

## **SET YOUR HOPE ON GOD'S HEAVENLY KINGDOM**

*23 Sarah lived to be a hundred and twenty seven years old. <sup>2</sup>She died in Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron), in the land of Canaan. And Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her.*

*<sup>3</sup>Then Abraham got up from beside his dead wife and spoke to the Hittites, saying, <sup>4</sup>I am an alien and a sojourner among you. Sell me a piece of property for a burial site here in your land, so that I may bury my dead. <sup>5</sup>The Hittites answered Abraham, <sup>6</sup>Listen to 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 his tomb from you, so that you may bury your dead. <sup>7</sup>Then Abraham got up and bowed before the people of the land, namely the Hittites. <sup>8</sup>He spoke with them, saying, If you are willing for me to bury my dead among you, I ask you to intercede for me with Ephron the son of Zohar, <sup>9</sup>requesting him to sell me the cave of Machpelah, which belongs to him, which is located at the end of his field. Ask him to sell it to me for the full price as a burial site among you.*

*<sup>10</sup>Now Ephron the Hittite was sitting among his people and he replied to Abraham in the presence of all the Hittites who had come to the gate of the city, <sup>11</sup>No, my lord, listen to me. I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is located on the property. I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead. <sup>12</sup>Again Abraham bowed down before the people of the land, <sup>13</sup>and he said to Ephron in their presence, But if you will, I beg you, please listen to me. I will pay you the price of the field. Accept the payment from me, and I will bury my dead there. <sup>14</sup>Then Ephron answered Abraham, saying to him, <sup>15</sup>My lord, listen to me. A piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between me and you? Therefore, bury your dead.*

*<sup>16</sup>So Abraham agreed to Ephron's terms. In the presence of the Hittites Abraham weighed out for Ephron the amount of silver he had requested, four hundred shekels of silver, according to the commercial standard. <sup>17</sup>So Ephron's field that was in Machpelah, which was near Mamre—the field, and the cave located in it, as well as all the trees that were in the field—were deeded <sup>18</sup>to Abraham as his property in the presence of all the Hittites who had come to the gate of the city.*

*<sup>19</sup>After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave located in the field of Machpelah that was near Mamre, (which is at Hebron,) in the land of Canaan. <sup>20</sup>So the field and the cave located in it, were deeded to Abraham as his property for a burial site by the Hittites. (Gen. 23:1-20)*

### **Introduction**

A woman who did a lot of research that required a great deal of reading began to have difficulty with her vision. After a thorough examination, the eye doctor told her, "Your eyes are extremely tired, they need a rest."

"But that's impossible," replied the woman, "my work demands a great deal of fine print reading."

After thinking about this dilemma for a moment, the eye doctor inquired, “You work at home, don’t you? Well, do you have any wide panoramic views of the countryside where you live?”

“Yes,” she answered, “from the front porch I can see the peaks of the Blue Ridge Mountains.”

“Well then, the next time your eyes get tired, gaze steadily at the mountains for 10-20 minutes,” prescribed the doctor. “The far look will rest your eyes.” (*Our Daily Bread*, 11/24/92)

What the eye specialist prescribed for the lady with tired eyes has spiritual application for us as well. As Christians, we, too, need to develop “the far look.” We need to set our hope on God’s heavenly kingdom, which is yet to come in glory, instead of expecting the complete fulfillment of all God’s promises in this world and in this present life. Because God’s promises transcend this present world, let us set our hope on God’s heavenly kingdom.

### **I. Set Your Hope on God’s Heavenly Kingdom, Recognizing Your Present Status as a Spiritual Sojourner**

Genesis 23 records the death of Sarah and the circumstances of her burial. The LORD has promised Abraham possession of the land of Canaan (note Genesis 13:14-17, printed below.) But at the time of Sarah’s death Abraham owns no property in the land.

