

The Matriarchs

*Four Women Who Birthed a
Nation and Changed History*

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Four Women Who Birthed a Nation and Changed History-

An Introduction to the Matriarchs

There's never been a time in history when you were needed more. You are uniquely gifted with the talent, dreams, and experience that you have to do big things for God right here, right now.

In this six-week study of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah from the Bible, learn how following Jesus will lead you right to your Divine calling. The Bible will guide us through issues of justice, waiting, how to correct course when we have made a mistake, how to thrive in challenging circumstances and love people radically.

You won't regret spending this time in the Scriptures, and you won't ever be the same.

Here's a little instruction on how this study is meant to be used. This book of daily homework can be used by itself, but it is most effective if it is accompanied by the DVD sessions for The Matriarchs available at www.comethirstyministry.com/matriarchs. Before you begin each day I encourage you to pray that the Word of God would be alive, active and fresh as you study it.

There are three graphic icons that should help guide us through our daily homework.



The most important icon is the Bible graphic. This identifies portions of scripture that are to be read. These are vital. Don't skip over any of the Bible readings, even if you are familiar with that particular scripture. If you are in a hurry one day, I would rather that you skipped my commentary than skip the words of Almighty God.



The second icon is of a map. Throughout this study we will find that the matriarchs moved around- a lot! We are going to track their movements as we progress through Scripture. You will need three different colored pens for this activity. One for Sarai, one for Rebekah and one for Rachel and Leah. At each map icon you will track their journey on the provided map.



The third icon is of two people. The Matriarchs can be done individually or as a group. If you are leading a small group through this study, these icons indicate discussion questions for your group time.

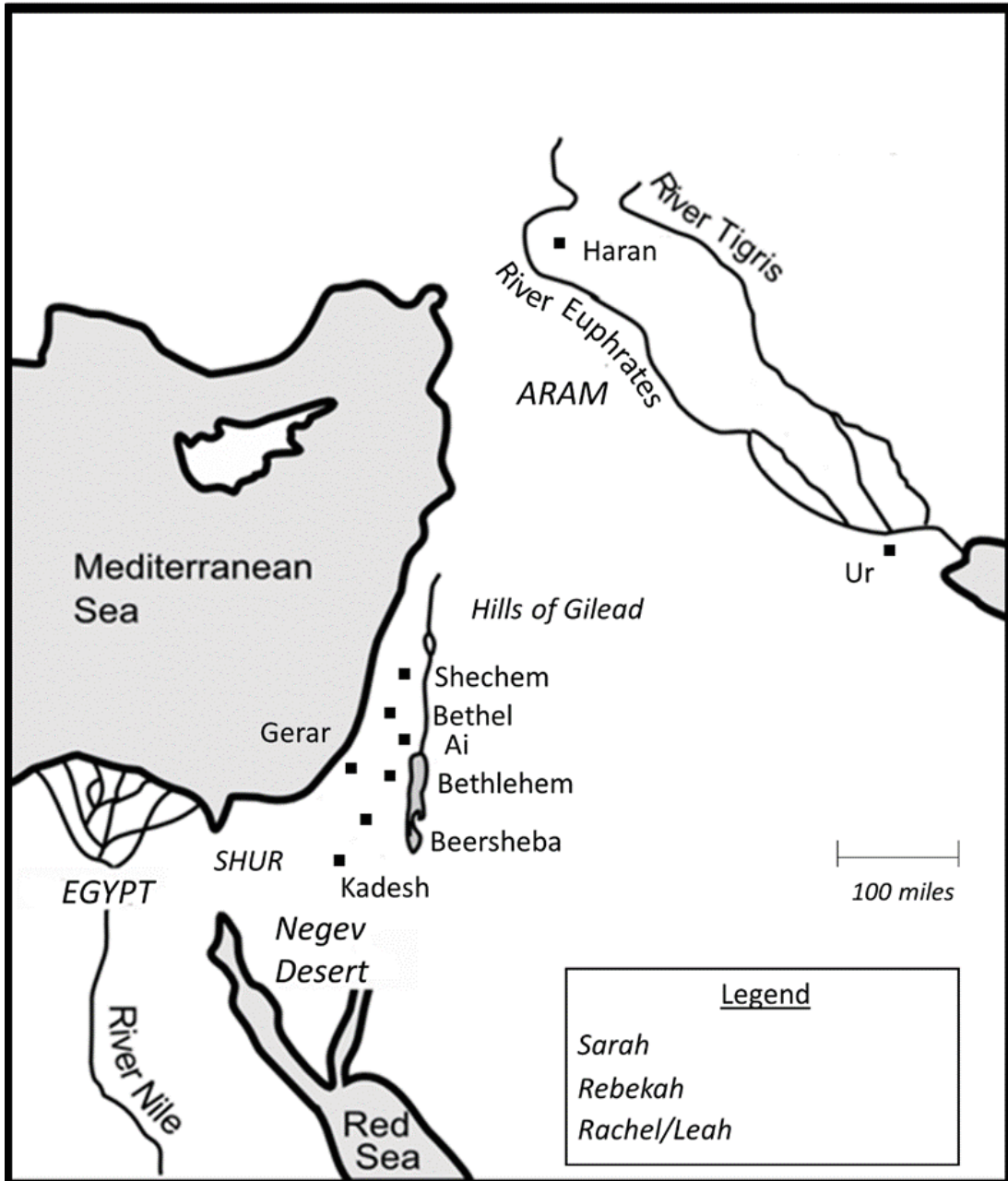
Welcome to The Matriarchs.

