“Abraham and the Cave of Machpelah”

(A Testimony Above Reproach)

Genesis 23

9/27/1998

Introduction:

* *In Abraham’s legal transaction with the sons of Heth and Ephron the Hittite over the cave of Machpelah, we see in Abraham a man who had* **a <u>good testimony</u> among the heathen.**

I. ***Abraham had a testimony of…***
Not having his roots too firmly imbedded in the soil of this world (v.3-4)
(He was a “stranger and sojourner” on earth)

II. ***Abraham had a testimony of…***
<u>Honor & dignity</u> making him a man <u>worthy of respect</u> (v.5-6)
(He was viewed as a “mighty prince”)

III. ***Abraham had a testimony of…***
<u>Social graciousness</u> in his dealings with others (v.7-9)

IV. ***Abraham had a testimony of…***
<u>Prudent financial integrity</u> (v.10-18)

A. He would not receive <u>charity</u> from the heathen (v.10-15)

B. He would not make secret, shady, “under the table” transactions with the heathen (v.16-18)

Concl. V.19-20

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Introduction:

In this somewhat bland dialogue and legal transaction between Abraham and the sons of Heth, a very applicable point rises to the surface: This passage depicts Abraham's testimony before these heathen people.

Although Abraham did not own any property in Canaan land, he had something of greater value – he had a reputation that was above reproach. "A good name" is preferred above riches!

* *In Abraham's legal transaction with the sons of Heth and Ephron the Hittite over the cave of Machpelah, we see in Abraham a man who had* **a good testimony among the heathen.**

I. ***Abraham had a testimony of…***
Not having his roots too firmly imbedded in the soil of this world (v.3-4)
(He was a "stranger and sojourner" on earth)

v. 3
We take so much for granted, including the relative ease of making funeral arrangements. Abraham, however, did not have a funeral home that he could call to make all the arrangements for the burial for him. This he would have to do for himself. No sooner had he mourned for his wife, Sarah, then he had to quickly find a burial cave for her (as dead bodies would quickly decay and decompose in that hot climate).

v. 4
"A **"stranger"** was a resident alien with some footing in the community but restricted rights." (Kidner, p. 145).

"I am a stranger and sojourner" – Although he and his descendents were promised the land of Canaan by God, Abraham did not own any real estate in Canaan. He was a traveling foreigner to that land, who, although he was wealthy, did not own any property.

Hebrews 11:13-16

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. [14] For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. [15] And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. [16] But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

Though waiting on the Lord is very hard to do, true faith enables one to wait for the fulfillment of God's promises in God's time (Wiersbe, p. 318).

Though God with an oath promised the land of Canaan to Abraham (Gen. 15:7-18), Abraham, by faith, had his eyes on an eternal, heavenly city.

Dr. George Morrison, a great Scottish preacher, once said, "The important thing is not what we live in, but what we look for." (Wiersbe, p. 319).

"Set your affection on things above . . ." (SEE: Col. 3:1ff)

"Live in the future tense" (Phil. 3:20-21)

An important lesson emerges from the death of Sarah and the acquisition of a burial cave in Hebron. The lesson is this: "God's promises are not exhausted in this lifetime" (Ross, p. 412).

"Give me a possession" – It is interesting that Abraham has a temporal need that can only be met by his going to the heathen and asking help of them.

Sometimes we, too, must trust God to work in the hearts of those who do not even know the Lord to help meet a tangible or material need that we may have.

At times like that, we too must open our mouths and ask for help. Often "we have not" because we simply "ask not."

II. ***Abraham had a testimony of…***
<u>Honor & dignity</u> making him a man <u>worthy of respect</u> (v.5-6)
(He was viewed as a "mighty prince")

v. 5
"The children of Heth" – were Hittites (cp. V. 10) who were descendents of Noah's son Ham and grandson Canaan (Gen. 10:15) – a people who were living under the curse of Canaan. Whereas Abraham was of the blessed line of Shem.

v. 6
Here we see most clearly one feature about Abraham that really shines in this chapter, and that was the <u>testimony</u> he had before the heathen.

It is very evident that he was very much <u>respected</u> by his neighbors.

When addressing him, they refer to him as **"lord,"** which is a term of respect. They also acknowledge him as a **"mighty prince among us."**

It was not merely his vast wealth that would have impressed the Hittites, but his <u>character</u> (as was evident in his past heroic military exploits when he rescued those who were taken captive at Sodom – Gen. 14).

