



BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: Ignite Your Faith: Genesis 12-25 wk. 5

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Abraham was one of the greatest men of faith of all time, but he dearly loved his wife and when she died, he mourned. It doesn't mean he didn't have faith. It doesn't mean he didn't trust that he would see her again, and all that. It's just a reality. It's a part of life. It's a part of being made in the image of God. Paul says, we grieve. We just don't grieve as those who have no hope. So Abraham grieves, but then he's got to go on with business.

[Gen.23]Verse three. *"Then Abraham rose from before his dead, and spoke to the sons of Heth, saying, 4 "I am a stranger and a sojourner among you; give me]a burial site among you that I may bury my dead out of my sight." 5 The sons of Heth answered Abraham, saying to him, 6 "Hear us, my lord, you are a mighty prince among us; bury your dead in the choicest of our graves; none of us will refuse you his grave for burying your dead." 7 So Abraham rose and bowed to the people of the land, the sons of Heth. 8 And he spoke with them, saying, "If it is your wish for me to bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and approach Ephron the son of Zohar for me, 9 that he may give me the cave of Machpelah which he owns, which is at the end of his field; for the full price let him give it to me in your presence for a burial site." 10 Now Ephron was sitting among the sons of Heth; and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the sons of Heth; even of all who went in at the gate of his city, saying, 11 "No, my lord, hear me; I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. In the presence of the sons of my people I give it to you; bury your dead." 12 And Abraham bowed before the people of the land. 13 He spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying, "If you will only please listen to me; I will give the price of the field, accept it from me that I may bury my dead there." 14 Then Ephron answered Abraham, saying to him, 15 "My lord, listen to me; a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between me and you? So bury your dead." 16 Abraham listened to Ephron; and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver which he had named in the hearing of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, commercial standard.*

17 So Ephron's field, which was in Machpelah, which faced Mamre, the field and cave which was in it, and all the trees which were in the field, that were within all the confines of its border, were deeded over 18 to Abraham for a possession in the presence of the sons of Heth, before all who went in at the gate of his city. 19 After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field at Machpelah facing Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. 20 So the field and the cave that is in it, were deeded over to Abraham for a burial site by the sons of Heth."

I find myself after reading that just needing to take a deep breath. And you've got to ask yourself the question, what is the point? Understanding that the biblical writers were very picky about what they

recorded, and they're known for an economy of language. In other words, they aren't just journaling; this was the next thing that happened in Abraham's life, out of this long life that we track. So, why spend so much time, describing this tedious process of trying to buy a burial site for Sarah? I mean, we have two verses for the death of Sarah, we had two verses for the birth of the Promise Seed, Isaac. Many of the most significant things we've looked at have had two or three verses. And here we have this lengthy kind of a monotonous discussion about a burial site. What's the point? Well, that's a good question. See if the text helps us out with that.

Whenever you're looking at a Hebrew narrative, dialogue is very important and often the first words out of a main character's mouth carry very important words. In verse four, the first thing out of Abraham's mouth is, "I am a stranger and a sojourner among you." The writer was careful in verse two to tell us that Sarah would be buried in the land of Canaan, meaning it was somebody else's land. Abraham reaffirms that by saying, I'm a sojourner. I'm a pilgrim. I'm a traveler, which is a way of saying, I don't belong here. I don't live here. This isn't my land. It's yours. They respond back and say that you are a mighty prince. Verse six, the literal Hebrew there is you are a prince with a god. They knew Abraham. They knew who he was, they knew what he was about.

And they enter into this bartering process that sounds so foreign to us, but to people of the Near East, it was the common process, by which they would sell a piece of property. It opens with this seemingly generous offer, but it's really kind of the beginning of a very shrewd business process. The offer is Abraham, take anything you want, it's yours. The process always sounded very polite, and that's the way it was supposed to open. But if Abraham would have said, that's a very generous offer, I'll take it. He would have had no ethics. He would have ripped them off, in our language. It was understood that the first offer was very polite. You can have anything you want, and he was to respond with his response, and back and forth, it would go. And so that's what they did. It's also important to notice that Abraham made sure this was all done in a public forum. This was their version of signing a contract, and since it was verbal, it was very important to have witnesses, because that's what would hold you to this deal generations later. And so the text is very clear, he's very careful to make sure that everybody was there, and they heard this, and so they go back and forth with this seemingly tedious discussion, until finally the owner of the land says, you know, ok, it's 400 shekels of silver, but what is that among friends, take the grave. That's a very shrewd business deal there, because that's the first point where he's putting his price on the table. He's not really saying take the land. He's saying, this is what I'm asking.

400 shekels was an absolutely outrageous price for a piece of ground, absolutely outrageous. I mean, it was way out of the ballpark, but he knew Abraham was a pilgrim. He had no bargaining power. He knew Abraham was wealthy, he knew Abraham's wife was dead, and he really didn't have many options, so he throws out this outrageous price. Typically what would be done, is Abraham then would come back with a counter offer, and back and forth they'd go, until they settled. So he threw out this dream price. Abraham pulls out his checkbook and signs the check. That's it.