Alicia

"As the rain and the snow come down from Heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is My Word that goes out from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish the purpose for which I sent it."

~ Isaiah 55:10-11

Map of the Matriarchs



WEEK 1

Sarah

Following God in Real Life



Day 1

Sarah – Following God in Real Life



“The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.’” Genesis 12:1

Welcome to *The Matriarchs: Four Women Who Birthed a Nation and Changed History*. Over the next six weeks, we will study the timeless struggles and successes of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, four ordinary women whom God used to change history. Their story is found in the book of Genesis, and in it we will learn about hope, faithfulness, waiting on God, prayer, grace, and how to treat other people well. It’s going to be a life changing adventure (as every encounter with the Word of God should be) so let’s get started.

Sarai (whom we will later know as Sarah) was living in a thriving metropolis called Ur near the Persian Gulf when her story begins in Scripture. “The city of Ur in Southern Mesopotamia is well known in the literature of the ancient Near East...An early empire with Ur as its capital existed for about a century.”¹ Many historians date this empire to the time of Sarai.

Sarai was a big city girl, and we have no reason to believe she would not have been content to spend the rest of her life comfortably in the city she called home. After all, she wasn’t exactly a spring chicken anymore.



Read Genesis 12:1-5

How old was Abram (vs. 4)?

We will soon learn that Sarai was ten years younger than Abram. How old was Sarai at this point?

What do you imagine you will be doing at this age? Most Americans consider this the ideal age

¹ (Cultural Background Study Bible, Zondervan, 2016)

Week 1 Day 1

to retire, slow down and begin taking life easy. Yet God chose this exact moment to call Sarai into a whole new phase of following Him. We will glean a whole host of lessons during our study of *The Matriarchs*, but an essential one is this: God has a plan for you right this very moment. You are not too old; you are not too young. Nothing about your current situation (except unrepentant sin) disqualifies you from service in the Kingdom of God. There is always something to look forward to when we are following Jesus! In fact, God may very well call you in the exact season of life when you feel least qualified.

What are your thoughts and feelings as you read these statements about God having a purpose for you right now?

Harper's Bible Dictionary puts it this way, "God has a plan and purpose for this world. Providence is not a principle of orderliness or reason; rather, Providence is the will of the Creator who is actively involved in moving His creation to a goal. History is not a cyclical process of endless repetition; history is being moved toward the predetermined end."

God gave Sarai a divine mission, and He gives you one too. Ephesian 2:10 tells us that we were created specifically to do the good works that God planned for us to do long before we were born. She may have thought at her age her best years were behind her. God didn't see it that way.



Do you ever think that your best years for serving God are behind you? Or maybe you're the opposite – can't wait to get on with God's plans for you?

Throughout this study we will find that the matriarchs moved around- a lot! We are going to track their movements as we progress through Scripture. You will need three different colored

Week 1 Day 1

pens for this activity. One for Sarai, one for Rebekah and one for Rachel and Leah. There is a map on page 8.



