

引言 INTRODUCTION

America is a land of opportunities. Many people come here from overseas to look for a better future. They chase after the so-called “American dream.” People can make a living as long as they work hard. There are many ways to accumulate wealth regardless of their background, skin color and skills. A usual goal in the American dream is to buy a house. A place to call your home brings a lot of fulfillment. At one time my wife and I moved once a year whenever the rent increased. We did not have a lot of belongings before we had kids. Therefore, moving was easier. Finally we purchased our first home. With ownership comes responsibilities. We could no longer call the management office when a faucet or toilet was leaking. Reality set in even before we moved in. I mowed the lawn for the first time in my life. I almost fainted under the summer heat! Thanks to many friends at church who shared their tips. Nowadays, you can also look up YouTube and find information to fix anything. You can almost learn how to build a rocket and fly to the moon! Buying a house means you decide to settle down. So far Abraham was still a migrant in a foreign place. He knew that God would give the whole Canaan to his descendants. As we come to chapter 23, Abraham took another step of faith while waiting for God’s promise to be fulfilled. His family had an urgent need. But God was working behind the scenes for Abraham. God can also use our life events to accomplish His will.

解釋 EXPLANATION

1. 需要 Need (v. 1-6)

We will study this story based on three words. The first word is need. Abraham needed a place to bury Sarah after she passed away. Let us begin by reading **verse 1-6**. Abraham could not wait. A body will quickly decompose in the heat of the Middle East. People in the ancient times did not cremate others’ remains. A proper burial was a way to pay tribute to a deceased person. It was impossible for Abraham to travel 1,000 miles back to Ur of the Chaldeans either. Therefore, he made a request to the Hittites in the area. They were a major tribe in Canaan. Abraham was wealthy. But he knew that he was just a visitor. He carefully crafted his words in verse 4: **“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 passage says Abraham was willing to pay full price for a burial ground. Buying land at that time was unlike purchasing a house today. The property was supposed to be passed down to one’s children. Moreover, Abraham did not want the locals to see him as a threat. Some foreigners are buying large parcels of farmland in some parts of the U.S. Some of those locations are close to military bases. It is reasonable to suspect if someone wants to spy on the armed forces or even to plan an attack. Abraham had no intention to conquer the area. The Hittites responded with kindness in verse 6: **“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.”** Abraham was no stranger to the local folks. They called him “a prince of God.” They heard of God’s special favor on him. Abraham led some untrained people to defeat an alliance of four kings from the east. He and his wife beat all odds and had a son at old age. This man was not a nobody! A refusal to a legitimate need might lead to

a conflict. Therefore, they welcomed Abraham to pick any tomb he liked. Abraham presented his need in a sincere and straightforward manner. He was facing foreign people who believed in other gods. We need wisdom too when we interact with non-believers. Paul reminds us in Colossians 4:5-6 – **5 Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. 6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.** We need wisdom and kindness in our words. We need to pay attention to our attitude too. We are representatives of God. Is there gentleness when you talk to cashiers, receptionists and waiters? Are you friendly when you talk to customer service agents on the phone? I know that a long wait and boring music in the background can wear you down. Remember that those who serve you are humans too. They may be having a bad day. They may have gotten an earful from their supervisors for a mistake made. Perhaps they just dealt with some demanding clients. Be nice to them. Being a customer does not make you boss. If you want to earn people's respect, you must show them respect first. Recently I went to a restaurant on a "stay-cation" to eat breakfast by myself. I looked around and observed people. I noticed a particular waitress. She took time to chat with patrons. She was detailed in taking care of their needs. I thought she could use some encouragement. I said to her: "Ma'am, I've met people who like their job. But I can tell that you love to serve people." She thanked me for the compliment. Sincere words like those would leave a bigger impression in people's mind than a huge tip. You can do the same thing to people who help you. It does not cost you anything! In doing so, you treat people as God's creation whom Jesus died for, and not tools to serve your needs.

