

Introduction

1. You've heard Dustin and I have mentioned on occasion that you can often tell what a passage is about by looking at the words that are repeated and our passage this morning is a glaring example:
  - a. The word dead is repeated nine times
  - b. In addition, various forms of the word bury are repeated another eleven times
  - c. So, it's pretty clear that death and burial are two of the major themes of the passage
2. In fact, it focuses on Sarah's death and Abraham's negotiation with the local Hittites to buy a burial site, and there are two things that stood out to me and they will form our outline:
  - a. Sarah died in faith without fully receiving God's promises (23:1-2)
  - b. Abraham buried Sarah in Canaan rather than their ancestral home (23:3-20)

A. Sarah died in faith without fully receiving God's promises (READ Genesis 23:1-2)

1. There are a few things I want to quickly note in these two verses before looking at our first main point this morning:
  - a. Sarah was 127 years old when she died: she was 65 when she left Ur with Abraham so this means she had spent almost half her life in the land God had promised her and Abraham; it also tells us that she died 37 years after Isaac was born (she was 90 then)
  - b. We are also told that she died in Hebron which was where Abraham and Sarah first settled after coming back from Egypt
  - c. The third thing I want to touch on is some controversy over v. 2:
    - 1) There are some who claim that Abraham and Sarah lived apart at her death, citing this verse as proof Sarah lived in Hebron and 22:19 as proof Abraham lived in Beersheba
    - 2) However, this verse doesn't say Sarah lived at Hebron, only that she died there
    - 3) In fact, Genesis 24:67 states that Isaac was living in the Negev (the region where Beersheba was located) and when he married Rebecca he brought her into his mother's tent; this suggests that Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac were living together at Beersheba
    - 4) It's most probable that Abraham and Sarah traveled back to Hebron temporarily as her death approached, having decided to make that their burial location due to its significance (God appearing to Abraham there and the altar he built to the Lord)
2. During her lifetime, Sarah experienced many of the promises and blessings God promised her and Abraham:
  - a. Summary of God's promises and blessings:
    - 1) Throughout Genesis 12, 13, 15, and 17 we find God repeatedly confirm His promises to Abraham and they include the following:
      - a) He would bless him
      - b) He would make his name great
      - c) He would give him not only a son, Isaac, but descendants as numerous as the dust of the earth, the sand of the sea, and the stars of the sky
      - d) He would give his descendants the land of Canaan
      - e) He would make him a great nation

- f) He would make Abraham a blessing to all the families of the earth
    - g) He would give his descendants the land of Canaan (12:7)
    - h) He also declared that Abraham's descendants would be enslaved in a foreign land for 400 years (Egypt), but God also promised that He would bring them back to the land of Canaan
  - 2) In Genesis 17, we learned that God didn't intend to fulfill these promises simply through Abraham, but through Sarah as well and we find three promises God made specifically regarding her (READ 17:15-19):
    - a) She would bear Abraham's son
    - b) She would become the mother of nations
    - c) Kings of people would come from her
- b. Sarah experienced many of God's blessings and promises:
  - 1) God had prospered Abraham and Sarah just as He promised:
    - a) They had accumulated many possessions, including servants, in Haran after leaving Ur (Genesis 12:5)
    - b) They acquired more wealth and possessions while living in Egypt and upon leaving the Bible tells us Abraham was **"very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold"** (Genesis 12:16; 13:2)
    - c) Later, they accumulated even more when King Abimelech made restitution for taking Sarah by giving Abraham **"sheep and oxen and male and female slaves"** along with **"1000 pieces of silver"** (20:14, 16)
  - 2) God had provided for and protected them in a foreign and godless land:
    - a) During the famine in Canaan when they traveled to Egypt and deceived the Pharaoh
    - b) When Abraham fought the Mesopotamian kings from the East and rescued Lot
    - c) When they traveled to Gerar and deceived King Abimelech
  - 3) They also experienced the miraculous birth of Isaac in fulfillment of God's promise of a son (READ Genesis 21:1-3)
- 3. While Sarah had experienced many of God's promises and blessings, she had not received all of them:
  - a. She had received the promised prosperity and the birth of Isaac, but was not yet the mother of nations or kings, and Abraham's and her descendants had not yet become like the sand of the sea or the stars of the sky; they had not become a great nation or possessed the land of Canaan
  - b. In fact, the author of Hebrews says that Sarah died in faith without receiving the promises of God (READ Hebrews 11:1-13):
    - 1) Sarah, like all the great saints the author just mentioned **"died in faith, without receiving the promises..."** (13)
    - 2) She only saw them and welcomed them **"from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth"** (13)
    - 3) After mentioning other saints like Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Sampson, David, Samuel, and numerous other unnamed saints, the author wrote again that they too all died in faith without receiving what was promised (READ 11:39)