Read Genesis 11:31



With your Sarai colored pen start at Ur and draw a line with an arrow to Haran.



Reread Genesis 12:1. What did God tell Abram to do?

Am I the only one who nearly bursts into tears at the thought of leaving my “people”? Maybe you’ve experienced a move away from friends and family, so you know exactly what that feels like. Leaving all of your connections behind can be terrifying. (Thank goodness for cell phones and social media.)

The Lord may have talked specifically to Sarai’s husband Abram, but in God’s eyes married couples are a package deal. God never calls one without also calling the other. Sarai was not along for the ride in God’s promise to Abraham; *she* was the plan too. Several times Abram and Sarai tried to cut Sarai out of God’s promise, and every time, God made it very clear He offered no plan B. Abraham and Sarah, the couple, were *the plan*. And the plan was huge.

Write Genesis 12:2-3 here.

Week 1 Day 1

We can see why Abram and Sarai would be excited about this blessing, but there was a catch.

What did Abram and Sarai have to do in order to activate this promise from God (vs. 1)?

This blessing wasn't going to come cheaply. In order to activate it Abram and Sarai would have to leave everyone and everything that they had ever known and head out of town to who knows where.

They had to leave everything. Forever.



Has God ever asked you to give up something significant in order to go on an adventure with Him? Briefly describe what happened.

God didn't ask Abram and Sarai to give up everything they knew just to see if they were committed enough to Him to make the sacrifice. (And we can all breath a huge sigh of relief for that.) God had a solid reason. Around the time of this account in Genesis, an interesting thing was happening in Mesopotamia where the couple lived. The people there were polytheistic (meaning that they believed in many gods), but around this time in history the people began to believe in personal gods. That is, of the many gods that they believed existed, the head of a family would choose a "family god." This one god would then be the sponsor

Week 1 Day 1

god of the family and devotion to that god would pass from generation to generation.

“In this type of system the gods are connected with the forces of nature and show themselves through natural phenomena. These gods do not reveal their natures or give any idea of what will bring their favor or wrath. They are worshiped by being flattered, cajoled, humored and appeased. Manipulation is the operative term. They are gods with needs made in the image of human beings.”²

When God made a covenant with Abram, God’s promise was in stark contrast. He was revealing His nature to Abram, and His nature was goodness, fellowship and grace. Furthermore, instead of expecting things from Abram and Sarai, God started out telling them what it was that He was going to do. *He* was going to make them a great nation. *He* was going to bless them. *He* was going to make their name great. *He* would bless those who blessed them and curse those who cursed them. And *He* would bless all the families of the earth through them. They would not (and could not) manipulate God, and *He* wanted nothing from them except their obedience. Rather than Abram choosing a sponsor god for his family, the One True God chose him.

There’s one more thing to know about these “family gods,” and knowing this provides the most distinct reason that God told Abram to leave his geographic location. In ancient Mesopotamia, deities were associated with the land and political and ethnic divisions. When Abram and Sarai moved away, they were making a clean break of all of that. The God they served would not be confined to any one place or people group. Abram’s God would be associated with the people who worshiped Him, wherever they were. Right from the beginning, God was very clear that His ultimate goal was to bless all the families of the earth.

Does it help to know that whatever sacrifice God asks us to make will serve an ultimate purpose? It does for me. Paul, the author of much of the New Testament, declared that whatever he had given up for Jesus (and it had been a lot) was nothing compared to what he had gained by knowing Him (Philippians 3:8). Abram and Sarai would find the same thing, and so will we. We may have to give up homes or relationships or jobs, to be where God wants us to be, but in the end it will all be worth it.

² Cultural Background Study Bible. Zondervan. 2016.

Day 2

Sarah – Following God in Real Life



“By faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered Him faithful who had made the promise.” Hebrews 11:11

God made an outrageous deal with Abram and Sarai. He was going to bless them, make their family into a great nation and through them, bless all the families of the earth. From Abram’s and Sarai’s perspective, God’s plan came with one fundamental problem.

What was the obvious problem (Genesis 11:30)?

When Abram and Sarai received this promise, they already knew it was impossible. After roughly half a century of trying, the one description we have of Sarai in Genesis 11 is that she was barren. To step out in faith meant that they would have to suspend the reality of decades and decades of life experience. Can you imagine their thoughts and feelings in light of their experiences?