2. 留心 Heed (v. 7-15)

Abraham presented his need to the Hittites. After that, he heeded their response. Let us hear the negotiation in **verse 7 to 15**. Abraham bowed down twice to the residents to show his respect and thankfulness. He offered to buy the cave of Machpelah. The owner Ephron happened to be on the scene. He reacted in verse 11: **"No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. In the sight of the sons of my people I give it to you. Bury your dead."** Ephron generously gave away the cave for free. Abraham thanked the man. But he insisted on paying full price. Ephron repeated his offer in verse 15: **"My lord, listen to me: a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between you and me? Bury your dead."** We may think: how dumb was Abraham to reject free stuff! Why would Ephron mention the price if he wanted to give the land to Abraham? Will you say to a friend when you give him a present: "I hope you like this Italian leather wallet. I bought it at Macy's for a hundred bucks!" Stating the price will defeat the meaning of the gift. What Ephron implied could be: "You can have the land for 400 shekels, not a dime less." It was a haggling skill Middle East merchants use to this day. A shopkeeper may ask you to take the item home free-of-charge. You will end up in jail for shoplifting if you do that! It would be an insult to Ephron too if Abraham paid nothing. Abraham was wise enough to heed Ephron's words. He knew that he had no right to bargain in a foreign place. The worst things that could happen were damaging the relationship and having nowhere to bury his wife. Therefore, he would accept any asking price. The transaction was done in the presence of some townsmen. At the time when there was no written contract, people's testimonies were considered trustworthy. For the same reason, God put in the Law later that a statement is valid when there are two or three witnesses. Abraham was a trader. But he knew when to negotiate and when to play a passive role. Today, we want the best deals when buying things. We need to heed the response from the sellers if we hope to get an upper hand. Two years

ago, I bought my wife's car. She needed a vehicle when her previous car was totaled. At that time, the prices in the used car market were still quite high. Therefore, we looked for a new car. A certain manufacturer had a promotion with low-interest financing. I was nervous because car salespeople have a bad reputation for being greedy. I found a particular car that we could afford. Then I started the negotiation process with emails and texts. I knew walking into the store unprepared was a bad move. I even avoided calling anyone unless it was necessary. My strategy seemed to work. The dealer agreed on a price I suggested. He sent me a written quote through email. I called the salesperson to confirm all the details. The next step was to go to the store and sign the papers. But the person called me a few minutes later and said: "Sorry sir, the car you want has been sold." I thought: "Goodness! Why didn't you tell me earlier?" He apologized and said: "But I found an identical car with a different color. Will you consider that?" I used their error as a leverage for bargaining. I calmly replied: "I believe it's fair for me to get a further discount as a compensation." I named an amount. His manager agreed. Thus the deal was sealed. I was firm but courteous in the whole process. I did not show any anger because they made a mistake. After the transaction, I invited the salesman to our church. He said yes but he has yet to show up. Imagine I was rude and I vented all my frustration to him on the phone. Would I still have the courage to tell him about Jesus? We are a testimony of God no matter whom we meet. We can build a bridge or a wall between God and people depending on how we behave.

3. 契約 Deed (v. 16-20)

Abraham told people his need for a burial ground. He heeded their responses in the discussion process. Eventually, a land was sold to him. He got a verbal deed to prove his possession. Let us finish reading the story from **verse 16 to 20**. We see the phrase "made over" in verses 17 and 20. The Hebrew word means "confirmed." Some translations render the word as "deeded." Picture it like buying a house today. The buyer will receive a deed after all the financial and legal procedures are completed. Abraham did not get any paper work. But the testimonies of the witnesses were as good as a deed. Verse 19 tells us that Abraham fulfilled his initial goal: **After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah east of Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan.** This cave in Hebron was very close to Mamre toward the east. Abraham settled at Mamre after he parted his way with Lot his nephew. Now he acquired a resting place for Sarah nearby in Hebron. Subsequently, a few other family members were also buried there. One of whom was Abraham's grandson, Jacob. Remember the stories of Joseph? By the special plan of God, a slave became the prime minister of Egypt. Due to a severe famine, Joseph relocated his father Jacob and the rest of the family to Egypt. Before Jacob passed away, he told his sons in Genesis 49:29-31 – **29 ... "I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, 30 in the cave that is in the field at Machpelah, to the east of Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite to possess as a burying place. 31 There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife. There they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah."** We see the names of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah and Leah. Members of three generations were buried in the same cave. When you go to Israel today, you will find the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron. On the top is a building. There is a synagogue on one side, and a mosque on the other side. Since no excavation is allowed due to religious and political reasons, it has not been confirmed whether it is the actual tomb of Abraham's family. For now, it just serves as a tourist site to make a profit! Abraham bought a tomb due to an urgent need. The land became a

