

99-05-30a

Let's begin our study of the Word of God this morning with a moment of prayer. Father, we thank you, as always, for the privilege of studying your Word together. We thank you for the environment of freedom and security that you have provided for us in this day and age and in this country where we are free from distractions.

We have wonderful opportunities to have our souls nourished up through the truth that is found in your Word. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will enable us to take the maximum advantage of this opportunity this morning. As we fellowship together, we pray that we will be alert and receptive to the truth, that it will be retained in our souls and be available as a resource for application as we think and act in the days ahead.

We thank you and praise you again for the salvation that we enjoy in our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. And we pray these things in his name. Amen.

We resume our study this morning in Genesis chapter 23. We have seen the maturing of Abraham's faith expressed in chapter 22. His faith, his obedience unto death, the grace of God in providing the substitute offering.

Chapter 22 closes out after the provision and the reaffirmation of God's covenant promise to Abraham. In verse 17 of chapter 22, Blessing I will bless you, multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies.

We saw in that verse that there are two new or expanded elements in the covenant promises of God. God is able to fill up and to magnify the original promise because of Abraham's faith and because of his obedience. And so in addition, he had told him once before that his descendants would be as the stars of the heavens in Genesis 15.5. And now he says they will also be as the sand which is on the seashore.

And we talked about last time that this makes more material, more real. Sand is something you can reach out and touch. It's something in the physical world.

You get the idea that Abraham is going to have a foretaste, even though he will not live to see all of these great descendants. He is going to see the beginnings of this. It's going to be something that he can more or less reach out and touch.

And this new element at the end of the verse, Your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. This is something God has not said before with regard to the multiplicity of his descendants, the blessing of his descendants, the blessing they will be to others. But now he says they will possess the gate of their enemies.

Of course, the gate is a very important element in ancient civilization. The gates of a town, this is where the seat of city government was. Now today we have county

courthouses.

We have the various buildings that might comprise the city government offices and so forth. If you want to go get a marriage license or if you want to conduct business with any given city, you go down to city hall. And city hall is where a lot of the governmental function takes place.

You have the courthouse where the judges and the courts hold forth. In ancient days, these functions were accomplished at the edge of the city because these were city states and the city would not only govern people within its walls and within its boundaries, but also the surrounding area, the small villages, the rural areas. It was a largely agricultural society.

So you had people who owned fields and who pastured flocks and herds. When they had a grievance or they needed redress for some wrong or when they wanted to transact business such as the transfer of property or whatever it might be, they would go to the town. So these functions were conducted at the city gate.

And sitting in the gates was to be a city official or an official of the city state government. To possess the gate of one's enemies is to have suzerainty, to have rule over the governmental functions of an enemy, to overcome them, to dominate them, to control them much as Rome did in the heyday of the Roman Empire. While they allowed autonomy in many of the regions that they conquered, they were nevertheless the governmental authority.

They possessed the gates of their enemies. And this is a promise that God has made to Israel. Now there are not many times in Israel's history, the descendants of Abraham that you can point to, where Israel was dominant over their enemies to this extent.

It doesn't just mean to conquer them. It doesn't just mean to enter into treaty with them or to force them to surrender. This means that you are actually controlling their domain and their governmental functions.

So this is quite a promise. The importance of understanding this is going to come up in our next chapter. He continues in verse 18, All the nations of the earth shall be blessed because you have obeyed my voice.

We've talked before about the tendency of theology to classify the promises to Abraham as well as others in the Old Testament as unconditional, that they are conditioned only on God's sovereignty, God's fulfillment of his own plan. But virtually every time you see the confirmation of these promises, it is a direct result of the expression of faith by Abraham. And here in this chapter, Abraham's faith has resulted in remarkable obedience.

Obedience unto death. It is even harder to put someone else's life at risk than it is one's

own. You see this crop up in movie plots all the time, where the enemy will capture somebody and he's willing to die rather than give up the information they're looking for.

But then they show him that they have captured a companion or a family member. And they say, I will take the life of your family member. And someone who is willing to die, to remain silent, is then put in a very much greater stress by the prospect that they are going to be the cause of someone else losing their life.

