

Dec 17, 2006 AM

THE DEATH OF THE MOTHER
GENESIS 22.20–23.20

Structure: (1) Genesis is arranged in “generations” sections. (2) Another way the texts are organized as well. This text, e.g., this section could be seen to run from 22.20–26.18. The “bookends” to the text concern the birth of twelve sons to two different non-seed-line men; i.e., Nahor and Ishmael. There are two parallel accounts of death: Sarah (23.1-20) and Abraham (25.7-11). And there are two related topics concerning the promised seed, Isaac, in chs. 24 and the first part of 25.

1. THE TWELVE SONS OF NAHOR (22.20-24)

“After these things”: ref. back to the offering up of Isaac.

“Why are the twelve sons of Nahor listed here, especially in some kind of connection to the sacrifice of Isaac?”

Possibilities: a. The text might be setting up a contrast between the prolific numbers of the non-seed lines and the one son of Abraham. The other nations out-number the promised seed.

b. After the death and resurrection of the seed, blessing–life, fruitfulness–will come to the world.

Note: 12 sons; indicates the foundation of a nation/city (cf. Gen 17 and Ishmael; Israel; Rev 21). The family of Nahor is “another nation,” not the priestly nation, but through Rebekah they will be incorporated into it.

Later with the Gentiles—who could be a part of the family generally before Christ but were not required to be a part of the priestly nation. The Gentiles are engrafted into the commonwealth of Israel (cf. Eph 2.11 ff.). This “making one new man” as Paul describes it happens after the death and resurrection of the seed.

c. This is also a preparation for a “new mother” with the ushering in of a new age. The old mother is about to die and a new mother will come from Abraham’s kin. Note again nation of Israel and the church in Christ.

Milcah, daughter of Haran: cf. 11.27ff.; daughter of Haran who died in the presence of his father in Ur. Haran assoc. with death. (The city of Haran is where Terah, Abraham’s father, died.)

Milcah is now fruitful (i.e., “life”). God has reversed her fortunes.

Brother Nahor (?): could be a simply biological connection. But remember, his family left Ur with him. The possibility exists that Nahor was converted. (This might also be the reason that Abraham makes his servant go to the household of Nahor to find a wife for Isaac.)

Preparations for a new mother: Rebekah will be the new mother as she becomes the wife of the promised seed.

2. THE DEATH OF SARAH IN THE PROMISED LAND (23.1-16)

Dying near the altar (1-2): emphasis is placed on the location Sarah’s death: Kirjath Arba, which is Hebron, in the land of Canaan. Strong emphasis throughout this incident on the *land* (i.e., the land of Canaan).

Abraham and Sarah have moved back into the promised land, specifically to Hebron, close to the oaks of Mamre, the place where Abraham built his third altar in the land of promise.

Altars: places where God met with and spoke to Abraham concerning his inheritance; i.e., the promises. These altars were the three witnesses of God’s word to Abraham.

This place where God confirmed His word is the place where Sarah dies. The time for the fulfillment of all the promises–resurrection; a new heavens and new earth where there is no more dying–had not yet come.

Abraham mourns and weeps: faith in God’s future promises does not take away the pain of present loss. There is absolutely nothing wrong with mourning and weeping at a loss. This is consistent throughout Scripture.

The first request for a grave (3-4): “sons of Heth,” or the Hittites; cf. 10.15; He is the second born son of Canaan,

the cursed grandson of Noah. They are some of the owners and possessors of the promised land at this time.

Abraham is a “sojourner and alien,” or a resident foreigner. Was not the land promised to Abraham by God? Yes, but it wasn’t his yet.

A gift for the prince of God? (5-6): “a prince of God” - this is the place where Abraham built the altar, establishing worship in the land. These had allied themselves with Abraham according to 14.13. These men were probably converts.

This was a temptation presented to Abraham (though probably not meant to be by the Hittites). He was being tempted to take the land before the time as the time when the king of Sodom offered him the spoils of the victory earlier (which Abraham refused; cf. ch. 14).

The second request for a grave (7-9): He wants a specific place and intends to pay full price for the land. He will put a down payment, as it were, on the promised land.

A gift from the aristocracy? (10-11): “his city,” could be just the place that he dwells, or it could be that he is the ruler of this city.

The third request for a grave (12-15): I do not take this as some type of bargaining ritual but rather as a genuine offer of a gift between two wealthy men.

Purchase of the land (16): Abraham is doing just the opposite of Adam and others earlier. He is refusing to take what does not yet rightfully belong to him. It will belong to him in time, but for now he must not grasp at it.

3. THE BURIAL OF SARAH IN THE PROMISED LAND (23.17-20)

The Garden (17-18): Remember, this is the place where the altar is.

The cave indicates that there is a mountain of some sort here. There are also trees in the field.

This is the Garden in the midst of the larger land. This reflects back on the original set up of the world and gives us a clue as to what is going on here. A new garden is established in the promised land from which all the land ... and eventually all the earth ... will be blessed.

Insertion into the land (19-20): Abraham will be buried here (25.9). Jacob, when he is in the land of Egypt, commands his children to bury him here (49.29-30).

Joseph, as a prince in Egypt, commands that when the children of Israel leave Egypt, his bones are to be carried up with them to the land of Canaan to be buried there (though not in this cave).

What is going on here? Why are they so concerned about being buried in the Promised Land? Cf. Heb 11.22, “by faith.”

Here is what we are to understand in part. They believed God’s promises about the land and eventual resurrection.

And like seeds that die only to come back to life to be fruitful, they are inserted or planted in the land believing that God will raise them up again to inherit the land. Abraham believed those promises and, because of this, buries Sarah in the promised land.

(1) *Our grasp on God’s promise should not be premature. There are many aspects of our inheritance for which we must wait patiently.*

(2) *Invest yourself with regard to our future inheritance.*

(3) *Our losses should always be mourned in perspective of the final resurrection of the dead.*