

genesis

God's Book of Beginnings

The Death of Sarah (Genesis 23)

23:1-4 Abraham's weeping and mourning expressed his great sorrow for the death of his beloved wife, Sarah (the/his "Princess"), who died at 127 in Kiriath Arba (Hebron ^{Joshua 14:15}). Not being from the area, Abraham asked the Hittites to sell him "property for a burial site".

Why was Sarah the only woman in the Bible whose age (127) was noted at the time of her death ^{v.1?} She was the "Mother" of the Israelites (physical offspring) and the spiritual offspring of Abraham.

Isaac was ~37 years old when his mother died. How many years had passed since Chapter 22?

Hittites were originally from Anatolia (modern-day Turkey), but by this time were an established and dominant people in Canaan (PL). Hittites were descendants of Noah, Ham and Canaan ^{Genesis 10:1,6,15}.

Abraham said he was an "alien" (*gēr*) ^{Leviticus 25:23} and a "stranger" (*tōšāb*) ^{Hebrews 11:9,13} ⇒ sojourner. All the children of God ^{John 1:12} (from OT and NT times) are strangers on the earth ^{Psalms 39:12, 1 Peter 2:11}.

23:5-9 The Hittites had great respect for Abraham, and offered him his choice of the tombs. Abraham declared his desire to purchase the cave of Machpelah, owned by Ephron ^{Genesis 25:9}.

The Hittites saw Abraham's blessings ^{Genesis 24:35}, so they considered him a "mighty prince" ^{v.6}.

23:10-16 Ephron was readily agreeable to 'give' the cave to Abraham, but Abraham insisted on buying the land ^{1 Chronicles 21:20-25}. After some discussion, Abraham paid the agreed price.

Most business and legal transactions were completed at the city's main gate ^{Joshua 20:4, Proverbs 31:23}.

The word (*nātan*) translated "give" three times ^{2 Samuel 24:23} seems to fit, but can also mean "sell" ^{v.4}.

Ephron seemed generous, but 400 shekels of silver was a large amount to pay for land ^{Jeremiah 32:9}.

Abraham only wanted the cave, but Ephron insisted on selling him all of the land, including the field, because Hittite law required anyone who sold part of his land to continue to pay tax on all the land.

23:17-20 Abraham received the "deed of purchase" ^{Jeremiah 32:8-11} (for both the burial cave and the large wooded field) in Machpelah near Mamre. Abraham then buried Sarah, his wife.

Genesis 23-24

Since the transaction agreement, the property description and the actual payment were all in front of witnesses, Abraham's (and his descendants') ownership of the land was binding for many years. As a result, Abraham ^{Genesis 25:7-10}, Sarah ^{v.19}, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Leah ^{Genesis 49:29-32, 50:12-13} were all buried in the cave of Machpelah; however, Rachel was buried near Bethlehem ^{Genesis 35:19}. Tradition declares the cave is now located beneath a Muslim shrine called the Mosque of Abraham. After many years of wandering, Abraham finally owned a piece of the Promised Land ^{Genesis 15:18-21}. While Paddan Aram was Abraham's official homeland, his purchase of this land for burials was an indirect way of proclaiming the Promised Land as the new homeland for him and his descendants.

Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 24)

24:1-4 God greatly blessed Abraham ^{Genesis 12:2, Galatians 3:8-9}. As he became quite old ^{Joshua 23:1}, he longed for his (only) son to be wed before he died. Marrying a Canaanite ^{Genesis 10:15-19} was unacceptable ^{Deuteronomy 7:1-6, 2 Corinthians 6:14}, but marrying a cousin was common ^{Genesis 29:16-30}. So he told his "chief servant" (who was "in charge of all [Abraham] had" ^{Genesis 39:2-6}) to take an oath that he would go to the area where his family was living and find a wife for Isaac.

Abraham's "chief servant" was Eliezer, who had been in line for Abraham's inheritance ^{Genesis 15:1-3}. He is unnamed here for a specific reason that will be explained later (see notes after verses 66-67).

Abraham required Eliezer to make a solemn pledge to bring Isaac a wife by swearing "by the Lord" and through an ancient custom for oaths by placing a hand under a person's thigh ^{Genesis 47:29-30}.

The custom meant if Eliezer did not fulfill the oath, Abraham's offspring would avenge the betrayal.

24:5-9 The servant (Eliezer) was concerned about failing, but Abraham was adamant about not taking Isaac to his former country ^{Genesis 12:1}. Furthermore, Abraham assured his servant that the same God who promised the land to him and his "offspring" ^{Genesis 12:7, Galatians 3:15-18} and had been divinely overseeing Abraham and his people would certainly bless the servant's task (by an angel ^{Genesis 22:11,15}). Comforted by Abraham's words, the chief servant took the oath.

24:10-14 After gathering camels ^{1 Kings 10:2} and supplies (including "good things" ^{Genesis 43:11}), Eliezer traveled, arriving at Nahor in the area of *Aram Naharaim* (NW Mesopotamia) ^{Judges 3:8}. He arrived early in the evening, prior to the women coming out for water ^{1 Samuel 9:11, John 4:5-7}. The servant prayed to God for "success" ^{Nehemiah 1:11} and "kindness" ^{Job 10:12} in his endeavor, and he asked God for a sign ^{Joshua 2:12-13, Judges 6:36-40} to indicate He was in control ^{Isaiah 38:7-8}.

Please forward questions/concerns about these notes to ron price, 505-294-4743, pricegang@integrity.com.

Genesis 23-24

Abraham sent his chief servant off to a town called Nahor, which was possibly named after one of Abraham's two brothers ^{Genesis 11:26}. Nahor was probably near Haran, where Abram and his family had stopped for a period of time when he was on his way to the Promised Land ^{Genesis 11:31}.

