

Sarah: The Woman who became Mother of Nations

It was by faith that Sarah together with Abraham was able to have a child, even though they were too old and Sarah was barren. Abraham believed that God would keep his promise.

Hebrews 11:11

Read Her Story:	Genesis 12:1-20, 16:1-8, 17:1-22, 18:1-15, 21:1-13, Galatians 4:22-31 (1) Genesis 23:1-19, 24:36,37, 25:10,12, 49:31, Isaiah 51:2, Romans 4:19, 9:9, Hebrews 11:11, I Peter 3:6 (2)
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Her name	Her name, Sarah, means “Chieftainness” or “Princess” (1) Certain people in the Bible are named specifically by God himself. Those types of names are classified as sacramental names. A sacramental name became a sign and seal of an established covenant between God and the recipient of such a name. Two Bible characters bearing sacramental names are Abraham and Sarah, both of which signify the gracious purposes and promises of God. (2) “Sarai” means “princely” or “a princess” (2) “Sarah” was the feminine of Sar meaning “captain” or “commander” (2) The promise of ancestorship of many nations came with the change of the name of Sarai to Sarah. “I will bless her and she shall become nations.” She was thus associated with her husband in the great blessing of the covenant whose name was also changed from Abram to Abraham. (2)
Her Time in History	2100 B.C. (32)
Her Promises In Scripture	Psalms 27:14, Psalm 130:5, Isaiah 30:18, Micah 7:7
Her Profession	Wife, mother, household manager
Her Home	
Did You Know	Sarah and Abraham were married over one hundred years!!!

Progression of Life Events
Married Abram in Ur.
God tells Abram to leave the city and travel to an unknown land. Abram obeys. First they stay in Haran, then they settle in Canaan. When they leave Haran, Sarai is about 65 and Abraham is about 75.
While in Canaan, a famine prevails and Abram and Sari travel to Egypt. Abram, afraid that the Egyptians would kill him so they could have his wife because she had such a “beautiful countenance” (Gen. 12:11) tells Sarai to tell everyone that she is his sister.
Sarai is taken as an Egyptian concubine by the Pharaoh of Egypt. Only when the Pharaoh household is plagued with problems does Abram confess and Sarai is released.
After 10 years in Canaan, Sarai gives up hope of ever having a child and encourages Abram to take Hagar, her maidservant, in the hopes that Sari could gain a child through Hagar. Sarai was about 77 years old.

At about the age of 85, Abram fathered a child with Hagar and they named him Ishmael. Sarai is so abusive to Hagar, that while pregnant she runs away. But the Angel of the Lord visits her in the desert and tells her to return
This situation between Sarai, Hagar, and Abram bring on jealousy, hatred, and contempt in Abram's household.
God renews the promise of a child changes Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai's name to Sarah. When Sarah hears of this promise, she laughs at the absurdity of her conceiving at her age.
While living in the Negev, Abraham again fears for his life because of Sarah's beauty and lies again telling people that she is his sister. King Abimelech sends for her and has her brought to his palace. In a dream, God tells Abimelech he's a dead man for taking Sarah, a married woman. Abimelech returns her and gives Abraham sheep, oxen, and servants as an apology.
When Sarah was 90 and Abraham was 99 (and Ishmael was 13) Sarah bore Abram a son. They called him "Isaac" which means "laughter". God told Abraham that Isaac was the true child of the promise.
When Isaac is three or four and Ishmael is sixteen or seventeen, Sarah sees Ishmael teasing Isaac. Sarah insists that Abraham cast out both Hagar and Ishmael.
Abraham refuses because he loved both sons. But God intervenes and explicitly tells Abraham to do as Sarah said. God promised Abraham that he Himself would care for Ishmael and that Ishmael, like Isaac, would father a great people.
Abraham, at God's command, takes Isaac to Mount Moriah to sacrifice him as a burnt offering. God is testing Abraham's faith.
Sarah dies at 127 years old and is buried in the Cave of Machpelah, near Mamre, which is at Hebron. Abraham purchased the land from the Hittites as a permanent burial place.

