

Series: **Proud of Marriage**

Today's Title: **"The Matriarch of Israel"**

July 14, 2024 – *Genesis 11:27-23:20 and other Selected passages*

Objective: To help us be encouraged as we look at the struggles and joys of Sarah's life and God's faithfulness to her.

Justin and Amber Elwell – introduction / commissioning prayer of blessing over their ministry here at CDOBC.

Prayer for Justin, Amber and family – and sermon.

We started a new series last week: "Great Women of the Bible" Last week I talked about Eve – "The Mother of the Living". Today, I'm talking about Sarah – "The Matriarch of Israel".

- Sarah is the only woman in the Bible whose name God changed. God replaced Sarai, which meant "my princess," with Sarah, "mother of nations."
- Sarah, and her husband, Abraham, lived around 1,900-2,000 B.C. – Other O.T. people – N.T. events – Pastor Justin.
- Another detail which speaks to her unique status in the Bible is she is the only woman whose age at death is recorded. This speaks to the high level of importance she had within the Hebrew culture. (*All of the Women of the Bible*, by Edith Deen, p. 15)

We read about Sarah in **Genesis 11:27-23:20**

We don't have the time to read these 12 chapters today – so allow me to summarize the major points of her life.

In **Genesis 12** God calls to Abraham and tells him to leave his home and go to a land that God will show him. (Genesis 12:1-3)

Abraham obeys God's call on his life – and he brings his wife, Sarah, his nephew Lot, and the rest of his family.

He was 75, and Sarah was 65 when they followed God's call.

God promises that He will lead them to another land – and he will make Abraham into a great nation – and through Abraham God would bless all the people of the earth.

Later, the couple travels down to Egypt – and then back to the land of Canaan.

Chapter 13 & 14 – Upon returning to Canaan, Abraham discovers 4 kings from the North attack the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah – and took Lot and Lot's family captive as a POW's.

Abraham marshaled his forces – over 300 men - and pursued after Lot – and rescued him and his family.

In **Genesis 15** God upgrades His promise to a Covenant – the *Abrahamic Covenant* – which was solely dependent on God's faithfulness to His Word – not on Abraham's obedience.

In **chapter 16**, 10 years after the initial promise of God to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations, with the urging of his wife, Sarah, Abraham took Sarah's maid, Hagar, as his concubine - and she bore him a son, Ishmael. Abraham was now 86 years old – Sarah was 76 (16:16).

Genesis 17 – Abraham is now 99 years old – and God commands all the males in his household (way more than 300

men) to be circumcised – as a sign that they were set apart to the Lord.

Genesis 18 – 3 angels visit Abraham and Sarah – 1 of them being the Angel of the Lord – and they promise that 1 year from that time Sarah would give birth to a son.

Sarah laughed at this – since she was old and well past the age of childbearing.

The 2nd half of **chapter 18** Abraham negotiates with God to save the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, where his nephew, Lot, was living with his family.

Genesis 19 – God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah – but saves Lot, his wife, and daughters.

In **Genesis 20**, a king near the area Abraham was living, took Sarah and added her to his haram. God intervenes, and Sarah is returned to Abraham, untouched by the king.

Chapter 21 is a wonderful chapter, as God’s promise is fulfilled when Sarah gives birth to Isaac. Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90 when Isaac was born.

Chapter 22 – After waiting 25 years for their son to be born, God now tests Abraham by telling him to offer his son, Isaac as a burnt offering on top of the hill – which would eventually be the location where King Solomon would build Israel’s first temple. God stops Abraham from going through with this and provides a ram to sacrifice in place of Isaac.

Chapter 23 – At 127 years of age, Sarah dies and is buried by Abraham in the Cave of Machpelah – also believed to be where Abraham, Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and Jacob and his wife Leah were also buried. Late in the 12th century the site was captured by Muslims and a mosque was built over the cave – which still stands today (the Ibrahimi Mosque).

Obviously, that is the Cliff Notes or the SparkNotes version of the passages that record Sarah’s life.

There is so much we can learn from her.

Even though she lived about 4,000 years ago and the world she lived in was so different than ours, we have much in common with her because her struggles and joys are not too different than ours – and in some cases, they are exactly the same.

Let’s look at 3 things we can learn from Sarah’s life.

Our struggle with waiting on God.

One of the most difficult parts of the Christian life is that God’s timeline and timing is often different from ours.

- We want something to happen today – but in God’s timing it will be years.
- We want something to happen sometime in the future – not now. But God’s timeline calls for it to happen today!

