

Lesson 8 | October 20, 2024

Sarah: Mother of Israel

Study Text: Genesis 12:1–9; 17:15–19; 18:9–15; Hebrews 11:11–12; 1 Peter 3:1–6

Central Truth: God rewards those who believe His promises.

Key Verse: 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 (KJV).

It was by faith that even Sarah was able to have a child, though she was barren and was too old. She believed that God would keep his promise (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will consider how living by faith requires times of waiting.
- Students will acknowledge the importance of staying engaged with God even when they have questions or doubts about His Word or His promises.
- Students will encourage one another to trust God’s plan and timing.

Introducing the Lesson

Say: For the next six weeks, we’re going to explore the lives of some of the godly women in Scripture—starting with Sarah, the mother of the nation of Israel. Sarah’s life teaches us many lessons, but especially the importance of believing God’s promises.

Discussion Starter—Influential Women in Your Life

Say: What lessons have you learned from the influential women in your life?

Resource Packet Item 1: Honoring an Influential Woman

Most of us have been influenced by older women who made sacrifices to care for us. Some modeled faithfulness and service to God, while others taught us tough lessons through their mistakes and struggles with sin. Students will create action plans to honor and bless older women who have impacted their lives.

Say: Sarah’s story begins in Genesis 11 and continues through chapter 23. We can see both faithfulness and failure there. Like He does for all of us, God had plans for Sarah, but trusting for their fulfillment was a challenge. Sarah teaches us that God is faithful. He keeps His promises in spite of our shortcomings, and He responds to our faith—no matter how small or imperfect it may be.

Reading Genesis 12–23, it is easy to focus entirely on Abraham’s perspective as the covenant is established and the nation of Israel begins to take shape. Yet Sarah was present from the beginning. When God told her husband, “Leave your native country,

your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you" (12:1), Sarah walked alongside him in obedience to God's call. (Note: Abram and Sarai's names were not changed to Abraham and Sarah until Genesis 17, but we will use their later names throughout this lesson.)

Genesis 12:5. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan.

1 Peter 3:5. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands:

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

Genesis 17:15. And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be.

16. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother

of nations; kings of people shall be of her.

17. Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah,

that is ninety years old, bear?

18. And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee!

19. And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an

everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.

18:10. And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him.

Genesis 12:5. He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all his wealth—his livestock and all the people he had taken into his household at Haran— and headed for the land of Canaan.

1 Peter 3:5. This is how the holy women of old made themselves beautiful. They put their trust in God and accepted the authority of their husbands.

6. For instance, Sarah obeyed her husband, Abraham, and called him her master. You are her daughters when you do what is right without fear of what your husbands might do.

Genesis 17:15. Then God said to Abraham, "Regarding Sarai, your wife—her name will no longer be Sarai. From now on her name will be Sarah.

16. And I will bless her and give you a son from her! Yes, I will bless her richly, and she will become the mother of many nations. Kings of nations will be among her descendants."

17. Then Abraham bowed down to the ground, but he laughed to himself in disbelief. "How could I become a father at the age of 100?" he thought. "And how can Sarah have a baby when she is ninety years old?"

18. So Abraham said to God, "May Ishmael live under your special blessing!"

19. But God replied, "No—Sarah, your wife, will give birth to a son for you. You will name him Isaac, and I will confirm my covenant with him and his descendants as an everlasting covenant."

18:10. Then one of them said, "I will return to you about this time next year, and your wife, Sarah, will have a son!" Sarah was listening to this conversation from the tent.

11. Abraham and Sarah were both very old by this time, and Sarah was long past the age of having children.

11. Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.

12. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?

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.

12. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.

12. So she laughed silently to herself and said, “How could a worn-out woman like me enjoy such pleasure, especially when my master—my husband—is also so old?”

Hebrews 11:11. It was by faith that even Sarah was able to have a child, though she was barren and was too old. She believed that God would keep his promise.

12. And so a whole nation came from this one man who was as good as dead—a nation with so many people that, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore, there is no way to count them.

Part 1—Sarah Faithfully Follows Abraham Trust and Obey

Genesis 12:1–9

Say: God’s instructions were clear. Abraham would leave his country and his extended family and go wherever God told him to go. There was no question what God was telling him to do. God was asking him to step out into the unknown (Hebrews 11:8). As he obediently started walking, God would show him where to go.

