

Women of the Bible

Lesson Two: Sarah

One of the first women whom the Bible mentions by name, after Eve, is Sarah. Sarah was the wife of Abraham, and the mother of Isaac, the first in the lineage of Abraham that would lead to the establishment of the Israelite nation and the birth of Jesus.



Introduction. Sarah was originally named Sarai (שָׂרַי) meaning “princess,” but God changed her name to Sarah (שָׂרָה), meaning “noblewoman.” (Genesis 17:15). Sarah was the half-sister of Abraham, by Terah and a different mother (Genesis 20:12). This, of course, was before such was forbidden in the Law of Moses (Leviticus 18:9). Sarah, even as an older woman, was a very beautiful woman (Genesis 12:11). Yet, New Testament writers praise her, not for her physical beauty, but for her respect for her husband. and her faith.

I. Sarah’s Obedient Respect for Abraham.

- A. Peter praises Sarah’s obedience to Abraham, calling him “lord” (I Peter 3:6). The Hebrew word, *adon* (אָדוֹן) can mean either lord and master or be used as a term of respect, like our word “sir.”
 - 1. The Holy Spirit is not teaching that Sarah worshipped Abraham, nor that she was under him as servant to a master. She did, however, obey and respect him, as Christian women are to do to their own husbands (Ephesians 5:33; Titus 2:5).
- B. Sarah submitted to Abraham’s instruction that she tell Pharaoh that she was his sister (Genesis 12:10-20). Abraham, knowing that Sarah was a beautiful woman, feared that he would be killed so that Pharaoh might take her for himself. The same thing happened out of fear of Abimelech, the king of Gerar (Genesis 20:1-18).
 - 1. Sarah demonstrated an obedient, submissive disposition in both instances. This deception did not go so far that Sarah was defiled or sinned. Submission to a husband never demands disobedience to God (cf. Acts 5:29).

II. Sarah’s Faith in God’s Promise.

- A. The Hebrew writer praises Sarah’s faith saying that Sarah received strength to bear a child, by faith, when she was past age (Hebrews 11:11).
 - 1. God promised Abraham that he would have an heir from his own body (Genesis 15:4). But, Sarah, was barren, well into her old age (Genesis 11:30; 16:2).

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2. In order to provide a child to Abraham, Sarah gave her maid Hagar to Abraham as his wife (Genesis 16:1-4). Cuneiform tablets found in Nuzi, near the modern Iraqi city of Kirkuk, reveal that Mesopotamian culture allowed this custom for a woman who was barren. Any child born to the servant was considered the legal child of the woman who owned the handmaid. (H V 67:19-21). Sarah, in doing this tried to use her own devices, relying upon the customs of her culture, to accomplish what God had promised. She eventually came to see this was wrong (Genesis 16:5).
 3. She mistreated Hagar, leading her to run away, until the Lord instructed Hagar to return (Genesis 16:6-16).
- B. When Abraham was ninety-nine years old, and Hagar's child, Ishmael, was thirteen God appeared to Abraham and promised that Sarah would have a child a year from that time (Genesis 17:21).
1. It is at this time that the Lord changed her name, declaring that "kings of people shall be from her" (Genesis 17:15-16).
- C. When the Lord appeared with the two angels and ate with Abraham, He promised again that Sarah would conceive (Genesis 18:1-10).
1. Sarah, hearing the promise laughed (Genesis 18:11,12). When the Lord asked why she laughed, she denied it, but the Lord confirmed that it would happen, asking, "is anything too hard for the LORD?" (Genesis 18:13-15).
 2. This exchange must have convinced her that she could trust the Lord's promise, because the Hebrew tells us she received strength to bear a child, by faith, when she was past age (Hebrews 11:11).
- D. At the appointed time Sarah did conceive and bear Isaac (Genesis 21:1-4).
1. Sarah expressed her joy over the birth saying, "God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me." And further, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age." (Genesis 21:6, 7).
 2. When Isaac grew, Sarah sent Hagar and Ishmael away when she saw Ishmael scoffing at Isaac (Genesis 21:8-12).



Ancient Cuneiform Tablet

Conclusion. Sarah died at 127 years of age and was buried in the cave of Machpelah (Genesis 23:1-9). Sarah, like all servants of God, had her struggles. Even so, she demonstrates the submissive and faithful attitude which the Lord expects of those who would serve Him.