This disparity often leads to a questioning of God – or in more drastic cases it can be the reason someone loses faith and trust in God – believing that He doesn't care or is unable to act.

This is one of the great lessons of the Bible – especially the O.T. accounts of the men and women of God.

God would promise something – He would prophecy what He would do in someone's life or in regard to a nation.

And then nothing... only silence from Heaven...

Not only would God's promise fail to manifest right away, but often, terrible problems would plague life.

God called Abraham – and his wife Sarah – to leave their home – which was a city by the name of Ur – Ur of the Chaldeans.

This city was located in the modern-day country of Iraq – likely at the most southern part of the country – just above the northern shore of the Persian Gulf.

Before God's call to Abraham, he and Sarah would have been pagan worshipers of false gods.

But from the time God calls Abraham, they begin worshiping Yahweh – the one, true God of the Bible.

In **Genesis 12** God made a promise to Abraham.

Genesis 12:1

“Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.”

In **chapter 15** God makes this promise a covenant – conditional only on God’s faithfulness, not Abraham or Sarah’s faithfulness.

The promise / covenant was:

“I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.” (Genesis 12:2)

Abraham was 75 – Sarah was 65 – when they left their home: Ur of the Chaldeans.

They had no children, but God’s promise to Abraham was clear that they would!

Years passed...still no children.

This was very difficult for Sarah – During that time in history, a woman’s stature and pride was in her ability to have children – to have a family – to pass on the family name and wealth.

In the ancient world, having children was believed to be controlled by the gods.

So, to be childless was seen as a curse – or a judgement from the gods.

Even those in ancient Israel who followed the true God believed that bareness was a sign of sin, disobedience, or judgment from God.

God promised Abraham and Sarah that their offspring / descendants would be as numerous as the stars (Genesis 15:5). But after 10 years passed, and still no child, the couple started to doubt that God would fulfill His promise in the usual way.

God would fulfill His promise – but it would be another 15 years before Sarah would give birth to a son, Isaac. Imagine being 65 – being told you would have a child – and too many descendants to count – expecting that would happen right away (after all you are 65!!!) and having to wait 25 years for the promise to become reality!

One of the great lessons of Sarah’s life is to learn that waiting on God is part of life.

Our timeline is not God’s timeline.

Our timing is not His timing.

Like us, we see her struggle with the long wait for God’s promise to be realized.

In our microwave, instantaneous world – where we get irritated when we see a little circle going round and round on our computer screen while the page loads – it can be very challenging to wait months or even years for God to show up!

We think God needs our help.

It's difficult for us to grasp how painful / humiliating it was for Sarah to not have any children.

Think about our culture – and how many women don't want to have children – in favor of a career – or couples want to 'experience life together' before having kids.

Sarah and others who lived in her time wouldn't understand our modern view of having kids.

As we seek to understand Sarah's story in the Bible, we must dig into the culture of her day.

Shame and honor were paramount to Ancient Near Eastern societies, and barrenness was considered shameful.

It indicated something faulty or incomplete, often resulting in marital strife and divorce.

(<https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/sarai-was-barren>)

As previously mentioned, Sarah came from the pagan land of Ur, where false gods were worshiped. Infertility wasn't just a physical problem; it would have been regarded as caused by a spiritual misstep. It signified something had been done to bring disfavor or anger to the gods.

Her frustration in regard to her bareness led her to one of the tragic mistakes in her life. A mistake that is still wreaking havoc on the world today!

Genesis 16:1-2

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar.

And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go into my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.

There is a lot wrong with what happened here.

Polygamy / extra marital sex

Using servants as a baby mill...

Even though this was a common practice in that era, there is no excusing it.

But...the reason Sarah goes to this option is the pain and reality of her barrenness reached a point where she thought this was the only option.

Sarah decides that God must need a little help – maybe He intended them to have kids in this way.

Instead of trusting God – even when Sarah couldn't imagine her and Abraham having kids given their age and... let's just say the abilities of their bodies... **Sarah decided to take matters into her own hands and come up with a solution on her own – to help God.**

Sarah's servant, Hagar, gets pregnant – which proves the 'problem' wasn't with Abraham.

Hagar has a son she names Ishmael – Finally an heir – God's promise is now a reality!!!

No... not really.

This would soon cause massive problems in the household – eventually leading to Sarah banishing Hagar and Ishmael from the family.

God intervenes and provides for Hagar and Ishmael – but we still live with this problem today.