*After Lot had separated himself from him, Jehovah said to Abram, Now lift up your eyes from the place where you are and look northward and southward and eastward and westward; <sup>15</sup>because I will give to you and to your descendants forever all the land that you see. <sup>16</sup>And I will make your descendants as numerous as the dust of the earth, so that if a man could count the dust of the earth, then may your offspring also be counted. <sup>17</sup>Arise, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I will give it to you. (Gen.13:14-17)*

Abraham identifies himself to the Hittites as “*an alien and a sojourner among you;*” he acknowledges that at this time the land legally is the possession of the Canaanites. Abraham then proceeds to negotiate with the Hittites for the purchase of a burial site for his family. He succeeds in securing the site, but only at the very high price of 400 shekels (Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentaries on the Old Testament, The Pentateuch*, Vol. 1, p.256) Sarah has come to the end of her earthly life, Abraham is well advanced in years and is approaching the time of his departure, and at this late date all he possesses in the Promised Land is a burial site, nothing more. What about the promises of God? Time is running out for Abraham, time has already run out for Sarah.

What went through Abraham's mind? What was he thinking at this stage of his life? The Book of Hebrews reveals these things to us:

*By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. <sup>9</sup>By faith he became a sojourner in the Promised Land, as though living in a land that was not his own, living in tents, with Isaac and Jacob who were heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup>He was willing to do so because he was looking for the city that has foundations, the city whose architect and builder is God. ...<sup>13</sup>All these men were still living by faith when they died, not having received the fulfillment of the promises, only seeing them and greeting them from a distance, confessing that they were strangers and aliens on the earth. <sup>14</sup>Men who say such things make it evident that they are seeking a country of their own. <sup>15</sup>If, indeed, they had been thinking of that country from which they came, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup>Instead, they desired a better country, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. (Heb. 11:8-10, 13-16)*

Hebrews informs us that by faith Abraham went out to a place he was to receive for an inheritance; he went out, not knowing where he was going (vs. 8.) By faith he became a sojourner in the Promised Land (vs.9.) He looked for *"the city that has foundations, whose Architect and Builder is God"* (vs. 10.) Abraham willingly acknowledged himself to be a sojourner on the earth, *"because he was seeking a country of his own"* (vs. 13-14). The country he was seeking was *"a better one, a heavenly one,"* the city God has prepared for him—which is none other than the kingdom of heaven (vs. 16.)

What was Abraham's perspective? Abraham possessed "the far look." Whether from the very outset or in the course of time, it became clear to Abraham that the promises of God transcend this present world—he came to see that the land of Canaan was a type (an earthly representation) of the heavenly inheritance. By faith his focus transcended this present world and, consequently, he was willing to identify himself as an alien and sojourner (both spiritually and physically) on the earth.

Set your hope on God's heavenly kingdom, recognizing and accepting your present status as a spiritual sojourner. In 1 Peter 1:1 the Apostle Peter addresses his epistle to *"those who have been chosen by God and who are refugees."* The Greek word Peter uses, *παρεπιδημιος*, translated *"refugee"* or *"sojourner,"* literally means "one who is beside the public assembly" as opposed to being a part of it. Note that Peter is writing to Jewish and Gentile Christians who were residents of what is modern day Turkey, many of whom were no doubt born there, yet he identifies them as *"refugees," "sojourners,"* "spiritual aliens." Contrast the New Testament's identification of the unbeliever, *"those who reside upon the earth"* (Revelation 3:10,) with its identification of the Christian, *"our citizenship is in heaven"* (Philippians 3:20.)

We tend to develop deep roots in this present world, especially to the place of our birth or long time residence. But Peter teaches us that as Christians we need to develop a different perspective, our vision must transcend this present world—our hearts must be rooted in the heavenly kingdom of God, as the Apostle Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 4:18,

*... we do not focus on the things that are seen, but on the things that are not seen; for the things that are seen are temporal; but the things that are not seen are eternal.* (2 Cor. 4:18)

If you view yourself as a sojourner who is just temporarily passing through this world, what impact will this new perspective have upon your life? How will that view impact your priorities?

*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break in and steal; <sup>20</sup>rather, store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consume, and where thieves do not break in and steal; <sup>21</sup>for wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be also. ... <sup>33</sup>But seek first God's kingdom, and its righteousness; and all the things you need shall be given to you.* (the words of our Lord Jesus recorded in Matt. 6:19-21,33)

How will that view impact your integrity?

*... we make it our goal, whether at home in the body or absent from the body, to be well-pleasing to Christ; <sup>10</sup>because all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ; so that each one may receive the just reward for the deeds done while living in this earthly body. Each one will be rewarded for what he has done, according to whether it was good or bad.* (2 Cor. 5:9-10)

How will that view affect your perspective on suffering?

