

## INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS CHAPTER 23

Here is,

- I. Abraham a mourner for the death of Sarah, **#Ge 23:1-2**.
- II. Abraham a purchaser of a burying-place for Sarah.
  1. The purchase humbly proposed by Abraham, **#Ge 23:3-4**.
  2. Fairly treated of, and agreed to, with a great deal of mutual civility and respect, **#Ge 23:5-16**.
  3. The purchase-money paid, **#Ge 23:16**.
  4. The premises conveyed and secured to Abraham, **#Ge 23:17,18,20**.
  5. Sarah's funeral, **#Ge 23:19**.

Ver. 1.

We have here,

1. Sarah's age, **#Ge 23:1**. Almost forty years before, she had called herself old, Genesis 18:12. Old people will die never the sooner, but may die the better, for reckoning themselves old.
2. Her death, **#Ge 23:2**. The longest liver must die at last. Abraham and Sarah had lived comfortably together many years; but death parts those whom nothing else could part. The special friends and favourites of Heaven are not exempted from the stroke of death. She died in the land of Canaan, where she had been above sixty years a sojourner.
3. Abraham's mourning for her; and he was a true mourner. He did not only perform the ceremonies of mourning according to the custom of those times, as the mourners that go about the streets, but he did sincerely lament the great loss he had of a good wife, and gave proof of the constancy of his affection to her to the last. Two words are used: he came both to *mourn* and to *weep*. His sorrow was not counterfeit, but real. He came to her tent, and sat down by the corpse, there to pay the tribute of his tears, that his eye might affect his heart, and that he might pay the greater respect to the memory of her that was gone. Note, It is not only lawful, but it is a duty, to lament the death of our near relations, both in compliance with the providence of God, who thus calls to weeping and mourning, and in honour to those to whom honour is due. Tears are a tribute due to our deceased friends. When the body is sown, it must be watered. But we must not sorrow as those that have no hope; for we have a good hope through grace both concerning them and concerning ourselves.

Ver. 3.

Here is,

- I. The humble request which Abraham made to his neighbours, the Hittites, for a burying place among them, **#Ge 23:3,4**. It was strange he had this to do now; but we are to impute it rather to God's providence than to his improvidence, as appears **#Ac 7:5**, where it is

said, *God gave him no inheritance in Canaan*. It were well if all those who take care to provide burying-places for their bodies after death were as careful to provide a resting-place for their souls. Observe here,

1. The convenient diversion which this affair gave, for the present, to Abraham's grief: He *stood up from before his dead*. Those that find themselves in danger of over-grieving for their dead relations, and are entering into that temptation, must take heed of poring upon their loss and sitting alone and melancholy. There must be a time of standing up from before their dead, and ceasing to mourn. For, thanks be to God, our happiness is not bound up in the life of any creature. Care of the funeral may, as here, be improved to divert grief for the death at first, when it is most in danger of tyrannizing. Weeping must not hinder sowing.

2. The argument he used with the children of Heth, which was this:

*"I am a stranger and a sojourner with you, therefore I am unprovided, and must become a humble suitor to you for a burying-place."*

This was one occasion which Abraham took to confess that he was a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth; he was not ashamed to own it thus publicly, [#Heb 11:13](#). Note, The death of our relations should effectually remind us that we are not at home in this world. When they are gone, say,

"We are going."

3. His uneasiness till this affair was settled, intimated in that word, *that I may bury my dead out of my sight*. Note, Death will make those unpleasant to our sight who while they lived were the desire of our eyes. The countenance that was fresh and lively becomes pale and ghastly, and fit to be removed into the land of darkness. While she was in his sight, it renewed his grief, which he would prevent.

II. The generous offer which the children of Heth made to him, [#Ge 23:5,6](#). They compliment him,

1. With a title of respect: *Thou art a prince of God among us*, so the word is; not only great, but good. He called himself a stranger and a sojourner; they call him a great prince; for those that humble themselves shall be exalted. God had promised to make Abraham's name great.

2. With a tender of the best of their burying-places. Note, Even the light of nature teaches us to be civil and respectful towards all, though they be strangers and sojourners. The noble generosity of these Canaanites shames and condemns the closeness, and selfishness, and ill-humour, of many that call themselves Israelites. Observe, These Canaanites would be glad to mingle their dust with Abraham's and to have their last end like his.

III. The particular proposal which Abraham made to them, [#Ge 23:7-9](#). He returns them his thanks for their kind offer with all possible decency and respect; though a great man, an old man, and now a mourner, yet he stands up, and bows himself humbly before them, [#Ge 23:7](#). Note, Religion teaches good manners; and those abuse it that place it in rudeness and clownishness. He then pitches upon the place he thinks most convenient, namely, the cave of Machpelah, which probably lay near him, and had not yet been used for a burying-place. The present owner was *Ephron*. Abraham cannot pretend to any interest in him, but he desires that they would improve theirs with him to get the purchase

of that cave, and the field in which it was. Note, A moderate desire to obtain that which is convenient for us, by fair and honest means, is not such a coveting of that which is our neighbour's as is forbidden in the tenth commandment.

