

Parashah 5

# Hayyei-Sarah

חיי שרה

“Sarah’s life”

Genesis 23:1 – 25:18

Torah Together



This *Torah* portion records the deaths of both Abraham and Sarah. It also records Abraham’s purchase of the family burial site, the first of several property transactions recorded in the Bible. The centerpiece of the portion, however, is the story of how Rebecca is chosen as Isaac’s wife. A tender story on its own, it also contains insights into God’s character and His plan for mankind.

## 1. The Death of Sarah - 23:1-20

a) How old was Sarah when she died? How old was her son Isaac when she died? Where was she when she died?

b) How did Abraham obtain a burial site for Sarah? Where and how was this business transacted? From whom were the Hittites descended?

c) Why do you suppose the Hittites offered to give Abraham the land he wanted? Why do you suppose that Abraham insisted on paying for it?



### The Cave at Machpelah

This plot of land is located in the city of Hebron and even today is the source of much controversy between Jews and Muslims, both of whom claim it as a holy site. In the time of *Yeshua*, Herod the Great built a large structure over the tomb which still stands. It is amazing to realize that this burial site is still preserved after almost 4000 years.

### **Cultural Politeness**

In the culture of this time, being hospitable and polite was highly valued. As such, it was not surprising that Ephron the Hittite offered to give the land to Abraham. However, it was also very appropriate that Abraham refuse the gift and insist on paying for the land. Also at this time, 400 shekels of silver would have been an exorbitant price for the land. However, it appears that Abraham wanted the land and was in no mood to haggle over the price. No one could later say that Abraham did not obtain the land fairly.

### **Hand under the Thigh?**

It appears that the act of placing one's hand under the thigh of another in preparation for taking a solemn oath was a custom of the time. While not much is known about this custom, speculation is quite varied. A similar scriptural reference can be found in **Genesis 47:29** in which Joseph takes an oath to act on Jacob's behalf. In both cases you have a younger man promising to do something on behalf of an older, esteemed father figure.

d) What do you find interesting about the negotiation process? Do you think 400 shekels of silver was a fair price? How was the deed to the property "recorded?"

e) What do you know of the history of this piece of property? What is its status today?

## **2. Isaac and Rebecca - 24:1-67**

a) Who was Abraham's chief servant, in charge of all he had? What do you remember about him?

b) Abraham made his servant swear an oath. How was this done? What things did he make him swear to do? What kind of help did Abraham tell his servant that he would have with his task? What does this oath reveal about Abraham's faith in God?

c) What things did the servant take with him on the journey? What was his purpose in taking these items? What was his destination and why was it chosen?

d) Analyze the servant's prayer in verses 12-14. What did his request show about his relationship to God? What qualities would the woman have who answered his prayer?

e) What did Rebecca do that answered the servant's prayer? Do you think just any woman would have done this? How was the servant sure he'd found the right woman? What was his response to his success? What did Rebecca do?

f) How were Rebecca and her family related to Abraham? Why do you think Rebecca's brother, Laban, "hurried" to meet the servant?

g) After arriving at Rebecca's household, the servant refused to share a meal before he had explained the purpose of his business. What does this tell you about his character?

### **The Dowry**

It was the custom of the times to "purchase" a bride from her family with a dowry or "bride price." The lavishness of the gifts that Abraham sent with Eliezar show that he wanted the best bride possible for his son Isaac and that "price was no object."

### **Watering 10 Camels**

Known as "ships of the desert," camels are known for going great distances with little or no water. A single thirsty camel can drink as much as 30 gallons of water. In this case, one can assume that after coming a great distance, these camels would be thirsty. To draw water for 10 such camels is no small task!

### **A Man on a Mission**

Notice that Eliezer was quick to explain the reason for his visit to Haran. Also, he would not even consent to eat until he had conducted his business. He obviously wanted to quickly reach an agreement concerning Rebecca before anything else. Eliezer's singleness of purpose testifies to the importance he attached to the success of his mission.

### **Hidden Motives**

In later portions, we will discover that Laban is a somewhat greedy man who is not above using deception to improve his wealth. With this in mind, can you think of any reason he might have had for suggesting that Eliezer return alone and that Rebecca would follow at some later time? Again, it seems that Eliezer was focused on the successful accomplishment of his mission.

h) Carefully study the servant's telling of his story. What details did he emphasize that supported his purpose? What was the servant asking for in verse 49?

i) Who responded to the servant and what was their answer? What did the servant do when he heard their answer? How do you think the servant felt at that moment?

j) The next morning, the servant wanted to be on his way. If possible, read verse 55 in several different versions of the Bible. What is your interpretation of this exchange? How was the impasse resolved? What does this show about Rebecca's feelings?

k) Describe the first meeting of Isaac and Rebecca. How do you think they felt about each other?

l) Carefully analyze verse 67. What do you think is meant by "brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah"? Do you think Isaac was having difficulty dealing with his mother's death?

"Thus was Isaac comforted for the loss of his mother."

Genesis 24:67

### 3. The Death of Abraham - 25:1-18

a) Who did Abraham marry after Sarah's death? How many children did they have? Do you know anything about any of these descendants?

b) Did any of these sons share in Isaac's inheritance? What did Abraham do to help assure that Isaac's inheritance was uncontested?

c) At what age did Abraham die? Where was he buried? Who buried Abraham? Where did Isaac live after Abraham's death?

d) How many sons did Ishmael have? How old was he when he died? Where did all of his descendants settle? Did they enjoy peace and prosperity?

#### Who was Keturah?

Jewish sages over the years have been in disagreement about Keturah. Some believe that Keturah was really Hagar, who Abraham sought out after Sarah died, although there is no indication of this in the Bible. Others believe her to be someone else entirely. The descendants of Abraham and Keturah settled in the Arabian peninsula. Moses' father-in-law and wife, for example, were Midianites.

### **Types and Shadows**

As we saw last week, many of the stories in the *Torah* can be seen as pictures of God's plan for our future. (Remember how Abraham's sacrificial offering of Isaac foreshadowed God's sacrificial offering of *Yeshua*?) As you consider the story in this portion, imagine Abraham as a picture of God and Rebecca as a picture of God's children. Who then would Eliezer and Isaac represent?

## **Digging deeper . . . .**

1. Carefully analyze the story of Rebecca and Isaac, putting yourself in the shoes of Eliezar, Rebecca, Abraham, and Isaac. Does this give you any insight into the faith these people must have had? With which character do you identify most? Do you find any symbolism in this story?

2. This is the end of our study of Abraham and Sarah. Reflecting back on the events of their lives, what do you find most note-worthy about them? What can you learn from them?

For further study, see

**Haftarah** : 1 Kings 1:1-31

**Brit Hadashah** : Matthew 8:19-22; 27:3-10; Luke 9:57-62