

Supposed controversy of Acts. 7:16

- I. Here is the King James version of what The Holy Spirit said through Stephen:

Acts 7:16 "And were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem."

- II. Some clarification of wording:

- a. Sychem is the Greek word for the Hebrew Shechem.
 - i. It was later called Aramaic "sychar".
 - ii. John 4:5 "Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph."
 - iii. The Romans called it Flavia Neapolis, that came to be known as Nablus or Nabulus(an Arabic corruption). At the time of Christ it is a chief city of the Samaritans.
 - iv. There is controversy as to whether Nablus and Shechem are "exactly" the same place, today the majority opinion is they are close to one another but the OT Shechem is a bit East of the current city of Nablus.
- b. Emmor or Emor is the Greek word for Hamor.

- III. The verses that bear on what vs. 16 says...

- a. Gen. 23 – Abraham buries Sarah in the cave in Machpelah, the field of Ephron before Mamre that he purchased from the sons of Heth(Ephron the Hittite).
- b. Gen. 33:18-20 Jacob bought a parcel of a field from "the children of Hamor, Shechem's father" and built an altar to Jehovah there.
 - i. Note here – Shalem is a "city of Shechem", that is Shechem is used as a PLACE name in vs. 18. But in vs. 19 Shechem is a PERSON name as the father of Hamor.
- c. Gen. 34:2 "And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her, and lay with her, and defiled her."
 - i. I mention this verse because in the Greek, the word EN is sometimes used and the Greek word "TOU" is sometimes used, and the difference in wording would make if EN "in Shechem" as the place Vs. if TOU "Hamar the father of Shechem".
 - ii. Again differentiating between a geographic region of Shechem and the person named Shechem.
- d. Gen. 49:29-33 & 50:13:
 - i. In Genesis 49 Jacob is about to die and gives his blessings regarding each of his sons. He then speaks of where to lay his bones in Israel.
 - ii. Gen. 49:29-33...
 - 1. 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,
 - 2. 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 of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a burying place.
 - 3. 31 There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah.
 - 4. 32 The purchase of the field and of the cave that is therein was from the children of Heth.

5. 33 And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.
 - iii. Gen. 50:13 "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 burying place of Ephron the Hittite, before Mamre."
 - e. This is where the controversy enters, because in Gen. 49 Jacob is speaking and Jacob said here is where he buried his wife Leah. And, at the end of Gen. 50 Joseph says he is to be buried in Israel too. It doesn't say specifically where in Gen. 50, but back in Israel.
 - f. Moses did as Joseph requested and took his bones with them.
 - i. Ex. 13:19 "And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you."
 - g. Now we add to the problem with what The Holy Spirit said through Joshua.
 - i. Joshua 24:32 "And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for an hundred pieces of silver: and it became the inheritance of the children of Joseph."
 - ii. Here we are told the parcel of ground is one Jacob bought. It was purchased from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, for 100 pieces of silver.
 - iii. The "controversy" being was this the land Abraham bought or the land Jacob bought?
 - iv. The Holy Spirit is saying through Stephen that Jacob was buried in the tomb Abraham bought. Joshua is saying a burial place Jacob bought.
 - h. We know where Abraham was buried...
 - i. Gen. 25:5 "And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac."
 - ii. Gen. 25:8-10...
 1. 8 Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people.
 2. 9 And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre;
 3. 10 The field which Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife.
 - i. We know where Isaac was when he died...
 - i. Gen. 35:27-29...
 1. 27 And Jacob came unto Isaac his father unto Mamre, unto the city of Arbah, which is Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac sojourned.
 2. 28 And the days of Isaac were an hundred and fourscore years.
 3. 29 And Isaac gave up the ghost, and died, and was gathered unto his people, being old and full of days: and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.
- IV. The "controversy"...
- a. Was Stephen speaking of the land Abraham bought or that which Jacob bought?
 - b. In Acts 7:15 & 16 it says Jacob "and our fathers" which appears to be the other sons of Jacob, the 12 tribal heads, where buried "over unto Shechem, and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a price in silver of the sons of Hamor IN Shechem."
 - c. In the OT we are told Joseph was buried AT(or IN?) Shechem. But we're not told where the "forefathers" are buried.
 - d. In Acts the field at Shechem was purchased from the sons of Emor(or Hamor) the father of Shechem. In Gen. 33:19 Jacob made a purchase, and in Gen. 23:20 it was a cave of Machpelah at Hebron from Ephron the Hittite.

