

“Sarah, the Mother of Nations”

“Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.” Genesis 18:14

As we look at the life of Sarah, the wife of one of the great patriarchs, Abraham, we will see that while she was a Godly woman of great strength and character, she was also a woman with human weaknesses. In that sense, as women who seek to follow the Lord and many times stumble, we can all certainly relate to her.

We are first introduced to Sarah, whose name at the time was actually Sarai (meaning “princess” or “noblewoman”), in Genesis 11:29, where she is listed in the genealogy as Abraham’s wife. After Abraham’s father Terah had taken them from the land of Ur, they were residing in Haran. Upon the death of his father, Abraham was told by God that he was to leave there and go where the Lord was leading him. Of course, this meant that he was taking his wife and all their possessions, including his nephew Lot and all of their servants. Though we do not actually know what Sarah’s reaction to this move was, we can only imagine. Was she excited to be going on this journey; this adventure? Was she afraid of what awaited them? Was she sad about leaving the comfort of her home? We can’t know, but what we do know is that she went willingly. She did what any God fearing woman was supposed to do ... she followed her husband. And so they came to the land of Canaan and resided there, until a severe famine came, and Abraham took his family and all their possessions and set out again ... this time for the land of Egypt.

Sarah the Beautiful. The great historian Josephus described Sarai as a woman of “great beauty” .. so much so, that her fame had preceded her when she and Abraham arrived in Egypt after leaving the land of Canaan. The bible describes her as being “*a woman of beautiful countenance.*” (Genesis 12:11) There are not too many instances in the bible where a woman’s physical beauty is described. When we study Rebekah and Rachel, we’ll see that their beauty is also mentioned. What is most interesting about Sarah, however, is that she was already about 65 years old at this time, but still remarkably beautiful. Feeling that her beauty would be a threat to his safety, Abraham devised a plan to pass her off as his sister. This was not a complete falsehood, since Sarah really was his half sister; they shared the same father, Terah. It was not a lie, but his plan was still a devious one. He felt that if she was presented as his wife, his life would be taken in order to get him out of the way. And so it was that when Pharaoh heard of her beauty, he felt he had to see her for himself and had her brought to him, with the intention of making her his wife. As soon as he did, however, the bible says God sent a great plague on him and his house. (Genesis 12:17) This was God’s way of protecting Sarah and preserving the great plan God had for her and Abraham. When Pharaoh tries to find out why he is being punished, he finds out the truth about Sarah. He confronts Abraham, returns Sarah to him and sends them all away with all the gifts he had lavished on Abraham.

There is no question but that what Abraham did put his wife’s safety and honor at risk. And how assuring and comforting it is to know that God protected her, in spite of her husband’s self-serving actions. What is even more mind boggling, however, is that it happened again! The next account is found in Genesis 20. Here we find Abraham and his family (approximately 20 years later) journeying south to the land of Gerar. Once again, lacking faith that God would protect him and fearing that he would be

killed because of Sarah, he tells everyone that she is his sister. As it happened with Pharaoh earlier, this time it is the King of Gerar, Abimelech, who takes Sarah. No sooner had he done so, though, that God tells him in a dream that the woman he has taken is actually a man's wife. I'd like us to read in Genesis 20:4-7 what God says to Abimelech.

How wonderful to know how much value God placed on the protection of Sarah. Her husband had once again failed to keep her out of harm's way, which is the job of a good husband, but God was faithful. And this wasn't just any husband, it was Abraham, friend of God, patriarch, father of nations, and yet after all his years of following God, he failed, in this instance, to trust him with his life. It took the divine providence and sovereignty of God to protect Sarah. This should serve as reassurance to us, as women, that God will always protect what is His, and we ARE His; we are daughters of the King! Once again, Abraham is sent away, this time with oxen, sheep, servants and 1,000 pieces of silver.

Sarah and the Plan to "Do it My Way." As women, we have our dreams and our desires. Some of us grow up with aspirations of a fulfilling career, and some of us long to be fulfilled as wives and mothers; and sometimes both. I believe Sarah knew the fulfillment of being a good, Godly wife, but she also yearned to be a mother. God knows our hearts, and His word tells us in Psalm 37:4, "*Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.*" We're also told in Proverbs 3:5-6, "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.*" Sarah must have embraced these beliefs deep in her core, but when the Lord promised Abraham that he would have a son by Sarah and the years went by, doubt began to grow in her heart. She forgot the promise for a moment and devised her own plan. Genesis 16:1-2: "Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no children. And he had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, '*See now, the Lord has restrained me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her.*' And Abraham heeded the voice of Sarai." Now we know that this was perfectly acceptable in the culture of this time. How great would it have been, though, if the story read here that Abraham objected to her plan and said something like, "What? No! The Lord has promised me a son from you, my wife, my partner, my love ... I could never lie with someone else!" But he didn't! He "heeded her voice." In other words, he obeyed. He went in to Hagar and, of course, as we know, she conceived.

