

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Paul Gunn, Pastor

**SARAH: THE MOTHER OF A NATION AND GREAT GRANDMOTHER OF JOSEPH**

Genesis 12:10-20; 16:1-6; 17:15-22; 21:1-14

January 30, 2022

For public use: See non-copyright comments at the end of the message.

**INTRODUCTION:** Today we will begin a new series on the life of Joseph. For the first few weeks of this series, we will concentrate on the women in Joseph's family. We hear a lot about the men in the Bible, but the women, not so much. We will look at who they were and what lessons we can learn from them. We will start with Sarah, the great-grandmother of Joseph and the wife of Abraham.

Most of us know a lot about Abraham. A few years ago, I preached a series on the life of Abraham, and Sarah was mentioned quite a bit. If Abraham is the father of the nation of Israel, then Sarah is the mother.

Sarah's original name was Sarai. Just like God renamed Abram to Abraham, he renamed Sarai to Sarah. The first time we are introduced to Sarai and Abram is in Genesis 11. There we discover that they had no children, and Sarai could not conceive. From Ur, Sarai traveled with her husband Abram, his nephew Lot, and her father-in-law, Terah, to Harran, where they settled for a while. Eventually, Sarai, Abram, and Lot followed God's call to Canaan where they lived as nomads.

Today's sermon has four points:

1. We are an example to others.
2. Our actions have consequences.
3. Faith is believing in what we cannot see.
4. God keeps his promises.

**WE ARE AN EXAMPLE TO OTHERS**

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 12:10-20

1— **Sarah: The Mother of a Nation and Great Grandmother of Joseph**—Genesis 12:10-20; 16:1-6; 17:15-22; 21:1-14—January 30, 2022

*At that time a severe famine struck the land of Canaan, forcing Abram to go down to Egypt, where he lived as a foreigner. <sup>11</sup> As he was approaching the border of Egypt, Abram said to his wife, Sarai, “Look, you are a very beautiful woman. <sup>12</sup> When the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife. Let’s kill him; then we can have her!’ <sup>13</sup> So please tell them you are my sister. Then they will spare my life and treat me well because of their interest in you.” <sup>14</sup> And sure enough, when Abram arrived in Egypt, everyone noticed Sarai’s beauty. <sup>15</sup> When the palace officials saw her, they sang her praises to Pharaoh, their king, and Sarai was taken into his palace. <sup>16</sup> Then Pharaoh gave Abram many gifts because of her—sheep, goats, cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels. <sup>17</sup> But the LORD sent terrible plagues upon Pharaoh and his household because of Sarai, Abram’s wife. <sup>18</sup> So Pharaoh summoned Abram and accused him sharply. “What have you done to me?” he demanded. “Why didn’t you tell me she was your wife? <sup>19</sup> Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ and allow me to take her as my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and get out of here!” <sup>20</sup> Pharaoh ordered some of his men to escort them, and he sent Abram out of the country, along with his wife and all his possessions.*

**EXPLANATION:** Although they were specially chosen by God to become the initial members of his chosen people, Abram and Sarai were obviously not perfect people. Abram understood Pharaoh’s power and wanted to stay on his good side. So, he devised a plan to deceive Pharaoh with a half-truth. We know from other scriptures that Sarai really was Abram’s half-sister; they shared the same father but not the same mother. So, Abram capitalized on that but did not mention that Sarai was also his wife. Sarai obeyed her husband and went along with the ruse.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Two hundred or so years ago, there was a man on horseback who passed a group of tired soldiers who were digging what appeared to be an important defensive position. The military leader stood to the side of the group yelling and threatening punishment if the soldiers did not move faster. The stranger asked the leader why he did not help. “I’m in charge! The men do as I tell them,” said the leader. “Help them yourself if you feel so strongly about it.” The leader was surprised when the man climbed down from his horse and helped until the job was finished. The leader was even more surprised when he discovered that the stranger was actually General George Washington dressed in civilian clothes.

**APPLICATION:** George Washington and other great leaders know that humans are by nature imitators. Albert Einstein once said, “Setting an example is not the main means of influencing others, it is the only means.” Unfortunately, Abram reacted out of fear. His response jeopardized his wife and did nothing to promote trust in the God he served. Intentionally or not, Abram set a bad example when he tried to take matters into his own hands instead of relying upon the Lord.

