

Genesis, Part 22

Last session we studied the subject of Abraham being called by God to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering. Abraham was a man of faith, and true faith will always be tested. God had promised Abraham many descendants, and this promise could not be fulfilled unless Isaac lived or God raised him from the dead. Abraham knew that God would not lie, so he rested in His unchanging Word and was prepared to offer his only son to God – right up to the point where the knife hovered over the throat of Isaac. At that last moment, God stayed Abraham’s hand and supplied a ram to take Isaac’s place.

God in His omniscience already knew what was in Abraham’s heart. The test was more for Abraham to fully realize the faithfulness of God, that He was true to His word. More importantly, though not a testimony to God, Abraham’s “works” demonstrating his faith stand throughout the ages as a testimony to mankind of the truthfulness of God and the faith of Father Abraham.

James 2:21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?

That word translated as “justified” is the Greek *dikaioo* /dik·ah·yo·o/ which means to show, exhibit, evince, to be righteous. Abraham’s demonstration of his faith evidenced his righteousness as a witness for all mankind to see.

Sarah’s Death

We will now continue our study on a sad note, the death of Abraham’s beloved wife Sarah.

Genesis 23:1 Sarah lived 127 years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. ² And Sarah died at Kiriath-Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. ³ And Abraham rose up from before his dead and said to the Hittites, ⁴ “I am a sojourner and foreigner among you; give me property among you for a burying place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.”

As we begin this segment of our story, we are about five years past the sacrifice of Isaac we looked at in the last chapter. Abraham was living at Kiriath-Arba (Hebron) when his wife died. Thus, it would appear that he had moved northward again after his lengthy sojourn in the land of the Philistines. Sarah died at the age of 127, and Isaac was 37 at the time. After mourning for his wife at Hebron (23:2) Abraham seeks a place to bury his beloved wife. The narrator emphasizes the fact that she died *in the land of Canaan*. The irony is that Abraham must buy a place to bury his wife in the land that God has given him. Abraham was determined to own a piece of the promised land before he died to bury his wife there. The lengthy negotiations described here show him using his need for a grave for Sarah to establish ownership in the land.

“And Abraham rose up from before his dead...” (v. 3). The word “rose” is *quwm /koom/* and it simply means to stand up. He concluded his deep mourning, stood up, and went to seek a place to bury his wife from the Hittites who occupied the land then. As was the custom, the transaction for the land took place at the city gate where the city elders gathered to conduct business and settle disputes.

Abraham describes himself as a “sojourner and foreigner” among them, acknowledging that he had no ownership rights, and asks for a place to bury Sarah. The owners of the cave that Abraham was interested in were Hittites. The great Hittite Empire (Josh. 1:4) never extended down this far, and the Hittite's Semitic names here make it unlikely that they had any connection with the Hittites of Asia Minor and were just another ethnic group among many in Canaan. It is, however, possible that pockets of Hittites have settled here and kept their customs even though they spoke a Semitic language.

Gen 23:5 The Hittites answered Abraham, ⁶ “Hear us, my lord; you are a prince of God among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will withhold from you his tomb to hinder you from burying your dead.” ⁷ Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land. ⁸ And he said to them, “If you are willing that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me and entreat for me Ephron the son of Zohar, ⁹ that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he owns; it is at the

end of his field. For the full price let him give it to me in your presence as property for a burying place.”

¹⁰ Now Ephron was sitting among the Hittites, and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, of all who went in at the gate of his city, ¹¹ “No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. In the sight of the sons of my people I give it to you. Bury your dead.” ¹² Then Abraham bowed down before the people of the land. ¹³ And he said to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, “But if you will, hear me: I give the price of the field. Accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there.” ¹⁴ Ephron answered Abraham, ¹⁵ “My lord, listen to me: a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between you and me? Bury your dead.” ¹⁶ Abraham listened to Ephron, and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver that he had named in the hearing of the Hittites, four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weights current among the merchants.

