

Sarai - Sarah

What do we know of Sarai? She was married to Abram in the magnificent city of Ur. Although in 2100 B.C. Ur's glory days were fading, the city remained a center of flourishing and prosperous society. We know their marriage was arranged, which indicated they came from a wealthy, privileged life. Sarai and Abram were half brother/sister. Marriage between half siblings in those days were not considered incestuous and often seen as advantageous. It is assumed they were married at between 15-20 years of age.

So when Abram was told by God to leave to some distant land the Lord would show him, he and Sarai and their servants took up their tents and left all they'd known to become nomads. They took off for Canaan some 600 miles from Ur, which was a desolate, nowhere land. Abram was 75 and Sarai 65 when they left. At a time when we are retiring and looking for the easy life, this couple gave up all of their comforts and family and stepped into the unknown. They had probably been married 45-50 years by that time.

The first mention of Sarai herself in the Bible is in Genesis 11:30, "Now Sarai was childless because she was not able to conceive." How would you feel if the first thing people learned about you was something that was considered a curse, a cultural shame, and an indication that you were not a "righteous" woman. Barren women were a bit suspect that God was punishing them for some kind of sin and was often looked down upon and ridiculed by others. Having been unable to have children and enduring a complete hysterectomy at 34, I felt I'd been denied one of my biggest dreams. I did feel there was something wrong with me as a woman, and that God was punishing me because I wasn't good enough to bear children. Many people couldn't understand my grieving after the surgery since I had 3 stepchildren, but I was devastated. I could certainly relate to Sarai's plight.

Another thing we learn about Sarai was that she was very beautiful. In fact when they journeyed to Egypt because of the famine, Abram feared he'd be killed in order to acquire his lovely wife. (Remember, she had to be more than 65!):

"As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife, Sarai, I know what a beautiful woman you are. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me and let you live. Say you are my sister so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you." — Genesis 12:11-13

Although it is thought by some commentators that she had to be angry and upset with Abram to treat her in this way, yet she submitted willingly to him. We can only conjecture she had a great love for Abram and so showed that love and respect by lying for him.

Sarai was taken to the Pharaoh's house and harem. She had to have been frightened about whether she'd even see Abram again. It must have been her faith that sustained her during that time. It was God who stepped in and caused the plagues. Not only that, but the Pharaoh did nothing to them when he found out the truth except to send them and all their servants on their way. Surely Sarai saw the Lord's hand at work in this event.

As Sarai was nearing 70, she gave up hope for bearing a child herself. She probably was past menopause and figured her child-bearing days were over. It was a custom and often written into the marriage contract that if the woman could not provide her husband with an offspring, then she would provide a slave woman, and if she produced a child, that child would become the husband and wife's heir and lineage.

There are some biblical scholars who point out Sarai's failings were shown by providing Abram with a slave for a child and that she should have waited upon the Lord to provide. Yet, I say it was a sign of Sarai's love for Abram that she wanted his lineage to continue, whether she could do it physically or not. Anyway, Sarai gave her slave Hagar to Abram. When she conceived, Hagar began to view her mistress with contempt. Eventually Sarai drove Hagar to run away from her abuse. An angel intervenes and sends Hagar back to Sarai, promising her son Ishmael would be someone important. When Ishmael was born, Abram was 85 and Sarai was 75. The relationship between the two women remains tense.

When Abram was 99 and Sarai 89, God made a covenant with them. A covenant is a sacred, permanent and complete bond with God. In this one, God established the Hebrew Nation and then changed their names. Abram became Abraham, and Sarai (princess) became Sarah (my princess). Again, God promised a son. (This is the 5th time.)

Later three angels disguised as men appeared and Abraham entertained them lavishly, as was the custom of the day. One of them told him he would return in a year and Sarah would have a son. Upon hearing that, Sarah laughed and said, "I'm worn out, Abraham is old, and now I'm going to have a child?" Wouldn't we all feel that way at 89?

The angel reminded them that nothing was too hard for the Lord and accused Sarah of laughing. In her fear, she lied and said she hadn't. Yet wouldn't we all have laughed and said, "YOU'VE GOT TO BE KIDDING! A MOTHER AT 90? GET REAL!"

Abraham again moved because of famine, this time to Gerar, and again claimed Sarah as his sister. So she was taken once again into a harem (at 89). God came to King Abimelek in a dream and told him Sarah was Abraham's wife. Once again, when Abraham was confronted by the King, he said he'd told Sarah "This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, "He is my brother." King Abimelek not only didn't punish them, he gave Abraham 1000 shekels of silver and land.

Soon after that, Sarah finally gets pregnant! In Genesis 17:16, it is said of Sarah, "*She shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be from her.*" The roll call of Sarah's descendants include patriarchs of the faith, kings of nations, and the Savior of the world - Jesus Christ!

How appropriate they called their son Isaac "He who laughs" because Sarah was overcome with laughter and joy at his birth. We know she was able to nurse her child, and lived another 37 years, dying at 127 years of age.

So, what is important for us to learn about Sarah?

1. She was a Matriarch. (That is a woman who has a profound influence, directly or indirectly, on her family and future generations.)
2. She is often considered the mother of three religions:
 - Judaism:* Mother of the start of the Hebrew Nation. Mother to Isaac, grandmother of Jacob, great-grandmother to the 12 tribes
 - Christianity:* Jesus Christ is descended from her.
 - Islam:* Ishmael, a direct result of her surrogacy of Hagar & Abram
3. She is the only woman in the Bible that has a name change by God, a sure sign of significance and influence.
4. For Sarah, waiting was not easy and she took events into her own hands. Yet God responds to our faith even in the midst of failures.
5. During that painful time of waiting, Sarah was learning.
6. She discovered the treasure of Isaac at the end of that long wait, knowing that God had blessed her in spite of her failings.
7. She was able to embrace the circumstances of being put into two separate Harems without being violated or injured with dignity.
8. Sarah's faith is extolled in the New Testament four times (Romans 4:19, Romans 9: 9, Peter 3:6 and Hebrews 11:11)
9. She is the first woman named in the Hebrew's Hall of Faith:
 - “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)
10. Sarah's patience, perseverance, and strength through all of her years and qualities make her worthy of the title of Matriarch.
11. Sarah and Abraham's love and marriage lasted over 100 years, a great example of fidelity and submission.
12. From Sarah we see God doesn't make any promises He does not keep. It may be outside of our time frame, but if we wait and watch patiently, He will keep His promises!