Abraham, by faith, believed that the land upon which they were standing would one day be theirs, because God promised. It would have been very easy to take Sarah back to Ur and have her buried there. She had plenty of family back there, but by faith, he wanted her buried in what would become their land, and so he would spare no earthly expense to make sure that that happened. In a sense, you can almost imagine Ephron's eyes bugging out, as Abraham writes him a check, and he probably would have bragged to all his friends and family what Abraham paid for that goofy piece of land. But in the process, it would be sealed for generations to come, that that land belonged to Abraham. He bought it. That deal would have been remembered for a long time by those witnesses. Abraham was absolutely determined, by faith, to bury Sarah in the middle of what would be their land one day. She died, having never realized, that he will die, without ever having realized, that promise. He would be buried in that cave. Isaac will be buried in that cave. Rebecca will be buried in that cave. Jacob will be buried in that

cave. Leah will be buried in that cave. Only by that time, it will be their land, their possession, and that burial site will be right in the heart of the Land of Promise.

It's interesting to notice the last few verses. There is a great emphasis on the fact that this land now belonged to Abraham, just this little piece of ground, but it was deeded over to him. You say, what's the point? The point is that Abraham, by faith, was absolutely determined to get this burial site in the middle of the land that one day would be theirs, and so that's what he did.

Have you ever thought about how much we just simply must believe, by faith? Just like Abraham, Abraham was made a promise. Sixty-seven years it was not realized. It wouldn't be realized in his lifetime, but he believed that God tells the truth, and so he acted upon that. Every week, we talk about truth as it relates to God, but it's truth, you have to take by faith. I can't prove it to you. You just have to either believe God tells the truth or he doesn't. When we talk about living for that which is eternal, that's what we're talking about. We're talking about living for that which God promises to be true, but that's up against that which is concrete, which I can hold, I can possess, I can own, I can touch, I can feel. I know what I'm getting, but a person of faith has to believe there's something beyond that.

A while back, I read an article about a 15-year-old Muslim boy who was martyred for his faith. As I read this, just think about how this young teenage boy was so determined to believe, by faith, that there was an eternal reality greater than the reality of this world.

"In a city in North Africa, a powerful Emir, a Muslim political and religious leader, watched as officials executed his 15-year-old son at his express orders. Hassan was only 15 years old when he died a martyr's death for publicly professing his faith in Christ. He died as his father watched and his mother sobbed uncontrollably, pleading for his life. Yet Hassan had counted the cost of following Christ, and was ready to be martyred for his faith. According to Islam's Law of apostasy, anyone who leaves the faith must be killed. In fact, Muslims are taught that if you kill such a person, you yourself are assured of entering paradise, as well as your victim.

"Hassan knew all this, yet one day he heard about a man named Jesus Christ, and his life was changed forever. Hassan knew he faced certain death all the more so, because of his father's position. As the son of a Muslim Emir, he was expected to be a model citizen and a devout Muslim. Nevertheless, with the truth of the Gospel burning deep within him, he courageously announced to his entire family that he had trusted Jesus as his Savior. Hassan's father was outraged. He commanded his son to renounce Jesus under the penalty of death. Hassan was brought before a council of elders in a crowd of witnesses to give his reply. To everyone's shock, Assan once again confirmed his belief in Christ, and stood ready to die for his faith. A Christian worker reported, Assan was brought before the crowd, members of the council and his father, and there he was slaughtered like a sheep. He was beheaded in the presence of all those in the Emir's Palace. Now, Hassan is in the presence of his Lord, destined to receive a martyr's crown."

But how do we know that? How do we know that's true? How do we know he didn't die for nothing? We take it by faith. It is impressive that this 15-year-old boy with a very limited amount of theology believed that God tells the truth, to the extent, that he was willing to die for what he believed was eternal.

I talked to Randy and Cathy Harris, two of our missionaries. Randy said, this is our last week here. We're packing up the family, we're headed to Macedonia, to live among the Gypsies. And then he said, I have to tell you, what we're doing is absolutely crazy. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, he's right. If there is no such thing as that, which is eternal, what they're doing is really foolish.

Couple of weeks ago I had lunch with Glen Ashcraft. Glen and Sue have been missionaries in Spain for years. In about a month and a half, they're going back, and we talked about all the things that they were leaving behind, for the sake of the call. In their case, it isn't material stuff. What they miss is this, a community of believers. We have a 100 things that you could send your children, your teenagers too, to build them up in their walk with God. They don't have any. We every week experience this kind of community and support and worship. They don't have any of this. That's what they're going to miss. They're going out alone, and if it wasn't for the fact that what they're doing is eternal, they wouldn't go.