Her Background, Life and Times
Names: In Bible times names had a significance they often do not have today. The names the mothers and fathers of these times gave to their children give us a glimpse into their personal experience, sometimes reflecting their emotional responses to a situation. Throughout Scripture, God gives to his people names that offer a picture of their significance and worth to him. We are his "treasures possessions" (Exodus 19:5, Malachi 3:17), the "people of his inheritance" (Deuteronomy 4:20), and "sons of the living God" (Hosea 1:10). We are his "friends" (John 15:15). No matter what your given name, God knows it. In love, he calls you to him by your name, and you belong to him. (Isaiah 43:1) (1)
First Hebrew: She was the first "Hebrewess", as her husband was the first man to be called a Hebrew (Gen 14:13). The word Hebrew itself means, "the immigrant". (2)
Women in the Ancient Middle East: The laws of Eshnunna, a city-state in what is now Iraq, illustrate a woman's dependence on her father and the father's rights over his daughter: • If a man gives bride – money for a man's daughter, but another man seizes her forcibly without asking the permission of her father and her mother and deprives her of her virginity, it is a capital offense and he shall die • If a man takes a man's daughter without asking the permission of her father and her mother and concludes no formal marriage contract with her father and her mother, even though she may live in his house for a year, she is not a housewife. • On the other hand, if he concludes a formal contract with her father and her mother and cohabits with her, she is a housewife. • Rapes was an offense against the father, for it deprived him of the bride price. • Marriage involved the legal transfer of the woman from her father to the husband.(32)

Ur: Sarah was married to Abraham in the then-magnificent city of Ur in Sumer in what is now southern Iraq. Although in 2100 B.C. Ur's glory days were fading, the city remained the center of a flourishing and prosperous society. Archaeologists have excavated Ur and discovered objects of gold, silver, and precious stones, as well as the remains of chariots, musical instruments, weapons, and even game boards. Trade was carried out over a wide region, with ships going as far as India and Africa via the Persian Gulf. We know that Abraham, first known as Abram, was a wealthy man. So he and Sarai lived a privileged life in one of the ancient worlds' great cities. (32)

Her Character

Beautiful: Beautiful enough to attract rulers in the ancient world, she could be strong-willed and jealous. Yet Sarah was considered a loyal wife who did what was right and who didn't give in to fear. (1)

Beautiful: She was unique in that she possessed unparalleled beauty that seems to have grown more attractive with the passing years. For even at 90 years of age she was so lovely that Abraham feared that kings would fall in love with her bewitching beauty - which Pharaoh and Abimelech did. (2)

Astonishing Beauty: Sarah was a woman of astonishing beauty even well into her sixties. Abraham was actually in fear of his life just traveling with her. She must have been exceptionally stunning in the face and figure to not only evoke this fear, but then to be taken into the harems of Egypt's pharaoh and King Abimelech. (32)

Half Sister: She was the daughter of Terah and was therefore half-sister to Abram, her senior by ten years (Gen 17:17) who she married in the Ur of the Chaldees. While Abram and Sarai had the same father, they had different mothers (Gen 20:12). (2)

Half-Sister: Sarah and Abraham had the same father, Terah, but had different mothers. Abraham married his half-sister while living in Ur. (32)

Faithful: Only two women are named in the illustrious roll of those conspicuous for their faith: Sarah is the first, and Rahab the second (Hebrews 11:11,31), both of whom lived by faith and died in faith. (2)

Faithful: Hebrews 11:11 focuses our attention on Sarah's faith, affirming that "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." Sarah is one of only two women mentioned in Faith's Hall of Fame, as Hebrews 11 is often called. (32)

Faithful: The Lord had watched Sarah's faithfulness for sixty years as she waited expectantly to become the mother of Abraham's heir. It is true that she faltered, but only after she could no longer see herself able to conceive. She still did not doubt that God would make Abraham the father of a great nation. What a wonderful gift God gave her, after she had waited faithfully so long. (32)

Desperate: After ten years in Canaan, Sarah urged Abraham to have a child with her Egyptian slave, Hagar. According to the custom of the time, Hagar was a surrogate, and the child would be considered Sarah's own. Abraham "heeded the voice of" Sarah. It's clear from the text that Sarah took the initiative and influenced Abraham to do what she wished. (32)

Infuriated: When Hagar became pregnant she felt contempt for the childless Sarah. Clearly Abraham was able to father children: Sarah was not fertile. The change in her slave's attitude infuriated Sarah, and she blamed Abraham (Gen. 16:5). Abraham's response was to remind Sarah that, according to the law and custom of that era, she had the right to discipline Hagar. And so Sarah "dealt harshly" with Hagar - so harshly that Hagar fled. Only after the intervention of the Angel of the Lord did Hagar return to Abraham's camp, where she bore his son Ishmael. (32)

Demanding: When Ishmael was a teenager God supernaturally enabled Sarah to give Abraham a son, Isaac. Sarah had never bonded with Ishmael, even though technically he was "her" son. When Isaac was three, Sarah saw Ishmael teasing his younger half-brother. Infuriated, she went to Abraham and demanded that he

send Ishmael away. Abraham was unwilling to do this for two reasons. He cared for his son, and the law and custom of the time required that a father who had acknowledged a child born to a slave as his own should divide his estate equally between such a child and any born to his wife. Only when God instructed Abraham to listen to Sarah, and promised to be with Ishmael, did Abraham send Hagar and Ishmael away. (32)

Godly: A major indication of the nature of the relationship between Sarah and God is that God not only changed Abram's name to Abraham, but also changed Sarai's name to Sarah. Both changes took place in the context of blessing, for God told Abraham, "I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her." (Gen. 17:16). (32)

Model Wife: I Peter 3:5-6 portrays Sarah as a model wife, who trusted in God and was submissive to her husband. (32)

Wife: Abraham was seventy five and Sarah was sixty-five when they left Haran. They had left family and friends behind once before, but when Abraham told her they were going to move she went willing. What was it like, the relationship this woman enjoyed with her husband?