¹⁷ So the field of Ephron in Machpelah, which was to the east of Mamre, the field with the cave that was in it and all the trees that were in the field, throughout its whole area, was made over ¹⁸ to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the Hittites, 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 of Machpelah east of Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. ²⁰ The field and the cave that is in it were made over to Abraham as property for a burying place by the Hittites.

Abraham was held in high regard by the people living around him. They described him as “a mighty prince among us”. To Abraham’s request, they said that they would not withhold from him even the choicest of the burial places (23:4–6). Abraham acknowledged the graciousness of his Hittite neighbors. He made it clear that he wished to buy a plot rather than accept the offer to use a Hittite burial ground.

Abraham was interested in the cave called Machpelah which was situated at the end of Ephron’s field. In this legal transaction, Abraham wanted to purchase only the cave owned by Ephron (23:9), but Ephron wanted to sell the whole field. When Ephron said he would “give” the field and the cave (three times in v. 11), he did not mean it was free. This was Bedouin bargaining—giving for giving. Though Abraham did not want the whole

field, he was willing to take it (vv. 12–13), at a high price of 400 shekels of silver to get the cave (vv. 15–16). The transaction was then finalized in the presence of all the Hittites at the city gate. Hittite law codes may explain why Ephron was insisting on the sale of the entire field. If Abraham owned the whole field, he would have to assume the Hittite tax (called *ilku*) obligations.

In this cave was buried not only Sarah but later also Abraham (25:9), Isaac and his wife Rebekah, as well as Jacob and Leah (49:29–31; 50:13).

Why did he not take Sarah someplace else to bury her? One simple reason is that in that climate it was necessary to bury the dead as soon as possible. That was often done on the same day as the death. But more importantly, the reason she will be buried in Canaan is because their hope for the future is there. It was important then where people buried their dead; burial was to be done in their native land. Thus with burying Sarah there, there was no going back to the place they had come from. Though Abraham was an alien and a stranger among the people (23:4), his hope was in the land. The point of this event was to ensure that the cave and field would be Abraham's possession. Abraham wanted to be buried in the land so that when the resurrection came, they would be raised in that land. This is their earthly hope.

In the Upper Room, our Lord said to His disciples who were schooled in the Old Testament and who had an Old Testament hope.

John 14:1 “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ²In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

Jesus was speaking of the New Jerusalem, the eternal abode of the Church. *This teaching was brand new to the disciples.* However, God never told Abraham that He would take him away from this earth. Rather, he kept telling them throughout the ages that, “I'm going to give you this land to occupy forever.” That is why Abraham wanted Sarah buried in that land.

When Abraham bought this cave, he was renouncing Paddan Aram, that is, northwest Mesopotamia. This had just recently been indirectly brought to the reader's attention back in Genesis 22:20–24 by mentioning the relatives of Abraham who remained in Mesopotamia (Gen 11:27–31).

Canaan was now Abraham's new native land. But interestingly, the only part of the Promised Land Abraham himself ever received he bought, and that was this burial cave. This first property of the patriarchs—a cave—bound them to the Promised Land. This was a real “occupation” of the land. There would never be a return to Mesopotamia. Later patriarchs would also die and be buried with their ancestors in Canaan.

Abraham knew he could not exhaust God's promise, so he made plans for the future. By buying the land for his dead, he was forced to realize that God's promises do not end with this life. God will do far more than He has done in this life, which is the hope of all who die in faith.

The promise of the land is one of the major themes in Genesis. But so is death. Death entered by sin and ruined the race. The deaths of patriarchs and saints are brutal reminders that people are sinners. Death brings out mourning. But death in this passage was also a basis for hope. In life, the patriarchs were sojourners – temporary residents, but in death, they were heirs of the promise and “occupied” the land.

The patriarchs and others died, not receiving the promises; yet they died in faith.