So you cannot imagine a greater test for faith and obedience than Abraham's potential sacrifice of his son Isaac. But in the light of that obedience, and there is no doubt about it, in no uncertain terms, God reiterates all of the essential elements of the promises that he's been making ever since chapter 12 of Genesis. Your seed will be a blessing to all the earth because you have obeyed my voice.

And it's important for us to understand that God is gracious and God has blessed us with salvation and with great potential after salvation. But it is up to us to seize and lay claim to what Christ has made available to us by faith. There just isn't any getting around it.

And sometimes that faith has to express itself in obedience that flies in the face of conventional wisdom. There are times when we have to be willing to trust when it puts us at risk, when it puts our family perhaps in an awkward position. It may cause stress.

It may seem to be the boat rocking action to take or the boat rocking thing to say to express that faith. But sooner or later, in fact it isn't so much sooner or later as to a greater and lesser extent every day, we have to express the faith that puts forth the promise of God and the facts of God's plan forward as reality. And we act based on recognizing that reality and not the reality that is put forward by the media or by circumstances or by people in our periphery or by even our own experience.

We tend to think, well, my experience is that if I do this, something bad will happen. I will be in an awkward spot. I will be in financial trouble.

I will be in relationship trouble. But we need only look at this reaffirmation of God's promises to see that they are conditioned upon faith and obedience on the part of Abraham. And Abraham has matured.

He's made some mistakes as we've seen in the preceding chapters. But here, because he has obeyed the voice of God, even in extremis, God can confirm and enhance the promises that he has made. Verse 19, Abraham returned to his young men, and they rose up and went together to Beersheba, and Abraham dwelt at Beersheba.

It's an interesting observation because from this point forward, even at this point, it's somewhat remarkable. In verse 19, it says, Abraham returned to his young men. It doesn't mention Isaac.

It is obvious that Isaac had to return along with his father, but the account doesn't say the two of them returned. Earlier in the chapter, it said they went, they traveled. He took these things and laid them on his son.

Verse 9, they came to the place in which God had told him, and so forth. But from this point forward and for the rest of the account, we don't see Abraham and Isaac in the same scene. We don't see them in the same view.

Nor do we see Sarah. Sarah has already sort of disappeared from the scene. In this chapter, with the word of the Lord coming to Abraham, his leave taking from his household, and going forward with the servants and with Isaac, we didn't see Sarah waving goodbye.

From this point forward, we don't see Abraham and Isaac co-located anymore. Each of the characters now, Sarah, Abraham, and Isaac, are seemingly isolated from one another. We don't see any of the three, any two of them, much less all three of them together from this point forward.

Why is that? To be honest with you, I'm not real sure. It is striking, the more you think about it, that they're a family. They would apparently be dwelling together for quite a number of years to come, but in the remainder of the account of Abraham's life, they're not seen together.

One function that this serves in the narrative, and this is my only suggestion as to a reason for this, is that beginning here in chapter 22, even though elements of their behavior and of their lives have been suggested in the past, they really are put forward more and more in Genesis as symbols, as foreshadowing things in the later history of Abraham's descendants, and later on in God's plan. And this isolation of Abraham and Sarah and Isaac serves to set them apart as distinct symbols for things that are to come. And as we go through chapter 23, and eventually chapter 24 and 25, we're going to see what this symbolism is.

We're going to see how they really are types or foreshadowings of important themes in the forward progress of God's plan. And this isolation serves to mark them out and distinguish them for that purpose. It's real easy to see how they function in a prophetic sense in the later history of Israel and in the later history overall in God's plan.

And one of the ways that this comes out is in verse 20, after these things, it was told Abraham, saying, Indeed, Milcah also has born children to your brother Nahor. You will recall that Milcah was mentioned back in Genesis 11, 29, when we had the genealogy that immediately precedes chapter 12, and Abraham getting up from his country in kindred and going to the land that God will show him. She is mentioned there as the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor.

And so, after these things, Abraham receives word, whether from travelers or by what means, he doesn't say, but he hears that Milcah, he finds out a little bit about the genealogy of his clan. Milcah has born children, Huz, his firstborn, Buz, his brother. You get the idea, I wonder if they were twins or something, Huz and Buz.