*Therefore we do not lose heart. Although our outward earthly being is wasting away, our inward spiritual being is renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup>Our light affliction, which lasts only for a moment, is producing an exceedingly great and eternal weight of glory for us, one that far outweighs all our earthly affliction.* (2 Cor. 4:16-17)

What enabled Abraham to exercise such life-transforming faith—faith that enabled him to willingly identify himself as a stranger and sojourner in the land of Canaan, the Promised Land? The answer: His personal communion with God. From the outset, the LORD instructed Abram, “*Walk before me*” (Gen. 17:1,) that is to say, “live your life in my presence.” Abraham’s personal communion with God is what increasingly enabled him to see things from God’s eternal perspective and to trust in God’s covenant faithfulness.

What was the result and benefit of Abraham's transcendent perspective? The benefit was hope, instead of anxiety and despair. For Abraham, death was not a permanent severance from the blessing but rather an entrance into the blessing, (following the resurrection of Christ.)

## **II. Set Your Hope on God's Heavenly Kingdom; Realizing that Your Physical Death will Usher You into Glory**

Genesis 25 records the death of Abraham and his burial beside Sarah in the cave of Machpelah. Verse 8 reports that Abraham upon his death *"was gathered to his people."* The expression *"gathered to his people,"* is an Old Testament expression describing the hope of the godly, intimating the final gathering of God's people. Note how the New Testament picks up this same expression and applies it to the Christian's final state of redemption:

*... then the Lord shall send out the angels, and he shall gather together his elect from the four winds—from the most distant part of the earth to the most distant part of heaven.* (Mk. 13:27)

*Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to him, ...* (2 Thess. 2:1)

Contrast this *"gathering"* with the fate of the ungodly as describe in Job 27:13,19, *"This is the destiny of a wicked man determined by God, ... <sup>19</sup>He lies down wealthy, but he shall not be gathered [to his fathers],"* intimating the final casting out of the unconverted. Note the New Testament's commentary on the final state of the ungodly: *"Then the king said to the servants, Tie him up hand and foot, and throw him out into the outer darkness; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth."* (Matt. 22:13.)

During the Old Testament era it appears that the redeemed, at the time of their death, entered into a state of soul sleep, note, for example, Psalm 88:10-12 and Psalm 115:17,

*Will you show wonders to the dead? Shall they that are deceased arise and praise you? <sup>11</sup>Shall your lovingkindness be declared in the grave? Or your faithfulness in the place of destruction? <sup>12</sup>Shall your wonders be known in the place of darkness? Or your righteousness in the land of oblivion?* (Psl. 88:10-12)

*The dead do not praise Jehovah, nor any who go down into silence.* (Psl. 115:17)

They departed this life with a sure hope, but the fulfillment of that hope was not realized until Christ's work of redemption was accomplished, for it is *"through Christ we ... have our access to the Father"* (Eph. 2:18.)

But for the New Testament believer—living on this side of Calvary and the accomplishment of redemption—the moment of death conveys his soul into the blessed presence of Christ his Savior: *“we are confident, I say, preferring to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord”* (2 Cor. 5:8.)

Set your hope on God’s heavenly kingdom, realizing that your physical death will usher you into glory. As the Apostle Paul testifies in Philippians 1:21,23, *“for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain ... I have the desire to depart and be with Christ, for it is very far better.”* Or as the Old Testament Psalmist testified concerning his hope, *“As for me, I shall see your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, seeing your image”* (Psl. 17:15.)

Question #37 of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* asks, “What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?” then gives the answer, “The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, still united to Christ, do rest in their graves until the resurrection.”

Question #38 asks, “What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection?” and gives the answer, “At the resurrection, believers being raised up in glory, shall be openly [i.e.; publicly] acknowledged [as God’s children] and acquitted on the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity.”

## **Conclusion**

As Christians, we need to develop and consistently exercise “the far view.” Because God’s promises transcend this present world, let us set our hope on God’s heavenly kingdom that is yet to come in all of its glory.

*Since you were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup>Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth; <sup>3</sup>because you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup>When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we also shall appear with him in glory. (Col. 3:1-4)*