



Who is Buried in the Cave of the Machpelah---

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A Tanach Tour of the Land of Israel - Program dedicated by Sarena & David Koschitzky, in memory of Riva Koschitzky z"l.

Shiur dedicated by ** David and Chani Klein in memory of Zvi Hersh ben Peretz z"l; by ** Morris Sosnovitch in honour of Rav Yeres for his dedication to the Seder Boker shiurim; and by ** Neville and Lyn Richter in memory of their parents and grandparents z"l.



1) Woodcut by Gustave Dore depicting burial of Sarah

2) Bible

Breishit chapter 23

יד וַיַּעַן עֶפְרוֹן אֶת-אַבְרָהָם, לֵאמֹר לוֹ. **14** And Ephron answered Abraham, saying unto him:

טו וַאֲדַנִּי שְׁמַעֲנִי, אֶרֶץ אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שֶׁקֶל-כֶּסֶף בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ מֵה-הוּא; וְאֶת-מִתְךָ, קַבֵּר. **15** 'My lord, hearken unto me: a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that betwixt me and thee? bury therefore thy dead.'

טז וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָהָם, אֶל-עֶפְרוֹן, וַיִּשְׁקַל אַבְרָהָם לְעֶפְרוֹן, אֶת-הַכֶּסֶף אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֵי-חֶת--אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שֶׁקֶל כֶּסֶף, עֵבֶר לַסֹּחֵר. **16** And Abraham hearkened unto Ephron; and Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in the hearing of the children of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant.

יז וַיִּקַּם שָׂדֵה עֶפְרוֹן, אֲשֶׁר בְּמַכְפֵּלָה, אֲשֶׁר, לְפָנַי מִמְרֵא: הַשָּׂדֵה, וְהַמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר-בוֹ, וְכָל-הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׂדֵה, אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל-גְּבוּלוֹ סָבִיב. **17** So 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 border thereof round about, were made sure

יח לְאַבְרָהָם לְמִקְנָה, לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי-חֶת, בְּכָל, בָּאֵי שַׁעַר-עִירוֹ. **18** unto Abraham for a possession in the presence of the children of Heth, before all that went in at the gate of his city.

יט וְאַחֲרֵי-כֵן קָבַר אַבְרָהָם אֶת-שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ, אֶל-מְעַרַת שָׂדֵה הַמַּכְפֵּלָה עַל-פְּנֵי מְרֵא--הוּא חֶבְרוֹן: בְּאֶרֶץ, כְּנָעַן. **19** And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre--the same is Hebron--in the land of Canaan.

כ וַיִּקַּם הַשָּׂדֵה וְהַמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר-בוֹ, לְאַבְרָהָם--לְאַחֲזֵת-קֶבֶר: מֵאֵת, בְּנֵי-חֶת. {ס} **20** And the field, and the cave that is therein, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession of a burying-place by the children of Heth. {S}

Breishit chapter 25

ח וַיָּגוּעַ וַיָּמָת אַבְרָהָם בְּשִׁיבָה טוֹבָה, זָקֵן וְשָׂבַע; וַיֵּאָסֶף, אֶל-עַמּוּיוֹ. **8** And Abraham expired, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people.

ט וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אֹתוֹ יִצְחָק וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל, **9** And Isaac and Ishmael his sons buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre;

י הַשְּׂדֵה אֲשֶׁר-קָנָה אַבְרָהָם, מֵאֵת בְּנֵי-חֵת--שָׁמָּה קָבַר אַבְרָהָם, וְשָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ. **10** the field which Abraham purchased of the children of Heth; there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife.

Breishit chapter 49

כט וַיְצַו אוֹתָם, וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אֲנִי נֹאֶסֶף אֶל-עַמִּי--קִבְּרוּ אֹתִי, אֶל-אֲבֹתַי: אֶל-הַמְעָרָה--אֲשֶׁר בְּשֵׂדֵה, עִפְרוֹן הַחִתִּי. **29** 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,

ל בַּמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשֵׂדֵה הַמַּכְפֵּלָה, אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי-מַמְרֵא--בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן: אֲשֶׁר קָנָה אַבְרָהָם אֶת-הַשְּׂדֵה, מֵאֵת עִפְרוֹן הַחִתִּי--לְאַחֲזַת-קֶבֶר. **30** 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 from Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a burying-place.

לא שָׁמָּה קִבְּרוּ אֶת-אַבְרָהָם, וְאֵת שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ, שָׁמָּה קִבְּרוּ אֶת-יִצְחָק, וְאֵת רֵבֶקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ; וְשָׁמָּה קִבְּרַתִּי, אֶת-לֵאָה. **31** There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah.