I remember always wondering something about my grandfather. He was a very hard worker, he was a very capable man, he was a good leader. And I always wondered why he didn't advance in the railroad, always worked the same job, always worked the night shift, until he retired. So one time, I finally asked him. He said, well, you know, I was offered many promotions along the way, but what I really wanted to give my life to, was building Maranatha camp and building the church in North Platte. And the best way to do that, was to keep the job, work at night, so I could do that during the day. He gave up a lot of what this world has to offer, in order to invest in that, which is eternal. He's been in heaven now for several years, and I bet he has never regretted that choice.

Every day we make the choice as to whether we're going to live for that, which is eternal, or that, which is temporal. The stuff of this world, it cries out for our attention. It's in our face every day and it's very easy to live for that. It's concrete, it's real, I hold it, I possess it. Therefore, it often gets my attention, but it will come and it will go, and at the end of our life, we will realize that we wasted our life away, unless we invested in that which is eternal.

We can reach out and we can grab what this world offers and we can hold onto it. That's a pretty sure deal, but it will come and it will go, and it will be a waste. Or we can believe by faith that what God said is true, and we'll trade in the things of this world for that which is eternal, and we'll live our lives differently from the rest of the world. It's the decision that people of faith make intentionally every day.

Cara: Thanks Bryan, for reminding us how important it is to live out what we believe. You gave us some really beautiful examples of people who have made tremendous sacrifices, in order to live for the kingdom. God calls each of us to this sacrificial life, even ordinary Joes, so to speak. So could you talk some more about that?

Bryan: Yeah. So in the message, I talked about a couple of friends that were missionaries. A lot of people would think that's kind of crazy to do that with your life. But I also talked about my grandfather. He was about as ordinary a Joe as they come - quiet, unassuming. He was a builder, liked to work with his hands. But God used him in amazing ways, a machinist for the railroad. But at the end of the day, we're all really ordinary Joes. So it's a question of what do I have? What has God given me and what do I do with it? How do I be faithful with what I've been given?

One of the great moments I love in David's life is when they're moving the Ark of the Covenant. And David wants to make a sacrifice and he needs a piece of ground to do it on. And the person that owns the piece of ground wants to give it to him. And David insists on paying for it. And then he says, I will not give to God that which costs me nothing. And I think about that all the time. What does this cost me? Our brothers and sisters around the world, it will cost them a lot to declare themselves to be Christ followers. What is it costing me? And I think we all need to wrestle with that question.

Cara: Right? And this includes everybody. So someone not thinking they're capable, of evangelizing or whatever, not leaving it up to somebody else.

Bryan: Right? You can't be faithful with something you don't have. So what do you have? [Right.] And what does it mean to be faithful with that today? But it is supposed to be sacrificial. That's the point.

Arnie: So you know, negotiations are a regular part of any business. And I used to work in Israel and those people love to negotiate. And I loved hearing about the bartering process that Abraham went through, way back when, to get this small burial site for Sara. And in the end, he paid a fortune for this little piece of land. This is so cool because it's historical fact, but it's also a pretty powerful metaphor, isn't it?

Bryan: Yeah. So it's literal. He actually did buy a piece of ground, but even Abraham understood that it wasn't ultimately about a piece of ground. It was about a greater promise. So Hebrews 11 tells us that Abraham and Sarah were looking for a better city, whose builder and architect was God. So we're not claiming pieces of ground today. We believe that God is going to deliver us to the Promised Land, which is everything our soul longs for today.

Cara: So Bryan, Abraham and Sarah's decisions, good and bad, affected pretty much everybody, every generation that followed them. That makes me think of those decisions I'm making, and how that's impacting my kids, for someone listening, grandkids and the ministries that I serve in.

Bryan: Sure. So I think about that all the time. Many have gone before us, and we build on what they have done, and I think we respect that, and then need to do our part. I have what I sometimes refer to as the funeral perspective, and that is, it's uncanny when you meet with families to prepare a funeral, they are so dialed into what matters. They're really clear what they want to talk about, what they want to emphasize. It's like in those moments there's clarity about what matters and that's part of our legacy. What did we live for? So the reality is for good or for bad, it is going to be passed on to the next generation. But one of the things I think is really encouraging is - so people would say to me, you have such a godly heritage. Well, my grandfather came to Christ and then my dad and then me. So you're just talking about three generations. So it's entirely possible before you die, the effect of your life has affected your kids and their kids, that people would say to your grandkids, what an amazing godly heritage you have. So it can happen even within your lifetime, which I find really compelling.

Cara: Right. I'm the first.

Arnie: Congratulations.

Cara: Thanks.

Bryan: Yeah, I think it is thanks, because you think it's hundreds of years, and it's like, someone will be saying to your grandkids, what a godly heritage you have.

Cara: Well, and then, you know, I was able to talk to my mom and my mom came to Christ, and then I just spoke this last summer at my grandma's assisted living center and told them, it's not over yet. So, anyway, it's pretty neat how God works.