

# Genesis 23

## April 28, 2024



### CONVERSATION STARTERS

What are some highs or lows you experienced this past week?

What Scripture has been shaping you recently?

Where have you seen God moving in your life this week?

What did you hear in today's sermon OR read in today's passage that you would like to discuss?

What did you learn about yourself in today's sermon/passage?

What did you learn about God in today's sermon/passage?

What convicted you as you listened to today's sermon OR read in today's passage?

### MAIN POINT

Abraham teaches us how to deal with faith and the death of a loved one.

### INTRODUCTION

*As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.*

**What do you understand the process of grief to entail?**

**Why do you think it is important to emphasize and understand that healing from grief is a slow, gradual process?**

**What has been the most helpful thing someone has done for you in a season of loss or grief? Why do you think that particular act was so helpful?**

In his 2013 book, *Hope for the Brokenhearted*, Dr. John Luke Terveen described the grief and difficulty that followed his fourteen-year-old daughter's heart attack. The book grew out of his own frustration in seeking books that offered direction on how to deal with his grief. After reading over two hundred books, he became burdened at the lack of books that focused on the biblical passages that offer insight and comfort to those going through the most difficult of spiritual seasons. As a result, he decided to write his own



book highlighting what Scripture says about mourning and addressing the difficult questions believers ask about grief.

In his description of his and his wife's journey out of perpetual grief and mourning, he mentioned the importance of worship. With no rose-colored depiction of the recovery journey, Dr. Terveen chronicled their discipline of attending worship:

*Over time, as again and again we came to worship in God's house, we sensed that we had come into his very presence. We entered worship—usually weakly, sometimes awkwardly, and frequently tearfully. Yet in the community of his people we experienced the Scriptures read, the songs sung, the sermons shared. . .and bit by bit, through these humble acts of worship, I encountered God's real presence with me again, and I embraced anew both God himself and eternal realities about the life of faith here and life hereafter. Hope was reawakened. Though such a struggle has ebbed and flowed, at that time I experienced a real turning point in the renewal of my faith and a reawakened hope for the future.*

In today's session on Genesis 23, we'll read about the death of Abraham's wife Sarah. We'll see what Abraham's process of grieving teaches us about having faith in our own seasons of grief.

## **UNDERSTANDING**

*Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.*

 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ GENESIS 23:1-2.

The initial description of Sarah's death might seem simply biographical. However, the writer noted two things of considerable importance. First, Sarah lived 127 years which indicated a long life richly blessed by God. The 127 years would have been 37 years since the time she gave birth to the covenantal-promised child, Isaac, at age 90. Factoring in the 25 years of their pilgrimage in the land of Canaan (the promised land), Sarah followed God's covenantal call for 62 years. Those 62 years were significant in God's redemptive history under His omnipotent direction.

Second, Sarah died in Canaan—the land God promised Abraham's descendants would ultimately call home after a four-hundred-year stay in Egypt under oppressive slavery. Her life, and now her death, was marked by the faithful lovingkindness of God.

**How does remembering the numerous ways God showed His favor and covenant faithfulness to Sarah inform the way you understand her death?**

**What does it tell you about God that even the location of Sarah's death evidenced His work in her life?**



**Why is it important for the Bible to describe the reaction of its key and prominent figures in seasons of loss or brokenness?**

**How does Abraham's reaction to Sarah's death set a model for the way God's people are to mourn?**

Abraham mourned and wept for Sarah. The patriarch was deeply and appropriately sorrowful. The text graphically described Abraham's audible cries, which would typically have been accompanied by the tearing of clothes, wearing sackcloth, or even shaving one's head. Significantly, there is no sense in the Scripture that this level of mourning and sorrow was in any way sinful. In fact, it was quite the opposite.

🌿 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ GENESIS 23:3-18.

**While grief is certainly not a linear process, what is the significance of the writer noting Abraham's transition?**

**What adjectives would you use to describe Abraham's character based on chapter 23?**

**What did it mean for the future people of Israel that Sarah was buried in Canaan?**

**What did that indicate about the condition of Abraham's faith in the face of his beloved wife's death?**

In the progression of Abraham's mourning, he moved from grieving his loss to seeking to provide for his wife one final time and honoring her as he did so. Abraham sought an audience with the Hethites—the inhabitants of Canaan in that region. Abraham was not attempting to make a lucrative business deal. Abraham was seeking to honor his deceased wife in such a way that demonstrated his faith in God's covenantal promise to his descendants—and God blessed Abraham in that.

