

Abraham Buried His Wife Sarah in the Cave in the field of Machpelah

23: 19-20

DIG: How might Sarah have been eulogized at her funeral? What did Abraham's purchase of a burial site in the Promised Land prove?

REFLECT: Do you have a family burial site like Abraham and his family? What are people going to say about you at your funeral? Where is your true home?

Sarah and **Abraham** never found a place to call home. In fact, the only piece of land they ever owned was the plot **Avraham** bought to bury **Sarah**.

After all the legal transactions were completed, **Abraham** buried his wife **Sarah** in the cave in the field of **Machpelah** near **Mamre** (which is **Hebron**) in the land of **Canaan**. The city of **Hebron** is in the hill country of **Judea**, about half way between **Jerusalem** and **Beersheba**. **Mamre** is about two miles north of **Hebron**. Today there is a mosque built over this cave, and it is considered one of the most important mosques in **Islam**. So the field and the cave in it were deeded to **Avraham** by the **Hittites** as a burial site (23:19-20). The fact that **Abraham** purchased a burying place in strictly legal form as a hereditary possession in the **Promised Land**, was proof of his strong faith in the promises of **God** and their eventual fulfillment.³⁷⁶

There seems to be a contradiction between this passage, **Stephen's** statement in **Acts** and a statement from **Joshua**. There were two different family plots about forty miles apart. One purchased by **Abraham** near **Mamre** and the other by **Jacob** at **Shechem**. **First, let's look at Stephen's statement.** Then **Jacob** went down to **Egypt**, where he and his brothers died. Their bodies were brought back to **Shechem** and placed in the tomb that **Abraham** had bought from the sons of **Hamor** at **Shechem** for a certain sum of money (**Acts 7:15-16**). After **Sarah** died, **Abraham** lived another thirty-eight years. During that time he met and married a woman named **Keturah** and had six more sons! The tomb that **Abraham** had bought was for his second family, in the region near **Shechem**, where he had built his first altar in the land of **Canaan** (12:6-7). When **Abraham** died, however, he was buried with **Sarah** in **Mamre**. **Keturah** and her sons may not have retained possession of the **Shechem** property, selling it or losing it somehow to the occupying people of **Hamor**. Then,

about eighty-five years after **Avraham's** death, when **Jacob** came to the region of **Shechem**, knowing that the land had once belonged to his grandfather, he bought it back again. And because **Abraham** had once built an altar there, **Jacob** then did the same thing. For a hundred pieces of silver, he bought from the sons of **Hamor**, the father of **Shechem**, the plot of ground where he pitched his tent. There he set up an altar and called it **El Elohe Israel** (33:19-20).

Secondly what did Joshua have to say about it? He said: And **Joseph's** bones, which the Israelites had brought up from **Egypt**, were buried at **Shechem** in the tract of land that **Jacob** bought for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of **Hamor**, the father of **Shechem**. This became the inheritance of **Joseph's** descendants (Joshua 24:32). As mentioned above, **Jacob** had purchased the land at **Shechem** to build an altar. He retained possession of it, but he wasn't buried there. When **Jacob** died he was buried in the cave in the field of **Machpelah** near **Mamre**. **Sarah** was the first to be buried there. But later she was followed by **Abraham** (25:9), **Isaac** (35:27-29), **Leah** (49:30-31), and finally **Jacob** (50:13). **Joseph** inherited the land at **Shechem** from **Jacob**. When **Joseph** died, his descendants brought his bones back from **Egypt** and buried him at **Shechem**. Eventually, **Joseph's** brothers were also buried there along with **Keturah** and her sons. Thus, there were two family plots, one in the field of **Machpelah** near **Mamre** (which is **Hebron**), and the other at **Shechem**.³⁷⁷

Abraham knew he still had a family burial place back in **Mesopotamia** (22:20-24) and he could have had **Sarah's** body transferred there, but burying **Sarah** in the land of **Canaan** was saying that **Mesopotamia** was no longer their home. I am sure **Sarah** felt the same way, and no doubt they had discussed this many times together. The **Promised Land of Canaan** was now their future and the future of their family. There was no looking back.

In death, the patriarchs were victorious in a way that escaped them in life. Though their voices grew silent, their grave site could not prevent them from entering into the promises of **God**. In this way they are examples to us all.³⁷⁸ Each one of these people of faith died not yet having in hand what was promised, but still believing. How did they do it? They saw it way off in the distance, waved their greeting, and accepted the fact that they were transients in this world. People who live this way make it plain that they are looking for their true home. If they were homesick for the old country, they could have gone back any time they wanted. But they were after a far better country than that - *heaven country*. You can see why **God** is so proud of them, and has a **City** waiting for them (Hebrews 11:13-16, *The Message*).