

LESSON 24 Devotional

Real Estate Deal Done Right

Sara, wife of Abraham, the Patriarch of our Faith, died at Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan at the age of 127 years. Even though he was deep in grief, Abraham engaged in an exemplary negotiation to buy a burial plot for her.

The story is in Genesis 23.

The Death of Sarah

Sarah lived to be a hundred and twenty-seven years old. ² She died at Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her.

³ Then Abraham rose from beside his dead wife and spoke to the Hittites. He said, ⁴ "I am a foreigner and stranger among you. Sell me some property for a burial site here so I can bury my dead."

⁵ The Hittites replied to Abraham, ⁶ "Sir, listen to us. You are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will refuse you his tomb for burying your dead."

⁷ Then Abraham rose and bowed down before the people of the land, the Hittites. ⁸ He said to them, "If you are willing to let me bury my dead, then listen to me and intercede with Ephron son of Zohar on my behalf ⁹ so he will sell me the cave of Machpelah, which belongs to him and is at the end of his field. Ask him to sell it to me for the full price as a burial site among you."

¹⁰ Ephron the Hittite was sitting among his people and he replied to Abraham in the hearing of all the Hittites who had come to the gate of his city. ¹¹ "No, my lord," he said. "Listen to me; I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead."

¹² Again Abraham bowed down before the people of the land ¹³ and he said to Ephron in their hearing, “Listen to me, if you will. I will pay the price of the field. Accept it from me so I can bury my dead there.”

¹⁴ Ephron answered Abraham, ¹⁵ “Listen to me, my lord; the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver, but what is that between you and me? Bury your dead.”

¹⁶ Abraham agreed to Ephron’s terms and weighed out for him the price he had named in the hearing of the Hittites: four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weight current among the merchants.

¹⁷ So Ephron’s field in Machpelah near Mamre—both the field and the cave in it, and all the trees within the borders of the field—was deeded ¹⁸ to Abraham as his property in the presence of all the Hittites who had come to the gate of the city. ¹⁹ Afterward Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre (which is at Hebron) in the land of Canaan. ²⁰ So the field and the cave in it were deeded to Abraham by the Hittites as a burial site.

Here we have Abraham negotiating and contracting with pagans (Hittites), and he delivers a perfect lesson on how we, as Christians in the 21st Century, need to also deal with unbelievers.

First, Abraham conducts the negotiations openly and honestly in the presence of witnesses, taking due care for the needs of both himself and the seller. The property in question is clearly identified, and Abraham’s intended use as a burial site is mentioned several times.

The dialogue of the negotiation is overtly clear, socially proper, and transparent. It takes place at the gate of the city where business was done in public. Abraham initiates the request for a real-estate transaction. The local Hittites freely offer a choice tomb. Abraham demurs, asking them to contact a certain owner of a field with a cave appropriate for a burial site so that he could buy it for the “full price.”

Ephron, the owner, overheard the request and offered the field as a gift. Because this would not have resulted in Abraham having permanent claim, he politely offered to pay market value for it. Contrary to the staged bargaining that was typical of business transactions ([Prov. 20:14](#)), Abraham immediately agreed to Ephron’s price and paid it “according to the weights current among the merchants.”

Purchasing this burial site was an important step in that it was the first establishment of ownership in the Promised Land by God’s chosen people. Ultimately Abraham himself, as well as Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Leah were also buried in the tomb.

In this matter, Abraham’s actions modeled core values of integrity, transparency, and business acumen.

- He honored his wife by mourning and properly caring for her remains.
- He understood his status in the land and treated its long-term residents with respect.
- He transacted business openly and honestly, doing so in front of witnesses.
- He communicated clearly.
- He was sensitive to the negotiating process and politely avoided accepting the land as a gift.
- He swiftly paid the agreed amount.
- He used the site only for the purpose he stated during the negotiations.

He thus maintained good relationships with everyone involved.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you believe Abraham entered into a contractual agreement?

What part do you believe God played in this agreement?

2. Why do you think Abraham refused to accept land as a gift? What might have been the consequences had he accepted it as a gift?

How do you believe Abraham, God, and Abraham’s family might have felt if he had accepted it as a gift?

3. How would a transaction such as this happen today in our secular environment?

4. Did the Hittites (and other unbelievers) recognize the quality of the contractual execution by Abraham?

Could it have made an impact in their respect for Abraham and his God?

5. What lessons can we begin using in our dealings with unbelievers in all our negotiations and contracts?
