

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Chayei Soroh

Cheshvan 22, 5778 – November 11, 2017

Compiled from the works of
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An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi Parshas Chayei Soroh

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Rashi in His Own Words

בראשית כ"ג, ט': וַיִּתְּנֵנִי לִי אֶת־מַעְרַת הַמַּכְפֵּלָה אֲשֶׁר־לּוֹ אֲשֶׁר בְּקֶצֶה שְׂדֵהוּ בְכֶסֶף מְלֵא יִתְּנֶנָּה לִי בְּתוֹכְכֶם לְאַחֲזֵת־קֶבֶר:
רש"י ד"ה המכפלה: בית ועליה על גביו. דבר אחר שכפולה בזוגות:

Bereishis 23:9: That he may give me the Machpelah (Double) Cave which belongs to him. It is at the end of his field. Let him give it to me for a full price in your midst for (me to use as a) burial property."

Rashi Heading - double: A structure with an upper story over it. Another interpretation (that it was called so is) because it was doubled with couples.

Synopsis

In this week's Torah portion, Chayei Soroh, we learn of the passing of our Matriarch Soroh. Avrohom wanted to buy a particular burial plot for his wife. It had belonged to Ephron Ben Tzochar of Chais. Avrohom approached the people of Chais and asked them to speak to Ephron on his behalf. He asked them to tell Ephron¹ "that he may give me the Machpelah (double) Cave, which belongs to him. It is at the end of his field." Furthermore he said that he would buy it "for the full price in your midst in order to serve as burial property."

Rashi cites the word "Machpelah," meaning double. He explains that there was a structure (literally a house) with a second story above it. In other words there was a two story cave at the end of the field. That was why it was called "double."

Rashi gives a second explanation, which also serves as another reason for calling the cave "double." He writes that it was doubled with couples². However we seem to have a number of difficulties with each of Rashi's explanations. If there is a double cave, why assume that one cave was above the other? It is just as easy to say that one was beside the other, or that one cave was within the other. That would certainly be called double. Furthermore, what do we mean that it was

1. Bereishis 23:9.

2. Four couples were buried there. Adam and Chava, Avrohom and Soroh, Yitzchok and Rivkah and Yaakov and Leah.

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“doubled with couples?” Was Ephron, or even Avrohom aware that Adam and Chava were buried there? If Ephron realized that they were buried there, he certainly would have asked for a great deal more money. Besides, the other couples were not yet buried!

It is also difficult to understand why one would call a cave a structure or a house. They are polar opposites! A structure, or a house is built on the ground; this is in direct contrast to a cave which is by definition *under* the ground.

We also find a few verses further³ “the field of Ephron which was in the Machpelah.” In other words we find that the entire area was called Machpelah. That is why Rashi explained that it was a structure with a second floor above it. Avrohom was giving a sign to show which piece of land which he wanted. He wanted the land called Machpelah. How would they know which particular plot of land Avrohom was referring to? It was in the field upon which there was a two-story house. A two-story house was uncommon in those days.

Rashi’s Explanation

This week we read the Torah portion of Chayei Soroh. First the Torah tells us of the passing of Soroh. Then we are told that Avrohom approached the people of Chais and asked them to speak to Ephron ben Tzohar on his behalf. He wanted to purchase a piece of land which Ephron owned in which to bury his wife Soroh. Avrohom asked the people of Chais to request of Ephron “that he should give me the Machpelah (Double) Cave which belongs to him, which is at the end of his field.”

Rashi cites the word “Hamachpelah – המכפלה,” meaning the double, and explains that it is “a structure (literally a house) with an upper story upon it.”

At first glance Rashi’s intention seems to be that the cave is called Machpelah – Doubled, because it consists of two floors; it is actually one cave above another.

Rashi continues his commentary with a second explanation. He writes that “(there is) another interpretation. (It was called “doubled”) because it was doubled with couples.” This is similar to Rashi’s comment earlier⁴. The verse writes that “(And Soroh died) in Kiryas Arbah (literally the city of four).” Rashi explains the reason for the unusual name. “It was so called

3. Bereishis 23:17.

4. Bereishis 23:2.

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because of the four couples that were buried there man and wife; Adam and Chava, Avrohom and Soroh, Yitzchak and Rivkah and Yaakov and Leah.”

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

Saying that the cave was a structure with an upper story above it poses a number of questions. The words “a Double Cave” merely imply that there were two caves. It does not say that one was above the other. It may just as well mean that one cave was within the other. In other words the caves could have been side by side and divided by one wall in between them. That would leave an outer cave and an inner cave. It could also mean that one cave was alongside the other. Why does Rashi find it necessary to say that one was above the other?

The word “Machpelah, “Double,” implies that we are talking about one thing which was divided in two; not about two separate things. One cave within the other would seem to fit with this description; it is one cave divided in half. That can certainly be called “double” because it is impossible to enter the inner cave without first going through the outer one. But Rashi describes the situation as one cave *above* the other. That would seem to describe two totally separate caves. The upper cave has no need for the lower cave whatsoever. To the contrary, without a cave underneath it the upper cave would be firmer!

Rashi teaches us that there was a structure with an upper story upon it. Yet a structure and a cave are not only two different things, they are polar opposites! A structure is built upon the ground, and a cave is beneath the ground. It would seem that Rashi should have said a cave with a story above it rather than a structure with a story above it.