Play the Lesson 8 video featuring Beersheva. You can download it for free at radiantlifecurriculum.com/resources.

God may not have told Abraham the final destination, but His call in Genesis 12:1–3 is full of incredible revelation about all God was going to do in response to Abraham’s obedience. Notice God’s “I will” statements:

- “I will show you.”
- “I will make you a great nation.”
- “I will bless you.”
- “I will make you famous.”
- “I will bless those who bless you.”
- “I will curse those who treat you with contempt.”

Eventually, God would credit Abraham with righteousness because of his belief in God’s covenant promises (15:6; Romans 4:3), but even here we can see the early seeds of that faith. Abraham and Sarah acted on God’s “I will” statements and left their familiar lives behind (Genesis 12:4–6). When they arrived in Canaan, God again affirmed His

promise to give the land to their descendants (verse 7). As they traveled through the land, Abraham expressed faith in God by building altars dedicated to God and worshipping Him (verses 8–9).

Although God’s command to Abraham and Sarah was unique—after all, they became father and mother of God’s chosen people—every child of God must walk by faith. We each must live out the truth that God is the One who leads us, provides for us, protects us, and blesses us. Our responsibility today is the same as Abraham and Sarah’s responsibility four thousand years ago: Trust and obey God.

We learn a great deal about God in Genesis 12:1–9. God’s commands can be connected to outcomes that He alone is responsible to fulfill. He may not reveal His detailed long-term plan, but He leads and provides one step at a time. Every good thing comes from His hand, and He provides for every need. He will bring about His plan as He chooses. He had a unique plan for Abraham and Sarah, and He has a unique plan for each of His children. Just as He blessed the world through Abraham and Sarah’s family, He will bless others through us as we follow Him faithfully.

Discuss

- Describe the faith required for Abraham and Sarah to walk in obedience to God. How do you think God’s “I will” statements (Genesis 12:1–3) fueled their trust in Him?
- How is God’s call to Abraham and Sarah like His call to us? How is it different?

Gentle and Quiet Spirit

1 Peter 3:3–6

Say: Sarah may have been uncertain or afraid when it was time to leave Haran; the Bible doesn’t tell us how she felt. All we know is what she did. She faithfully followed Abraham as he followed God into the unknown.

In his instructions to wives, the apostle Peter exhorted women not to be overly concerned with their outward appearance (1 Peter 3:3). Instead, godly women should focus on developing inward beauty—the kind God values (1 Samuel 16:7). Peter called this “the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God” (1 Peter 3:4). Some misunderstand this verse to mean that only quiet people can please the Lord. But a closer look at those two words—*gentle* and *quiet*—will give us a clearer picture of Peter’s intent.

- *Gentle* describes the way believers should interact with the people around us. Paul told the Colossians to “clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience” (3:12), and he told the Philippians to “let your gentleness be evident to all” (4:5, NIV). This kind of response to others is precious and pleasing to God.
- *Quiet* describes the way believers should place our rest and trust in God. It signifies the opposite of anxiety and fear—a spirit of tranquility and peace. Paul’s

use of this same word in 1 Timothy 2:2 confirms that all believers, regardless of gender, should desire this virtue.

Although we know from Genesis 12:11–14 that Sarah was considered a physically beautiful woman, Peter explains that she is an example of inward beauty as well. With humility and respect, she followed her husband in full obedience to God’s call on their lives. “You are her daughters” when you do likewise, Peter wrote (1 Peter 3:6).

Greater beauty shines from within. It issues from a heart that fully trusts and rests in God rather than striving with other people or worrying about the unknown. This kind of person walks in submission to the leadership God has placed over them and trusts fully in His commands and promises. Not only is this kind of heart precious in God’s sight, but it draws other people as well. Unlike external beauty that fades with time, this kind of beauty lasts eternally.

Discuss

- How is a restless and fearful heart unattractive?
- What do you think is beautiful about trusting God and obeying His Word?

Part 2—Sarah Is Blessed by God A Mother of Nations

Genesis 17:15–16

Say: In Genesis 17, God blessed Sarai and changed her name to Sarah (verse 15). The meaning of her name didn’t change—both names mean “princess”—but the fact that God changed her name signified a break with the past. Leaving her old home and identity behind, she would conceive a son and become the mother of nations (verse 16).