When we read their story, we can easily take for granted that when God told Abram and Sarai to set out on a great adventure, they didn’t think twice about it. However, when we really consider the great risk they took, we can understand much better why they were each commended in Hebrews 11 for their faith. They weren’t just risking their material wealth and their lifestyle. They were risking hope. Hope in something they desperately wanted but couldn’t possibly have, unless God intervened.

Hebrews 11:1 says, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” Faith is not positive thinking. It is not dreaming big. It is not “build it and they will come.” Faith is cemented in the truth of God’s Word. It is firmly believing that God will keep His promise, and then putting action to that belief.

Week 1 Day 2

Fortunately, God usually gives us a foundation of truth before He asks us to go big.



Read Luke 5:1-11

In verse one, what was Jesus doing?

What was Simon (Peter) doing in verse two?

Where did Jesus move to in verse three?

Did you notice that before Jesus asked anything of Peter, He first gave him a front row seat as He preached the truth of Scripture?

What did Jesus ask Simon to do in verse four?

What happened in verse seven?

Week 1 Day 2

Write Luke 5:11 word for word here:

Did you notice the progression?

We have no idea what happened before Abram and Sarai showed up in Scripture, but we might assume that they had had some history with Yahweh before Genesis 12 because Abram was able to hear God's voice and believed what he heard. I wish I knew how God spoke to Abram. Was it a booming voice from Heaven? Angel? Burning bush? Whatever it was, they had no doubt that it was real and that it was God.

Believing that they had heard the voice of God is not faith, however. Their belief didn't turn into faith until they packed the dishes, sold the house and mounted the camels.



Read Genesis 12:4-9.



Grab your Sarai colored pen and turn to the map on page 8. Track Sarai's movement from Harran to Shechem, then between Bethel and Ai and finally to the Negev.

At each stop, what did Abram do?

Each step of the way, Abram prayed for guidance - expecting God to answer him.

When was the last time that you knew for sure that God spoke to you personally? I'm not talking about you learning general knowledge about God, something that is also essential. I'm

Week 1 Day 2

talking about God communicating just to you in your personal circumstances. Guiding you, encouraging you, strengthening you. Do you want Him to speak to you this way?

If we want to hear God speak directly to us, we are going to have to understand a few things. First, God wants to talk to us. We don't have to beg Him or manipulate Him. He wants us to hear Him. Jeremiah 33:3 says, "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know."

Second, if we want to hear God's voice, we have to get into the posture of listening. That means, when we have our quiet time, we start by thanking God that He is waiting to speak to us. Then we ask Him to speak in a way that we can't possibly miss. We read the Scriptures with the cap off our pen and our notebook open, ready to take down everything that God wants to tell us. We leave a margin of quiet where we sit silently and expectantly. These are the equivalent of us doing what Abram did when he built an altar to the Lord waiting to hear where to go next (Gen. 12:7-9).

Third, we have to obey. Not long ago, I was going through a real crisis. We had just moved across the country (again!). I had nearly gone blind and had three back-to-back emergency surgeries to stop that from happening. I didn't know anyone where we lived, we were going through the agonizing process of church hunting, and for the first time in my parenting life I began to wonder if I could really do it. (After four kids I realize that it might have been a tad late to have this particular concern.)

I am a people person and don't do well lonely (like, for real). Yet here I was, month after month, every day without a single person to talk to outside of my house. It felt like the walls of my life were caving in, and I had no power to stop them.

During this time, God began to deal with me about something that I was doing. I got mad. I felt like God had taken away almost everything that I had worked hard for and loved (again!), and all I had was this little, tiny thing to bring me some comfort. Besides, it wasn't a sin, I reminded God. There was no spiritual rule against what I was doing. God just kept pressing about this same thing.

God and I argued for a while about this until, finally, I was sitting in one of the churches that we were visiting and the pastor preached on 1 Thessalonians 5:19.

Week 1 Day 2

Write 1 Thessalonians 5:19 here:

The pastor explained that we put out the Holy Spirit's fire and miss out on hearing God in our lives when we know what God is telling us to do and fail to do it. He gave the example of Saul in the Old Testament who knew how sacrifices were supposed to be held, but did them his own way just the same (1 Samuel 13). The consequence for his disobedience was catastrophic. Saul lost his kingdom.

