

Chapter Ten

SARAH

Hebrews 11:11 *"By FAITH Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore."*

We read of Sarah in Genesis 18: 9 - 15 and of the birth of Isaac, her son, in Genesis 21: 1 - 7.

As we read the Genesis account we are struck by the apparent lack of belief that Sarah shows, and would certainly not regard her as a candidate for a great heroine of faith if such is to be equated with belief. Indeed, Sarah continually reveals her human nature as she plans and schemes with her husband. God had told Abraham that he would have an heir and would be the father of a great nation but Sarah is barren and reason would declare that the promise of God is vain. She, however, will have a child, even if it means giving her maid, Hagar, to be a sex partner for Abraham. The child is to belong to Sarah but, when she sees Hagar with the boy, human jealousy rises in her breast and Hagar is driven from the home.

From this son, Ishmael, the great Arab nations are to come and the world continues to reap their whirlwind. Note that it is God Himself who has raised up these nations but His covenant remains with the Children of the Promise. (18:20, 21). Do not be surprised at the ongoing enmity between the Arab nations and the Children of Israel. There will always be antagonism between the fruit of carnal humanity and the fruit of God's Promise. For example, Jesus told His disciples to *tarry in Jerusalem for (another) promise of His Father, - the baptism with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:4,5)*. Isn't it amazing that the carnal outworking of this promise is so often discord and antagonism among God's people rather than the great power it should be to enable us to be the witnesses Christ has called us to be!! Ishmael was birthed out of human plans and schemes; Isaac was birthed 'by faith'. All the world's religions are founded upon the teachings and principles of carnal ingenuity, but the church of Jesus Christ comprises a people justified by faith.

We then see Sarah and Abraham scheming to deceive Abimelech, king of Gerar, by pretending that they were brother and sister. Abraham was afraid that the Gerites might kill him as Sarah's husband, so that Abimelech might take the widow as his wife. If the king thought they were siblings, he might still take Sarah but, at least, the life of Abraham would be spared! Does this read to you as people having great faith in God, if that is to be equated with trust? How striking that the heathen king, Abimelech, had more integrity of heart and fear of God than the man of faith! He restored Sarah to her husband, having not abused the sanctity of their marriage and giving them many gifts as vindication before all the people. God honoured Abimelech and his household, but His hand was still on Abraham and Sarah to lead them in the deeds of faith.

By faith (the action or gift of God), Sarah was able to conceive, though over ninety years of age, and the child of promise, Isaac, was born. The couple came together in intercourse, God quickened both the sperm and ova so that conception took place, and Sarah accepted that the morning sickness was evidence of God's faithfulness. Herein was her faith. She did not struggle against what was happening within her though it was contrary to everything she, or anyone she knew, had experienced at that age. Her body would not reject, nor would she abort what God was birthing within her. How often we reject the workings of the Holy Spirit in our lives because we do not understand! How often we abort that gift or ministry God would birth within us because we are afraid to pay the price! Not so, Sarah.

What principles can we learn from Sarah's example ?

Firstly that He is faithful to His promises, even when it seems to be an impossibility. Indeed, with Him, nothing is impossible!

Secondly, God is looking for a people of faith, led by Him, not political or scheming. The church today is so full of men's plans and organisation that there is no place for the Holy Spirit to move.

Sarah produced one son by scheming. The result has been great sorrow for the people of God throughout the centuries since. Her other son was 'by faith', the son of promise. From him God has established His covenant people, through whom all nations of the earth will be blessed. They are to be the nation who brought us the Bible and the Messiah, our Saviour, Jesus.

God's work in God's way

I am reminded of the time that King David would bring the *ark of the covenant* back to Jerusalem. The story is told for us in 1 Chronicles 13 & 15. To the Hebrews, the ark represented the presence of God among His people, but it had been out of the land for twenty years, after being taken in battle by the Philistines during the carnal priesthood of Eli. For seven months the Philistines had suffered greatly while the ark was in their land, so they had set it on a new cart drawn by milch cows which had never previously been yoked together. God allowed them to bring the ark safely back across the borders of Israel, no sickness or injury occurring on the journey. However, when David tried to use *the same method* to bring 'God's presence' back to Jerusalem, his trained oxen slipped and death resulted. David was very angry with God but soon had to repent when he read *God's method* for carrying the ark, recorded in Numbers 4. God had brought judgment upon His people *'because we did not care for it in the way that is ordained'* (15:13). It is my opinion that the anointing of God's presence and power is sadly missing from so much of what we call church. Could this be because we are trying to build His church our way and not the way He has ordained? Indeed, could it be that we are not building His church at all, but our church? He has never promised to put His anointing on anything that is done in man's strength or wisdom. He said, *"I will build My church and the gates of Hell shall not overcome it"* (Matthew 16:18). Further, He will build His church on the rock, as exemplified in Peter! Which characteristic of Peter is the Master referring to? Surely not his impetuous, carnal behaviour! I suggest that the rock is FAITH such as the apostle demonstrated by his confession that Jesus as the Christ. "You are blessed, Peter. My Father has revealed this to you." said Jesus. Faith here is seen in revelation followed by confession; God's initiative followed by man's response.

Isn't it about time we returned to doing God's work in God's way?

It is time we got back to being people of the book, basing our work and walk on its principles and precepts. I am convinced that when we do God's work in God's way, we shall receive the anointing of His quickening upon our efforts. For example, we have many plans and schemes to evangelise the people around us. We use 'Four Spiritual laws' or 'The Roman Road'; we learn A-B-C tactics like salesmen and plan 'seeker-sensitive services'. We write many tracts and put on evangelistic programs. All of these are good but are they God's way? I challenge you to pull one single sheet out of your Bible that you give away as a gospel tract. Can you find one scheme that the early church developed which we could emulate today? Surely the Holy Spirit could have moved another of the disciples, say Andrew or Philip, who could have produced a book made up of "Tracts sure to succeed" or "Fifty ways to win your friends to Jesus" if that were the Spirit's plan of Salvation! We could have printed it as the last book in the Bible with 'pull-out' sheets for convenience.

However, I am convinced that the Bible does contain God's plan for salvation. Indeed, though we cannot pull out one page to give away as a gospel tract, we can pull out entire books which emphasise **His method**. It is the Unity of His people!

Father I pray that they may be one, so that the world may believe that you have sent me; so that the world may know that you have loved them even as you love me. (The prayer of Jesus in John 17 - a prayer He is still praying!)

All our plans and schemes will produce some fruit, for He is a God of grace, but a full harvest will never come until we do it God's way. He wants to build His church, to give us the nations, people as numerable as sand upon the sea shore, but He will only do it His way. His way is the way of faith and, one way this is demonstrated is by our unity in the Spirit.

Summary

The example of Sarah, the schemer who laughed at God, is given to us to teach us the following principles:

- 1. With God all things are possible.**
- 2. Human reasoning and faith are contradictory.**
- 3. God's destiny for us will only be achieved by faith.**
- 4. We must do God's work in God's way!**