permanent claim of his share in Canaan. In doing so, God put down a deposit for Abraham. It guaranteed the future generations to receive the whole region. Similarly, God lays down a deposit in us when He saves us. Paul says in Ephesians 1:13-14 – **13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.** The Holy Spirit lives inside us the moment we receive Jesus. Paul describes the Holy Spirit as a seal. It is as if God puts a stamp on our hearts to show His ownership of us. Once the Holy Spirit enters, He will stay forever. He assures believers that He will always be with them. Hardship cannot remove our relationship with God. He will not kick us out of His family even if we commit serious sins. Such security is not based on our feelings. It is grounded in God's promise. His love will never change even though we often change. Abraham acted out of faith because he believed in God's promises. Do our lives reflect the same close relationship with God? Kids are proud of their parents. Students show school spirit with their clothes. Employees of big companies gladly tell others where they work. Does our speech and conduct show our relationship with the Heavenly Father? We must not only know our beliefs, we must also show what we believe. As we live out our faith through actions, our title as a Christian is a status backed up by substance.

結論 CONCLUSION

God can use our life events to accomplish His will. The passage today was about making arrangements for Sarah's burial. Nowadays, funerals can be an extravagant, if not expensive matter. Aging parents hope that their children will honor their last wishes. Things like the format, location, memorial service and what to write about their lives can vary a great deal. In Sarah's case, the family only needed a cave. The main issue was not her preferences. The key thing was how God made use of the need to fulfill His plans. Abraham learned to submit to God in all things. He did not foresee the long-term significance of buying a tomb in Hebron. God surely planned everything in advance. The lesson for us is to include God in our plans, such as school, major, career, marriage, etc. We have our interests, family members have their opinions, friends have their suggestions and experts have their advice. But most importantly, we must follow God's guidance. Through our decisions and actions, we allow people to see how God works in our lives.

引言 INTRODUCTION

美國是一片充滿機會的土地。許多人從海外來到這裡，尋找更好的生活。他們追求所謂的「美國夢」。只要你肯努力工作，就能謀生。不論你的背景、膚色或技能如何，都有許多累積財富的途徑。實現美國夢的一個常見目標就是買房子。能擁有自己的家，會帶來許多滿足感。曾經有一段時間，我和妻子幾乎每年都搬家一次，只要房租漲價，我們就搬。那時我們還沒有孩子，家當也不多，因此搬家比較容易。終於，我們買下了第一棟屬於自己的房子。擁有房子也意味著責任隨之而來。當水龍頭或馬桶漏水時，我們再也不能打電話給管理處求助。甚至在搬進新家之前我就要面對現實。我永遠不會忘記人生第一次割草的經歷。我差一點在夏天的太陽底下中暑昏倒！感謝教會中許多朋友分享他們的經驗。如今，你也可以上 YouTube 找到各種修理的祕訣。你幾乎可以學會造火箭飛到月球！買房子意味著你決定安頓下來。到目前為止，亞伯拉罕仍然是寄居在異地的局外人。他知道神要將整個迦南地賜給他的後代。當我們來到創世記第 23 章時，亞伯拉罕又踏出信心的一步，迎接神的應許。他面臨一個迫切的需要，但神在幕後為亞伯拉罕開路。神也能藉著我們生命中的各樣事件，成就祂的旨意。

