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Exhortation

"By faith . . ."

6. Sarah (Heb. 11:11,12)

Tom Griffiths

SARAH'S FAITH enabled her to receive "strength to conceive seed, and [she] was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged Him faithful Who had promised" (Heb. 11:11). Faith enabled God to make the changes in her body, for with God nothing shall be impossible.

There were other events in Sarah's life which also showed her faith. Firstly, Sarah's faith was shown by her submission to Abraham in all decisions of their marriage.

The marriage union (Gen. 2:18-24; 3:16) is a pattern for that of Christ and his ecclesia (Eph. 5:22-33). Christ is the head and saviour of the body; his ecclesia subjects herself to his will. Promises made to Christ are promises made to his ecclesia, in him (Gal. 3:29). Similarly, promises to Abraham were promises to Sarah, they were one flesh. Sarah's actions exemplified this, and Peter sets her as the example to wives in Christ (1 Pet. 3:5,6), referring to the instance where Sarah called Abraham her lord (Gen. 18:12). Yet it appears that this had been her position all their married life. On two occasions Abraham asked her to say she was his sister, not his wife. It appears that Abraham was not yet able to trust in God's promise to bless him (Gen. 12:2), nor to sacrifice himself for his wife. Yet Sarah showed her support and faith. She obeyed, believing that God would protect her for her faithfulness. Perhaps she believed the blessing would apply to her in him and went in faith. "And the LORD plagued Pharaoh . . . with great plagues because of Sarai" (v. 17). What an awful experience for Sarah! Yet her God protected her, and she was not taken to be Pharaoh's wife (v. 20), nor harmed later when this incident was, surprisingly, repeated with Abimelech, and the Lord "suffered . . . [him] not to touch her" (20:6).

Secondly, Sarah's faith was shown by her belief in the promises and desire for an heir to make them possible.

Sarah, past the age of childbearing, suggested to Abraham that she could have children through

her handmaid Hagar. So she believed the promises but not that she could bear the child. It was left to Abraham to decide, and he accepted Sarah's offer; so she "gave [Hagar] to her husband Abram to be his wife" (16:3). What a sacrifice, what love this showed, so that he might have an heir!

When Sarah was eighty-nine, God promised that she would have a child of her own (17:16). What did she think when Abraham told her? Here we see her faith stretched to the limit. She was old, how then could she give birth? When the three angels appeared and repeated the promise, she still doubted (18:9-15). How patient her God was in reassuring her that she would bear a son! So, "through faith . . . Sara herself received strength . . . because she judged Him faithful Who had promised" (Heb. 11:11). Now we see the extent of her faith, which enabled the changes to take place in her so that Isaac could be conceived.

It was Sarah who saw Ishmael persecuting Isaac and spoke to Abraham to get him to cast Ishmael out, as cited by Paul: "what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman" (Gal. 4:30). Although it grieved Abraham, it was the Divine will, and he was told by God to hearken to Sarah, "for in Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Gen. 21:12). Sarah had spoken in accordance with the spirit, and it became "the scripture".

We see, then, the nature of the faith of Sarah in her actions as a wife. She called Abraham "lord", and left him to act on their behalf. She faithfully followed what he decided, even when it put her in jeopardy, and she was rewarded by being delivered out of danger by God. She came to understand that the promises made to her husband were also to her by their marriage, and that she therefore had to bear Isaac. The bride of Christ, the saints, also has to show the same submission to him in faith, believing that she will inherit with him.