לב מִקְנֵה הַשְּׂדֵה וְהַמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר-בוֹ, מֵאֵת בְּנֵי-חֵת. **32** The field and the cave that is therein, which was purchased from the children of Heth.'

Breishit chapter 50

יג וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֹתוֹ בְּנָיו, אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן, וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אֹתוֹ, בַּמְעָרַת שֵׂדֵה הַמַּכְפֵּלָה: אֲשֶׁר קָנָה אַבְרָהָם אֶת-הַשְּׂדֵה לְאַחֲזַת-קֶבֶר, מֵאֵת עִפְרוֹן הַחִתִּי--עַל-פְּנֵי מַמְרֵא. **13** 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 b

3) President Isaac Herzog lights a Hanukkah candle in Hebron's Tomb of the Patriarchs in the West Bank, November 28, 2021



4) Babylonian Talmud Eruvin 53a

מערת המכפלה, רב ושמואל, חד אמר: שני בתים זה לפניו מזה, וחד אמר: בית ועלייה על גביו. בשלמא למאן דאמר זה על גב זה — היינו "מכפלה". אלא למאן דאמר שני בתים זה לפניו מזה, מאי "מכפלה"?

שכפולה בזוגות. "ממרא קרית ארבע", אמר רבי יצחק, קרית הארבע זוגות: אדם וחוה, אברהם ושרה, יצחק ורבקה, יעקב ולאה.

Apropos this dispute, the Gemara cites similar disputes between Rav and Shmuel. With regard to the Machpelah Cave, in which the Patriarchs and Matriarchs are buried, Rav and Shmuel disagreed. One said: The cave consists of two rooms, one farther in than the other. And one said: It consists of a room and a second story above it.

The Gemara asks: Granted, this is understandable according to the one who said the cave consists of one room above the other, as that is the meaning of Machpelah, double. However, according to the one who said it consists of two rooms, one farther in than the other, in what sense is it Machpelah? Even ordinary houses contain two rooms.

Rather, it is called Machpelah in the sense that it is doubled with the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, who are buried there in pairs. This is similar to the homiletic interpretation of the alternative name for Hebron mentioned in the Torah: "Mamre of Kiryat Ha'Arba, which is Hebron" (Genesis 35:27). Rabbi Yitzhak said: The city is called Kiryat Ha'Arba, the city of four, because it is the city of the four couples buried there: Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and Jacob and Leah.

5) Ramban 25;9

מערת המכפלה — לשון רבינו שלמה: בית ועלייה על גביו. דבר אחר: שכפולה בזוגות (בבלי עירובין נ"ג). ואינו נכון, כי הכתוב אמר: שדה עפרון אשר במכפלה (בראשית כ"ג:ז), והנה הוא שם המקום אשר בו השדה. ואין צורך לבקש טעם לשם המקומות.

ובבראשית רבה (בראשית רבה נ"ח:ח) אמרו שכפל הקב"ה קומתו של אדם הראשון וקברו בתוכה. ועל דעתם, היה כל המקום ההוא נקרא כן מעולם, והם לא ידעו טעמו, כי עפרון בדמי השדה מכר לו הכל על דעתו שאין שם קבר, והנה אברהם לא היה מבקש רק למכור לו המערה כי היא בקצה השדה, וישאר השדה לעפרון. והוא אמר לו דרך מוסר או מרמה שיתן לו השדה והמערה אשר בו, כי לא יתכן לאדם נכבד כמוהו שתהיה לו המערה לאחוזתה והשדה יהיה לאחר, ואברהם שמח בכך וקנה הכל בדמים שהזכיר לו.

THE CAVE OF MACHPELAH. Rashi comments: "It had a lower and an upper cave. Another explanation [of why it was called Machpelah — the root of which is keiphal (double)] — is that it was 'doubled' on account of the four couples who were buried there: Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah". But this is incorrect since Scripture states, the field of Ephron which was in Machpelah. Thus we see that it is the name of the place in which the field was located, and there is no need to search for a reason for the names of places.

In Bereshith Rabbah, the Sages have said: "The Holy One, blessed be He, bent double the stature of the first man and He buried him there." In their opinion, this entire place was always called Machpelah though the people did not know the reason for it for Ephron sold him everything for the price of the field unaware that there was a grave in it. Abraham, on the other hand, desired only that he should sell him the cave which was in the end of the field, and the field might be retained by Ephron. But Ephron by way of good conduct or trickery, [possibly hoping to receive a higher price for the larger transaction], said that he would give him the field

and the cave which was in it since it would be unbecoming for such an honorable person to own the cave as a possession for a burial-place while the field belonged to another. Abraham rejoiced at this suggestion, and he purchased it in its entirety for the price that Ephron mentioned.