解釋 EXPLANATION

1. 需要 Need (v. 1-6)

我們根據三個用詞來探討這段經文。第一個字是需要。亞伯拉罕在妻子撒拉去世後，需要一個地方安葬她。我們先來讀第 1 到第 6 節。亞伯拉罕不能等，因為在中東的高溫下，屍體很快就會腐化。古代人不會火化遺體，妥善的埋葬是對過世的人表示尊意的方式。亞伯拉罕也不可能走一千英里的路回到迦勒底的吾珥的故鄉。因此，他向當地的赫人提出請求。赫人是迦南地的一個主要部落。亞伯拉罕雖然富有，但是他也知道自己是個外人。他在第 4 節中謙卑地說：「我在你們中間是外人，是寄居的。求你們在這裡給我一塊地，我好埋葬我的死人，使他不在我眼前。」經文指出，亞伯拉罕願意付全價購買墓地。在那個年代，買地不像今天買房子一樣簡單。土地是要傳給子孫的產業。此外，亞伯拉罕也不希望當地人以為他要侵略他們。如今，在美國某些地區，有些外國人購買大面積的農地，其中一些地點靠近軍事基地。人們自然會懷疑他們是否想要監視軍隊，甚至計劃搞破壞。但是亞伯拉罕並無意圖征服那片土地。赫人以善意回應，在第 6 節說：「我主請聽。你在我們中間是一位尊大的王子，只管在我們最好的墳地裡埋葬你的死人；我們沒有一人不容你在他的墳地裡埋葬你的死人。」亞伯拉罕對當地人並不陌生，他們稱他為

「尊大的王子」。他們聽說過神如何特別祝福他。亞伯拉罕曾率領未受訓練的人，打敗從東方來的四王聯軍；他和妻子在老年仍能得子。這樣的人，絕非小人物！如果拒絕他的合理要求，可能會引起衝突。因此，赫人歡迎亞伯拉罕選擇任何墓地。亞伯拉罕以真誠、直接的態度表達了自己的需要。他面對的是信奉別神的外邦人。當我們與非信徒交流之時，也同樣需要智慧。保羅在歌羅西書 4:5-6 勉勵我們：**5 你們要愛惜光陰，用智慧與外人交往。6 你們的言語要常常帶著和氣，好像用鹽調和，就可知道該怎樣回答各人。**我們的言語需要帶著智慧與恩慈。我們也要注意自己的態度，因為我們是神的代表。當你與收銀員、接待員、或侍應生交談時，是否表現出溫柔？當你打電話給客戶服務人員時，是否保持友善？我知道長時間等待和無聊的背景音樂會讓人煩躁。但請記得，那些服務你的人也是人。他們可能當天事情並不順利，甚至因為犯錯被上司責備，又或是剛剛應付完一個難纏的顧客。你要善待他們。作為顧客並不等於你是他們的老闆。如果你想贏得別人的尊重，你必須先尊重別人。最近一次我在家休假，一個人去餐廳吃早餐。我四處觀察人群，我特別注意到一位侍應。她花時間與客人聊天，也細心照顧他們的需要。我覺得她值得被鼓勵，於是我便對她說：「女士，我見過喜歡自己工作的人，但我可以看出妳是真心喜歡服務別人的。」她感謝我的讚賞。這樣真誠的話，比給她一大筆小費更能留在她的心中。你也可以對服事你的人這樣做，你不用花一分錢！當你這樣做之時，就是把他們看為神所創造、耶穌為之捨命的人，而不是滿足你需要的工具。

2. 留心 Heed (v. 7-15)