Heb 11:39 And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised

It was not God's plan to give them the promised rest without the participation of New Testament believers. A Sabbath rest yet remains, yet those who believe enter into it even now and will fully realize it in the future.

Heb. 4:8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. ⁹ So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the

people of God, ¹⁰ for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

The point is that God's promises to those in the faith are not exhausted in this life. As Abraham in hope bought a grave site in the land, believers today have a hope beyond this life. The time of death—when one's natural inclination is to mourn as the world mourns—should be the time of a believer's greatest demonstration of faith, for the recipient of God's promises has a hope beyond the grave. Jesus Himself referred to Abraham when discussing the resurrection with the Sadducees.

Matt. 22:31 “And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: ³² ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.”

God's promises demand a resurrection!

The Doctrine of Physical Death

Death is a result of God's perfect timing and decision, and since our death is the decision of God, it is God's victory. Because God's wisdom is perfect, we must accept God's decision regarding the time, place, and manner of the death of someone we love, or of our death. God is the expert and knows best when and how we should die.

The divine decision regarding the believer's death includes the time, the manner, and the place of his death. Therefore, nothing can remove the believer from this life until God decides. In all matters of life and death, God's timing is important. Since God is perfect, His timing is perfect both in the life and the death of the believer. Neither historical nor natural disaster, neither warfare nor accident, neither disease, earthquake, flood, or hurricane can remove the believer apart from divine consent.

Apart from the Rapture generation, all believers will experience physical death. Some denominations teach that the believer enters “soul sleep,” like a state of “suspended animation” until the resurrection of the dead. The term “soul sleep” is not found in Scripture, however, the term “sleep” or

“asleep” is, but in the context of physical death. It does not refer to some suspended state of being in the “waiting room of eternity”. It is simply a euphemistic term describing death.

1 Thes 4:13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

There is no biblical support for soul sleep that implies some form of separation from the Lord with the soul asleep somewhere. The believer in death is “at home with the Lord”. His physical body is, however, described as “asleep.” as in the grave.

2 Cor 5:6 So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸ Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

Only two options are stated here:

1. At home in the body and away from the Lord – alive
2. Away from the body and at home with the Lord – dead

No third option of being in soul sleep.

What Happens After Death?

There are three “theories” of what happens to the believer at death.

- **Disembodied Spirit** – Since your glorified body is received at the resurrection (1 Cor 15:51-54 below), the believer is conscious as a disembodied spirit similar to angels who have no physical form.
- **Glorified Body** – The believer receives his glorified body at death.
- **Temporary Body** – The believer has a temporary body while waiting for their glorified body to be received at the resurrection of the “dead in Christ”. For the Church, that is at the rapture of the Church.

For me, the winner seems To be the last option: the believer receives a temporary body.

1 Cor 15:51 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality ...

The First Corinthians 15 passage pretty well sums it up. It is speaking of the rapture of the Church. Verse 51 tells us, that at the time of the rapture, we shall not all be asleep. That is we shall not all be dead when this happens, some will be alive. As for the dead in Christ, verse 52 tells us “The dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall **all** be changed.” That word translated as “changed” is *allasso* /al·**las**·so/ and it means to exchange one thing for another, to transform. Our perishable human bodies will be transformed into resurrection bodies. As this passage indicates, that does not happen for the dead believer until the rapture!

If the dead in Christ don't get their resurrection bodies until the rapture, and their dead mortal bodies have likely long rotted away to nothing in the grave or even been blown to vapor in some battlefield or industrial accident, where does their soul and spirit live until the resurrection? Regarding the long-rotted or disintegrated dead body, God is perfectly capable of collecting all the scattered elements of one's destroyed remains to transform them into a resurrection body, but that still begs the question: in what form of body do the dead in Christ live from death until the resurrection?

The answer is that we seem to get some sort of temporary body, a “tent” or temporary dwelling place until the resurrection.