Rashi’s second explanation also poses a number of difficulties. At the time that this real estate purchase took place the only couple buried there were Adam and Chava. We know that a place can be called by a name prophetically because of something which *will* happen there in the future. We know this from an earlier verse in the Torah. The Torah said that⁵ “Sarah died in Kiryas Arbah.” At that point only Adam and Chava were buried there. However we cannot say that this is Avrohom’s meaning here. He used the name “the Doubled Cave” in order to describe to the people of Chais and Ephron the area he wanted to buy. If they did not know that Adam and Chava were buried there, as would three other couples, it would not seem to be a good description of the area he wished to buy.

5. Bereishis 23:2.

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Furthermore it was highly unlikely that it was known that Adam and Chava were already buried there. Had Ephron known, he would have been aware of how precious the cave was to Avrohom and to all of the people of the world. With that knowledge he would have sold the cave for a much higher price.

Rashi generally only offers one explanation for each question. When Rashi gives two reasons for something it is because there is a small problem remaining in Peshat even after the first answer. The second answer explains the problem remaining from the first; however it is not as close to Peshat as the first answer is. We need to understand why Rashi finds a need to offer us two answers here.

A few verses further on it says⁶ “and so the field of Ephron which was in Machpelah facing Mamre was established (as Avrohom's possession). (This included) the field and the cave that was in it, and all of the trees that were in the field ...” In other words, that entire area was called Machpelah; not merely the cave. That seems like an excellent reason for referring to the cave as the “Machpelah Cave.” Why does Rashi need (not only one reason, but *two*) for calling the cave “double?”

The Explanation

The expression in our verse “the Machpelah – Double – Cave” makes it clear that the word “Machpelah – Double” is modifying the word cave. What sort of cave was it? It was a double cave. That is why Rashi explains here that the term “Machpelah” refers to the cave, and not to the field.

However, according to this Rashi is faced with a dilemma. The Torah uses expressions such as⁶ “Ephron’s field which was in the Machpelah.” This expression, among others, indicate that the word Machpelah refers to the entire area; not merely the cave.

Therefore Rashi needs to find another reason that the cave was called “Double – Machpelah.” was because *near* the cave was a structure with a second story, meaning a two story house⁷. This explains all of the different expression mentioned earlier. Both the cave and the field were called “Machpelah.”

There is another reason that Rashi explains that the meaning of “Machpelah” is a double house, i.e. two floors, rather than a double cave. If we say that the cave was double, it would have

6. Bereishis 23:17.

7. In their time a two-story house was uncommon.

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to mean that it was very large. That would emphasize the size of the cave. Hence the value of the field would not have been in Avrohom's best interest.

The Torah tells us that Avrohom gave two signs to show exactly which cave he wished to purchase. He said (a) that he wanted the Machpelah Cave, and (b) that it is at the end of Ephron's field. Rashi is not satisfied with that explanation alone. That is why he gave a second explanations.

Avrohom knew that the cave was a burial place for couples. He knew that it had pairs. However he did not know how many there were or who these couples were. He only said that it had pairs, i.e. it was a burial place for couples. That is the reason that Avrohom used the word "double." Despite the fact that the people of Chais offered Avrohom the choicest of their burial plots, he only wanted Ephron's cave because it has place for couples.

The people of Chais could still have countered Avrohom's request by offering him two plots; one for himself and one for Soroh. Therefore he did not just say that it was "double," he said that it is "doubled with couples." He did not wish to be buried among strangers, but rather in a place which has places for couples built in. He wanted a burial place for himself and his family.

However, there are difficulties with explaining it in this manner. The way that the story reads is difficult to understand. First Avrohom asks the people of Chais to have mercy on him. He asked them to give him a place in which he can (finally) bury his wife. Then he requested that it must be a family burial place! Therefore Rashi favors his first explanation. Even though there is a difficulty with that explanation, it is not a very great difficulty. While it is true that according to Rashi there was a two-story house on the field. This caused everything there to be called "double." This necessitated Avrohom to give two signs in order to point out the cave which he meant⁸. The fact is that it is not a very strong question. At times people do give more than one sign to specify which plot of land they mean.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Chayei Soroh 5729)

I hope that you gained as much by reading this as I did by translating and adapting it.

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8. As stated above, he told the people of Chais that he wanted the "Double Cave," which was at the end of Ephron's field.

**DEDICATED IN HONOR OF
the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

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**IN HONOR OF
Chaim and Aiden Oded שיחיו Morris**

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**DEDICATED BY THEIR PARENTS
Rabbi & Mrs. Menachem M. and Chaya Mushka שיחיו Morris**

* * *

**IN LOVING MEMORY OF
Mrs. Sima Alexandra ע"ה bas Reb Idel Yeshaya שי Eagle
Passed away on 23 Cheshvan, 5772
May Her Soul be bound in the Eternal Bond of Life**

*

**DEDICATED BY HER SON
Hatomim Shmuel Halevi שי Eagle**

* * *

**IN HONOR OF
Mr. Sholom Moshe Hacoheh ben Tzivia שי Cohen
&
Mrs. Berocho bas Soroh שתחילי Cohen
For a complete and speedy recovery**

* * *

**DEDICATED BY
Hatomim Moshe Shlomoh Zohar שי Mars**

*

May he merit to be a Chossid, a Yerei Shomayim and a Lamdon

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חיילי "צבאות השם" חיים ועדן עודד שיחיו מאריס

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נדפס ע"י הוריהם

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ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

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יהי רצון שיזכה להיות חסיד, ירא שמים, ולמדן