Faith: While there is no record of direct interaction between Sarah and the Lord, the Genesis account clearly illustrates intimacy between Sarah and Abraham. It is safe to assume that Abraham shared his growing knowledge of faith in the Lord with his wife. (32)

Love: During the time when Sarai is in the Egyptian harem, she must have assumed there was good reason for her husband's fear. She also showed compliance to Abraham's request as an act of faith, much like Abraham's later compliance with God's command to bring Isaac to Mount Moriah to be offered as a sacrifice. Both of these are an expression of love for her husband. (32)

Shared Burial: Sarah's death is a poignant moment in the biblical record. The love this couple shared for each other during their lifelong marriage is legendary. Abraham mourned his loss, purchased a cave for his beloved's resting place, and buried her. Forty-eight years later his sons laid Abraham to rest in that same cave. (32)

Selfless giving: Sarah has often been criticized for giving Hagar to her husband as a surrogate. But consider. We don't know how many years Sarah was married to Abraham before they left Ur. But we do know that it was common in those days to marry by age thirteen or fifteen. It is likely that Sarah and Abraham had been married thirty-five years even before leaving Ur. Abraham was eighty-six when he became Ishmael's father and Sarah was ten years younger. If they married at age fifteen, Sarah had waited some sixty years, not the contractual norm of two years, before giving her slave to Abraham to produce his heir!! Why after waiting so long did she act when she did? We know that when women stop producing estrogen their skin begins to age more quickly. We also know that kings wanted Sarah in their harems when she was sixty-five (Gen 20:2-8). That fact that she was still a ravishing beauty at this age would tend to indicate that Sarah retained her feminine cycle late in life. We can conjecture that as long as Sarah felt able to become pregnant she waited in faith, and only after she ceased menstruating did she consider the culturally approved alternative. Commentators say that Sarah gave up too soon. In reality, Sarah waited faithfully, trusting far longer than any of us could imagine. When at last she believed she had passed her years of childbearing, she unselfishly offered her husband Hagar to provide the gift she thought she herself could not give. (32)

Her Sorrow

Childless: That she remained childless for most of her life.(1)

No Children: The one great grief of Abraham and Sarah was that through their long life together they had no children. To a Hebrew woman, barrenness was looked upon as a gnawing grief, and sometimes regarded

as a sign of divine disfavor. In spite of the fact that, along with her husband, she had received the divine promise, that from her nations would spring, the possibility of ever becoming a mother died. (2)

Barren: How much it must have hurt Sarah to realize that, after maintaining hope all those barren years, her aged body had passed the time of childbearing. She had loved Abraham most of her life, but at age seventy-five Sarah assumed that while God had promised Abraham that he would father a great nation, she would not be the mother of that people. How it must have pained her to give her young slave to Abraham as she tried to help God make good on His promise. (32)

Abraham's Deception: Due to famine, Sarah traveled to Egypt with Abraham. Fearing that they may be taken prisoners, Abraham felt that if oriental despots knew that Sarah and he were married they would slay him and add the lovely woman to their harem. Fear of death unmanned him and led him to risk the dishonor of his wife and thereby save his own neck. She dearly loved her husband, and his life was too precious to her to make her think of the shame she might incur. Sarah was utterly wrong in yielding to her husband's plot. How nobler she would have been had she stoutly refused Abraham saying, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?". But she called her husband "lord", and evidently he was lord of her conscience. It seems hard to believe that such a good man could deliver his lovely wife over to a heathen monarch, but he did, and Sarah entered Pharaoh's harem. The same plan was carried out when Abimelech, king of the Philistines, admiring her bewitching beauty had her taken to his harem. God protected her in both instances and she was returned untouched. Abraham's lofty soul suffered an eclipse of the virtue of faith for which he was renowned when he adopted such a plan of deception, exposing his wife to great peril, and also thwarting of the divine plan for and through Sarah. (2)

Hagar: Sarah had given up the life she had known in Ur for an uncertain life of wandering, and finally even gave the man she loved into the arms of another woman so she could provide Abraham what Sarah had not been able to give him – a son. It must have been a shocking blow when Hagar conceived so quickly. But the grief and anger worsened due to Hagar's attitude toward Sarah. (32)