2 Cor 5:1 For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our

heavenly dwelling, ³ if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

The first “tent” mentioned (v. 1) is our physical mortal body, our earthly home, but what happens if the “tent” that is our earthly home is destroyed? “We have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (v. 1). “For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, ³ if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked.” The “tent” here refers to some form of temporary body while we await our resurrection bodies to be granted at the rapture.

In 1 Corinthians 15:23, we see the order of the resurrections.

1 Cor 15:23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then comes the end,

First, Christ is resurrected, then “at his coming those who belong to Christ,” and that refers to the rapture and Church Age believers. Between death and “His coming” the deceased believers must live in what 1 Corinthians 5:2 is “this tent (in which) we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling.” Otherwise, we would be “unclothed” (v. 4). Why the wait? I don’t know. We will have to ask Christ when we get to Heaven.

Some commentators disagree with this interpretation. They say Paul had only two conditions in view since 2 Corinthians 4:16, the temporal and the eternal. The introduction of an intervening third condition is therefore unlikely. It seems clear from 5:4 that being in this tent and unclothed describes mortality while being clothed and possessing a heavenly dwelling depict immortality, without specifying any intervening stages.

That, however, does seem to conflict with 1 Corinthians 15:51-54, as explained above. It does seem obvious that we don’t receive our glorified bodies until Christ’s return (rapture), thus this calls for some form of interim body. I believe the Bible teaches that when a New Testament saint dies, he immediately enters into the presence of God (“to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord”). His (or her) earthly body remains in the

grave, awaiting the return of Christ and its resurrection and transformation. First Corinthians 15:53 describes the transaction as our “perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality” implying a change from one state to another state. As I understand it, when Christ returns to this earth again, we are only then united with our resurrected mortal body, which is changed into our glorified body, the “house not made with hands” (2 Cor 5:1). Furthermore, Philippians 3:21 below tells us Christ will “*transform* our lowly body to be like his glorious body.” “Transform” is *metaschematizo* /*met·askh·ay·mat·id·zo*/ which means to change the figure of, to transform, and is where we get our English word “metamorphosis”.

What will this body be like?

Phil 3:20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Phil 3:10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

The short answer is it will be just like the one that Christ has – just like it! Our imperishable bodies will no longer suffer from sickness and death, nor will they ever be subject to heat and cold or hunger and thirst. Our new bodies will be honorable in that they will not be shamed or shameful because of sin. When Adam and Eve sinned, the first thing they felt was shame because of their nakedness (Gen 3:6-7). Although the Bible doesn’t portray glorified bodies as being naked, but rather clothed in white garments. They will be pure and undefiled by sin.

Rev 3:4 Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. ⁵ The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life.

Rev 3:18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the

shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.

Our earthly bodies are “weak” in many ways. Not only are we subject to the natural laws of gravity and time/space, but we are weakened by sin and its temptations. Our glorified bodies will be empowered by the Spirit that owns us, and weakness will be no more.

Just as our earthly bodies are perfectly suited to life on earth, our resurrected bodies will be suited for life in eternity. We will have form and solidity to the touch. The risen Christ said in Luke ...

Luke 24:39 “See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

Clearly, this resurrection body can be felt, but it will be able to pass through walls and doors.

John 20:19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”
²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

The doors were locked, but “Jesus came and stood among them”. He must have passed through the locked door or the wall. Then in Luke’s description of the same scene, He asks for something to eat.

Luke 24:41 But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, “Have you any food here?” ⁴² So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. ⁴³ And He took *it* and ate in their presence.

Jesus takes food in His resurrection body. I can only conclude that we will be able to enjoy food, but will not be driven to it by necessity or fleshly desire.

The bodies we inherit will be like what God originally intended, rather than what we now abide in. Gone will be the infirmity, weakness, and sickness of our sinful flesh; rather, we will be glorified with Christ, and that glory will extend to the bodies we will inhabit. Our new bodies will no longer be “natural” bodies, subject to decay and death; we will live in “victory over sin and death,” won by Christ on our behalf.