

# Buying the Cave at Machpelah as Sarah's Tomb (Genesis 23)

Grace Chapel September 30, 2009 Dr. John Niemelä

## INTRODUCTION

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Hittites

### NEW EXPOSITION

**(23:1–2) Sarah died at age 127 in Hebron, in the land of Canaan & Abraham mourned**

Kirjath Arba was an old name for Hebron

Abraham was 137. Isaac was 37.

**(23:3) Abraham stood up from before his deceased one (Sarah) and spoke to the sons of Heth (e.g., Hittites)**

Heth = חֶתִּי (cf. Genesis 10:15) Hittites (cf. Gen 15:20) = חִתִּי (Hittî)

Archeological evidence shows that Hittites had settled around Hebron by that time

Significance of Abraham standing up (*qāṣm*): cf. verses 7 and 17

**(23:4) He said that he was a foreign sojourner (not a landowner), but wished to buy a burial plot from them to bury Sarah in a secluded spot (out of sight)**

*Give* has a broader semantic range than *gift*, in the biblical languages and in English.

Compensated transfer	Uncompensated transfer
<i>Give</i>	<i>Give</i>
	<i>Gift</i>

Neither Abraham nor the sons of Heth conceived of the cave as a gift.

Note: Usually, only tribal members could own tribal land. By purchasing it at full price, Abraham claimed the burial site forever, even though it was in a Hittite area.

**(23:5–6) The sons of Heth said that he was a mighty prince among them, so he was free to select any of their finest burial places; none would be off limits**

**(23:7–9) Abraham stood & bowed to the sons of Heth, requesting to meet with Ephron (Zohar's son) to buy the Machpelah cave (at an end of his field) at full price for a tomb**

**(23:10–11) Ephron answered Abraham before all the Hittites at the city gate that he indeed would sell both the cave & the field, so Abraham could bury the deceased (Sarah)**

**(23:12–13) Abraham bowed before the people of the land and told him that, if Ephron was willing to sell both cave and field, Abraham was willing to purchase them to bury the deceased (Sarah)**

**(23:14–15) Ephron set the price at 400 silver shekels, calling it a bargain, so Abraham should (buy it and) bury the deceased (Sarah)**

Ephron asked \$3000.00, an exorbitant price. In that economy, the asking price was.

**(23:16) Abraham weighed out for Ephron 400 shekels (by the merchants' standard) in the presence of the sons of Heth**

**(23:17–18) The whole field, including the cave and the trees (that were within the boundary markers) was deeded to Abraham before all of the people at the gate**

**(23:19–20) Abraham buried Sarah in the cave near Mamre (Hebron) in the land of Canaan, which had been deeded over to him**

This is tomb for Abraham (Gen 25:9), Isaac, Rebekah, Leah (Gen 49:29–31) & Jacob (50:13)  
Joseph's bones also were taken from Egypt & buried elsewhere in Israel (Josh 24:32)

## CONCLUSION