Ishmael: Understanding Sarah's emotional state helps us to understand her harshness with Hagar. Any other response under these circumstances would have been super-human. It also gives insight into why Sarah could not accept Ishmael as her own. Every time Sarah looked at Ishmael, she was reminded of her failure to provide an heir and of her slave woman's disdain. (32)

Weaknesses:

- Had trouble believing God's promises to her
- Attempted to work problems out on her own, without consulting God
- Tried to cover her faults by blaming others. (224)

Her Joy

Isaac: That at the age of ninety, she gave birth to Isaac, child of the promise. (1)

Isaac: Isaac means "laughter." Abraham and Sarah were full of joy to the point of laughter when finally at ages one hundred and ninety respectively they became parents. God is so good. He then granted Sarah thirty-seven more years, to watch her son grow into manhood, to revel in the miracle of new life as mothers do. In Sarah we see both the trial of faith and faith's reward. (32)

Love: A strong bond of love existed between Abraham and Sarah, and Sarah was free within that relationship to urge, to complain, to initiate, and even to insist that her husband take a specific course of action. The fact that a woman was legally dependent was less important in determining her status than her own personality and the character of the relationship she developed with her husband. (32)

Strengths:

- Was intensely loyal to her own child.
- Became the mother of a nation and an ancestor of Jesus

- Was a woman of faith, the first woman listed in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11 (34)

Her Promises, Her Lessons, Her Legacy	
When Tempted:	When you're tempted to step in and make things happen on your own, think of Sarah. Her attempts to fulfill God's promise of a son through her servant Hagar had disastrous results. God's promises are revealed and fulfilled in his timing, which is often on a calendar far different from our own. Waiting patiently for God to work may be one of the most difficult experiences of our Christian walk. Remember that God has his own timetable and rest in the assurances that he loves you and will fulfill his promises to you. (1)
Quick To Judge:	Being quick to judge can cause some hurtful words to escape into our marriages – and we all know how impossible they are to retrieve. Be slow to speak, slower to assign blame. (4)
True Character:	When you are under pressure in marriage, your true character is revealed not so much in actions as in reactions. (4)
No Marriage is Perfect:	Let it be of some comfort to you to know that the father of nations and his wife found themselves at odds with each other enough times in their marriage that one of their most unflattering episodes – it was a fight all right! – made it way way into the Bible. The rest is history. (4)
Faithful to God:	Abraham and Sarah's hearts were focused on being faithful to God. And God is faithful to such persons. (32)
Marriage:	Abraham and Sarah were married over a century. While each made some bad choices over the years, they remain a great example of the mutual submission Christ calls for in marriage. (32)
Nothing Is Impossible:	God asked Sarah is anything was too difficult for Him, (Gen. 18:14). She came to understand that even those things that appear impossible to us are not impossible for Him. (32)
God's Timetable:	From Sarah we learn that God does not set His timetable according to our schedule. In His time His desires shall come to pass. He does not need us to jump in and make things possible for Him. Sometimes, this may mean we are to wait for a lifetime. (32)
Promises:	From Sarah we also learn that God makes no promises that He does not keep. (32)
Consequences:	Sarah's life story reminds us that God does not normally interfere when we make a bad choice, as in the case of Sarah's gift of Hagar to Abraham. Instead God may well let us live with consequences, and learn from them. But as the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael illustrates, if our mistake infringes on His overall plan, He may step in. (32)
Commitment:	Sarah's life story also illustrates the importance of commitment. This, plus valuing our partner, can build a relationship that will withstand the pressures and the ravages of time. (32)
God:	• Responds to faith even in the midst of failure • Is not bound by what usually happens; he can stretch the limits and cause unheard-of events to occur

Her Legacy of Prayer	
Women of the Bible	
Reflect On	Genesis 17:1-22
Praise God	Because he keeps his promises.
Offer Thanks	That God has a gracious plan for you that will unfold in his time, according to his way.
Confess	Your anxiety and self-reliance.
Ask God	To help you wait with a listening ear and a ready heart to do his will.

A Final Prayer	Father, thank you for loving me despite the fact that my soul still contains shadows that sometimes block the light of your Spirit. As I grow older, may I trust you more completely for the dreams you've implanted in my soul, the promises you've made to me. Like Sarah, may I be surrounded by laughter at the wonderful way you accomplish your purpose despite my weakness.
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Final Thoughts	
<i>Women of the Bible</i>	
Lift Your Heart	God hits at his purpose for you by planting dreams within your heart.

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Please note that NO information contained in this study is original work of Susan McGeown, unless otherwise noted.

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