V. A word about Hebron...

- a. In early Genesis Hebron is mentioned a few times as being "the same as" –
 - i. A place in Mamre where Abraham built an altar. Gen. 13:18
 - ii. Kirjatharba (the city of Arba) where Sarah died. Gen. 23:2
 - iii. The place where Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpleah before Mamre: The same is Hebron in the land of Canaan. Gen. 23:19
 - iv. Where Jacob came to his father Isaac, the city of Arba, which is Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac sojourned. (which I take to mean where Abraham offered up Isaac). Gen. 35:27
 - v. So Abraham built an altar there in Gen. 13, was it that same altar where Isaac was offered? A beautiful foreshadowing of Jesus Christ being offered to take away our sin.
- b. HEBRON means "alliance" or "joining together" and we see Abraham as an individual, Jacob as Israel joined by his 12 sons to form Israel, and then in Joshua it was given to Caleb as one of the two spies who wanted to take the land. Later Joshua assign Hebron as in the territory of Judah, into which tribe Our Lord came as man.
- c. MACHPELAH means "double". We find all of the patriarchs and their wives(double) or at least Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were buried there (with their wives). But we know God DOUBLES things to make them sure. Those buried pointing to the fulfilment of God's Promised to Israel. We'll see the idea of "doubles" again just below.
- d. MAMRE – means "from the seeing" or "from the vision". The gravesites are "unknown" to men today. Out of sight as it were, but these people are alive in Heaven and have never been out of God's sight. Israel today may revere the men, but they don't revere The God who these men worshipped. The God who called them out and built them into a nation and put them in the position they have today awaiting His second return. We can see Spiritually that God's Wisdom is "out of sight" for men. It must be revealed through The Lord Jesus Christ. In this case the lives of these founders of Israel need to be seen as looking to "The Seed of Abraham", The Lord Jesus Christ, not as historically significant as the founding fathers of a nation.

VI. My thoughts...

- a. The Holy Spirit often gives us areas where we are forced to pause to think about Scripture compared to Scripture.
- b. But we know this is God's Word and The Holy Spirit isn't making mistakes and it is The Holy Spirit speaking through Stephen, not Stephen's momentary confusion.
- c. Many solutions have been presented to "fix" the, on-the-surface, differences.
- d. Rather than look at all those, I am just going to mention something I did not find as possibly important to our consideration.
 - i. The Greek Septuagint has interesting wording in Gen. 23...
 - ii. Vs. 9 – "And let him give me the cave..." it reads "το σπηλαιον το διπλουν" The Cave the double.
 - iii. As we go on with the transaction, Ephron introduces the price in his subtle way, vs. 15 "Not so O lord for I heard four hundred double-drachmas of silver; but what is that between me and you?" I just want us to understand the "doubles" in Ch. 23.
 - iv. Vs. 17 "And is the field of Ephron which was in double cave, which is against the face of Mamre." The words for "double cave" but the word "cave" is singular. It goes on to say "the field and the cave" singular "which are in it".
 - v. So is this a cave with two entrances? Is it two caves close to one another? Is it one entrance that branches two ways? It doesn't say any more.

- vi. Vs. 19, as we would expect, Sarah can only be buried in one, Abraham buried her in "The cave of the field at double cave which is before Mamre, this in Hebron the land of Canaan".
- vii. Vs. 20 Ch. 23 ends "And confirmed the field(singular) and the cave(singular) which was to Abraham for a possession of a burying-place(singular) from the sons of Heth."
- viii. We were told Abraham was promised land and sons by The Lord, yet this is the only land he ever owned, and that for burying Sarah.
- ix. But it speaks of "the field" and "double cave". I ask myself if there were perhaps several caves, and Abraham only bought one of them, later Jacob bought another, or more of them???
- x. I didn't find anyone addressing the textual presentation of "double cave", although it is singular. One cave with two parts? OR are we saying there were several caves, but for the price Abraham paid he only bought one of several caves.
- xi. I further wonder in that regard because Abraham had land "of promise" and it seems ironic the only land was for "the dead". Yet we know by Abraham's seed, The Lord Jesus Christ, he and Sarah are in Heaven with The Lord today.
- xii. So it was Jacob, Isreal, who perhaps bought several more caves along the same track of land for subsequent burial of Joseph and the forefathers and their wives in The Promised Land??
- xiii. I am NOT saying these thoughts resolve or answer questions people may have between the verses, I'm saying it is one other piece of information that MAY contribute to a resolution.
- xiv. BUT what we KNOW is this is GOD'S WORD and Stephen is not causing a controversy among these learned Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees.