

# Sarah

## The wife of Abraham

Compiled By Dr. Harold B. Singer

## Overview:

### SARAH WAITED 90 YEARS FOR A BABY

Sarah's story is told in Genesis 11-25. She is also mentioned in Isaiah 51:2; Romans 4:19; Romans 9:9; Hebrews 11:11; 1 Peter 3:6.

There probably isn't anything harder to do than wait, whether we are expecting something good, something bad, or an unknown.

One way we often cope with a long wait (or even a short one) is to begin helping God get his plan into action. Sarah tried this approach. She was too old to expect to have a child of her own, so she thought God must have something else in mind.

From Sarah's limited point of view this could only be to give Abraham a son through another woman—a common practice in her day.

The plan seemed harmless enough. Abraham would sleep with Sarah's maidservant, who would then give birth to a child. Sarah would take the child as her own. The plan worked beautifully— at first. But as you read about the events that followed, you will be struck by how often Sarah must have regretted the day she decided to push God's timetable ahead.

Another way we cope with a long wait is to gradually conclude that what we're waiting for is never going to happen. Sarah waited 90 years for a baby! When God told her she would finally have one of her own, she laughed, not so much from a lack of faith in what God could do, but from doubt about what he could do through her.

When confronted about her laughter, she lied— as she had seen her husband do from time to time. She probably didn't want her true feelings to be known.

## **Terah, Father of Abram, Grandfather of Lot, They Remove to Haran**

### **Genesis 11:27-32**

Here begins the story of Abram, whose name is famous in both Testaments. Even the children of Eber had become worshippers of false gods. Those who are through grace, heirs of the land of promise, ought to remember what the land of their birth was; what was their corrupt and sinful state by nature

Abram grew up in Ur of the Chaldeans, an important city in the ancient world. Archaeologists have discovered evidence of a flourishing civilization there in Abram's day. The city carried on an extensive trade with its neighbors and had a vast library. Growing up in Ur, Abram was probably well educated.

Terah left Ur to go to Canaan but settled in Haran instead. Why did he stop halfway? It may have been his health, the climate, or even fear. But this did not change Abram's calling ("the LORD had said to Abram," Genesis 12:1). He had respect for his father's leadership, but when Terah died Abram moved on to Canaan. God's will may come in stages.

Just as the time in Haran was a transition period for Abram, so God may give us transition periods and times of waiting to help us depend on him and trust his timing. If we patiently do his will during the transition times, we will be better prepared to serve him as we should when he calls us.

## **God Calls Abram, and Blesses Him with a Promise of Christ**

### **Genesis 12:1-3**

God made choice of Abram, and singled him out from among his fellow-idolaters, that he might reserve a people for himself, among whom his true worship might be maintained till the coming of Christ.

From henceforward Abram and his seed are almost the only subject of the history in the Bible. Abram was tried whether he loved God better than all, and whether he could willingly leave all to go with God.

His kindred and his father's house were a constant temptation to him, he could not continue among them without danger of being infected by them.

When God called him, Abram moved out in faith from Ur to Haran and finally to Canaan. God then established a covenant with Abram, telling him that he would found a great nation. Not only would this nation be blessed, God said, but the other nations of the earth would be blessed through Abram's descendants. Israel, the nation that would come from Abram, was to follow God and influence those with whom it came in contact.

Through Abram's family tree, Jesus Christ was born to save humanity. Through Christ, people can have a personal relationship with God and be blessed beyond measure.

**12:2** God promised to bless Abram and make him great, but there was one condition. Abram had to do what God wanted him to do. This meant leaving his home and friends and traveling to a new land where God promised to build a great nation from Abram's family.

Abram obeyed, walking away from his home for God's promise of even greater blessings in the future. God may be trying to lead you to a place of greater service and usefulness for him. Don't let the comfort and security of your present position make you miss God's plan for you.

### **Sarai Gives Hagar to Abram**

#### **Genesis 16:1-3**

Sarai, no longer expecting to have children herself, proposed to Abram to take another wife, whose children she might; her slave, whose children would be her property. This was done without asking counsel of the Lord. Unbelief worked, God's almighty power was forgotten. It was a bad example, and a source of manifold uneasiness.

Sarai gave Hagar to Abram as a substitute wife, a common practice of that time. A married woman who could not have children was shamed by her peers and was often required to give a female servant to her husband in order to produce heirs.

The children born to the servant woman were considered the children of the wife. Abram was acting in line with the custom of the day, but his action showed a lack of faith that God would fulfill his promise.

Sarai took matters into her own hands by giving Hagar to Abram. Like Abram she had trouble believing God's promise that was apparently directed specifically toward Abram and Sarai.

Out of this lack of faith came a series of problems. This invariably happens when we take over for God, trying to make his promise come true through efforts that are not in line with his specific directions.

In this case, time was the greatest test of Abram and Sarai's willingness to let God work in their lives. Sometimes we too must simply wait. When we ask God for something and have to wait, it is a temptation to take matters into our own hands and interfere with God's plans.

### **Hagar's Misbehavior to Sarai**

#### **Genesis 16:4-6**

Abram's unhappy marriage to Hagar very soon made a great deal of mischief.

Although Sarai arranged for Hagar to have a child by Abram, she later blamed Abram for the results. It is often easier to strike out in frustration and accuse someone else than to admit an error and ask forgiveness. (Adam and Eve did the same thing in Genesis 3:12-13.)

Sarai took out her anger against Abram and herself on Hagar, and her treatment was harsh enough to cause Hagar to run away. Anger, especially when it arises from our own shortcomings, can be dangerous.

### **God Renews the Covenant with Abram**

## **Genesis 17:1-6**

The covenant was to be accomplished in due time. The promised Seed was Christ, and Christians in him. And all who are of faith are blessed with faithful Abram, being partakers of the same covenant blessings.

In token of this covenant his name was changed from Abram, "a high father," to Abraham, "the father of a multitude." All that the Christian world enjoys, it is indebted for to Abraham and his Seed.

The Lord told Abram, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless." God has the same message for us today. We are to obey the Lord in every respect because he is God—that is reason enough.

If you don't think the benefits of obedience are worth it, consider who God is—the only one with the power and ability to meet your every need.

Why did God repeat his covenant to Abram? Twice before, he had mentioned this agreement (Genesis 12 and Genesis 15). Here, however, God was bringing it into focus and preparing to carry it out.

He revealed to Abram several specific parts of his covenant:

- (1) God would give Abram many descendants;
- (2) many nations would descend from him;
- (3) God would maintain his covenant with Abram's descendants;
- (4) God would give Abram's descendants the land of Canaan.

God changed Abram's name to Abraham ("father of many") shortly before the promised son was conceived. From this point on, the Bible calls him Abraham.

## **The Lord Appears to Abraham**

### **Genesis 18:1-8**

Abraham was waiting to entertain any weary traveler, for inns were not to be met with as among us. While Abraham was thus sitting, he saw three men coming. These were three heavenly beings in human bodies. Some think they were all created angels; others, that one of them was the

Abraham was eager to show hospitality to these three visitors, as was Lot (Genesis 19:2). In Abraham's day, a person's reputation was largely connected to his hospitality—the sharing of home and food.

Even strangers were to be treated as highly honored guests. Meeting another's need for food or shelter was and still is one of the most immediate and practical ways to obey God. It is also a time-honored relationship builder. Hebrews 13:2 suggests that we, like Abraham, might actually entertain angels.

This thought should be on our minds the next time we have the opportunity to meet a stranger's needs.

### **Sarah's Unbelief Reproved**

#### **Genesis 18:9-15**

Where is Sarah thy wife? Was asked. Note the answer, in the tent. Just at hand, in her proper place, occupied in her household concerns.

Sarah thinks this too good news to be true; she laughed, and therefore cannot as yet find in her heart to believe it. Sarah laughed.

We might not have thought there was a difference between Sarah's laughter and Abraham's faith.

She denied that she had laughed.