**IV.** The present which Ephron made to Abraham of his field: *The field give I thee*, #Ge 23:10,11. Abraham thought he must be entreated to sell it; but, upon the first mention of it, without entreaty, Ephron freely gives it. Some men have more generosity than they are thought to have. Abraham, no doubt, had taken all occasions to oblige his neighbours, and do them any service that lay in his power; and now they return his kindness: for *he that watereth shall be watered also himself*. Note, If those that profess religion adorn their profession by eminent civility and serviceableness to all, they shall find it will redound to their own comfort and advantage, as well as to the glory of God.

**V.** Abraham's modest and sincere refusal of Ephron's kind offer, #Ge 23:12,13. Abundance of thanks he returns him for it (#Ge 23:12), makes his obeisance to him before the people of the land, that they might respect Ephron the more for the respect they saw Abraham give him (#1Sa 15:30), but resolves to give him money for the field, even the full value of it. It was not in pride that Abraham refused the gift, or because he scorned to be beholden to Ephron; but,

1. In justice. Abraham was rich in silver and gold (#Ge 13:2) and was able to pay for the field, and therefore would not take advantage of Ephron's generosity. Note, Honesty, as well as honour, forbids us to sponge upon our neighbours and to impose upon those that are free. Job reflected upon it with comfort, when he was poor, that he had not eaten the fruits of his land without money, #Job 31:39.
2. In prudence. He would pay for it lest Ephron, when this good humour was over, should upbraid him with it, and say, *I have made Abraham rich* #Ge 14:23, or lest the next heir should question Abraham's title (because that grant was made without any consideration), and claim back the field. Thus David afterwards refused Araunah's offer, #2Sa 24:24. We know not what affronts we may hereafter receive from those that are now most kind and generous.

**VI.** The price of the land fixed by Ephron but not insisted on: *The land is worth four hundred shekels of silver* (about fifty pounds of our money), *but what is that between me and thee?* #Ge 23:14,15. He would rather oblige his friend than have so much money in his pocket. Herein Ephron discovers,

1. A great contempt of worldly wealth.

"What is that between me and thee? It is a small matter, not worth speaking of."

Many a one would have said,

"It is a deal of money; it will go far in a child's portion."

But Ephron says,

"What is that?"

Note, It is an excellent thing for people to have low and mean thoughts of all the wealth of this world; it is that which is not, and in the abundance of which a man's life does not

consist, #Lu 12:15.

2. Great courtesy, and obligingness to his friend and neighbour. Ephron was not jealous of Abraham as a resident foreigner, nor envious at him as a man likely to thrive and grow rich. He bore him no ill-will for his singularity in religion, but was much kinder to him than most people now-a-days are to their own brothers: *What is that between me and thee?* Note, No little thing should occasion demurs and differences between true friends. When we are tempted to be hot in resenting affronts, high in demanding our rights, or hard in denying a kindness, we should answer the temptation with this question:

"What is that between me and my friend?"

Ver. 16.

We have here the conclusion of the treaty between Abraham and Ephron about the burying-place. The bargain was publicly made before all the neighbours, *in the presence and audience of the sons of Heth*, #Ge 23:16,17. Note, Prudence, as well as justice, directs us to be fair, and open, and above-board, in our dealings. Fraudulent contracts hate the light, and choose to be clandestine; but those that design honestly in their bargains care not who are witnesses to them. Our law countenances sales made in market-overt, and by deed enrolled. Observe,

1. Abraham, without fraud, covin, or further delay, pays the money, #Ge 23:16. He pays it readily, without hesitation,--pays it in full, without diminution,--and pays it by weight, current money with the merchant, without deceit. See how anciently money was used for the help of commerce; and see how honestly money should be paid where it is due. Observe, Though all the land of Canaan was Abraham's by promise, yet, the time of his possessing not having come, what he had now occasion for he bought and paid for. Note, Dominion is not founded in grace. The saints' title to an eternal inheritance does not entitle them to the possessions of this world, nor justify them in doing wrong.
2. Ephron honestly and fairly makes him a good title to the land, #Ge 23:17,18,20. The field, with all its appurtenances, is conveyed to Abraham and his heirs for ever, in open court, not by writing (it does not appear that writing was then used), but by such a public solemn declaration before witnesses as was sufficient to pass it. Note, As that which is bought must be honestly paid for, so that which is sold must be honestly paid for, so that which is sold must be honestly delivered and secured.
3. Abraham, thereupon, takes possession, and buries Sarah in the cave or vault (whether framed by nature or art is not certain) which was in the purchased field. It is probable that Abraham had buried servants out of his family since he came to Canaan, but the graves of the common people (#2Ki 23:6) might suffice for them; now that Sarah was dead a peculiar place must be found for her remains. It is worth noting,

(1.) That a burying-place was the first spot of ground Abraham possessed in Canaan. Note, When we are entering into the world it is good to think of our going out of it; for, as soon as we are born, we begin to die.

(2.) That it was the only piece of land he ever possessed, though the country was all his own in reversion. Those that have least of this earth find a grave in it. Abraham provided, not cities, as Cain and Nimrod, but a sepulchre,

[1.] To be a constant memorandum of death to himself and his posterity, that he and they might learn to die daily. This sepulchre is said to be *at the end of the field* (#Ge 23:9); for, whatever our possessions are, there is a sepulchre at the end of them.

[2.] To be a token of his belief and expectation of the resurrection; for why should such care be taken of the body if it be thrown away for ever, and must not rise again? Abraham, in this, said plainly that he sought a better country, that is, a heavenly. Abraham is content to be still flitting, while he lives, but secures a place where, when he dies his flesh may rest in hope.