6) Le Strange 1890, pp. 317–18 = p. 317, p. 318

In the year 1113 during the reign of Baldwin II of Jerusalem, according to Ali of Herat (writing in 1173), a certain part over the cave of Abraham had given way, and "a number of Franks had made their entrance therein". And they discovered "(the bodies) of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob", "their shrouds having fallen to pieces, lying propped up against a wall...Then the King, after providing new shrouds, caused the place to be closed once more". Similar information is given in Ibn al Athir's Chronicle under the year 1119; "In this year was opened the tomb of Abraham, and those of his two sons Isaac and Jacob ...Many people saw the Patriarch. Their limbs had nowise been disturbed, and beside them were placed lamps of gold and of silver."

7) "Itinerary," ed. Asher, pp. 40–42, Hebr --- .Benjamin of Tudela: (1170)

"Here that there is the great church called St. Abram, and this was a Jewish place of worship at the time of the Mohammedan rule, but the Gentiles have erected there six tombs, respectively called those of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah. The custodians tell the pilgrims that these are the tombs of the Patriarchs, for which information the pilgrims give them money. If a Jew comes, however, and gives a special reward, the custodian of the cave opens unto him a gate of iron, which was constructed by our forefathers, and then he is able to descend below by means of steps, holding a lighted candle in his hand. He then reaches a cave, in which nothing is to be found, and a cave beyond, which is likewise empty, but when he reaches the third cave behold there are six sepulchres, those of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, respectively facing those of Sarah, Rebekah and Leah, upon which the names of the three Patriarchs and their wives are inscribed in Hebrew characters. The cave is filled with barrels containing bones of people, which are taken there as to a sacred place. At the end of the field of the Machpelah stands Abraham's house with a spring in front of it".

8) Translation: Wright, Thomas (1848). Early Travels in Palestine: Comprising the Narratives of Arculf, Willibald, Bernard, Saewulf, Sigurd, Benjamin of Tudela, Sir John Maundeville, de. p. 86.

"The Gentiles have erected six sepulchres in this place, which they pretend to be those of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah. The pilgrims are told that they are the sepulchres of the fathers, and money is extorted from them. But if any Jew comes, who gives an additional fee to the keeper of the cave, an iron door is opened, which dates from the time of our forefathers who rest in peace, and with a burning candle in his hands, the visitor descends into a first cave, which is empty, traverses a second in the same state, and at last reaches a third, which contains six sepulchres, those of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and of Sarah, Rebekah, and Leah, one opposite the other. All these sepulchres bear inscriptions, the letters being engraved. Thus, upon that of Abraham we read: – "This is the sepulchre of our father Abraham; upon " whom be peace," and so on that of Isaac, and upon all the other sepulchres. A lamp burns in the cave and upon the sepulchres continually, both night and day, and you there see tombs filled with the bones of Israelites—for unto this day it is a custom of the house of Israel to bring hither the bones of their saints and of their forefathers, and to leave them there."

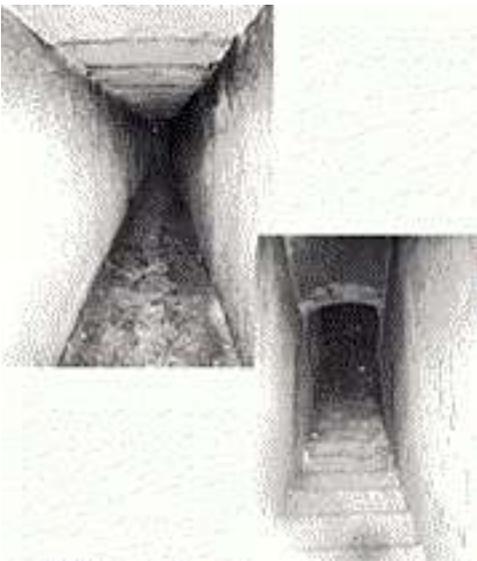
9) Stone canopy above the more visible known entrance to the caves



10) Michal Arbel entering cave Oct. 9, 1968



11) Pictures taken by Michal Arbel, 1968



12) Pictures From Elul 5781 -1981



13) Cave of rock, leading into the earth.



14) Pictures from Elul 1981



15) Map schematic of the "caves"