“Is anything too hard for the LORD?” The obvious answer is, “Of course not!” This question reveals much about God. Make it a habit to insert your specific needs into the question. “Is this day in my life too hard for the Lord?” “Is this habit I'm

trying to break too hard for him?” “Is the communication problem I’m having too hard for him?”

Asking the question this way reminds you that God is personally involved in your life and nudges you to ask for his power to help you

Sarah lied because she was afraid of being discovered. Fear is the most common motive for lying. We are afraid that our inner thoughts and emotions will be exposed or our wrongdoings discovered.

But lying causes greater complications than telling the truth and brings even more problems. If God can’t be trusted with our innermost thoughts and fears, we are in greater trouble than we first imagined.

### **Abraham's Sojourn at Gerar, Sarah Is Taken by Abimelech**

#### **Genesis 20:1-8**

And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar.

And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife.

But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation? [5] Said he not unto me, she is my sister? and she, even she herself said, He is my brother: in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this.

And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her.

Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine.



Therefore Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told all these things in their ears: and the men were sore afraid.

Abraham had used this same trick before to protect himself (Genesis 12:11-13). Although Abraham is one of our heroes of faith, he did not learn his lesson well enough the first time. In fact, by giving in to the temptation again, he risked turning a sinful act into a sinful pattern of lying whenever he suspected his life was in danger.

No matter how much we love God, certain temptations are especially difficult to resist. These are the vulnerable spots in our spiritual armor. As we struggle with these weaknesses, we can be encouraged to know that God is watching out for us just as he did for Abraham.

Abimelech had unknowingly taken a married woman to be his wife and was about to commit adultery. But God somehow prevented him from touching Sarah and held him back from sinning. What mercy on God's part! How many times has God done the same for us, holding us back from sin in ways we can't even detect? We have no way of knowing—we just know from this story that he can. God works just as often in ways we can't see as in ways we can.

### **Abimelech's Rebuke to Abraham**

#### **Genesis 20:9-13**

See here much to blame, even in the father of the faithful. Mark his distrust of God, his undue care about life, his intent to deceive. He also threw temptation in the way of others, caused affliction to them, exposed himself and Sarah to just rebukes, and yet attempted an excuse.

Because Abraham mistakenly assumed that Abimelech was a wicked man, he made a quick decision to tell a half-truth. Abraham thought it would be more effective to deceive Abimelech than to trust God to work in the king's life. Don't assume that God will not work in a situation that has potential problems.

You may not completely understand the situation, and God may intervene when you least expect it.

## **Abimelech Restores Sarah**

### **Genesis 20:14-18**

And Abimelech took sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and women servants, and gave them unto Abraham, and restored him Sarah his wife.

And Abimelech said, Behold, my land is before thee: dwell where it pleases thee. And unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver: behold, he is to thee a covering of the eyes, unto all that are with thee, and with all other: thus she was reproved.

So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children.

For the Lord had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife.

Why did God punish Abimelech when he had no idea Sarah was married? (1) Even though Abimelech's intentions were good, as long as Sarah was living in his harem he was in danger of sinning.

A person who eats a poisonous toadstool, thinking it's a harmless mushroom, no doubt has perfectly good intentions—but will still suffer. Sin is a poison that damages us and those around us, whatever our intentions.

The punishment, closing up “every womb in Abimelech's household,” lasted only as long as Abimelech was in danger of sleeping with Sarah. It was meant to change the situation, not to harm Abimelech.

The punishment clearly showed that Abraham was in league with almighty God. This incident may have made Abimelech respect and fear Abraham's God.

## **Birth of Isaac, Sarah's Joy**

### **Genesis 21:1-8**

Few under the Old Testament were brought into the world with such expectations as Isaac. He was in this a type of Christ, which Seed which the holy God so long promised, and holy men so long expected.

He was born according to the promise, at the set time of which God had spoken. God's promised mercies will certainly come at the time which He sets, and that is the best time. Isaac means "laughter," and there was good reason for the name, Gen 17:17; Gen 18:13.

