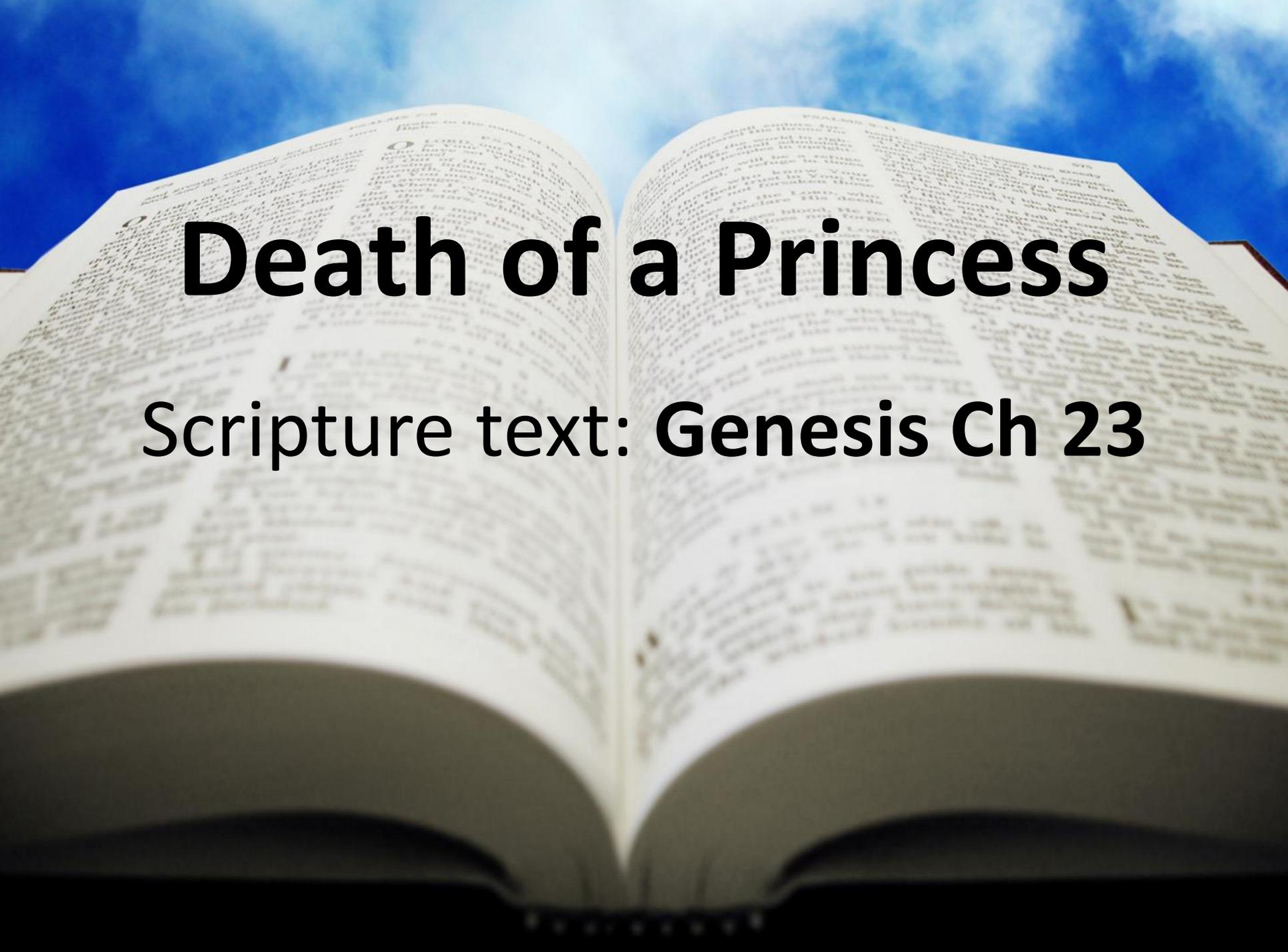


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Death of a Princess

Scripture text: **Genesis Ch 23**

Ecclesiastes 3:1-2 For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

King Solomon said, “A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death, than the day of one’s birth” (Ecc. 7:1). He did not say that death is better than birth; for, after all, we must be born before we can die.

Solomon's point was that the name given you at birth is like fragrant ointment, and you must keep it that way until you die.

