

Parashas Chayei Sarah

Parsha Summary

Sarah died at the age of 127 and Avraham must negotiate with Efron of the Hittim for a burial plot. He buries her in the cave of Machpela, in Chevron after buying it for 400 silver shekels.

Avraham had his slave swear to him that he would search for a wife for Avraham's son Yitzchak in the land of Avraham's fathers, but that the servant would not bring Yitzchak outside of the land. The servant brought Avraham's wealth to Aram Naharaim, and prayed that God help him find a wife for Yitzchak by sending him a woman who would offer water to his camels. He saw Rivkah, the daughter of Besuel, son of Milka, Avraham's brother. She did offer water to the servant and his camels, and so Avraham's servant gave her gifts, told her about his mission, and asked to be brought to Rivkah's family. There, he told Besuel and Rivkah's brother Lavan about his search for a wife for Yitzchak, and upon hearing of the sign that she gave water to the servant and his camels Rivkah's family agreed that God ordained that she should go with this man. Rivkah agreed, and she was brought to Yitzchak, who married and loved her.

Avraham married another wife, Keturah, and had several children with her but sent them all away with gifts in the presence of Yitzchak. Avraham died at the age of 175 and was buried in Machpela together with Sarah by Yitzchak and Yishmael. Yishmael had many sons, "12 princes," and died at the age of 137.

Classic Questions

Why does the Torah tell the story of Avraham's buying of Sarah's burial plot?

- **(Midrash):** so that Avraham's children will know that they bought and own this land
 - **R. Bachya:** even though the nation conquered the whole country, there's special quality to the areas acquired: Chevron, Har Gerizim and Eival, and Moriah
- **Ibn Ezra:** to teach that the land of Israel is good, even for the dead (as a burial place)
- **Ramban:** to illustrate how God caused Avraham to be so well respected, and to inform us of the burial place of the forefathers so that we treat it accordingly
- **Chizkuni, many others:** this was one of Avraham's tests that he remain faithful to God
 - **Rabbienu Yonah** to Avos 5:3 counts this even as the last of Avraham's ten tests
 - **R. DZ Hoffman:** this shows how Avraham trusted God regarding his eventual inheritance of the land, even though he was being forced to buy land after he should be its rightful conqueror from defeating the four kings
- **R. SR Hirsch:** to show the permanence of Avraham and Sarah's relationship, and the relationship with their children forever maintained even in their death, which is the model for every Jewish marriage as learned from these verses

Why does the Torah provide so much detail and repeat the story of Eliezer's finding Rivkah?

- **Rashi:** because the chatter of even the servants of forefathers are beloved to God
 - **Maharal (Gur Aryeh):** because the forefathers are the foundation of the nation
- **Akedas Yitzchak:** to teach that one should perfect themselves and be self-sufficient before marrying, like Yitzchak was 40 years old when he married

- **Abarbanel, Malbim**: to show the wisdom of Avraham's servant, who subtly changed the story when speaking to Lavan and Besuel to ensure that they would agree

Important "Chazal"s and "Rashi"s

- Four pairs were buried in the Cave of Machpela: Adam and Hava, Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivkah, and Yaakov with Leah (Eruvin 53)
 - Rav and Shmuel argued: one said it is called 'machpela' (doubled) because it has multiple pairs buried there, and one said because it is a cave in a cave (ibid)
- "God blessed Avraham with everything [ba-kol]", R. Meir said, that he did not have a daughter. R. Yehudah said, that he did have a daughter; others say she was named 'Bakol' (Bava Basra 16b)
- R. Shmuel b. Nachmeni said, R. Yochanan said, Eliezer asked improperly but was nevertheless answered properly (Taanis 4a)
- Besuel tried to stop [Rivkah from leaving with Eliezer] but an angel killed him (Rashi)
- As long as Sarah lived, the candle was lit from Friday to Friday, and a blessing was found in the dough, and a cloud covered the tent. When she died, these ceased, but Rivkah returned them (Rashi)
- Yitzchak established Mincha, as it says "he left to converse in the field" (Brachos 26b)
- Rashi, Midrash: Keturah is another name for Hagar, who Avraham remarried
 - Ibn Ezra: this is not correct (according to the plain reading of the Torah)

A Short Vort

When sending off his servant to find Yitzchak's mate, Avraham names no names and gives him little direction, other than to find someone who is not a member of the surrounding Canaanite nations. This is extraordinary, because Avraham is actually told (immediately after the sacrifice of Yitzchak) about his brother Nachor's descendents, including the birth of Rivkah (in fact, Seforno and others believe that the verse is indicating that Avraham already knew that a girl was born who was worthy of marrying his son). Why would Avraham still send his servant out on a search if Yitzchak's mate had already been identified? However one might answer this question, the impression that one gets from reading the Torah in this order is that although many efforts were expended to find the perfect match for Yitzhak, in truth, God had it planned out all along - and all those human efforts were nothing but a way to uncover God's predetermined plan.

Avraham's Ten Tests, according to Pirkei R. Eliezer 26-30, Midrash Tehillim (Buber) 18, Avot d'Rebi Natan 33, and Rambam, and Rabbeinu Yonah (to Avot 5:3)

1. **Pirkei R. Eliezer (26-30)**: Avraham was threatened at birth
2. Nimrod's throwing Avraham to the furnace
 - a. **Rambam** does not count this
3. "Leave your homeland"
4. The famine and/or travel to Egypt
 - a. Not counted by **Midrash Tehillim**
5. Sarah's kidnapping by Pharaoh
6. The war of the four kings against the five
7. **Rambam, Midrash Tehillim**: marrying Hagar
8. **Midrash (not Rambam, Rabbeinu Yonah)**: The 'covenant between the parts'
9. Circumcision
10. **Midrash Tehillim, Rambam, Rabbeinu Yonah**: Sarah's kidnapping by Avimelech
11. Sending away of Hagar and Yishmael
 - a. **Rambam and Avot d'R. Natan**: this is 2 tests
12. Sacrifice of Yitzhak
13. **Rabbeinu Yonah only**: buying Sarah's burial plot