- c. The point of Hebrews 11 is two-fold:
  - 1) First, the faith of Sarah and the other saints mentioned was not based in what they could see, but in what they could not see: God's promises regarding the future; most of the promises God made Abraham and Sarah would not, could not, be fulfilled in their lifetimes but God would fulfill them; the same is true of many of the promises God made to the other OT saints listed in Hebrews 11
  - 2) Second, God's promises to Sarah and Abraham (and the other saints) were more than earthly; they were ultimately spiritual in that one day all of God's people would be perfected together in Christ (READ Hebrews 11:40)
- 4. Takeaway: God's promises to us are not exhausted in this life:
  - a. God promises us many things in this life: to provide for our needs, to give us comfort and peace when we go through trials, to give us strength and rest when we are weary, to help us overcome temptation and sin, to give us wisdom, understanding, and knowledge when we need it, and the list goes on and on
  - b. However, as Paul reminded the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 15:19, **"If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied"** because God has promised us so much more than what we could ever possibly experience in this life
  - c. He has promised us eternal life and as Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:3, **"has bless us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ"**
  - d. Our faith and hope are not in the things that are seen (the things of this life), but in those eternal blessings and promises of God that we have not yet seen or experienced

B. Abraham buried Sarah in Canaan rather than their ancestral home (READ Genesis 23:2-20)

- 1. After mourning the loss of his wife, Abraham sought a place to bury Sarah:
  - a. Normally in the ANE, people were buried back in the land where they were born or in the land of their ancestors
  - b. So, it would have been normal for Abraham to bury Sarah back in Mesopotamia where they were from, possibly Ur where he was born or in Haran where his father was buried
  - c. However, Abraham chose to bury Sarah near Hebron
- 2. Most of this passage focuses on the negotiation between Abraham and the local inhabitants (Hittites) to secure a place to bury Sarah, and it follows what most believe was a fairly typical ANE negotiation:
  - a. Abraham asked to purchase a burial site for Sarah (READ 23:4):
    - 1) "Give" in the context of these verses refers to the sale and purchase of the burial site
    - 2) Even though God had promised him the land, we see Abraham's humility here as he referred to himself as a **"stranger and sojourner"**
    - 3) This didn't mean that he was unknown to them; He and Sarah actually lived at Hebron for many years and Abraham was well known to the locals as we'll see in a minute
    - 4) Rather, both of these words refer to someone who lived in a place that was not primarily their own, and in fact God referred to Abraham's future descendants as sojourners who would live in Egypt for 400 years (Genesis 15:13): **"Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers [sojourners] in a land that is not theirs..."**
    - 5) Today's equivalent might be the word immigrant or foreign resident