When you received your name at birth, nobody knew what you would make out of it; but at death, that name is either fragrant or putrid. If it is fragrant at death, then people can rejoice; for after death, **nothing can change it. So, for a person with a good name, the day of death is better than the day of birth.**

The names of Abraham and Sarah **were fragrant in life and in death and are still fragrant today.**

In chapters 23 and 25, we meet Abraham and Sarah at the end of life's road, and **we learn from them what it means to die in faith.**

1. The death of a princess (Gen. 23:1–20)

Sarah had been a good wife to Abraham and a good mother to Isaac. Yes, she had her faults, as we all do; but **God called her a princess** (Gen. 17:15) and **listed her with the heroes and heroines of faith** (Heb. 11:11).

Genesis 17:15-16 And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but **Sarah shall be her name**. I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; **kings of peoples shall come from her.**"

Sarah (sa'-rah) = Princess; chieftainness; noblewoman; (roots = [1] a princess; a noble lady; [2] to lead; to fight). A ruler. Numbers 26:46 - the prince breathed.

The exhaustive dictionary of Bible names

The Apostle Peter named her as a good example for Christian wives to follow (1 Peter 3:1–6), and Paul used her to illustrate the grace of God in the life of the believer (Gal. 4:21–31).

1 Peter 3:5-6 For this is how **the holy women who hoped in God** used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as **Sarah obeyed Abraham**, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

Galatians 4:27-31 For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For **the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband.**" Now you, brothers, **like Isaac, are children of promise.** But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was **born according to the Spirit**, so also it is now. But what does the Scripture say? "**Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.**" So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

Abraham's tears (Gen. 23:1–2). How often in my pastoral ministry I have heard well-meaning but ignorant people say to grieving friends or relatives, “Now, don't cry!” That is very poor counsel, for God made us with the ability to weep; and He expects us to cry. Even Jesus wept (John 11:35). Grieving is one of God's gifts to help heal broken hearts when people we love are taken from us in death. Paul did not tell the Thessalonian Christians not to weep; **he cautioned them not to sorrow “as others who have no hope”** (1 Thes. 4:13–18). **The grief of a believer should be different from that of an unbeliever.**

Genesis 23:1-2 Sarah lived **127 years**; these were the years of the life of Sarah. 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.**

John 11:33-35 When **Jesus saw her weeping**, and the Jews who had come with her **also weeping**, he was **deeply moved in his spirit** and greatly troubled. And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." **Jesus wept.**

1 Thessalonians 4:13-15 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.** For since we believe **that Jesus died and rose again,** even so, through Jesus, God **will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.** 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.

Abraham loved his wife, and her **death was a painful experience for him**. He showed his love and his grief **by his weeping**. These are the first recorded tears in the Bible, and **tears will not end until God wipes them away in glory** (Rev. 21:4). Even though he was a man of faith, Abraham did not feel that his tears were an evidence of unbelief.

Revelation 21:4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and **death shall be no more**, neither shall there be mourning, **nor crying, nor pain** anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Sarah died in faith (Heb. 11:11, 13), so Abraham knew that **she was in the Lord's care**. In the Old Testament, very little was revealed about the afterlife; but God's people knew that God would receive them when they died (Ps. 73:24).

Hebrews 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

Psalms 73:24 You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory.

The late Vance Havner had a wife named Sarah. Shortly after her untimely death, a young man was with Dr. Havner at the Moody Bible Institute, and he shared his condolences with him. “I’m sorry to hear you lost your wife,” he said to him when they met in the dining room. He smiled and replied, **“Son, when you know where something is, you haven’t lost it.”** For the believer, to be **“absent from the body”** means to be **“present with the Lord”** (Phil. 1:21–23; 2 Cor. 5:1–8); so Christians do not approach death with fear. **“Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord ... that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them”** (Rev. 14:13).

Philippians 1:21-26 For to me to live is **Christ, and to die is gain.** If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. **I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.** But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, **for your progress and joy in the faith,** so that in me you may have **ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus,** because of my coming to you again.

2 Corinthians 5:4-8 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. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, **who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always of good courage.** We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, **for we walk by faith, not by sight.** Yes, we are of good courage, and **we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.**

Revelation 14:12-13 Here is a call for the **endurance of the saints**, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: **Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.**" "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"

The death of the wicked is vividly described in Job 18, and what a fearful picture it is! When the wicked die, it is like putting out a light (18:5–6), trapping an animal or a bird (18:7–10), catching a criminal (18:11–14), or uprooting a tree (18:15–21).

What a difference it makes when you know Jesus Christ as your Savior and as “the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25–26; 2 Tim. 1:10).