While no one wants to say it out loud, people often believe that we can take care of ourselves. People devise plans, fudge numbers, cut corners, and tell white lies in an effort to resolve our problems instead of allowing God to work things out in his way and his time. Like Abram, we may think that we are taking care of ourselves, but we fail to realize the dangers of our actions. We also forget how many people are watching us. Our actions either point people to Christ or away from him.

1. We are an example to others. What example are we setting?

## **OUR ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES**

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 16:1-6

*Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had not been able to bear children for him. But she had an Egyptian servant named Hagar. <sup>2</sup> So Sarai said to Abram, “The LORD has prevented me from having children. Go and sleep with my servant. Perhaps I can have children through her.” And Abram agreed with Sarai’s proposal. <sup>3</sup> So Sarai, Abram’s wife, took Hagar the Egyptian servant and gave her to Abram as a wife. (This happened ten years after Abram had settled in the land of Canaan.) <sup>4</sup> So Abram had sexual relations with Hagar, and she became pregnant. But when Hagar knew she was pregnant, she began to treat her mistress, Sarai, with contempt. <sup>5</sup> Then Sarai said to Abram, “This is all your fault! I put my servant into your arms, but now that she’s pregnant she treats me with contempt. The LORD will show who’s wrong—you or me!” <sup>6</sup> Abram replied, “Look, she is your servant, so deal with her as you see fit.” Then Sarai treated Hagar so harshly that she finally ran away.*

**EXPLANATION:** Although Abram and Sarai were childless, God had promised Abram that he would have a son and that his descendants would outnumber the stars. The Bible tells us (Genesis 15) that Abram believed the Lord. So, we can assume then that he told his wife all about the promise. There was only one

problem. God did not mention Sarai. Really, he did not need to. Sarai was Abram's wife. So, if God promised Abram a son, it was only logical that Sarai would be the boy's mom. But that's not how Sarai processed the news. I wonder how many times she asked Abram to retell the story of God's promise. Did she question him again and again, "Did he mention my name, Abram? Did he say that I would have a son?"

The Bible specifically says Sarai could not conceive. We do not know if she knew this, but given the cultural expectations, the blame would have rested primarily on her anyway. So, Sarai must have spent many sleepless nights considering how Abram could have a son if she could not bear a child. Just as Abram had taken matters into his own hands when they were in Egypt, Sarai did the same exact thing, following her husband's example, she devised a plan to help God give Abram a son.

**ILLUSTRATION:** A Sunday school teacher once told his high school students about a ticket he received. The teacher had slowly rolled through a stop sign and been pulled over by a policeman. "Officer," he asked, "what's the difference between what I did and a complete stop?" The officer handed the man the citation and said, "About \$100."

**APPLICATION:** Somehow, we like to think that we are immune to the consequences of our actions, but we are not. For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. Even before it became known as Newton's Law of Physics, that was the natural order of human life on earth.

Sarai forced her Egyptian servant into a sexual relationship with Abram. Is it any surprise then that she had hard feelings towards her mistress? She was likely young. She was far away from her home, and any thoughts of having a normal life with her own husband and her own family were now out of the question. Sarai's plan was successful, but it was also disastrous not only for her and Hagar but for generations to come. The descendants of Ishmael would forever hate the descendants of Abram and Sarai's true son, Isaac.

We may think we know what's best, but every time we fail to trust and obey, there will be fall-out.

1. We are an example to others.
2. Our actions have consequences.

**4— Sarah: The Mother of a Nation and Great Grandmother of Joseph—Genesis 12:10-20; 16:1-6; 17:15-22; 21:1-14—January 30, 2022**

## FAITH IS BELIEVING WHAT YOU CANNOT SEE

### **SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 17:15-22

*Then God said to Abraham, “Regarding Sarai, your wife—her name will no longer be Sarai. From now on her name will be Sarah.”<sup>16</sup> 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.”<sup>17</sup> 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?”<sup>18</sup> So Abraham said to God, “May Ishmael live under your special blessing!”<sup>19</sup> 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.”<sup>20</sup> As for Ishmael, I will bless him also, just as you have asked. I will make him extremely fruitful and multiply his descendants. He will become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation.”<sup>21</sup> But my covenant will be confirmed with Isaac, who will be born to you and Sarah about this time next year.”<sup>22</sup> When God had finished speaking, he left Abraham.*