The test was significant: giving him a drink was normal hospitality, but watering camels was not.

24:15-27 As Eliezer prayed, Rebekah came out to get water for her family. The servant was not aware, but Rebekah was Nahor's grand-daughter (Abraham's grand-niece) ^{Genesis 22:20-23} and a virgin ^{Leviticus 21:13}. The servant spoke to Rebekah, and she responded just as Eliezer had prayed the right girl would respond: by providing water for both him and his camels. After watching her serve, he gave her gold jewelry: a nose ring and two bracelets ^{Ezekiel 23:42}. The servant asked Rebekah who her father was and if they (Eliezer and his men) could spend the night with her family. Rebekah assured him they would be welcome to stay. As she explained her ancestry, Eliezer realized God had guided him directly to Isaac's cousin, and immediately "bowed down" in humility and worshipped "the LORD" with a prayer of gratitude.

Rebekah's provision of water for both Eliezer and the camels revealed her servant-attitude ^{v.18-20}.

Rebekah worked hard carrying water, because each of the thirsty camels could drink 25+ gallons.

The deep faith of Eliezer was exhibited in his prayer of trust in God's directives ^{v.12-14}, his patience after prayer ^{v.21}, his grateful worship for answered prayer ^{v.26} and his praise for divine guidance ^{v.27}.

24:28-33 Rebekah hurried to tell her family, while her brother, Laban ^{Genesis 28:2}, went out to greet Eliezer. After reaching the house of Bethuel (Rebekah's father ^{v.24}), the camels were cared for, water provided for Eliezer and his men to wash up ^{Genesis 18:4}, and food was offered. But, Eliezer refused to eat until he explained everything about and the purpose of his visit.

Hinted here ^{v.30} and revealed in later events ^{Genesis 29}, Laban always had an eye for gaining a profit.

24:34-49 Eliezer related God's blessings on Abraham, including having a son when he was old. He spoke of his oath, his fear that he might fail and all that happened at the spring, including his interactions with Rebekah. He then asked for "kindness and faithfulness" to 'Abraham'.

Eliezer was a committed, faithful and selfless servant to Abraham, revealed throughout this story: he would not eat until he explained who sent him and why ^{v.34-38}, the blessings of God granted to Abraham ^{v.34-41} and upon him ^{v.48}, a factual description of what had happened at the well ^{v.42-47} and his desire to complete his task as efficiently as possible and return home to Isaac and Abraham ^{v.49}.

Please forward questions/concerns about these notes to ron price, 505-294-4743, pricegang@integrity.com.

Genesis 23-24

24:50-54a After Eliezer's convincing explanation, Laban and Bethuel could do nothing except agree to allow Rebekah to go. The servant responded by bowing and presenting extravagant gifts to Rebekah, Laban and mother. Once the agreement was complete, they all celebrated. Eliezer and his men "ate, drank and spent the night" and prepared to leave the next morning. The "costly gifts" given to Rebekah, her mother and brother was the dowry (bride price ^{Genesis 34:12}). Once Eliezer had presented these gifts, Rebekah was formally betrothed (legally bound) to Isaac. In that culture, once the father (Bethuel) consented to the marriage of his daughter (Rebekah), the remainder of the process of giving the bride away was left to the girl's mother and oldest brother.

24:54b-61 The next day, Eliezer asked for approval to leave, but Rebekah's brother and mother wanted her to stay for 10 "more days". Rebekah was asked and freely agreed to go ^{Ruth 1:8-16}, so her family blessed Rebekah and then sent her off with "her nurse ... and her maids" ^{v.59,61}. The family blessing ^{v.60} on Rebekah was a perfect parallel with God's blessings on Abraham: vast fruitfulness of descendants ^{Genesis 15:4-5} and strength necessary to defeat enemies ^{Genesis 22:17}. Rebekah's agreement to go with Eliezer indicated she sensed a divine calling on her life ^{Ruth 1:16-17}. Rebekah's nurse was mentioned briefly here, but named (Deborah) later when she died ^{Genesis 35:8}.

24:62-65 Isaac had been living in the Negev near *Beer Lahai Roi* ^{Genesis 16:14} at the southwest edge of Canaan (the PL). Isaac "went out into the field one evening to meditate" ^{Joshua 1:8}, glancing up, he saw a caravan approaching and at that moment Rebekah saw a man ahead. Eliezer told her the man she saw was Isaac, so she covered her face with a veil ^{Song of Songs 4:3}. Isaac's meditation was probably centered on his grief over the recent death of his mother ^{Genesis 23:2} and his curiosity about what was happening with his father's chief servant, Eliezer, and his mission. The Hebrew word translated as "got down" (*nāpal*) generally means "to fall" or "to prostrate". In that culture, a woman wore a veil when in the presence of her betrothed until their wedding day.

24:66-67 The servant reported, not to Abraham, but to Isaac, who soon married Rebekah. His love for Rebekah was a great comfort, easing his time of grief over his mother's death. Isaac was a model or type of Jesus (God the Son) and Abraham a model of God the Father ^{Genesis 22}. Here, the chief servant, Eliezer ('God of help'), is a model of the Holy Spirit (*paraklētos*: counselor, helper ^{John 14:26}): he did not speak for himself ^{John 16:13}, he searched for a bride ^{John 3:1-8, Ephesians 1:13-14}, he gave gifts to the bride ^{Hebrews 2:4}, he undoubtedly told Rebekah all about Isaac ^{John 15:26}, etc.

Please forward questions/concerns about these notes to ron price, 505-294-4743, pricegang@integrity.com.