Of course, you wouldn't think Buz would be a biblical name. We have people who have that as a nickname, Buz Aldrin was an astronaut and so forth, but actually it's a good biblical name, Huz and Buz. Chemuel, the father of Aram, Kesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaf, and Bethuel.

And Bethuel begot Rebekah. These eight, Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother. Seven sons and a daughter.

His concubine, whose name was Reuma, also bore Teba, Gaham, Tahash, and Ma'akah. The significance of some of this information becomes clear as we move forward in the story, but for now, Abraham is aware that there are relatives in his father's house, in his clan. And he knows some of their names.

And it is interesting to analyze these names and see that there is the indication that there is faith in God, there is acknowledgment of God in this household. Without going into a whole lot of detail on these names, Bethuel, for example, Beit is the word for house, the U extension is your, your house belongs to God, Bethuel. You have Kesed, which is the word for God's grace, and so forth.

You have these names indicating that there is some acknowledgment of God in the household. And this becomes significant later on as well. But then in chapter 23, and this is where we want to pick up this morning, it tells us that Sarah lived 127 years.

Well, how old was Sarah when Isaac was born? We know that she was just shy of 100 years old. Abraham himself is 100 when Isaac is born, and Sarah is a few years younger than he. But 127 years, this indicates to us that Isaac must be somewhere in the vicinity of 30 years old.

These were the years of the life of Sarah. So Sarah died in Kiriath Arba, that is Hebron, in the land of Canaan. And Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.

You remember Kiriath Arba, that's the name for the city of four, or the four cities, that's its ancient name. And it later was known as Hebron. We've noticed before the significance of events that take place in and around Hebron.

Most recently we saw this in Luke chapter 1. This is the area in which Zacharias and Elizabeth dwell. Mary goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth to find that she is pregnant with a son in her old age, just as Sarah was. And they live in this region of Hebron, which is south of Jerusalem, in what will be eventually the land of Judea.

But it makes special note of the fact that Kiriath Arba, that is Hebron, is in the land of Canaan. And this is significant. Obviously all of these events have been taking place in the land of Canaan.

But this stresses to us that this is a foreign land. This is a land where Abraham and Sarah are sojourners. We are reminded of that.

She died in the land of Canaan. Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. Now it sounds like maybe Abraham is off someplace else, but this means that he came in.

It was a common practice of mourning along the lines of our open casket funerals, I guess, to lay out the body of the deceased in a tent. And the near relatives would enter that tent and mourn and prostrate themselves and go through their grieving in this manner before the dead body of their relative. And this is what Abraham did.

He came in to mourn for Sarah and to weep. Weeping, the latter verb there, can be used of different kinds of weeping. You can weep for joy, just like our English word, weep.

That word can be used in different contexts. You have to look at the context to find out what is the occasion for weeping. It could be joy.

It could be sadness. But the former word, mourning, this is a word that specifically is used for grief. It almost always accompanies a scene where you see someone who has died.

This is mourning for the dead, specifically. So, Abraham came in to the tent, as it were, and mourned and wept for Sarah. Then, in verse 3, Abraham stood up from before his dead, meaning he finished his period of mourning, however long that was, and he spoke to the sons of Heth, saying, I am a foreigner and a visitor among you.

We've already been reminded of this in verse 2, that they're still dwelling in the land of Canaan. It's not the land of Abraham, even though God has repeatedly promised him possession of it. He told him, everywhere you set your foot, the land is yours.

But he says, I am a foreigner and a visitor among you. Give me property for a burial place among you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight. This word for give, natan, most recently there was an election in Israel, just in the past few weeks, and the former Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, was voted out of office and another man was voted in.

But Netanyahu, his last name, natan, is from natan, which means to give. Yahu is the Lord. Benyamin, of course, son of the right hand.

He's got a wonderful biblical name, Benyamin, son of the right hand. And Netanyahu,

given by the Lord. Not necessarily to indicate that his politics or his leadership in Israel has been good or bad, but that's what his name means.

And this is the verb that's used here when he says give. And this doesn't mean give in the sense of no obligation or no strings or there's no exchange of money. But he's basically saying, make available to me.

I would like to have you part with, in some way, this land. It doesn't mean that he's asking for a freebie. But he would like to have property for a burial place that belongs to them, so that he can bury the dead out of his sight.

