



ST. STEPHEN'S CHURCH

Cedar Run Episcopal Parish, *The Rev. Dr. Peter R. Gustin, Rector*

The Adult Class: Women in the Bible

Sarah (Sarai)

Scripture References

Genesis 12:1-7	The Call of Abram
Genesis 12:10-15	Abram identifies Sarai as his sister
Genesis 15:1-4	God's covenant with Abram
Genesis 16:1-6	Sarai gives Hagar to Abram (and regrets it)
Genesis 17:1-14	God changes Abram's name to Abraham; orders circumcision
Genesis 17:15-19	God changes Sarai's name to Sarah; promises a son; Abraham laughs
Genesis 18:1-15	God appears (as Trinity?), renews promise of a son; Sarah laughs

{Interlude: Sodom and Gomorrah; some comedy between Abraham and God beforehand}

Genesis 21:1-7	The birth of Isaac
Genesis 21:8-14	Sarah tells Abraham to banish Hagar and Ishmael

{Interlude: Abraham is prepared to sacrifice Isaac; no comments from Sarah}

Genesis 23	The death and burial of Sarah
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Comments

1. We have (I believe?) discussed the Northern and Southern sources of Old Testament stories in Genesis. This is clearly a Southern story: God's Name is rendered "LORD," which the North won't use until Moses in Exodus 3. It also has God speaking directly to Abraham and Sarah, which would never (ever!) happen in Northern stories (until Moses). In the North, God always uses angels. Moreover, it makes use of laughter and comedy, which again, for those dour, Puritan Northerners, would be unheard of. Finally, we see a lot of ceremony and ritual surrounding the covenants God makes and seals; the Northerners would see those things as vain and idolatrous. I always think it's helpful to place the stories' origin for our understanding and appreciation.

2. If you're interested in the contrast between Northern and Southern stories in the Pentateuch (first five Books of the Bible), we identify the Southern source as "J," for Judah (the name of the Southern Kingdom where they originated) and also the German name for Yahweh (Jahweh), named for the German scholar (Julius Wellhausen) who posited the source theory. It's called the Yahweh (or Jahweh) source because only J uses that divine Name before Exodus 3. We THINK J was a woman in Solomon's court; tons of books have been written about her; just look up "J Source in the Pentateuch" for some fascinating reading about this incredible woman. If you're

intrigued by the Northern influence, we identify that author as “E,” for Elohim, the Northern Name for God, as well as for Ephraim, the city in the Northern Kingdom where we think the stories originated. Two other sources of the Pentateuch exist, which haven’t yet entered our discussions; they are “P,” for the Priestly source, and “D,” for the Deuteronomist, who is thought to be the guy who put the other three sources together into one (giant) document, which would later become the Pentateuch.

Questions for Consideration/Discussion

1. We know that Sarah was beautiful and devoted to Abraham. But, like everyone else in the world, she has a dark side. What are some of the things she does to reveal her baser nature?
2. The Abraham and Sarah story contains two interludes (interruptions, if you will): one for the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, and one for the sacrifice of Isaac. In both interludes, Sarah is silent. Any ideas about why that might be?
3. Abraham twice identifies Sarah as his half-sister (same father, different mothers). Is he doing it simply to save himself, or do you think it’s possible that he actually married his half-sister? Does that have any bearing on how you read the story?
4. If Abraham is the Father of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, then Sara is surely the Mother. Why do you think we so often invoke the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” without invoking the “God of Sara, Rachel, and Leah?”
5. What, if anything, surprises you about the overall Sarah story?