Job 18:5-10 "Indeed, **the light of the wicked is put out**, and the flame of his fire does not shine. **The light is dark in his tent, and his lamp above him is put out.** His strong steps are shortened, and his own schemes throw him down. For **he is cast into a net** by his own feet, and he walks on its mesh. **A trap seizes** him by the heel; a **snare lays hold of him.** A rope is hidden for him in the ground, a **trap for him in the path.**

Job 18:15-21 In his tent dwells that which is none of his; **sulfur is scattered over his habitation.** His **roots dry up beneath,** and his branches wither above. His memory perishes from the earth, and he has no name in the street. **He is thrust from light into darkness, and driven out of the world.** He has no posterity or progeny among his people, and no survivor where he used to live. They of the west are appalled at his day, and horror seizes them of the east. **Surely such are the dwellings of the unrighteous, such is the place of him who knows not God."**

John 11:25-27 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

2 Timothy 1:10 and which now has been manifested through the appearing of **our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,**

Abraham's testimony (Gen. 23:3–6). We cannot mourn over our dead forever; there comes a time when we must accept what has happened, face life, and fulfill our obligations to both the living and the dead. **Because he was not a citizen of the land** (Heb. 11:13), Abraham had to request a place to bury his wife. The truth was that Abraham owned the whole land. God had given it to him, but there was no way he could convince his neighbors of that.

Genesis 23:3-6 And Abraham rose up from before his dead and said to the Hittites, "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." The Hittites answered Abraham, "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."

Like Abraham, God's people today are "**pilgrims and strangers**" in this present world (1 Peter 1:1; 2:11). We live in "**tents**" (2 Cor. 5:1–8) which one day will be taken down when we move to glory. When Paul wrote "**the time of my departure is at hand**" (2 Tim. 4:6), he used a military word that meant "**to take down a tent and move on.**" Our present body is **temporary**, but one day we will receive a **glorified body like the body that Jesus Christ** now has in heaven (Phil. 3:20–21; 1 John 3:1–3).

1 Peter 1:1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,

1 Peter 2:11-12 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. **Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable**, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they **may see your good deeds and glorify God** on the day of visitation.

2 Timothy 4:5-8 As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, **fulfill your ministry**. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and **the time of my departure has come**. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, **I have kept the faith**. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and **not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing**.

Philippians 3:17-21 Brothers, join in imitating me, and **keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.** For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But **our citizenship is in heaven,** and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, **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.**

1 John 3:1-5 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, **that we should be called children of God; and so we are.** The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, **we are God's children now,** and what we will be has not yet appeared; but **we know that when he appears we shall be like him,** because we shall see him as he is. And **everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.** Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.

The men of the land called Abraham “a mighty prince” (Gen. 23:6), which in the Hebrew is “**a prince with God.**” He had a good testimony among them, and **they respected him.** Even though this world is not our home, **we must be careful as pilgrims and strangers** to have a good witness to those who are outside the faith (1 Thes. 4:12; Col. 4:5; 1 Peter 2:11ff). These Hittites did not worship Abraham’s God, but **they respected Abraham and his faith.** In fact, they offered him the use of one of their own tombs (Gen. 23:6); but Abraham refused.

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, and **to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.**

Colossians 4:2-6 Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison-- that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. **Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.**

It is a wonderful thing in a time of sorrow when the child of God has a strong witness to the lost. There is a natural sorrow that everyone expects us to manifest, but **there is also a supernatural grace that God gives so that we might have joy in the midst of sorrow.** The unsaved can tell the difference, and **this gives us opportunity for sharing the good news of the Gospel.**

Abraham's tact (Gen. 23:7–16). In the East in that day, most business transactions were carried on at the city gate (23:10) with the people as witnesses (23:7). Arriving at a final price for a piece of property usually involved a great deal of bargaining and deferential politeness that sometimes covered up greed and intrigue. **But Abraham was open and honest in his request: He wanted to buy the cave of Machpelah from Ephron, who was in the crowd at the time.**

Following the custom of the East, Ephron offered to give Abraham not only the cave but the whole field in which the cave was located. Of course, this was only a clever maneuver on his part; for he had no intentions of giving away a valuable piece of property, especially to a man as wealthy as Abraham. But Ephron's reply gave Abraham two pieces of information: Ephron **was willing to sell**, but he wanted to sell the whole field and not just the cave.