Verse 5, the sons of Heth. Heth, by the way, if you go back in Genesis to the generations of the sons of Noah, you'll find that Heth is a descendant of Canaan, who in turn is the son of Ham. So these are the Hamitic or Canaanite occupants of the land.

This is why they call it the land of Canaan. And they're descended from Canaan and from Ham through Heth. There is, by the way, a separate set of Hittites that are not the biblical Hittites.

Generally, if you see Hittites in the Old Testament, these are the sons of Heth, the Canaanites. There is a Hittite empire in ancient history that had its headquarters up in Asia Minor. And as near as I can tell, there's no direct relationship between the sons of Heth, who are Hittites in the Bible, and the Hittite empire proper that had its headquarters up in Asia Minor.

These are the sons of Heth. And they answer Abraham in verse 5, saying unto him, Hear us, my lord, you are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places.

None of us will withhold from you his burial place, that you may bury your dead. A couple of things to note here. When they say you are a mighty prince, this is literally a prince of Elohim, a prince of God.

But Elohim is used sometimes as a superlative, as a word meaning divine or very lofty, very high, and it comes to mean mighty. And I think this is a good translation. The Hethites are not believers in God per se, but they acknowledge Abraham's greatness.

They compliment him and say you are a prince unto God or a prince of God. We have this word God-like with a small g, talking about someone who is very handsome, a man who is very handsome. They say, oh, he's a God or something like that.

We use this to try to indicate the superlative, the highest degree of something. And this is how Elohim was used in the ancient Near East sometimes. And that is the use here.

He is a mighty prince, a prince, a God-like prince or a prince of God, so to speak. You are

a prince among us. But notice what they say.

Bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places. None of us will withhold from you his burial place. They are offering to let Abraham enter Sarah's remains in one of their tombs, but have no exchange of possession of the land.

Abraham is a sojourner. He doesn't own legally any of the land. He has been a tenant.

He probably leases or pays dues to pasture his flocks and to wander about in land that has already been claimed by these individuals, the sons of Heth. So he's renting. He doesn't have a deed to any of this land.

And they say, well, if you just need a place to bury your dead, you just feel free to pick out a tomb here among our tombs. No one will deny you the use of his burial grounds so that you can bury your dead. But this is not what Abraham is looking for, and it's really important to understand why.

There is deep significance, and the reason there is a whole chapter devoted to this is Abraham is looking ahead. Abraham, the man of faith, who looked ahead, who claimed the promise of God when he laid Isaac on the altar, believes in resurrection. Abraham believes in the future fulfillment of God's promise.

And Abraham is determined that he have a place where Sarah and eventually himself and the rest of his family can have their remains interred. And he wants it to be in the land, and he wants it to be something that he owns so that there will be no possibility of their bones being removed. Not so much because of the physical presence of the corpse, but it's a symbolic act.

He wants a piece of the land of his very own where he will, in effect, wait for the rest of it to be granted to him and to his descendants. This is going to be the first piece of the rock that he owns. This is going to be his own piece of the fulfillment of God's promise.

And he's determined to own it and not rent it. It is only the burial plot. He doesn't buy and say, I want to build a house.

He doesn't say, let me buy some land so that I can start a city or so that I can have a place for my descendants to live and grow and operate from and have a headquarters at. He says, I want a burial grounds that I own. And this is Abraham's forward thinking.

He's thinking resurrection. He's thinking future possession. And he wants that place to stand for that and to remind his descendants of the fact that he's there waiting for the resurrection.

That becomes more clear as he goes forward because when they offer him, it's not just a matter of solving the problem of where to put Sarah's remains. Because Abraham in

verse 7 stood up and bowed himself to the people of the land, the sons of Heth. Now this phrase, the people of the land, this is a technical term for the elders of the land.

Abraham is basically at the city gates. Remember we talked about possessing the gates of the enemies? Well, Abraham doesn't possess, and of course these are not enemies per se. The sons of Heth have been on very good terms with Abraham.

You will recall that they helped him when he went up against the confederation of kings that came down and kidnapped Lot and carried off everyone and everything and Sodom. He has had a good long-standing relationship with these men. But he stood and bowed himself, and people of the land, these are the officials of the land, the sons of Heth.

