

## **IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ABRAHAM -- GENESIS 23**

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### **Genesis 23:1-4**

**And Sarah was an hundred and seven and twenty years old: these were the years of the life of Sarah. And Sarah died in Kirjatharba; the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan: and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her. And Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spake unto the sons of Heth, saying, I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a buryingplace with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.**

### **Verses 17-20**

**And the field of Ephron, which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field, and the cave which was therein, and all the trees that were in the field, that were in all the borders round about, were made sure Unto Abraham for a possession in the presence of the children of Heth, before all that 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: the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan. And the field, and the cave that is therein, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession of a buryingplace by the sons of Heth.**

## **IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ABRAHAM -- GENESIS 23**

The chapter is a fascinating account of the customs of Abraham's time –

- Of burial.
- Of Business transactions.

It is much more than this though. It tells of the time that Abraham first began to actually possess his promised inheritance.

God had promised Abraham a land – **Genesis 12:7**.

This promise was reiterated in **Genesis 13:15, 17:8** Abraham left Ur in pursuit of the promise and purpose of God and traversed the land – North, South, East, West as a pilgrim, sojourner, but he never owned one square metre of the land until this Chapter 23.

It took the death of his beloved Sarah before he began to enter into the fulfillment of the promise.

I want to draw a picture out of this historical incident and apply it to our lives.

**1 Corinthians 10:11** states that all that is written in the Old Testament is written for our admonition and instruction.

## **IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ABRAHAM -- GENESIS 23**

We, like Abraham, are possessors of promises.

We have an inheritance that God has promised us.

Abraham's promise related to physical geography – hills, rivers and mountains.

Ours isn't primarily physical, although it may involve that as well.

Ours is a spiritual inheritance. God has promised each of us dimensions of fruitfulness and ministry potential.

Many of us are like Abraham. Although we know God has promised us a place of fruitfulness, we haven't come into it yet.

It is still in the realm of promise.

We haven't possessed it yet.

Before Abraham could possess his promise it required a death.

For us to come into our promise it may also require a death.

Before you panic, I'm not talking about a physical death.

## **IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ABRAHAM -- GENESIS 23**

I want to suggest to you that Sarah speaks to us of three things that may have to die before we can inherit God's promises.

### **1. Sarah was the love of Abraham's life.**

In a day when marriage was often little more than a business arrangement and often the women were little more than domestic slaves – Sarah was a very obvious exception.

Sarah occupies a very prominent place in the Biblical narrative.

If I was to ask you to name Isaiah's wife, or Ezekiel's or even Moses' wife, I wonder how many of you could.

Sarah's prominence gives us some indication of the high place she occupied in Abraham's affections.

She was the love of his life.

The love of his life had to die before he could begin to see the fulfillment of God's purpose.

Sometimes it so with us also.

The love of our lives needs to be laid down.

## **IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ABRAHAM -- GENESIS 23**

It may not be a person (if it is obviously they don't have to die – we have to die to the hold of that relationship)

It may be a hobby, business pursuit, a cherished goal or dream that takes a place of priority in our lives.

It could be our pursuit of prestige, reputation, power or wealth.

It might be our own ministry.

What we're talking about here is a reordering of priorities – **GOD FIRST**

We cannot receive that which God has promised if our hands are filled with our own purposes.

### **Luke 9:57-62.**

**And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but **let me first** go bid them farewell, which**

## **IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ABRAHAM -- GENESIS 23**

**are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.**

The word 'first,' is a word of priority.

This young man wasn't talking about waiting to have an imminent funeral; he was talking about remaining until his wealthy father died so he could pick up his share of the inheritance before he followed Jesus in discipleship.

There was something else that was first in his affections – wealth, security.

**Matthew 6:33.**

**“Seek ye **first** the Kingdom of God...”**

**C. S. Lewis** once quipped,

**“You can't get second things by putting them first. You get second things only by putting first things first.”**

He is to be the love of our lives; preeminent in our affections.

## **IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ABRAHAM -- GENESIS 23**

Our “Sarah’s” need to be laid down – the hold broken, so we can be free to receive what God purposes for us.

### **2. Sarah was the channel of promise in days gone by.**

Abraham was not only promised a land but an heir.

Sarah was the channel through whom that promise flowed.

The child was a miracle child and as such was very treasured and very precious.

In **Genesis 25:1** we are told a little known aspect of Abraham’s life.

He remarried after Sarah’s death to a woman named Keturah and she bore him bore 6 sons.

I’m not suggesting that these children were as important in God’s redemptive purposes as Isaac was, but I’m simply making the observation that after Sarah’s death Abraham discovered increased fruitfulness through another channel.

What oes this say to us?

## **IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ABRAHAM -- GENESIS 23**

We treasure our ‘Sarah’s”, places, means, methods through which God has moved and blessed us in days gone by and rightly so.

But it can be a short step from honouring and esteeming them to being bound to them in a way that is little short of idolatrous.

We can end up looking more to the channel that God used than we do to the God who used the channel.

### **2 Kings 18:4**

Serpent on the pole. In Hezekiah’s time it had become an idol that people worshipped.

God wants to do new things

### **Isaiah 43:18-19**

**Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.**

We must remain flexible – open to God’s endless creativity.

## **IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ABRAHAM -- GENESIS 23**

### **Amos 5:4-6.**

**For thus saith the LORD unto the house of Israel, Seek ye me, and ye shall live: But seek not Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beersheba: for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nought. Seek the LORD, and ye shall live; lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, and there be none to quench it in Bethel.**

### **3. Sarah speaks to us of the failures of the past.**

Abraham's most cowardly and despicable moments centred on Sarah.

- Pharaoh's harem.
- Abimelech's harem.

He probably couldn't look her in the face at times.

Memories that constantly intimidated, accused and condemned him.

The failures of past had to be buried in order to come into his dreams.

## **IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ABRAHAM -- GENESIS 23**

Just as God can't put His purposes into our hands if they're filled with our own priorities, so He can't release to us our dreams if our hands are clogged with the ashes of past failures.

Coming into the fulfillment of our dreams requires personal risk.

Risk is difficult if there have been significant failures in our past.

E.g. Joseph's dreams

- His own.
- The Butler and Baker's.
- Pharaohs.

"I got hurt – I'll never let that happen again."

God brings us full circle.

We've got to bury the memories of the past.

Release the past. It must be buried out of our sight.

Sarah speaks to us of three things that must be buried if we are going to inherit the promises of God.

## **IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ABRAHAM -- GENESIS 23**

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- Love of our lives – **re-order** priorities
- Old methods must make way for new channels – we have to **remain** flexible.
- Past Failures need to be buried – **release** the past.