

The Hebrew Corner

Sometimes a simple act by an individual can cause a chain of events that lead to a much greater result than anyone could predict. That God can work through an act of one individual to achieve a great outcome is evidenced in the Tanach. For an example of this, let's look in the book of Genesis, starting with Genesis 23:1-18:

“And Sarah was an hundred and seven and twenty years old: these were the years of the life of Sarah. And Sarah died in Kirjatharba; the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan: and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her. And Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spake unto the sons of Heth, saying, I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a buryingplace with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight. And the children of Heth answered Abraham, saying unto him, Hear us, my lord: thou art a mighty prince among us: in the choice of our sepulchres bury thy dead; none of us shall withhold from thee his sepulchre, but that thou mayest bury thy dead. And Abraham stood up, and bowed himself to the people of the land, even to the children of Heth. And he communed with them, saying, If it be your mind that I should bury my dead out of my sight; hear me, and intreat for me to Ephron the son of Zohar, That he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he hath, which is in the end of his field; for as much money as it is worth he shall give it me for a possession of a buryingplace amongst you. And Ephron dwelt among the children of Heth: and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the audience of the children of Heth, even of all that went in at the gate of his city, saying, Nay, my lord, hear me: the field give I thee, and the cave that is therein, I give it thee; in the presence of the sons of

my people give I it thee: bury thy dead. And Abraham bowed down himself before the people of the land. And he spake unto Ephron in the audience of the people of the land, saying, But if thou wilt give it, I pray thee, hear me: I will give thee money for the field; take it of me, and I will bury my dead there. And Ephron answered Abraham, saying unto him, My lord, hearken unto me: the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver; what is that betwixt me and thee? bury therefore thy dead. And Abraham hearkened unto Ephron; and Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in the audience of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant. And the field of Ephron which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field, and the cave which was therein, and all the trees that were in the field, that were in all the borders round about, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession in the presence of the children of Heth, before all that went in at the gate of his city.”

Kirjatharba in Hebrew is qiryat-arba (קְרִיַת־אַרְבַּע, kihr-yaht-ahr-BAH). The meaning is the town of Arba (the Anakim) or the town of four (giants?). This is the ancient name of the city of Hebron. The purchase of this field by Abraham constituted the first territorial possession by the lineage of Abraham and his son Isaac. In the next passage, Genesis 25:7-10, we learn that Abraham was in turn buried there:

“And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, an hundred threescore and fifteen years. Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people. And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre; The field which

Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife.”

In turn, Genesis records Jacob last words, in which he states that Isaac and Leah were buried in the same field (Genesis 49:29-32):

“And he charged them, and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a buryingplace. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah. The purchase of the field and of the cave that is therein was from the children of Heth.”

Finally, Jacob himself was buried in this field (Genesis 50:12-14):

“And his sons did unto him according as he commanded them: For his sons carried him into the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham bought with the field for a possession of a buryingplace of Ephron the Hittite, before Mamre. And Joseph returned into Egypt, he, and his brethren, and all that went up with him to bury his father, after he had buried his father.”

However, Joseph's last words were also recorded, and he did not ask to be buried in this field, but had the following request (Genesis

50:24-26):

“And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence. So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.”

Since Joseph was a ruler in Egypt, he could have asked to be buried with his father in Hebron, and his request would surely have been granted. Instead, he asked that his bones be brought up by his descendants at a later time. This suggests that he had a revelation from God that his descendants, the Israelites, were going to leave Egypt, and God was going to bring them back to the promised land of Canaan, this time to inherit the entire land, and not only a field with a burial cave. This was fulfilled as indicated by the following passage from Joshua (Joshua 24:32):

“And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for an hundred pieces of silver: and it became the inheritance of the children of Joseph.”

The Hebrew word translated as bones is etzem (עֵצֶם, EH-tsehm). It is striking here that Joseph's bones were buried, also in a plot of

ground purchased in the land of Canaan, but this time purchased by Jacob, his father, whose name was changed by God to Israel, which would be the name of the new nation to be founded in the land of Canaan. Thus we see that God, starting from a single act of a faithful man, Abraham, buying a place to bury himself and his wife, founded a new nation of the seed of Abraham, just as he had promised.

May you have a month filled with abundant blessings from God.