Sarah, the Discontented. I can think of many times in my life when I have tried to take matters into my own hands instead of turning over the situation to God. Of course, our way never works out well without the Lord. I'm sure I'm not the only one guilty of this, so we probably shouldn't judge Sarah too harshly, when her plan backfires. She thought a child by Hagar would solve all their problems. Let me help God; I know he said this, but let's hurry it along a little. And what happens? Disaster! First of all, Hagar's pride causes her to develop a superior and hateful attitude towards Sarah as soon as she becomes pregnant. Sarah retaliated by treating her badly, so much so, that Hagar runs away. Mercifully, the Lord guides her back, and Ishmael, her son, is born. We can read the whole account in Genesis, Chapter 16.

In the 17th chapter of Genesis, God appears to Abraham again and reestablishes His covenant with him. He changes his name from Abram to Abraham, and Sarai's name to Sarah (the only woman in the bible whose name God changed) and it is here that he also names her the "*mother of nations.*" "*Kings of peoples shall be from her,*" the Lord says. He also tells Abraham that it is not Ishmael who will be the heir of Abraham's covenant. "*No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him.*" (Genesis 17:19)

Sarah and Isaac. Isaac, the son of promise, is born to Sarah in the 21st chapter of Genesis. His name meant “laughter.” The bible quotes her as saying, “*God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me ... who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age.*” (Genesis 21:7) Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born, and Sarah was 90! Is it no wonder that there was laughter?

As Isaac’s mother, Sarah was, no doubt, at her happiest. Her dream, her desire had finally been fulfilled by the Lord. Even though it came late in her life, she was a mother; she had borne her husband a son! Unfortunately, there was more heartache in store for her with regard to Hagar’s son Ishmael. We know that even in today’s society, blended families, more often than not, have their trials and challenges. We’re told that a feast was made to commemorate the weaning of Isaac. This was considered a milestone in the child’s life and cause for a celebration. It was at that celebration, that Sarah saw Ishmael, who would have been a teenager by this time, mocking the celebration and scoffing Isaac. Galatians 4:29 makes mention of this where the Apostle Paul compares us to Isaac as the “*children of promise.*” “*But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now.*” There was always going to be that animosity, that struggle, just as it continues today. That’s why God intervenes in what happens next. Now, if this had been in present times, we probably would have used the expression that Sarah “blew her top.” This is exactly what happened. It was not the best side of Sarah’s character and caused her to lash out in a way that was anything but Godly! “*Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac.*” (Genesis 21:10) The bible says the matter was “*displeasing*” to Abraham. That’s probably putting it mildly; after all, Ishmael was his son, too; his flesh and blood. But God, in his infinite wisdom says to Abraham, “*Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called. Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed.*” (Genesis 21:12-13) God still had a plan and, in order to accomplish it, there had to be a separation between Ishmael, who would lead the Arab nations, and Isaac, Abraham’s true heir.

Lessons to be Learned from Sarah. There are many life lessons to be learned from the life of Sarah. We could talk about her faith, her patience and her obedience – to her God and to her husband. Here are three other important facts that stand out from her story:

- Nothing is impossible with God Matthew 17:20
- God keeps His promises Hebrews 10:23
- God’s timing is always right 2 Peter 3:8
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The Death of Sarah. The last account of Sarah in the bible is in Genesis, Chapter 23, where it says that she lived to be 127 years old. She died in Canaan, and we’re told that Abraham wept for her and grieved her loss. For those of us that have been visited by grief, we know what that pain is like. Sarah had been his wife for more than 100 years. His love for her was so strong that he could not rest until he found a suitable place for her to be buried. Since he was considered a foreigner in Canaan, he had to negotiate for a burial place. The bible devotes 15 verses (Genesis 23:3-18) to Abraham’s quest to negotiate a suitable place to lay Sarah to rest. The Hittites to whom the burial site Abraham wanted belonged offered to give it to him as a gesture of goodwill. It was a field in Ephron that had a cave. Abraham refused to accept it as a gift, however, and, in front of witnesses, agreed to pay the full price for the property. We might wonder, why didn’t he accept it as a gift? It was so important to Abraham that he did not want it questioned later

that the land belonged to him. It also shows his integrity; he was a man of wealth, so why shouldn't he pay for the place? When we lose those we love, it is with great care and mourning that we seek to properly dispose of their remains. This is what Abraham did. Sarah had been his lifelong partner, and he grieved her loss deeply. This was the last act of love he could perform for her. And so she was buried in Hebron, and the life of one of the most impactful women in the bible came to a close.



“By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful Who had promised.” Hebrews 11:11