亞伯拉罕向赫人表達了自己的需要之後，他留心聽取他們的回應。讓我們從**第 7 到第 15 節**聽聽他們之間的交涉過程。亞伯拉罕兩次俯伏在當地居民面前，以示尊敬與感謝。他提出要購買麥比拉洞，洞的主人以弗崙剛好就在現場。他在第 11 節回答說：「**不然，我主請聽。我送給你這塊田，連田間的洞也送給你，在我同族的人面前都給你，可以埋葬你的死人。**」以弗崙很大方地把洞白白送給亞伯拉罕。亞伯拉罕感謝他的好意，但是他仍然堅持要付全價。以弗崙在第 15 節又說：「**我主請聽。值四百舍客勒銀子的一塊田，在你我中間還算什麼呢？只管埋葬你的死人吧！**」我們可能會想：「亞伯拉罕怎麼這麼笨？有人要送東西他還不收！」但是，如果以弗崙真的想要把地送給亞伯拉罕，他為何提到價錢？假設你送禮物給一位朋友，你會不會對他說：「希望你喜歡這個義大利真皮錢包，我在百貨公司花了一百塊買的！」？這樣一說，就破壞了禮物的意義。其實，以弗崙正在暗示：「你付四百舍客勒就可以得到這塊地，一分錢都不能少。」這是中東商人至今仍常用的討價還價技巧。有時店主口頭上會說「免費拿去吧」，但若你是真的不付錢，肯定會被當成小偷！若亞伯拉罕真的不付錢，他便是羞辱以弗崙。亞伯拉罕留心以弗崙的反應。他明白自己身在異地，沒有討價還價的權利。若談判破裂，不僅會影響關係，連妻子的安葬地都沒有。因此，他願意接受任何開價。交易便在眾人面前完成。那時沒有書面合約，眾人的見證被視為有法律效力。這也是後來神在律法中規定的原

則，只要有兩三個見證人，便能確認一件事。亞伯拉罕是個商人，但是他知道什麼時候該談判、什麼時候該退讓。今天，我們買東西時都想拿到最便宜的價格。然而若想在談判中佔上風，我們要留心對方的回應。兩年前，我為妻子買了一輛車。她的舊車報廢了，需要找代步工具。當時二手車市場價格仍然偏高，因此我們考慮購買新車。某品牌推出了低利率貸款的優惠。我心裡有些緊張，因為車商常被認為貪心。當我們找到買得起的車子後，我使用電子郵件與簡訊開始談判。我知道，若毫無準備就走進車行，肯定會吃虧。我甚至盡量避免打電話，除非必要。這個策略似乎奏效，車行接受了我提出的價格，並以電子郵件寄來正式報價。然後我打電話給銷售員確認細節，下一步就是去店裡簽約。但幾分鐘後，他又打來說：「先生，不好意思，你要的那輛車已經賣掉了。」我心想：「天啊，為什麼不早說！」他道歉後又補充：「不過我找到一輛同款但不同顏色的車，你願意考慮嗎？」我把他們的失誤當作談判的籌碼，我冷靜地回應：「作為補償，我認為你們給我額外的折扣是合理的。」我提出具體金額後，他的經理答應了，交易就這樣完成了。在整個過程中，我保持態度堅定但有禮貌，我並沒有因他們的錯誤而發火。交易後，我還邀請那位銷售員來教會。他答應了，雖然至今還沒出現。想想看，如果當時我態度粗暴、滿口怨氣，還有臉跟他傳福音嗎？無論遇見誰，我們都是神的見證人。我們的態度可以成為連接人與神的橋樑，也可能成為人與神之間的牆壁。

3. 契約 Deed (v. 16-20)