He spoke with them, saying, If it is your wish that I bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and meet with Ephron the son of Zohar for me. This means conduct a negotiation or ask him on my behalf, Ephron the son of Zohar, that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he has, which is at the end of his field. Let him give it to me at the full price as property for a burial place among you.

Machpelah, by the way, is from a word, the C-H-P and the L, kaphal, has the idea of a fold or a doubling over of something. And this probably referred originally to the shape of the cave or the mouth of the cave or something. It's been suggested that maybe it was a double cave or a cave with two large caverns, and hence its name.

Name in front of something, the letter M in Hebrew means from, so literally this is from a fold or from a folding or from a doubling. It would be the literal meaning. But Abraham has already done his reconnaissance.

He knows the piece of ground that he would specifically like to have. It is at the edge of a field. It's not going to inconvenience the owner to part with this section of land.

He says, let him give it to me at the full price. And once again, this is the use of natan, not meaning to give with nothing in exchange or nothing in return, but to grant or to allow him to purchase this. At the full price as property for a burial place among you or in your midst.

Now Ephron, it says dwelt among the sons of Heth, but basically he's standing in the gates. This is a hearing, and apparently Abraham doesn't know Ephron by sight, either that or this is sort of a formal negotiation where it's proper for him to address his request to Ephron through the city council or through the local government. But Ephron is present at these proceedings, and he speaks up at the point that Abraham makes this request.

So it's not so much that he dwelt among the sons of Heth. Obviously he does, or I mean that goes without saying, but this literally means he's standing among the sons of Heth. He's present at the time.

So Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the presence of the sons of Heth, all who entered at the gate of his city, saying, and once again these are the city officials who were at the gate, saying, No, my lord, hear me. And this no is a particle in Hebrew and in the Hurrian language that was prevalent in this day. It's a Semitic language, but it's not Hebrew.

And this is a dialect of the old Semitic language, and no in Hebrew is l-o, lo. This is actually probably l-u, which is lu, and this is a Hurrian prefix that means please, or indeed, or please pay attention to what I'm about to say. So he's not contradicting Abraham.

He's saying, please, my lord, hear me, or allow me to speak. It's sort of an introductory, almost like a special word that is used when you're going to introduce a request or introduce a reply. So Ephron speaks up and says, Please, my lord, hear me.

I give you the field and the cave that is in it. I give it to you in the presence of the sons of my people. These are the city officials, the witnesses.

Bury your dead. And so he offers it to him at no price. He doesn't mention a price.

But Abraham bowed himself down before the people of the land, again, the city officials, and he spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying, If you will give it, please hear me. And once again, you have this, when it says please hear me, this is that lu word. And so you get the idea that Abraham is sort of trying to speak their language.

He's using their forms. He's adapting himself to their procedures as he negotiates for this land because he uses this Hurrian form of speech to introduce his request. He says, If you will give it, please hear me.

I will give you money for the field. Take the money from me, and I will bury my dead there. And Ephron answered Abraham, saying to him, My lord, listen to me.

Once again, that lu. The land is worth 400 shekels of silver. What is that between you and me? So bury your dead.

Abraham listened to Ephron, i.e., he agreed with him, and Abraham weighed out the silver for Ephron, which he had named in the hearing of the sons of Heth, 400 shekels of silver, currency of the merchants. Now this is a close-up look at the negotiation, but what is essentially happening here? Abraham is securing for himself a permanent possession, for himself and for his descendants. He doesn't want to accept it as a gift, and in fact, this is sort of a formality.

In fact, even today in the Middle East, there was an example of a man who overheard this just recently, where within this century, they were traveling around in the early days of this century in the Holy Land, doing some reconnaissance of places to do archaeology

and so forth, and they had a guide, and the guide had a beautiful gray horse. And back then, a lot of your transport, before they had four-wheel drive and a lot of vehicles over there, you would get around in this rough terrain by using horses. Well, here was this wonderful gray horse, and so one of the men on the expedition thought he might try to buy this horse.

And so he approached one of the Turkish guides who was there at the time, and he came up and brought the horse. And he said, would it be possible for me to purchase that gray horse? And the Turkish man replied, oh, I will be happy to give you this horse. I will make a present of it to you.