- **Ishmael** became the Father of the Arab nations.
- Abraham, through his son **Isaac**, became the Father of the Jewish people.

These two groups are still fighting today – and their battle has spilled blood all over the world – including the 2,977 Americans who were killed in the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 – and the thousands of Israeli's killed and injured by Hamas on October 7, 2023 – and the thousands of Palestinians who have been killed and injured in the Gaza War since then.

Sarah was just like us – struggling to be obedient in life and wondering why God acted – why He allowed something to happen – or not happen – or why He seems so distant and silent – often for a very long time. Sarah struggles waiting on God to fulfill His promises, and decided God needed a little help.

But her solution – although it produced a child – was not God's plan.

Galatians 4:21-24

“For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman.
But the son of the slave (Hagar) was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman (Sarah) was born through promise. Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar.”

Romans 4:13

“For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.”

One of the most difficult things we must do in the Christian life is wait on God.

He calls us to obey – to love Him and love others – and wait for Him to change hearts – to change a situation.

You might be struggling in your marriage – and you want to take matters into your own hands – to ‘fix things’ – to make your spouse change.

- But God calls you to love your spouse – not change them.

- He calls you to serve and sacrifice for your spouse – not make them into the person you think they should be.

- You struggle with someone at work – or at school – God calls you to pray to Him – pray for them – and love them.

There are certainly actions we can and should take while we wait on God.

Abraham and Sarah didn't just sit around waiting for her to become pregnant.

They had to act on the promise – as God would enable their aged and dried up bodies.

They would have likely tried various popular remedies which people believed would help increase fertility.

Eating mandrakes or pomegranates might have been added to their diet.

Not sure they had oysters in the Negev desert!

Yes, there are often things we can and should do in response to God's promises and as we wait on God.

But in the end – it was God who would do a supernatural work in Abraham and Sarah's bodies which would enable them – even when they were well past childbearing age and ability – to conceive, have a child, and for Sarah to even nurse the child!

Nothing is impossible for God.

When Abraham was 100 – and Sarah was 90 – they had a son – Isaac.

His birth was miraculous as both Abraham and Sarah's physical ability to have children was gone.

God waited to fulfill His promise – until the only way they could have children was by God's power, not their own physical ability.

Genesis 21:2-3

“Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac.”

Romans 4:19

“And Abraham’s faith did not weaken, even though, at about 100 years of age, he figured his body was as good as dead—and so was Sarah’s womb.”

This was a miracle birth – and through Abraham and Sarah’s son, Isaac, God would birth a nation – the nation of Israel.

The writer of **Hebrews** includes Sarah in the ‘Hall of Faith’ chapter – **chapter 11**.

Hebrews 11:11

“By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered Him faithful who had promised.”

We see another supernatural work of God – in the life of the virgin Mary – who became pregnant by a miracle of God. When the angel, Gabriel, appeared to Mary to tell her what God was going to do, Mary had a good – basic question:

Luke 1:34-35, 37

And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you...”

For nothing will be impossible with God.”

We often see our world and our circumstances through our human eyes – with our human limitations.

But God is not bound by our limitations – or the limitations of nature itself.

It is indeed rare that He works outside of the laws of nature that He created, but He can and will when He wants.

The Bible is so up front and honest with what it tells us about Sarah, “The Matriarch of Israel”.

The Bible gives us the record of her life – warts and all.

- **Sarah struggled with waiting on God.**
- **Sarah tried to help God keep His promise.**
- **Sarah experienced the supernatural power of God.**

Even if we don’t have the exact struggles that Sarah had, we have our own struggles – and Sarah was someone who didn’t always get it right – but her faith was resilient – her faith outlasted her struggles and doubts.

Apply it...

1. Believe God’s promises.

God promised to make a great nation from the offspring of Abraham and Sarah, but it seemed as though Sarah’s infertility posed an impossible

obstacle. What Sarah found out is valid for us. God is a God of the impossible. He will do what He promises.

2. God uses imperfect people.

Both Abraham and Sarah are listed as great people of faith in **Hebrews 11**, but they weren't perfect, and their story is far from pretty.

Still, God used them to accomplish His purposes.

3. God accomplishes His will, in His way, in His time.

God will keep His promises – in His way and in His timing.

Don't grow impatient with God.

Know that He is at work – even when He is silent.

Know God's character – His perfections – and rest in His faithfulness to you and be confident that He will work His will – in His way – and in His perfect time.

Closing Prayer