



Genesis 23 - Sarah Dies and Is Buried

A. The death of Sarah.

1. (1) The death of Sarah.

a. **Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years:** Sarah is the only woman in the Bible whose age at death is recorded; it gives us some measure of understanding how great a woman she is in the Bible.

b. **The life of Sarah:** Nowhere in the Bible are we told to look to Mary as an example of a godly woman. Twice we are told to look to Sarah as such an example (Isaiah 51:1-2 and 1 Peter 3:3-6).

2. (2) Abraham's mourning.

a. **Abraham came to mourn for Sarah:** "That is, he set himself deliberately to all the functions of a mourner." (Boice) Abraham wasn't afraid to mourn, though he did not sorrow as those without hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

b. **And to weep for her:** "To weep for a loved one is to show that we have been close, that the loss is keenly felt, that death is an enemy, and that sin has brought this sad punishment upon the human race." (Boice)

B. Abraham buys land for Sarah's burial.

1. (3-16) Abraham haggles with the Philistines for the land of Sarah's tomb.

a. **I am a foreigner and a sojourner among you:** Abraham did not feel this way because he came from Ur of the Chaldeans. It was because he recognized his real home was heaven. Moses knew the same, and commanded Israel to know it (Leviticus 25:23). David also knew this truth (1 Chronicles 29:14 and Psalm 39:12).

b. **Give me property for a burial place among you:** This way of negotiating the price is typical of ancient and modern practices in that culture. As a gesture of kindness, the selling party may offer to give the property in question to the buyer, until the buyer insists on paying a price.

i. The Canaanite, Ephron, follows the cultural customs of bargaining. First, the seller offers to *give* the item. Then, when that is refused, the seller suggests a price, which he claims is modest but is really very high. This is understood to be the starting point, and from there the bargaining begins.

c. **Abraham stood up and bowed himself to the people of the land:** Abraham shows how a Christian should do business with the world: *courteously, fairly, prudently*.



i. “They who, under the sanction of religion, trample under foot the decent forms of civil respect, supposing that because they are religious, they have a right to be rude, totally mistake the spirit of Christianity” (Clarke).

2. (17-20) Abraham buys the field and buries Sarah.

a. **Were deeded to Abraham as a possession:** The text emphasizes this property was Abraham’s land by deed, not only by the promise of God. If this was the only piece of land Abraham ever owned in the land promised to him, it shows he was a real man of faith.

b. **Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah:** This is where Isaac and Ishmael buried Abraham. Isaac and Rebekah were both buried here. Jacob buried Leah here, and Joseph buried Jacob here. And this was the place Joseph told his descendants to bury him, taking his bones with them when they came into the Promised Land.

Genesis 24 - Isaac and Rebekah

A. Abraham’s commission to his servant.

1. (1-4) Abraham sends out a servant to seek out a bride for his son.

a. **The oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had:** This is the servant named *Eliezer* (Genesis 15:2), or at least he was some 60 years before this. If it was someone else, the Holy Spirit didn’t want us to know it.

b. **Put your hand under my thigh:** According to ancient custom, this describes a very serious oath. Abraham is extremely concerned that Isaac not be married to a Canaanite bride.

2. (5-9) The commission clearly defined.

a. **Abraham said to him:** Apparently, Abraham anticipated that he might die while his servant was gone, so the instructions were made perfectly clear.

b. **Beware that you do not take my son back there:** Isaac, the son of promise, never once left the Promised Land.

B. The servant’s mission fulfilled.

1. (10-14) Eliezer’s prayer to God.

a. **O LORD God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day:**

Essentially, Eliezer asks God to guide through providential circumstances, which is not always a bad way to discern God’s will.

i. However, generally speaking, circumstances alone can be a dangerous way to discern God’s will. We have a way of ignoring circumstances which speak against what we want (or attributing them to the devil), while focusing on the circumstances that speak for what we want.

ii. But in this case, Eliezer establishes what he will look for before anything happens. He isn’t making up the rules as he goes along.

b. **Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink:** Eliezer was wise enough to ask for a sign that was remarkable, but (in human terms) possible. He didn’t tempt God by asking for fire to fall from heaven or for protection as he leapt from the pinnacle of the temple.

c. **Let her be the one:** In praying this prayer, there is a sense in which Eliezer “stacked the deck” against finding someone. It would take a remarkable woman to volunteer for this tedious task.