And the man said, oh, no, I couldn't accept it as a gift. Let me pay you. And the man said, well, he is worth so many shekels or whatever the coin at the time was, but what is that between you and me? It is nothing between friends.

But the idea is all along that when he offers it as a gift, this is a formality. It's customary to offer to make something a present, and it is equally customary to refuse that and to offer money. And then for the person who initially offered to say, oh, well, on the open market, this would be worth so much, but what is that between you and me? And for the first person then to either agree or not and to pay the money.

And this is an ancient, ancient custom, and you have it reflected here in this negotiation between Abraham and the man. So it's not so likely that Ephron is actually offering to give this quite valuable parcel of land to Abraham as a gift. But in the oriental mind, in the idea of hospitality and of these gestures that are made, there's a very complex social interaction that is well known and understood by parties on both sides.

I've mentioned to you before the coffee custom that I became familiar with where as you visit someone in any Arabic-speaking area over there, they offer you a cup of coffee or of espresso, and you accept it. And you drink that, and they'll offer you a second cup, and you accept that, and you drink it. It's these little cups about the size of a shot glass, and it's very thick, very strong coffee.

And at the point that the host offers the third cup, it's offered just as politely and just as smilingly as the first two, but at the point that the third cup is offered, this is the signal that your host feels like it's time for the visit to come to an end. And the person who's visiting, when they see that third cup being offered, they know that this is a time to politely refuse the third cup and indicate that, oh, I really must be going. And it's a wonderful, unspoken agreement.

Nobody overstays their welcome this way because you have these unwritten rules of communication. And everyone can smile, and the host has offered hospitality, and the person recognizes that it's time to leave, and everything works out great. Well, that's what happens here in this negotiation.

Not only that, but this is a pretty hefty price. Efron, in a sense, knows that he's kind of got Abraham over a barrel because Abraham has specified the land that he wants, and this is a pretty big price. If you look elsewhere in the Bible, fields can be bought for 50 shekels or for the 30 pieces of silver that Judas flung back at the priests in the temple or used to buy the potter's field.

You can look over in Jeremiah and other places in Kings where fields are purchased, and nowhere else in the Bible is this much money paid for a field. This was either a very huge field or Efron. And Abraham doesn't quibble.

He pays the price that is asked, and it is done before witnesses, and it's very clear to everyone that Abraham has paid a handsome price. He's not beholden in the same way that he didn't want to be beholden to the king of Sodom. He didn't want to be beholden to anyone in the land.

And he's not going to have an obligation or have any question that this is not his land. And what they ask, he pays. So, the field of Ekron, in verse 17, which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field and the cave which was in it, and all the trees that were in the field, which were within all the surrounding borders, were deeded to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the sons of Heth, before all who went in at the gate of his city.

This was according to the customs and in front of the government. It was all proper, and there was no question, there was no quibble. Abraham totally conformed himself to their legal requirements to obtain possession of this field.

And after this, Abraham buried Sarah, his wife, in the cave of the field of Machpelah, before Mamre, that is Hebron, in the land of Canaan. Once again, you have that notice, which is already obvious, that they're in the land of Canaan, but it's put here on purpose, because here is the one piece of Canaan that Abraham actually owns. He's paid a handsome price for it.

This is where he and his wife, and later his sons and grandson, will be interred. The field and the cave that is in it were deeded to Abraham by the sons of Heth as property for a burial place. You get the idea that this is a down payment.

God has given Abraham the wherewithal to pay this high price, and God has given him the promise that he'll be resurrected. And on resurrection day for the Old Testament saints, this is where Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Sarah and Leah and the other patriarchal progenitors, this is where they're going to stand. This is the first sight they're going to see, is right there at the cave of Machpelah.

It's interesting, if you have access to the Biblical Archaeology Review from May-June of 1985, this is volume 11, number 3, if you can find it in a library or something, there is an

article on the cave of Machpelah. There are pictures. It is known today.

They build churches and things on top of all of the sites that are of any significance in the land of Israel. This edifice was actually built by Herod, and it has the distinction of being the only intact Herodian building in the land. It has architecture identical to the temple that Herod built in Jerusalem.

There are pictures in here that show the nature of the masonry and the stonework, and it is identical in every detail, and it's very clearly something that Herod built on top of this structure. There are also some fascinating accounts of visits to the cave. The cave is down below this structure, and what people have seen or claimed to have seen when they went down into the cave.

