

# NOTES ON THE BOOK OF GENESIS

by

Charles H. MacIntosh

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

This little section of inspiration furnishes much sweet and profitable instruction to the soul. In it the Holy Spirit sets before us a beautiful exhibition of the mode in which the man of faith should carry himself toward those that are without. While it is true, divinely true, that faith makes a man independent of the men of the world, it is no less true that faith will ever teach him to walk honestly toward them.

We are told to **“walk honestly toward them that are without;”** (I Thessalonians 4:12:) **“to provide things honest in the sight of all;”** (II Corinthians 8:21:) **“to owe no man any thing;”** (Romans 13:8).

These are weighty precepts, - precepts which, even before their distinct enunciation, were duly observed in all ages by the faithful servants of Christ, but which in modern times alas! have not been sufficiently attended to.

The 23rd Chapter of Genesis, therefore, is worthy of special notice. It opens with the death of Sarah, and introduces Abraham in a new character, viz., that of a mourner.

**“Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her.”**

The child of God must meet such things, but he must not meet them as others.

The great fact of resurrection comes in to his relief, and imparts a character to his sorrow quite peculiar. (I Thessalonians 4:13, 14). The man of faith can stand at the grave of a brother or sister, in the happy consciousness that it shall not long hold its captive, **“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.”** The redemption of the soul secures the redemption of the body; the former we have, the latter we wait for. (Romans 8:23).

Now, I believe that in purchasing Macpelah for a burying-place, Abraham gave expression to his faith in resurrection. **“He stood up from before his dead.”**

Faith cannot long keep death in view; it has a higher object, blessed be the **“living God”** who has given it.

Resurrection is that which ever fills the vision of faith; and, in the power thereof, it can rise up from before the dead.

There is much conveyed in this action of Abraham. We want to understand its meaning much more fully, because we are much too prone to be occupied with death and its consequences. Death is the boundary of Satan's power; but where Satan ends, God begins. Abraham understood this when he rose up and purchased the cave of Macpelah as a sleeping-place for Sarah. This was the expression of Abraham's thought in reference to the future. He knew that in the ages to come, God's promise about the land of Canaan would be fulfilled, and he was able to lay the body of Sarah in the tomb, **"in sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection."**

The sons of Heth knew nothing about this. The thoughts which were filling the patriarch's soul were entirely foreign to the uncircumcised children of Heth. To them it seemed a small matter where he buried his dead; but it was by no means a small matter to him.

**"I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a burying-place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight."**

It might, and manifestly did, appear strange to them to make so much ado about a grave; but, beloved, **"the world knoweth us not, even as it knew him not."**

The finest traits and characteristics of faith are those which are most incomprehensible to the natural man. The Canaanites had no idea of the expectations which were giving character to Abraham's actions on this occasion. They had no idea that he was looking forward to the possession of the land, while he was merely looking for a spot in which, as a dead man, he might wait for God's time, and God's manner, viz., the MORNING OF RESURRECTION.

He felt he had no controversy with the children of Heth, and hence he was quite prepared to lay his head in the grave, and allow God to act for him, and with him, and by him.

**"These all died in (or according to) 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."** (Hebrews 11:13).

This is a truly exquisite feature in the divine life. Those **"witnesses,"** of whom the apostle is speaking in Hebrews 9 not merely lived by faith, but even when they arrived at the close of their career, they proved that the promises of God were as real and satisfying to their souls as when they first started. Now, I believe this purchase of a burying place in the land was an exhibition of the power of faith, not only to live, but to die.

Why was Abraham so particular about this purchase? Why was he so anxious to make good his claim to the field and cave of Ephron on righteous principles? Why so determined to weigh out the full price **"current with the merchant?"** FAITH is the answer. He did it all by faith. He knew the land was his in prospect, and that in resurrection-glory his seed should yet possess it, and until then he would be no debtor to those who were yet to be dispossessed.

Thus we may view this beautiful chapter in a twofold light; first, as setting before us a plain, practical principle, as, to our dealings with the men of this world; and secondly, as presenting the blessed hope which should ever animate the man of faith.

Putting both these points together, we have an example of what the child of God should ever be.

The hope set before us in the Gospel is a glorious immortality; and this, while it lifts the heart above every influence of nature and the world, furnishes a high and holy principle with which to govern all our intercourse with those who are without. **“We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”** This is our hope. What is the moral effect of this?

**“Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure”** (I John 3:2, 3).

If I am to be like Christ by-and-by, I shall seek to be as like him now as I can. Hence, the Christian should ever seek to walk in purity integrity, and moral grace, in the view of all around. Thus it was with Abraham, in reference to the sons of Heth. His whole deportment and conduct, as set forth in our chapter, would seem to have been marked with very pure elevation and disinterestedness.

He was **“a mighty prince among them,”** and they would fain have done him a favor; but Abraham had learnt to take his favors only from the God of resurrection, and while he would pay them for Macpelah, he would look to him for Canaan.

The sons of Heth knew well the value of **“current money with the merchant,”** and Abraham knew the value of the cave of Macpelah. It was worth much more to him than it was to them.

**“The land was worth”** to them **“four hundred shekels of silver,”** but to him it was priceless, as the earnest of an everlasting inheritance, which, because it was an everlasting inheritance, could only be possessed in the power of resurrection.

Faith conducts the soul onward into God’s future; it looks at things as He looks at them, and estimates them according to the judgment of the sanctuary. Therefore, in the intelligence of faith, Abraham stood up from before his dead, and purchased a burying-place, which significantly set forth his hope of resurrection, and of an inheritance founded thereon.

~ end of chapter 23 ~

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