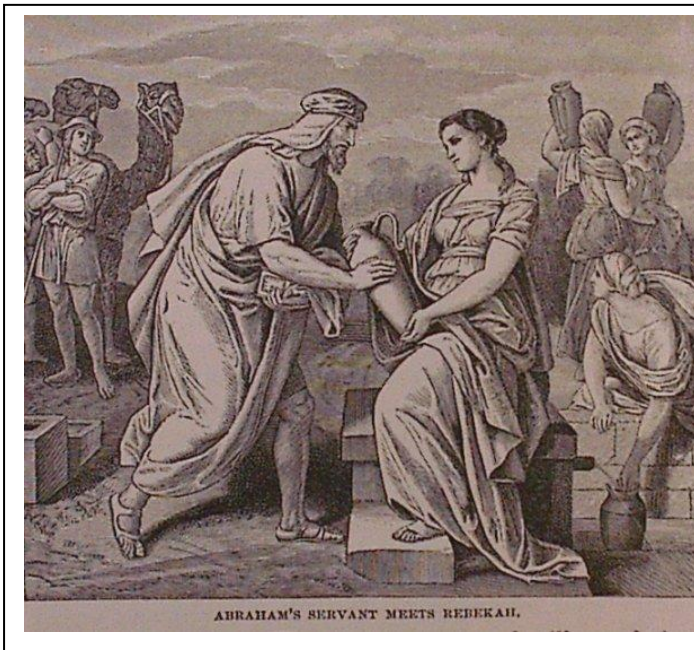
i. Considering that a camel may drink up to 20 gallons, watering ten camels meant at least an hour of hard work.

d. **By this I will know:** Eliezer cares nothing about what the woman will *look* like. He wants a woman of character, a woman whom God has chosen.

2. (15) God answers the servant’s prayer before it was finished.

a. **Before he had finished speaking:** Isaiah 65:24 speaks of this kind of gracious answer to prayer: *It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear.*

b. **Rebekah . . . came out with her pitcher on her shoulder:** The servant did not yet *know* the prayer was answered, only time would prove it.



3. (16-21) The servant, though surprised, waits for complete confirmation of his prayer.

a. **The servant ran to meet her:** The servant did not think it was unspiritual to introduce himself to Rebekah; yet, he certainly did not do anything to suggest she provide water for the camels. Prayer is no substitute for action.

b. **And drew for all his camels:** As Rebekah began the hard work of watering all the camels, the servant did not stop her. He wanted a woman who would not only *say* she would water the camels, but who would actually *do* it.

i. Perhaps Eliezer knew that for some, it is much easier to talk like a servant than to actually serve. He wanted to see if she had a servant’s *heart*, not only a servant’s *talk*.

4. (22-28) The servant, when the bride has been chosen, gives her rich gifts even before the marriage to the father’s son.

a. **A golden nose ring:** Some think it gross that Rebekah would wear a nose ring, but there was certainly nothing strange, shocking, or rebellious about it in that culture.

b. **Being on the way, the LORD led me:** It is hard to steer a parked car. If we want to be guided by the LORD, we should be on our way.

5. (29-33) Laban entertains the servant.
 - a. **When he saw the nose ring, and the bracelets on his sister's wrists:** Laban's eyes are very much on the riches the servant brings; yet, he also shows appropriate hospitality.
6. (34-49) The servant tells his story and what he is there for.

C. Rebekah is brought to Isaac.

1. (50-53) The family agrees to give Rebekah to Isaac. The father's servant gives more gifts.
 - a. **He also gave precious things to her brother and to her mother:** When an agreement of marriage had been made, it was customary for the bridegroom (or his representative) to give the family of the bride gifts as a dowry to demonstrate his financial ability to provide for the bride.
2. (54-60) The servant intends to depart quickly; Rebekah agrees.
 - a. **I will go:** One of the most remarkable things about Rebekah is her total willingness to leave all to be with a bridegroom she has never seen. Her words "**I will go**" are worthy words of faith.
 - b. **"Do not hinder me" . . . "I will go":** "If the world does not succeed in persuading the believer to abide in the world, it will seek to delay his exit . . . When you decide to go with the Lord, the world will applaud your devotion but will say, 'Don't rush. Abide a few days, at least ten, and then go.'" (Barnhouse)
3. (61-67) Rebekah is brought unto Isaac; they marry.
 - a. **So the servant took Rebekah and departed:** We can well imagine the conversations Rebekah and Eliezer would have on the journey. She would want to know all she could about Isaac, whom she loved without ever seeing, and he would be delighted to tell her.
 - i. Rebekah would never dream of telling Eliezer the best way to get her to the home of her bridegroom, but many of us will reject the Holy Spirit's guidance in our life.
 - b. **She took a veil and covered herself:** The covering with a veil signified chastity, modesty, and submission. This is how Rebekah wants to meet her bridegroom.
 - c. **Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening:** This is the first mention of Isaac since he was left on top of Mount Moriah (Genesis 22:19). We see nothing of Isaac from the time on the mountain until he is united with his bride.

References: The Bible, David Guzik, James Boice, Adam Clarke, and Donald Barnhouse