There have been some fanciful tales of people who went into the cave and were struck blind or struck senseless and so forth. There are some wild things. There is currently a Moslem temple on top of this point, and it was taken back by the crusaders and then taken back by the Moslems and so forth.

Moshe Dayan, in 1967, when Israel regained control of this area, lowered a 12-year-old girl named Michael, M-I-C-H-A-L, on a rope down into the cave in 1967, and she looked around with a flashlight and took some photographs. Anyway, this is quite an interesting article, but the bones have obviously long since disappeared. There are accounts from back in the 1100s that indicate that some monks who were living in that vicinity at the time found some loose stones in a wall, which they removed and found a passage that led to a second cave.

Remember, makpila means double, and they thought there was a cavern, and it was empty and that the bones had long since disappeared, but they removed stones in a wall and found a passage leading to a second cavern, and in that cavern, in the dirt, they found some actual bones. From that point, it's not clear. There are some later additions to the story where they think they found the bones of Adam and Eve and all other kinds of wild things, but apparently back as late as the 1100s, there may have actually been the bones of the patriarchs in that cave.

Those areas are all inaccessible and have been walled up, and there's no knowledge now if the bones are there or not, but I have no doubt that this will be the place from which Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their spouses and so forth will be resurrected, because that's Abraham's last official act, was purchasing that spot as a symbol of his confidence in the resurrection, and he wanted to be raised up. He didn't want to be taken back to Haran or back to Ur. He wanted to be raised where he could see his possession.

He expects when he wakes up, he's going to see his descendants in possession of the land, and that's exactly what he's going to see, because the Lord Jesus Christ is going to secure that territory, and on day one of the millennial kingdom, Abraham will rise, and

when he looks around, it will all be his and his descendants, and it's a wonderful symbol. It's a wonderful symbolic act that Abraham left for his descendants, much as his great-grandson Joseph will do with his bones later on in Egypt. This is a good place to pause and take our break.

As we do, the thought we're left with as we look at Abraham mourning Sarah and burying Sarah here is that his dealings with outsiders are expressions of his own faith, but you will notice Abraham doesn't try to evangelize the Hittites. He doesn't say, Oh, behold, I want this cave so that when I'm resurrected or I believe that I will see my wife Sarah on the last day. In modern day parlance, in modern day Christianity, there's such an emphasis on evangelism that people are encouraged, well, when you have dealings with outsiders, you've got to give them the gospel.

You've got to give your testimony. Let your light so shine before men, and one thing and another. But people are people.

These Hittites are in just as great a need of salvation as anyone else and are in just as much danger of hellfire as any other believer that ever lived. Here's a great opportunity. What happens at funerals? What happens when people are invited to a funeral and then they pound the gospel down the throats of all who come? Look at Abraham.

Here are people who are not believers in God. You think, well, what a wonderful opportunity. Abraham, you really fell on your sword here.

You didn't take the chance to give your testimony or give the gospel or use this as an occasion to talk about resurrection and the significance of death and so forth. Abraham is considered to be a prince of God, a mighty prince by the Hittites. Why? Because they've known him for years and he's a man of character.

He's a man of integrity. He is a man who keeps his promises. He's a man who doesn't take advantage of others.

He could have broken the tradition there when Ephraim offered him the land and said, hey, great, where do I sign? That's wonderful. He's a man of integrity. He pays what he owes.

He apparently has been a tenant of land here. He's paid somebody rent for where he grazes and so forth for all these years. They admire him.

They respect him. His life is his testimony. His integrity and his consistency are his testimony.

He doesn't need to hand a flyer to the sons of Heth. He doesn't need to use Sarah's funeral as an occasion to shove the gospel at them. Anybody who's interested in the things of God knows what Abraham stands for and is welcome to come and associate

himself with Abraham and with the promises that God has made.

You wouldn't think at first reading that this is a passage that applies in that way, but stop and think about it. Throughout the pages of Scripture, you find people who are pursuing their own faith in the Lord and letting God decide when and where and how others are going to be brought into the picture. We have a responsibility to live by faith, and God will use that in his own way and in his own time.

Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll resume.