They also were no doubt impressed with his <u>spirituality</u>, for all would come to know him as a "prophet of God" (Gen. 20:7) (a man who had power with God, whose prayers were heard).

"In the choice of our sepulchres, bury thy dead" – This man had such an outstanding testimony that they offered Abraham the <u>best</u> they had.

They also invite him to bury Sarah with the dead bodies of their people. This offer, however, would be unacceptable to Abraham. Such a co-mingling and a blurring of the lines of separation and Godly distinction (cp. Gen. 24:3) would be unacceptable to the man of God.

III. ***Abraham had a testimony of…***
<u>Social graciousness</u> in his dealings with others (v.7-9)

v. 7
Out of a grateful heard that acknowledge their kind offer, Abraham graciously and respectfully bows himself before the Hittites.

If we want to go places in life, we too must learn how to deal with people with dignity and respect. We would be wise to ask God to help us with our social graces, so that we would know how to communicate in a dignified manner. It's not, "Yo, man, that's cool, let's cut the deal." Etc.

IV. ***Abraham had a testimony of…***
<u>Prudent financial integrity</u> (v.10-18)

A. He would not receive <u>charity</u> from the heathen (v.10-15)

v. 11
"The field give I thee" – Had Abraham accepted the field as a gift, he might have:

1) <u>Insulted</u> Ephron (such would have gone contrary to the bargaining customs of the day)

2) <u>Obligated</u> Abraham to Ephron

3) <u>Risked the loss</u> of the property (in the future)

--Honest ownership has its privileges.

v. 12
Again, Abraham displays gracious thanks in bowing himself.

v. 13 [cp. V. 9]
"For as much money as it is worth" – Abraham never asked the <u>world</u> for charitable contributions. He did not have a "welfare" mentality. He did not connive for "free hand outs." He did not extend the "beggar's hand." He was willing to pay full price.

[Note: The financial support of any bonified ministry will not involve an exploitation of the riches of the heathen. Our ministries should not be sustained by the giving of unbelievers.

"I will give money" – Despite Ephron's customary gracious offer, again Abraham insistently reiterates his desire to pay for the land.

This is not the first time Abraham refused to take something for nothing from the hands of pagans (cp. Gen. 14:21-24).

v. 15
Four hundred shekels of silver, calculated perhaps at about half-ounce per shekel would have been 12 ½ pounds of silver. That would have been a substantial amount of money for the land at that time.

B. He would not make secret, shady, "under the table" transactions with the heathen (v.16-18)

Abraham wisely has witnesses attest to the transaction, so no one could later accuse him falsely.

Abraham again takes wise steps to uphold his testimony of honesty and financial integrity.

There would be nothing shady or "under the table" with Abraham. Everything was honest, open, and above board!

Concl. V.19-20

v. 19
This burial cave would not only be the place for Sarah's burial, but also for Abraham, Isaac, and Rebekah, and Jacob and Leah (25:9; 49:31; 50:13).

"The site of the cave has been identified with two caves, one above the other, beneath the great mosque in the center of modern Hebron" (Ryrie note).

No doubt Abraham wanted his wife buried in the land of Canaan (rather than embalming her and bringing her back to the place of her birth – Ur of the Chaldees) because of the promises God gave to Abraham regarding this land.

Abraham had every intention of staying right where God put him and in the place God had promised him. He (like Joseph, who requested that his bones be brought to Canaan land) believed in a resurrection and wanted to be resurrected in the land of promise when that great event took place. (Gen. 50:24-25).

Hebrews 11:22

By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.

> By faith Joseph knew that when the 400 years of Israel's sojourn in Egypt had ended that they would exit and go into the promised land.

Having a good testimony before the world is vital to:

1) Honoring God's holy reputation and not profaning it.

> Ezekiel 36:20
> And when they entered unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned my holy name, when they said to them, These are the people of the Lord, and are gone forth out of his land.

2) Upholding God's high standards of spiritual leadership

> 1 Tim. 3:7
> Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

3) Maintaining a lasting influence in the world as "salt and light"

At the moment of salvation, God delivers us out of the domain of darkness, and transfers us into the Kingdom of His dear Son (Col. 1:13). We become children of light (Eph. 5:8).

"By definition, an influence must be <u>different</u> from that which it influences" (MacArthur, p. 240).

Those who are worldly cannot influence the world.

God saved us to be different. I Peter 2:9 - "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light"

We are <u>not</u> to <u>reflect</u> the world (I Jn. 2:15) but to <u>impact</u> it!!

