

**The challenge of inheritance beyond the grave**

• God's promises about a land not yet fulfilled

• The land Abraham was looking for was not purely and entirely in this world.

• Canaan was only the first instalment – and Abraham himself would not get any of it

• The ultimate hope of the Christian is heaven on earth

• Abraham does not even have land to bury his wife

• The Canaan which God had in mind was a spiritual matter and the last phase of it was to be obtained in the world beyond this his lifetime

• He knows that the future of the purpose of God is tied up with what God will do in Canaan

Abraham still has one more great lesson to learn. He has entered into rest and the success of his life's work is assured. Now he has to face the challenge of inheritance beyond the grave. The ultimate blessing for the believer is after this life, in 'the world to come'. It is not just a matter of preoccupation with this world. It is true that God gives us many blessings and takes care of us in this world. But they are just extras and side-effects added on top of what God is doing for us. The Christian also has his eyes fixed on what is to be his or hers beyond the grave.

God had given Abraham promises about a land. He was to go to 'the land' that God would show him. 'All this land will I give to you', God said again and again. But at this point Abraham is elderly. His life will obviously soon be over and he has not received any land.

It was forcefully brought home to him when Sarah died. She died near Hebron <sup>☐1</sup> which was one of the places where Abraham had stayed. He and Sarah had some kind of temporary home there. Abraham had not received any territory. The promise that had been coming again and again has not been fulfilled in this respect. In the New Testament Paul speaks of the promise that Abraham should inherit **the world** <sup>☐2</sup>. God was not just speaking about the limited territory of Canaan when He gave these promises to Abraham. Later, the nation of Israel did indeed get that territory. But Canaan was only a tiny part of what God was intending to give. In Hebrews 11:8 it says Abraham sojourned in the land of promise as in a foreign land. He was looking forward 'to a city which has foundations whose builder and maker is God' <sup>☐3</sup>. The land Abraham was looking for was not purely and entirely in this world. Canaan was only the first instalment, and Abraham himself would not get any of it. The real territory was the whole world. The seed of Abraham will inherit the earth. There will be a new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells. The ultimate hope of the Christian is a glorified earth, when Christians will have new bodies and live in a glorified earth. The ultimate hope is heaven on earth.

When Sarah dies none of the land belongs to Abraham and he does not even have land enough to bury his wife. He has to go to some Hittites to ask for a place to bury her. Yet the promise has been all about land and physical territory.

Often Christians act as if being a Christian is just a kind of insurance policy to save us from hell and make sure that we have a good life here on planet earth. But this is not the right way of looking at salvation at all. We must not act as if God's blessings for us are entirely in this world. Peter said 'Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal ... as though something strange were happening' <sup>☐1</sup>. Jesus said 'In the world you shall have tribulation' <sup>☐2</sup>. We are not to expect an easy life. Our sights are to be set on glory beyond the grave. We are looking for a new heavens and new earth. We are looking for the world to come, a city which has foundations. Abraham wanted Canaan but the Canaan which God had in mind was a spiritual matter and the last phase of it was to be obtained in the world beyond this his lifetime.

Abraham knew that God's purpose would continue even after he had died. He wants to bury Sarah in Canaan. He goes to the Hittites and asks to buy some property <sup>☐1</sup>. The Hittites offer to give Abraham the land he needs <sup>☐2</sup> but Abraham is not happy with that. He wants to buy it in a legal way. He buys it at 'the gate' which was the place where business was done <sup>☐3</sup> (23:7-16). He wants this plot of land to be legally owned by

☐1 23:1-2

☐2 Romans 4:13

☐3 11:10

☐1 1 Peter 4:12

☐2 John 16:33

☐1 23:3-4

☐2 23:5-6

• A patch of ground to belong to his family to bury Sarah

**Living for the world to come**

• The purposes of God will go on beyond our personal death

• In Abraham's life story we have a preview of the Christian life – from our call to salvation and to ministry and inheritance

• Our Canaan, our promised land, is partly here and now – a first instalment.

• But the best is yet to come

• We shall be enjoying the glory that lasts for ever

his family. He knows that the future of the purpose of God is tied up with what God will do in Canaan. So he wants Sarah buried there and he wants that patch of ground to belong to his family. Everyone will know in ages to come that Abraham believed that his descendants would own that land. So the land becomes Abraham's <sup>3</sup>, an indication that Abraham had faith in what God would do beyond his lifetime.

<sup>3</sup> 23:7-16

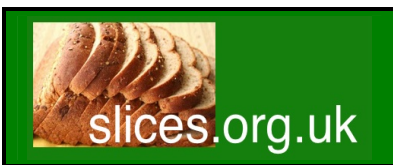
<sup>4</sup> 23:17-20

Are you living for this world? For pleasure? Money? Property? The thing to live for is God's purpose in history through the seed of Abraham, Jesus. Then you become an heir of the new heavens and the new earth in which righteousness dwells. Life rushes by at such a fast rate. We are to live for the world which is to come. Abraham had no fear of death.

The purposes of God will go on beyond our personal death. But we shall not lose the land. We shall have a new earth and we shall radiate in glory in God's new world.

In Abraham's life story we have a preview of the Christian life. It begins with justifying faith. Our call to salvation is at the same time a call to ministry and inheritance. We get caught up into God's plan and we become co-workers with Christ. The whole story of our life will be the story of the conflicts and triumphs of faith. Faith is the master-characteristic of the Christian life. It leads into every other blessing. By faith and patience we inherit God's promises for our lives. We achieve something within His kingdom. As we live the life of faith we are all along the way in covenant relationship with Him. God has sworn that Abraham's seed will come into being. He has sworn that His Priest after the order of Melchizedek will continue to intercede. We have Jesus as the anchor of our souls. We are tied to Him and He is in glory.

We live depending on the oath to Abraham. The seed of Abraham cannot fail. But we are wanting our own oath. We are children of Abraham and we want God to swear to us as He swore to Abraham. If we persist it will happen. He will say 'Now I know you fear me'. Most of our life after that point will be reaping more than sowing. Yet final glory never comes in this life. Our Canaan, our promised land, is partly here and now. We get a good portion of it even now and our life flows with 'milk and honey'. Yet the best is yet to come. We are laying up treasure in heaven. Any part of 'Canaan' here is only a first instalment. We already have a bit of heaven below and soon will get heaven above. Soon we shall pass on to the next phase of our inheritance and our Isaac will get married and continue the life of faith without us. We shall be happy to have it that way, for we shall be appreciating the city which has foundations, whose maker and builder is God. We shall be enjoying the glory that lasts for ever.



Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible* (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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