God’s timetable was different from Abraham and Sarah’s. They had been waiting for years for a child to be born. In the meantime, Sarah struggled with the challenge of being unable to have a child in a culture that expected that of women. This led to her following a cultural pattern of creating an heir for Abraham by asking him to conceive a child with her handmaid, Hagar (Genesis 16:1–4). But Hagar’s pregnancy led to turmoil in Abraham’s family. Amazingly, that contention continues to this day between Ishmael and Isaac’s descendants (Arabs and Jews). Despite Sarah’s decisions, God still blessed her richly. She would have a son (Isaac) and “become the mother of many nations” (17:16) and her family line would produce kings—including the King of kings. Interestingly, of all the women in the Old Testament, Sarah is the only one God specifically indicated He would bless. Her faith and character are applauded as exemplary (Hebrews 11:11; 1 Peter 3:6).

Faith almost always requires seasons of waiting, because God’s schedule rarely lines up with ours. If we grow impatient and take matters into our own hands, the outcome could be disastrous. Our wisdom does not compare to God’s (Isaiah 55:8–9). So in times of waiting, we should remind ourselves of His character, goodness, and

faithfulness. As we remember who He is and all He has done, we can choose to trust His timing. This is never wasted time. Often, He teaches us important lessons while we wait, so we should listen for His voice as we read His Word. He blesses us as we patiently depend on Him to keep His promises.

Discuss

- How did Sarah's use of Hagar create unrest in her family and household?
- How good are you at waiting? Tell us about a time when God's timetable didn't line up with yours. How did you respond? What did you learn?
- What should we do if we're tempted to pull away from God when He seems slow to respond?

Resource Packet Item 2: Trusting God's Timing

The Bible is full of encouragement and guidance to help us patiently wait for God to fulfill His promises and work on our behalf. Students will read passages of Scripture and reflect on what they teach about trusting God's timing.

Sarah's Son Inherits the Covenant

Genesis 17:17–19

Say: Sarah wasn't the only one who wondered how God's promise could be fulfilled. Abraham's response to God shows his own struggle to understand how he and Sarah could have a child of their own in their extreme old age.

The original text does not clarify Abraham's reasoning for laughing. Some commentators do not see his laughter as a sign of unbelief, but delight in God's ability to do whatever He promises (Romans 4:20–21). In an attempt to clarify what the original Hebrew left vague, the *New Living Translation* renders Genesis 17:17 as "he laughed to himself in disbelief" even though the original doesn't include a word for "disbelief." Some other commentators think Abraham suggested an alternative plan, possibly out of fatherly love for Ishmael. Could his son Ishmael live under God's blessing and serve as the fulfillment of His promise? God did not respond harshly to him, but replied, "No—Sarah, your wife, will give birth to a son for you. You will name him Isaac, and I will confirm my covenant with him and his descendants as an everlasting covenant" (verse 19). God clarified that His initial promise had involved the wife who faithfully followed Abraham in his journey of faith—Sarah. She would bear a son named Isaac, which means "he laughs." God would confirm His covenant with Isaac and his descendants.

Waiting can create feelings of uncertainty, and we should bring those honest emotions to God. David is a wonderful example of this. He encouraged God's people to "trust in him at all times. Pour out your heart to him, for God is our refuge" (Psalm 62:8). Rather than doubting and pulling away from God, we can bring our doubts to Him and process them together during our times of prayer.

When we struggle to understand how God's promises can be fulfilled or when we are frustrated with His timing, we can be tempted to work out our own solution. But our

“wisdom” is not wisdom at all (1 Corinthians 1:25). When we try to figure things out on our own, we end up with results that are far from His will. By walking in obedience to His revealed Word, we can engage in honest conversation with God like Abraham did. The Father isn’t rattled by our doubts and questions—He understands our human frailty. As long as we remain connected with Him in humility, He will lovingly correct us, guiding us toward His purposes and plans.

Discuss

- What does Abraham’s response reveal about his perspective on God’s promise?
- Why do we sometimes tell God how we think He should respond? How can we learn to simply trust Him?
- How are you encouraged by God’s response to Abraham?

Part 3—By Faith, Sarah Receives the Promise Is Anything Too Hard for God?

Genesis 18:9–15

Say: Sarah laughed when she heard that God would give her a son at the age of 90. Quite honestly, who wouldn’t be amazed at such news? The fulfillment of this promise would take a miracle.