I got the message. I didn't want to miss out on hearing God's voice in the future, and I certainly didn't want to suffer whatever consequences may have come from my disobedience. I went home, confessed my stubborn spirit to God and let go of that thing that I was doing.

How about you? Has God been speaking to you about something? Maybe it is a sin issue, but maybe it is just Him telling you He wants you to be obedient to Him in some way. Listen. Obey. Don't risk putting out the Holy Spirit's fire in your life.

Day 3

Sarah –Following God in Real Life



“Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you.” Genesis 12:13

When I was a teenager, I was waiting tables at a restaurant when something very bizarre happened. Our district manager got called to the store because a number of employees had been spiking their own soft drinks with vodka and drinking their entire shift. Some even began stealing beer from the taps at the restaurant after hours. They had gotten away with it for months because the store manager was doing it too.

When word came down that a district manager was going to come assess the situation, people naturally began to panic, knowing that if it could be proved, all of them were going to get fired. Their only hope was to stick together and deny everything. I was the wild card. My manager sat me down and flat-out asked me to lie for them.

Though I was completely innocent in the situation, in that moment I had to decide if I was willing to see my group of friends lose their jobs or enter into their sin by not telling the truth. Sarai found herself in a similar situation, but with much more disastrous consequences.



Read Genesis 12:10-13



Take your Sarai colored pen and draw a line from the Negev to Egypt.

What did Abram ask Sarai to do?

Week 1 Day 3

Why?

We may fault Sarai for many things, but we cannot criticize her commitment to her husband. We will find this to be true throughout her story. If she was anything, Sarai was a loyal wife. In First Peter 3:6, Peter commends her for her devotion to Abram. However, there is a distinction between loyalty and lying and as we live as employees and employers, as wives, mothers, daughters, and leaders, we had better know the difference or the consequences could be catastrophic!



Read Genesis 12:14-16. Write your thoughts here (trust me- you'll have them):

When the Bible tells us Sarai was taken to Pharaoh's palace, this means he took her into his harem. She would be required to sleep with him anytime he wanted, and she would never leave. Ever. She and Abram were done, and she would die in Egypt while Abram moved on. And Abram knew that this would probably happen when he instructed her to lie for him in the first place! Chivalry (or even common decency) is nowhere to be found in this story.

This is the first time that Abram (and probably Sarai) failed to understand the

“married couple” = “package deal”

thing that we talked about in day one. This wouldn't be the last time, unfortunately, that they would forget.

Week 1 Day 3

We aren't told how Sarai felt about this ridiculous and self-centered plan of Abram's, but apparently, she went along with it. Of course, the case could certainly be made that she didn't have a choice in her day and age. Abram was her husband and what he said went.

However, it is also quite possible that she submitted to Abram's plan willingly because of her loyalty to him. If that were the case, it was certainly a mistake and the same type of thing happened another time in Scripture.



Read Acts 5:1-11

Ananias's plan was as self-serving as Abram's but the motivations were different.

Abram was motivated by what?

Ananias was motivated by what?

What is specifically noted about Sapphira in verse 2?

Sapphira had full knowledge of the price she and her husband had received for the sale of their property. She also had the opportunity to tell the truth when Peter asked her about it. Though the sin was originally her husband's, she entered into it when she agreed with it. The result of her lie speaks for itself.

Week 1 Day 3

Our situations can be complicated. Sarai went along with a lie to protect her husband, Sapphira lied to save her family's reputation, and I was pressured to lie for the benefit of people who I cared about. All of the *reasons* were noble. Nevertheless, we must be careful not to enter into anyone else's sin or it becomes our own.

As it turns out, God didn't let Abram's foolishness (I'm putting this as nicely as I can) derail His plan for Sarai.



Read Genesis 12:17 – 13:1



Take your Sarai colored pen and draw a line back to the Negev.

This entire turn of events was certainly a miraculous intervention by our merciful God on our friend Sarai's behalf. It should also give us some hope. No one can stop God from doing His will in our life. If something is God's will and we have an obedient heart, nothing will stop it from happening. That is good news.