Ephron had Abraham in a corner, and he knew it. Sarah had to be buried soon, and Ephron had the only piece of property that met Abraham's needs. So, Abraham agreed to buy both the cave and the field even before Ephron named the price.

That is really living by faith! Ephron's price was far too much, but Abraham paid it and claimed the property for himself.

In Acts 7:15–16, Stephen seems to contradict the Genesis record by saying that Abraham bought the property from Hamor and it was located in Shechem rather than Hebron (Gen. 23:19). But surely two different burial places are in view here. It is likely that Abraham bought a second burial plot from Hamor in Shechem and **that Jacob had to buy it back years later** (33:18–19). Since Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob moved about quite a bit, **it would be difficult for the residents of the land to keep track of them and their family real estate.**

In our business dealings with the people of the world, **we must be careful to maintain honesty and integrity and to put our witness for the Lord ahead of monetary gain.** Abraham knew that Ephron had him trapped and that it was foolish to haggle over the price, as much as Easterners love to do it.

Genesis 23:16 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.

Abraham's tomb (Gen. 23:17–20).

The key phrase in the chapter, used seven times, is “bury my [the, thy] dead.” Even though Sarah was gone, **Abraham showed respect for her body and wanted to give it a proper burial.** This is the pattern for God's people throughout the Scriptures. Neither the Old Testament Jews nor the New Testament Christians cremated their dead.

Rather, they washed the body, wrapped it in clean cloth with spices, and placed it in the ground or in a tomb. While there may be some situations when cremation is the better way to dispose of the body, for the most part, **Christians prefer burial.**

This is the way our Lord's body was handled after His death (Matt. 27:57–61), and Paul seems to teach burial in 1 Corinthians 15:35–46.

Matthew 27:57-60 When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and **asked for the body of Jesus.** Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And **Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb,** which he had cut in the rock. And he **rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb** and went away.

1 Corinthians 15:42-46 So is it with the resurrection of the dead. **What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable.** It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. **It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.** If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual.

When Abraham purchased the cave of Machpelah for a tomb, **he was making a statement of faith to all who were there.** He did not take Sarah back to their former home in Ur but **buried her in the land God had given him and his descendants.** He did not ignore the body but **gave it a proper burial in view of the promised resurrection.** When God saves us, He saves the whole person, not just “the soul.” **The body has a future, and burial bears witness to our faith in the return of Christ and the resurrection of the body.**

It must be pointed out, however, that resurrection is not “reconstruction.” God will not reassemble the dust of the body and restore the body to its previous state. **God promises us a new body!** In 1 Corinthians 15:35–38, Paul makes it clear that there is continuity but not identity between the old body and the new body.

1 Corinthians 15:37-38 And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But **God gives it a body as he has chosen**, and to each kind of seed its own body.

He illustrated this miracle with **the planting of a seed.**

The seed dies and decays, but from it comes a beautiful flower or some grain. There is continuity but not identity: The same seed does not come out of the ground, but what came out came from the seed that was planted.

Christian burial bears witness that we believe in a future resurrection.

When you get to the end of Genesis, you find that **Abraham's tomb is quite full**. Sarah was buried there, and then Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah (Gen. 49:29–31); and then Jacob joined them (50:13).

Genesis ends with a full tomb, but **the four Gospels end with an empty tomb!** Jesus has conquered death and taken away its sting (1 Cor. 15:55–58). **Because of His victory, we need not fear death or the grave.**

1 Corinthians 15:54-58 When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and **the mortal puts on immortality**, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "**Death is swallowed up in victory.**" "**O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?**" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But **thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.** Therefore, my beloved brothers, **be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.**

Abraham owned the whole land, but **the only piece of property that was legally his was a tomb**. If the Lord Jesus does not return to take us to heaven, the only piece of property each of us will own in this world will be a plot in the cemetery! **We will take nothing with us; we will leave it all behind (1 Tim. 6:7)**. But, if we are investing in things eternal, we can send it ahead (Matt. 6:19–34). **If we live by faith, then we can die by faith; and when you die by faith, you have a wonderful future.**

In November 1858, missionary John Paton landed in the New Hebrides to establish a ministry among the people. On February 12, 1859, his wife gave birth to a son; and on March 3, his **wife died**. Seventeen days later, the **baby died**. “But for Jesus and the fellowship He gave me there,” said Paton, “I must have gone mad and died beside that lonely grave.” **But we do not sorrow as those who have no hope!** We have been born again “**to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead**” (1 Peter 1:3, NKJV), and we are “**looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ**” (Titus 2:13).