

Acts 7:16: Shechem or Cave of Machpelah; Abraham or Jacob? – Floyd Nolen Jones, Th.D., Ph.D.

Gen. 23:16 ...and Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in the audience of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant.

17 And the field of Ephron which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre (Hebron), the field and the cave which was therein, and all the trees that were in the field...were made sure

18 To Abraham for a possession in the presence of the children of Heth before all...at the gate of his city.

19 And...Abraham buried Sarah...in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre: the same is Hebron.

20 And the field & cave...therein, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession of a buryingplace by the sons of Heth. (As Hebrew & Greek alphabets differ, NT spellings may differ from OT: e.g., Acts 7:16)

Gen. 33:18 And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padanaram; and pitched his tent before the city.

19 And he bought a parcel of a field, where he had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor (Grk. = Emmor), Shechem's father, for an hundred pieces of money.

Gen. 49:29 And (Jacob) said unto (his sons)...bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite,

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 buryingplace.

31 There they buried Abraham & his wife Sarah, Isaac, and Rebekah; and there I (Jacob) buried Leah.

32 The purchase of the field and of the cave that is therein was from the children of Heth.

Gen. 50:13 For (Jacob's) sons...buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham bought with the field for a possession of a buryingplace of Ephron the Hittite, before Mamre (Hebron).

Josh. 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.

Acts 7:15 So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers,

16 And were carried over into Sychem (trans. from Greek = Heb. Shechem), & laid in the sepulcher Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor (Hamor) the father of Sychem (Shechem).

Some mistakenly take Acts 7:15-16 as meaning Jacob was buried at Sychem (aka Shechem). As a result, they insist a contradiction exists between Acts 7:16 and Genesis 50:13, for the latter clearly states Jacob was interred in the Cave of Machpelah near Mamre. (aka Hebron – along with his wife Leah, his parents Isaac and Rebekah as well as his grandparents Abraham and Sarah: see Gen. 23:16-20, 49:29-31 above)

Now the Creator not only originally gave His Word free of error, our Lord further promised to forever *preserve* the text, even to the jot and tittle (Psa. 12:6-7; Isa. 40:8; Mat. 5:18; Mk. 13:31; 1 Pet. 1:23-25). Consequently, the Genesis passages (and Joshua 24:32) must be taken as authentic. Furthermore, in his address before the Sanhedrin Stephen is said to have been “full of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 7:55); thus, he is speaking under the Spirits direction! (cp. Jer. 36:4, 18, 27-28, 32) Therefore, Acts 7:15-16 *cannot* be taken to mean Jacob was buried at Shechem but is instead one's misguided comprehension of the verse.

Since Genesis 50 states Jacob was laid in the cave in the field of Machpelah, Acts 7:16 obviously does not *include* Jacob as being buried in Shechem. Thus, we properly understand Acts 7:16 such that Jacob & his 12 sons all *died* in Egypt and were interred there. (110-year-old Joseph in 1635 BC & afterward his 11 brothers - the Acts 7:15 “fathers”: from these sons came the 12 tribes) But when Joshua began dividing the land among the tribes (c.1445 BC) after a 7-year war with the Canaanites, Joseph and his brothers (aka the patriarchs) were re-buried at Shechem (Sychem, Josh. 24:32; Acts 7:15-16) – whereas Jacob was not.

The doubters next reply: so who purchased the burial plot in Shechem – Abraham or Jacob? Stephen said Abraham bought it, but Genesis 33:18-19 says it was Jacob. As God does not contradict Himself, the straightforward answer is that Abraham obviously purchased *two* burial grounds. The first, near Hebron, he bought from Ephron the Hittite (Gen. 23:17): the second, near Shechem (Sychem) from the sons of Emmor (aka Hamor; Acts 7:15-16). As Scripture never associates his son Isaac with Shechem, apparently over time the locals considered Abraham's ownership no longer valid; so Jacob re-purchased the Shechem plot.