we have just read, we see the commission that Abraham gives to the servant. There are strict guidelines and restrictions as to what the servant was expected to do and not do. There is also a solemn commitment made. We find in these verses that Abraham has confidence in the LORD God – 'He will send His angel before you and you shall take a wife for my son from there'. Abraham is totally convinced that all will be well in this venture. However, to

satisfy the servant, there is a release clause should things not happen as intended. I have no doubt that in this important matter Abraham rested confidently upon God for a right conclusion.

In verse 10, we find the servant makes provision for the journey and we know from later verses that he took jewellery and other items as gifts for the intended bride and her family. These gifts would be of appropriate value to clearly indicate the wealth of Abraham and the intended bridegroom, Isaac.

Upon arriving at his destination, the first thing the servant does is pray. He seeks that, his journey having been safely accomplished, he might have success in identifying the young woman who will be the bride for Isaac. The servant prays with conditions so that he will know clearly who it is to be - a helpful young woman showing kindness. What is remarkable that God is already answering the servant's prayer before he has finished praying, see verse 15. It is the right person and from the right family of Abraham's relatives.

In verse 23 the servant enquires of her family and upon learning who she is, he gives her gifts and the servant is offered hospitality. This again brings the servant to prayer and he bows his head and worships. Verse 27 gives the details of his simple outpouring of worship,

"Blessed be the LORD God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His mercy and His truth toward my master. As for me, being on the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren."

The servant appreciates the kindness of God towards Abraham. He also appreciates how he kept steadfast to his mission – being on the way. But, more than that – the LORD led me. It is good to be constant in our Christian service and conscious of the Lord's leading.

We have another admirable feature of the servant that he would not satisfy his own wants until he had discharged his purpose for coming. His own requirements were secondary to that of Abraham's commission. We see this same dedication to the Lord in the New Testament by the apostles. Even more so with our Lord Jesus Christ Himself when He said that He must be about His Father's business, at the end of Luke chapter 2.

An additional wonderful feature of the family of the young woman, Rebekah, is that they see the hand of the LORD God in what the servant says. Therefore, they can only agree that Rebekah should go with the servant to be the bride of Isaac. Once the decision has been successfully reached, the servant for the third time bows his head and worships. This action of prayer and worship by this man is surely a great challenge to every believer. Am I similarly thankful as I see the Lord guiding and bring to fruition His work? Am I conscious of the Lord's leading day by day?

Next, the servant dispenses gifts and only then does the servant sit down to enjoy the hospitality offered. But the next morning the servant is ready to return to Abraham and Isaac. He wants no delay. The family were not prepared for such a sudden departure and possibly this was not the custom of the day. A week or more of celebrations was the normal course of events for such an occasion. However, Rebekah makes the decision to go at once. Again, the journey passes without difficulty. It is not until the journey ends that we are introduced to Isaac walking in the fields. The servant presents Rebekah to him and she becomes his wife. Verse 67 gives a nice affectionate end to the chapter, that Isaac was comforted after the death of his mother.

#### **Abraham's new wife, (chapter 25:1-4).**

The opening verses of chapter 25 introduce another wife for Abraham. Her name is Keturah which, according to Strong's concordance, means incense. We should remember that Abraham is now 140 years old and Isaac is married to Rebekah. Isaac, as the true heir, will inherit the vast wealth and business empire established by Abraham and probably is now overseeing the whole of

the family interests. Although Abraham is going to live for another 35 years, he now has a companion in his old age whose name would remind him of offerings to the LORD God. Let us read verses 1 - 4 of this chapter 25.

"Then again Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah. And she bare him Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah. And Jokshan begat Sheba, and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, and Letushim, and Leummim. And the sons of Midian; Ephah, and Epher, and Hanoch, and Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah."

Keturah has six children by Abraham, the remaining names read are grandchildren and great grandchildren of this marriage. One of the children, Midian, becomes the father of a nation which opposed the nation of Israel in later years. However, this was one of the promises made to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations.

### **The death of Abraham and his burial, (chapter 25:5-10).**

We now come to the final phase of Abraham's life. His final act is to provide for all his children. In verse 5 we have the clear statement that Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. Isaac has inherited all that Abraham has acquired under the good hand of God. However, regarding his two concubine wives, Hagar and Keturah, Abraham provides gifts for their children and sends them away from his son Isaac. There was not to be any rival regarding Isaac's rights as the sole heir to all that Abraham had. The promises that God made to Abraham would follow through to Isaac who himself was both a son of promise and heir to God's promises.

So, at the old age of 175 Abraham dies. Let us read verses 7 – 8.

"This is the sum of the years of Abraham's life which he lived: one hundred and seventy-five years. Then Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people."

It would seem, that Abraham put his affairs in order as he neared the end of his life and having done so, the scriptures record that he died in a good old age. We surely gain the impression of a person happy to depart this life, to await the future, placing himself into the hands of the eternal God - the God of resurrection.

"And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, the field which Abraham purchased from the sons of Heth. There Abraham was buried, and Sarah his wife (verses 9 - 10)."

It is Isaac and Ishmael who arrange the burial. It is in the cave purchased a long time ago where Abraham buried Sarah his wife. T. Kelly's hymn sums up the Christian life and the promise of a future blessing. All Abraham's future depends upon what the Lord Jesus has already accomplished and will yet accomplish. Past promises will all be fulfilled in Christ.

To wait for that appointed day,  
When Christ His glories will display,  
Be this our one great care:  
To do His will, our business here;  
No toil to shun, no danger fear,  
Resolved the cross to bear.

And though He should prolong His stay,  
And sinners mock at the delay,  
His people need not fear;  
The Man who wore the crown of thorns,  
Whose claim the world rejects and scorns,  
In glory will appear.

In patience then we now may rest,  
Assured the Father's time is best,  
And all His word obey;  
We wait till that blest day shall come;  
The Lord will first convey us home,  
And then His power display.

Thank you for listening to the final Truth for Today talk on The Life of Abraham, The Fruitfulness of Faith - Learning to rest, talk number T1150.

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