

Genesis 23:5-9

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The sons of Heth offer Abraham the choice of their gravesites. Abraham asks them to speak to Ephron about the cave at Machpelah which he owns. Abraham offers to pay full price for this to be the burial site.

Sarah has died, and Abraham seeks a place to bury her. He wants to bury her in Hebron, in Canaan, the land promised to Abraham by God. But at this point in time Abraham does not own any land, therefore he is negotiating a burial plot purchase with local men. He speaks to the sons of Heth, who are Hittites. When addressing them, Abraham distinguishes himself as a stranger in that land ([Gen. 23:4](#)).

The sons of Heth reply to Abraham's request, saying to him, "Hear us, my lord: you are a mighty prince among us; bury your dead in the choicest of our graves; none of us will refuse you his grave for burying your dead."

The local Hittites respected and considered Abraham a *mighty prince* or "prince of God" (Hebrew "nasiy Elohim"). Abraham had a good reputation among the Hittites. Clearly they could see that he was a godly neighbor whom they liked and wished to get along with. So the *sons of Heth* graciously offer any of their own graveyards for the burial of Sarah. They claim that none among them would *refuse* Abraham any *grave for burying his dead*.

Abraham responds with respect; he *stood up and bowed to the people of the land, the sons of Heth*. He adds to his initial request, *If you are willing to let me bury my dead out of my sight, listen to me, and plead with Ephron the son of Zohar for me that he may give me the cave of Machpelah which he owns, which is at the end of his field; for the full price let him give it to me in your presence for a burial site.*

Since the *sons of Heth* were willing to let Abraham bury his *dead out of his sight* wherever he requested, Abraham pushes for a specific location he wants to buy, from a specific landowner: *Ephron the son of Zohar*. *Ephron* owned a *field* with a *cave* at its *end*. The cave is called *Machpelah*, the meaning of which isn't totally clear. Traditionally it means, "the double," or the "the couple." Abraham is willing to pay *the full price* for it, and to make the purchase *in the presence of the sons of Heth*, witnesses to ratify the purchase.

The cave of Machpelah is near the city of Hebron, southwest of Jerusalem and east of Mamre. Abraham and his household had lived near [there among the trees of Mamre at an earlier time \(Genesis 13:18, 14:13, 18:1\)](#). The believed location of the cave became a sacred place for the Jewish people. It has a tumultuous history, changing hands many times, with various structures built to honor it. Jews, Christians, and Muslims have possessed it at different points in history, but in the present day all are now free to visit and worship there.

Biblical Text:

5 The sons of Heth answered Abraham, saying to him, 6 “Hear us, my lord: you are a mighty prince among us; bury your dead in the choicest of our graves; none of us will refuse you his grave for burying your dead.” 7 So Abraham stood up and bowed to the people of the land, the sons of Heth. 8 And he spoke with them, saying, “If you are willing to let me bury my dead out of my sight, listen to me, and plead with Ephron the son of Zohar for me, 9 that he may give me the cave of Machpelah which he owns, which is at the end of his field; for the full price let him give it to me in your presence for a burial site.”