When the Sun of comfort is risen upon the soul, it is good to remember how welcome the dawning of the day was. When Sarah received the promise, she laughed with distrust and doubt.

Who could believe that Abraham would have a son at 100 years of age—and live to raise him to adulthood? But doing the impossible is everyday business for God. Our big problems won't seem so impossible if we let God handle them.

After repeated promises, a visit by two angels, and the appearance of the Lord himself, Sarah finally cried out with surprise and joy at the birth of her son. Because of her doubt, worry, and fear, she had forfeited the peace she could have felt in God's wonderful promise to her.

The way to bring peace to a troubled heart is to focus on God's promises. Trust him to do what he says.

### **The Death of Sarah, Abraham Applies for a Burying-Place**

#### **Genesis 23:1-13**

Abraham buried Sarah in cave. or vault, which was in the purchased field. It would tend to endear the land to his posterity. And it is worth noting, that a burying-place was the only piece of the land which Abraham possessed in Canaan.

In Abraham's day, death and burial were steeped in ritual and traditions. Failing to honor a dead person demonstrated the greatest possible lack of respect. An improper burial was the equivalent of a curse.

Mourning was an essential part of the death ritual. Friends and relatives let out loud cries for the whole neighborhood to hear. Because there were no funeral homes or undertakers, these same friends and relatives helped prepare the body for burial, which usually took place on the same day because of the warm climate.

Abraham was in a foreign land looking for a place to bury his wife. Strangers offered to help him because he was “a mighty prince,” and they respected him. Although Abraham had not established roots in the area, his reputation was above reproach.

Those who invest their time and money in serving God often earn a pleasant return on their investment—a good reputation and the respect of others.

### **Abraham and Sarah were called and blessed of the Lord.**

#### **Isaiah 51:2**

Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him.

The faithful remnant may have felt alone because they were few. But God reminded them of their ancestors, the source of their spiritual heritage—Abraham and Sarah. Abraham was only one person, but much came from his faithfulness. If the faithful few would remain faithful, even more could come from them. If we Christians, even a faithful few, remain faithful, think what God can do through us!

### **Abraham believed that Sarah could still bear a child.**

#### **Romans 4:19**

And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb.

### **Sara received strength to conceive seed and deliver a child.**

## **Hebrews 11:11**

Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.

### **Sarah was not afraid.**

## **1 Peter 3:6**

Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.

When a man became a Christian, he usually would bring his whole family into the church with him (see, for example, the story of the conversion of the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:29-33).

By contrast, a woman who became a Christian usually came into the church alone. Under Roman law, the husband and father had absolute authority over all members of his household, including his wife. Demanding her rights as a free woman in Christ could endanger her marriage if her husband disapproved.

Peter reassured Christian women who were married to unbelievers that they did not need to preach to their husbands. Under the circumstances, their best approach would be one of loving service: they should show their husbands the kind of self-giving love that Christ showed the church.

By being exemplary wives, they would please their husbands. At the very least, the men would then allow them to continue practicing their “strange” religion. At best, their husbands would join them and become Christians too.

A changed life speaks loudly and clearly, and it is often the most effective way to influence a family member. Peter instructs Christian wives to develop inner beauty rather than being overly concerned about their outward appearance.

Their husbands will be won over by their love rather than by their looks. Live your Christian faith quietly and consistently in your home, and your family will see Christ in you.

We should not be obsessed by fashion, but neither should we be so unconcerned that we do not bother to care for ourselves. Hygiene, neatness, and grooming are important, but even more important are a person's attitude and inner spirit. True beauty begins inside.

### **Life Application**

What parts of your life seem to be on hold right now? Do you understand that this may be part of God's plan for you?

The Bible has more than enough clear direction to keep us busy while we're waiting for some particular part of life to move ahead.

Key verse: "By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren— was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise" (Hebrews 11:11).

### **To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:**

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

References:

Holy Bible: King James Translation

Holy Bible: Living Bible Translation

Additional comments and charts are taken from: *Life Application Study Bible*.

Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print

Matthew Henry Concise Bible Commentary