In Genesis 18:1, “the Lord appeared again to Abraham,” visiting his tent as one of “three men” (verse 2). When Sarah overheard God tell Abraham that she would have a son in the next year, she “laughed silently to herself” (verse 12). Nothing in the biblical account before Genesis 18 tells us whether Abraham had told Sarah about God’s covenant promise (17:21). It’s possible that this was the first time she heard the news that she was going to have a son. Regardless of what she did or did not know ahead of time, she couldn’t help but laugh at this idea. And God heard her. “Then the Lord said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh? Why did she say, “Can an old woman like me have a baby?” Is anything too hard for the Lord?’” (18:13–14). Sarah denied laughing, “but the Lord said, ‘No, you did laugh’” (verse 15).

Despite Sarah’s emotions and questions, God would keep His promise and give her a child (21:1–2). Just like it did for Sarah, God’s plan for your life can supersede your natural abilities. We can trust Him to bring about everything He has said in Scripture and every purpose to which He has called us.

Thankfully, nothing is too difficult for God. Sarah’s question about how God would keep His promise did not stop Him from doing so. She gave birth to Isaac within the next year and became the mother of the nation of Israel. God is not bound by human limitations or the laws of nature. He has the power to act however He chooses to accomplish His will here on earth.

Discuss

- How can we grow to believe God’s promises and trust that He will keep them?

- Why is it important to have faith that nothing is too hard for God? How can we encourage one another to believe this truth?

Resource Packet Item 3: Believing God’s Promises

For most people, some of God’s promises are easier to believe than others. Students will evaluate their level of confidence in certain biblical promises and ask God to increase their faith.

It Was By Faith

Hebrews 11:11–12

Say: Sarah is the first woman listed in what’s often referred to as the “Hall of Faith” in Hebrews 11. She “believed that God would keep his promise” (verse 11). And He did! Genesis 21:1–2 tells us, “The Lord kept his word and did for Sarah exactly what he had promised. She became pregnant, and she gave birth to a son for Abraham in his old age. This happened at just the time God had said it would.”

By faith, Sarah received God’s promise, becoming the mother of the nation of Israel and an ancestor of Jesus, the Messiah. God responded to her faith, despite her doubts and questions. Hebrews 11:12 emphasizes the incredible results of that faith. From one elderly couple—never able to conceive and now well past childbearing years—came not just a son, but a nation so prolific that they were as innumerable as the stars and the grains of sand.

We may think we are the only ones who struggle to believe God’s promises are true or that they apply to us. But thankfully, Scripture includes the stories of other people who struggled to believe them too. Even Sarah, the mother of God’s chosen people, struggled with His timing and wondered how He would keep His word. She wasn’t able to read the Bible like we can, but God still spoke to her, clarifying His plan for her life and her family. We are blessed to have the written Word of God—the revelation of who He is and all He does for those who believe in Him. When we read His Word and believe what He says, He will take care of the rest.

Discuss

- Describe the freedom of believing God will do what He says.
- What does Sarah’s story teach us about the dangers of taking matters into our own hands when it comes to God’s promises?
- How does Sarah’s story encourage you to believe God’s promises?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: God wants us to believe that He will fulfill His promises. He wants us to depend on Him instead of trusting our own limited understanding (Proverbs 3:5). We should expect His timing and His methods to be very different from ours. Only His supernatural work can bring about His intended outcome. He will do His part as we simply trust and obey.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- If you are waiting for God to respond in a particular situation, ask Him daily to help you wait faithfully.
- Read Sarah's entire story (Genesis 12–23). Reflect on her life and what you learn about God through His interactions with her, Hagar, and Abraham. Share what you learn with a friend who needs to be encouraged that God keeps His promises.
- Text, call, or send a card to someone who is in a season of waiting. Share an encouraging verse or write out a prayer for them. It could be the encouragement they need to keep trusting in God's faithfulness.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

God Blesses Noah.

Genesis 9:1–11

Tuesday:

God Is David's Refuge.

Psalms 61:1–8

Wednesday:

God Delivers Daniel's Friends.

Daniel 3:16–18, 24–25

Thursday:

Healed by Touching Jesus'

Garment. Matthew 9:18–22

Friday:

Promise of the Father Fulfilled.

Acts 2:1–4

Saturday:

Salvation Assured to Those Who Believe.

Romans 10:9–13