亞伯拉罕向人們表達需要一塊墓地，並在討論過程中留心聆聽他們的回應。最終，他買到了土地。他也得到了口頭承諾作為契約，證明那塊地屬於他。讓我們讀完第 16 到第 20 節的經文。在第 18 節和第 20 節都出現「定準」這個字，希伯來文的意思是「確認擁有權」。這就好像今天買房子一樣，當你完成所有財務與法律手續後，便會拿到一張契約。亞伯拉罕雖然沒有書面文件，但眾人的見證就等同於契約。第 19 節說明亞伯拉罕完成了他的目的：此後，亞伯拉罕把他妻子撒拉埋葬在迦南地幔利前的麥比拉田間的洞裡。(幔利就是希伯崙)。這個洞位於希伯崙，就是在幔利的東邊。亞伯拉罕與姪子羅得分開後，就定居在幔利。如今他在附近的希伯崙為撒拉買下了安息之地。後來，亞伯拉罕家族的幾位成員也葬在那裡，其中包括他的孫子雅各。還記得約瑟的故事嗎？因著神奇妙的安排，一個奴隸成為了埃及的宰相。由於嚴重的饑荒，約瑟把父親雅各和全家接到埃及居住。雅各臨終前在創世記 49:29-31 吩咐兒子們：29 「...我將要歸到我列祖那裡，你們要將我葬在赫人以弗崙田間的洞裡，與我祖我父在一處，30 就是在迦南地幔利前、麥比拉田間的洞；那洞和田是亞伯拉罕向赫人以弗崙買來為業，作墳地的。31 他們在那裡葬了亞伯拉罕和他妻撒拉，又在那裡葬了以撒和他的妻子利百加；我也在那裡葬了利亞。」我們看到亞伯拉罕與撒拉、以撒與利百加，以及利亞的名字。三代人葬在同一個洞裡。今天你到以色列的希伯崙旅遊，你會看到「族長之墓」。墓穴上建有建築物，一邊是猶太會堂，另一邊是清真寺。由於宗教與政治的原因，當地禁止考古

挖掘，因此無法確定那是否真是亞伯拉罕一家的墓地。目前它只是一個觀光景點，用以盈利。亞伯拉罕因緊急的需要而購買墳地，結果那塊地成為他在迦南的永久產業。彷彿神為亞伯拉罕的後代留下了一個憑據，確認他的後代會得到整遍土地。同樣地，當神拯救我們時，祂也在我們裡面放下一個屬靈的憑據。保羅在以弗所書 1:13-14 說：**13 你們既聽見真理的道，就是那叫你們得救的福音，也信了基督，既然信他，就受了所應許的聖靈為印記。14 這聖靈是我們得基業的憑據，直等到神之民被贖，使他的榮耀得著稱讚。**當我們接受耶穌的那一刻，聖靈就住在我們裡面。保羅把聖靈形容為「印記」，就像神在我們心上蓋印，表明我們屬於祂。聖靈一旦進入我們的生命，就永遠不會離開。信徒無論遭遇什麼困難，神都與他們同在。就算我們犯了嚴重的罪，神也不會將我們逐出祂的家。這份安全感不是建立在感覺上，而是建立在神的應許之上。神的愛永不改變，雖然我們常常改變。亞伯拉罕以行動證明他的信心，因為他相信神的應許。我們的生命是否也反映出與神同樣親密的關係？孩子為父母感到驕傲，學生喜歡穿寫著他們學校名字的衣服，大公司的員工也樂於告訴別人自己在哪裡工作。那麼，我們的言語與行為，是否顯出我們與天父的關係？我們不但要認識自己的信仰，更要活出我們的信仰。當我們以行動表明信心，基督徒就不只是一個頭銜，而是有真實生命的見證。

結論 CONCLUSION

神能藉著我們生命中的各樣事件，成就祂的旨意。今天的經文講述亞伯拉罕為撒拉的埋葬作安排。如今，喪禮往往成為一件極為隆重、甚至昂貴的事情。年邁的父母希望子女能完成他們臨終前的心願。葬禮的形式、地點、追思禮拜的安排，甚至生平的介紹，都可能有很大差異。在撒拉的情況中，家人所需要的只是一個洞穴。焦點並不在於她的個人喜好，而是神如何藉著這個需要成就祂的計畫。亞伯拉罕學會了在凡事上順服神。他無法預計在希伯崙購買墓地會產生什麼長遠的屬靈意義。然而，神早已為一切預備好。這段故事給我們的提醒是：在我們的計畫中，必須讓神參與其中：無論是學業、科系、事業、婚姻，或其他人生的重大決定。我們有自己的選擇，家人有他們的意見，朋友會給建議，專家也提供分析；但最重要的是，我們要跟隨神的帶領。透過我們的選擇與行動，讓人們看到神在我們生命中的作為。