- b. The Hittites (sons of Heth) agreed and told him he could choose any of their choicest graves (READ 23:5-6):
  - 1) Their reference to him as a **“mighty prince among them”** signifies not just their respect for him but a certain amount of prominence and leadership within culture and society:
    - a) The Hebrew word for prince often referred to rulers or tribal leaders, and fits Abraham due to his wealth, large household, and his interaction with national rulers like the Pharaoh of Egypt and King Abimelech
    - b) If you have an ESV you may noticed a slightly different translation than most English translations; it reads, **“you are a prince of God to us”**
    - c) The literal Hebrew here is **“you are a prince of God among us”**, but it is generally thought that the Hebrew word “elohim” (god) here is being used in a superlative sense to intensify prince; in other words, “prince of god” means “mighty prince”
    - d) There are other examples of this in the OT:
      - Genesis 30:8: Hebrew **“Then Rachel said, ‘In my wrestlings with God, I have wrestled with my sister...’** is translated as **“With my mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister...”**
      - Jonah 3:3: Hebrew **“Now Nineveh was a great city of God”** is translated as **“now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city...”**
      - 1 Samuel 14;15: Hebrew **“And the earth quaked so that it became a trembling of God”** is translated as **“and the earth quaked so that it became a great trembling...”**
  - 2) Because of their respect for Abraham and his prominence they offered him the best of their grave sites; none of them would refuse to sell him whatever site he wanted
- c. So, Abraham chose the cave of Machpela and asked for their help in convincing the owner, Ephron, to sell it to him, and he was intent on paying **“full price”** (READ 23:7-9)
- d. Ephron happened to be among those Abraham was speaking with and ultimately agreed to sell Abraham the cave (READ 23:10-20):
  - 1) Initially, Ephron offered to give Abraham not only the cave but the field surrounding it
  - 2) However, Abraham rejected his offer and insisted on paying for it
  - 3) So, Ephron gave him a price of four hundred shekels of silver and the two completed the transaction
  - 4) And, Abraham buried Sarah there in the cave of Machpela
3. Abraham’s burial of Sarah in the land of Canaan demonstrated a forward-looking faith:
  - a. By purchasing the field and cave and burying Sarah there, Abraham was making the land of Canaan his new ancestral home; there would be no returning to Mesopotamia for himself or his descendants:
    - 1) As one commentator put it, “It is interesting to observe that the only land that Abraham ever received he bought—and that was a grave. But this grave bound them to the land, for later patriarchs would die and be gathered to their ancestors—in Canaan” (Ross, p. 411)
    - 2) In fact, along with Sarah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Rebecca, and Leah were all buried in the cave at Machpela
  - b. Jeremiah did something similar right before King Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah and took them captive to Babylon:

- 1) In Jeremiah 32, God commanded him to buy plot of land from his uncle
  - 2) He then had his scribe, Baruch, seal up the deeds—both the signed deed as well as a copy—in clay jars so that they would “last a long time”
  - 3) These deeds were to serve as a sign and a reminder of God’s promise that He would one day restore Israel and return them to the Promise Land
- c. Both Abraham’s purchase of the burial site, and Jeremiah’s purchase of land from his uncle in Israel, demonstrated a forward-looking faith which means they looked beyond the present to future time with additional promises
4. Takeaway: Our faith should also be a forward-looking one, looking beyond this earthly, temporal life into an eternal one filled with additional promises:
- a. We’ve already established that God’s promises were not exhausted in Sarah’s life
  - b. There were additional promises that weren’t fulfilled until long after they were gone, including the promise of salvation through the seed of Abraham and the Gospel
  - c. When Abraham forsook the burial ground of his ancestors and bought a new burial site in the land of Canaan in which to bury Sarah, himself and his descendants, it demonstrated his desire to see **ALL** of God’s promises fulfilled, including that he and his seed would become a blessing to all the families of the earth
  - d. Do you remember what Jesus said about Abraham in John 8:56? **“Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.”**
  - e. Abraham wasn’t interested in only those promises that would be fulfilled in HIS lifetime, but those that would also be fulfilled after his death
  - f. Let me ask this question: are we satisfied with only receiving the blessings God has promised us in this life, or are we pursuing the promises He’s made to us regarding the next life?
  - g. The Bible repeatedly speaks of rewards in eternity that will only be granted to those who serve Jesus faithfully in this life (READ 1 Corinthians 3:10-15)