**EXPLANATION:** Again, God confirmed his promise to Abraham, but this time he mentioned Sarah by name (six times in these eight verses). Unfortunately, both Sarah and Abraham had doubts. In this passage, we see Abraham laughing at the prospect of having another child. Even if Sarah’s previous problems were corrected, and she was able to conceive, Abraham made it clear that they both were well past their child-bearing years. Later, when Sarah heard the promise with her own ears, she also laughed. The news was simply unbelievable.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Every week all across the world, employees leave work on Friday believing that their employer has direct deposited their paycheck and that the bank has credited the appropriate amount of money into their account. They pay bills and make purchases using money they have never seen. It’s just one example of the faith we exhibit in our everyday lives. When an alarm on our phone tells us that a storm is brewing, we take cover—even if we do not see the tornado outside our window. When we push the brakes on our car, we believe that our car will slow down—even though we cannot view the braking mechanism in action. When we

talk to someone on the phone, we trust it is the person whose voice we hear—even if we cannot see that person’s face.

**APPLICATION:** We exhibit various forms of passive faith every day, but our faith in God must be active. He is more trustworthy than anything or anyone else on this earth. But sometimes we waver. Like Sarah and Abraham, we put our confidence in what we think we know. They only thought of their reality: that their bodies were well beyond their child-bearing years.

We also put our confidence in things we know. Here are some things people have told me they knew for a fact:

- That the diagnosis is bad.
  - That their finances will not cover the bills.
  - That a friend was too caught up in his addiction to stop.
- The Bible tells us that with God, nothing is impossible.

Let’s review:

1. We are an example to others.
2. Our actions have consequences.
3. Faith is believing what you cannot see.

## **GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES**

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 21:1-14

*The LORD kept his word and did for Sarah exactly what he had promised. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> And Abraham named their son Isaac. <sup>4</sup> Eight days after Isaac was born, Abraham circumcised him as God had commanded. <sup>5</sup> Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born. <sup>6</sup> And Sarah declared, “God has brought me laughter. All who hear about this will laugh with me. <sup>7</sup> Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse a baby? Yet I have given Abraham a son in his old age!” <sup>8</sup> When Isaac grew up and was about to be weaned, Abraham prepared a huge feast to celebrate the occasion. <sup>9</sup> But Sarah saw Ishmael—the son of Abraham and her Egyptian servant Hagar—making fun of her son, Isaac.<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>10</sup> So she turned to Abraham and demanded, “Get rid of that slave*

woman and her son. He is not going to share the inheritance with my son, Isaac. I won't have it!"

**EXPLANATION:** God kept his word. He blessed Sarah and Abraham with a son named Isaac (laughter). Sarah was obviously full of joy, but her happiness was tainted by her earlier sin. The relationship between herself and Hagar was complicated, and although Ishmael was Abraham's first-born, Sarah never accepted him as part of the family. Eventually, Sarah forced Hagar and Ishmael away.

**APPLICATION:** Nothing more is said about Sarah from this point until she died at the age of 127 years old (Genesis 23). If that was the last word on her life, it would be kind of a sad testimony, would it not? We like meaningful last words, touching deathbed scenes. It would be sad to think that Sarah, the mother of the nation of Israel, was forever known by that hateful statement, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son..." Thankfully, the Bible gives us something more, something better to remember Sarah by.

The author of Hebrews encourages believers by presenting the names and stories of people of great faith. In that list, you will find Sarah. Hebrews 11:11 says, "*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.*" Ultimately, despite her humanity, despite her sinfulness, Sarah left us an example of faith. Her life was a testament that God is who he says he is, and he will do what he says he will do.

1. We are an example to others.
2. Our actions have consequences.
3. Faith is believing in what we cannot see.
4. God keeps his promises.

**INVITATION:** How are you doing in your journey of faith? What kind of example are you setting for those around you? Do you live what you say you believe, or are you like Sarai and Abram, trying to take matters into your own hands? Maybe there is something going on in your life that you need to give to the Lord. If so, come to the altar today and pray about it. If you do not know Christ as your personal Savior, then your first step is admitting your sinfulness and asking him to forgive you. Come forward if you want to commit your life to him today.

To preachers, teachers, students, and anyone else reading or using this message: I have posted this for all to use as you see fit. There is no need to cite me as the source. You are free to delete sections, add your own, or do whatever you want. There is no copyright. My request is that you do not copyright or sell my work. I am sharing my preaching notes in good faith with you because I know the challenges of putting together a lesson, especially when your week gets consumed with other things. Use it and enjoy!

I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

Find me at [www.thbc.com](http://www.thbc.com). Click on sermons or YouTube channel: Pastor Paul Gunn  
Thanks to Jennifer Anderson for her editing assistance.

Sincerely, Paul Gunn  
Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Nashville, Tennessee  
USA