Jesus prayed: "I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. . . as Thou didst send me into the world, I also have sent them into the world" (Jn. 17:15-16, 18)

What kind of <u>influence</u> will you be in this world?

"No human being can come into this world without increasing or diminishing the sum total of human happiness, not only of the present but of every subsequent age of humanity. No one can detach himself from this connection. There is no sequestered spot in the universe, no dark niche along the disc of nonexistence to which he can retreat from his relations with others, where he can withdraw the influence of his existence upon the moral destiny of the world. Everywhere his presence or absence will be felt. Everywhere he will have companions who will be better or worse because of him. It is an old saying, and one of the fearful and fathomless statements of import, that we are forming characters for eternity. Forming characters? Whose? Our own or others? Both." (Elihu Burrit, cited by MacArthur, p. 236)

"Ye" - Plural. Every disciple of Christ is to be salt and light.

By stating that we are salt and light in the world, Jesus implies that the world needs salt and light.

"The world needs salt because it is corrupt and it needs light because it is dark" (MacArthur, p. 237)

"The Biblical world view is that the world is corrupted and decayed, that it is dark and darkening" (MacArthur, p. 237)

"Evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived" (II Tim. 3:13)

"A college student once reported that his professor told the class that marriage was on the decline because man was evolving to a higher level. Marriage was something that man needed only at the lower stages of his evolutionary development. Now that man had ascended farther up the evolutionary scale, marriage was falling off just as his prehensile tail had done millions of years ago" (MacArthur, p. 238)

It is significant that believers are called "salt" and "light" after the admonition regarding "persecution for righteousness sake" (V. 10-12).

Because of the distinctiveness of "salt and light," because salt stings and light exposes the darkness, persecution will often accompany such a lifestyle which is a rebuke to unrighteousness.

***Make an impact on this world!**
How?

1. **Don't lose your savor!**
   (The world needs to taste the pungency of Christianity)
   A Christian who loses his/her distinctive, sharp, pure, invigorating savor is useless to God! Satan would love for you to lose your effectiveness, usefulness, and fruitfulness. His goal is to use his people (unbelievers) to dilute or eradicate the pungency of God's people so that they become rubble under the shoes of the world.

2. Don't hide your light!
(The world needs to see the brilliancy of Christianity)

Just as the moon has no light of itself but is a reflector of the sun, so the Christian has no light of himself, but is a reflector of the Son of God.

It does matter what people think of you!

You are a representative for Christ! (II Cor. 5:20)

It is not merely for our sake but for the sake (cause) of Jesus Christ that we must guard our lives! It is for the sake of others!

God is concerned about His holy reputation (Ezek. 20:9, 14, 22, 39, 44; 36:23)

***Realize the importance of a good reputation! Have a shining testimony!**

1. A Good Reputation is more valuable than Great Riches (Prov. 22:1)
(The value of a good testimony)

Proverbs 22:1
A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.

Money can buy almost anything in this world, except a good reputation.

Eccles. 7:1 - "A good name is better than precious ointment."

No perfume can cover up ungodly character.

2. A Good Reputation is gained by Godly Actions (20:11) and Associations (31:23)
(The keys to a good testimony)
Proverbs 20:11
Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right.

Proverbs 31:23
Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.

3. A Good Reputation can be ruined by just a little folly (Eccl. 10:1)

(The ruin of a good testimony)

Eccles. 10:1
Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour.

This is why pastors must be "blameless" (I Tim. 3; Titus 1)
EX: Jimmy Swaggert
Christians do live in a glass house before the watching eyes of the world.
The world is watching, looking for flaws, cracks, inconsistencies, hypocrisy, skeletons, etc.

I believe some are saddened when they do see the downfall of a Christian, because they are looking to see if real change is possible.

4. A Good Reputation is vital to an effective witness (Titus 2:5, 8, 10, 11-15)
(The reason for a good testimony)

Titus 2:11-15 - Because the grace of God is available to all men, we are responsible to adorn the grace of God!

How? By being responsible in 3 areas of our life:

a. An Inward Purity (v. 12a)
b. An Outward Duty (v. 12b, 14)
c. An Upward Expectancy (v. 13)

5. A Good Reputation will result in lasting sweet memories (Prov. 10:7)
(The remembrance of a good testimony)

Proverbs 10:7
The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot.

Every day we touch the lives of others; many of whom we will never ever rub shoulders with again. What mark do you make on their lives?

How will your children remember you?

How will you be remembered when you are gone? I want the Devil to be glad.

What epitaph will be written on your tombstone?