🌿 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ GENESIS 23:19-20.

**In your experience, how does being able to grasp a greater purpose for seasons of difficulty change your perception of that season? Can you provide an example?**

**Chapter 23 closes with Sarah's burial. Chapter 24 opens with the quest to find a wife for Isaac. What does that tell us about God's continued faithfulness to His people, even in the face of death?**

Abraham—the father of God's covenant people—buried his wife, through whom the covenant people was inaugurated, in the land that was promised to Abraham by God over six decades earlier. The importance of recognizing the occurrence of Sarah's death within the framework of God's redemptive history was that it placed the glory of God and His gracious work in creation at the center of the narrative. That would



obviously not be to say that her death was just a detail. Even during the seasons of greatest heartache, God still reigned supreme and His purpose in the lives of His people could never be thwarted—even by death.

Family burial sites carried immense importance in the days of Abraham, in which it was not uncommon for multiple generations to be buried in the same plot of land. For the land to be officially and permanently deeded over to Abraham meant all his descendants would be rooted in the promised land. Aside from redemptive history, however, the personal meaning of Sarah's burial for Abraham was the needed closure in the grieving process. The author clearly had that in mind when placing the search for Isaac's wife immediately after the burial of Sarah. The next generation of God's covenantal faithfulness was already at hand and Abraham had to look forward to the continuation of faithfulness in his offspring.

### **APPLICATION**

*Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.*

**Why do we often shy away from grief and mourning?**

**Who offers you the gift of relationship that would allow you to honestly process grief with them? How can you cultivate other relationships that may grow to that depth? Why is it important to act in that direction now, even if you aren't grieving presently?**

**How does understanding how God has used another person in times of loss help alleviate grief and sorrow? What memories of your life do you want people to have about how God used you in difficult times?**

### **PRAYER**

*Close your time together by sharing prayer requests, praying for each other, and the group.*

Thank God that He does not dismiss our sorrow but has given many examples of sincere grief and sorrow in the Bible. Pray that He would help you properly grieve losses in your life while you continue to place your faith in Him through hardship.

### **LOOKING AHEAD**

*Encourage your group to look ahead to next week's scripture passage as we continue our study of the life of Abraham:*

**May 5, 2024 --- Genesis 24**



## COMMENTARY

Genesis 23

**23:1-6.** Upon the death of Sarah, Abraham decided not to return her to their ancestral home in Mesopotamia but to secure a burial space in this land of God's promise. She died in Hebron, and we read that Abraham went to mourn for Sarah. Went where? Since 22:19 tells us that "Abraham stayed in Beersheba," we assume this trip took him from Beersheba to Hebron. Abraham recited words that became characteristic of the Hebrew nation from the moment of Sarah's death to the present hour: I am an alien and a stranger among you. Abraham's people would wander in and out of Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Greece, and around the Roman Empire.

If Abraham had accepted the first offer, he would have buried Sarah in the Hittite tomb—and still not owned an acre of Canaan. That would have been the wrong choice.

**23:7-16.** Since the Hittites had agreed that Abraham could bury Sarah in their territory, the only question was where and under what conditions. Apparently Abraham already had a spot in mind because he immediately defined with great specificity the cave of Machpelah, which belongs to him [Ephron] and is in the end of his field. Although Ephron was sitting right there, Abraham addressed the request to the entire group of Hittite leaders. This kind of specific request began the Bedouin bargaining which concludes in verse 16 as Abraham placed four hundred shekels of silver on the table.

**23:17-20.** What did Abraham buy? The text leaves nothing in doubt: Both the field and the cave in it, and all the trees within the borders of the field. For Abraham, Mesopotamia was now history; the new homeland would be built around this burial plot. The humble beginnings of the Abrahamic estate represent a symbol of the great geography of Israel described in earlier chapters. Sarah was the first of four generations buried at Machpelah. Only after the death of his wife did Abraham actually own any portion of the land.

Abraham was buying the field not only as a burial place for Sarah but also to express his confidence in God's promises. He had lived for sixty years in the land as a nomad. But before he himself died, he mingled the dust of his love with that of the land of promise as a sign of his expectation that God would fulfill the promise to his descendants. This purchase was a testimony to his children, since they did not possess the land for some four hundred years. And the lesson was well learned. Abraham himself, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah were buried there, even though Jacob died in Egypt. His sons took his body back to Canaan and buried him beside his father and grandfather.

