

## **Reflection on Sarah – Sarah Penfold**

### **Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> June**

I share the name Sarah with my Great Grandmother. It is apparently the Hebrew word for a princess, although I am not sure how appropriate that is either for me or for Great Granny, an Edwardian matriarch married to the local draper.

Last week Gill told us about Abraham and his great faith. I wonder how it would have felt to be married to him. Perhaps Sarah, his wife, can tell us herself.

‘It wasn’t the travelling that I found hard. I was born to a people who travelled wherever the grazing took them but Abe, Abraham, was so driven by his need to do what God wanted that he scarcely acknowledged that the rest of us had to just follow on. Please don’t think that I don’t love and respect my husband - I do. But there have been times when that has been hard.

I know that I am lucky to be married to a rich man, with large flocks of sheep and goats. I haven’t wanted for anything in that way. But it was hard all those years wanting a child – a child that never came. And there was Abe going on about God having promised that he would be the Father of many nations, when there was no sign of even a single child.

I tried to do my bit, fall in with his plan, offered him to take Hagar my maid, to give us a child through her. Abe was delighted at the idea and soon Hagar’s belly began to swell. But so did her head. How she gloated that she was having ‘the master’s child’ and that his ‘poor old wife’ was barren. The minx. Had she forgotten that any child of hers would be my child? I am the wife of Abraham, a prosperous man with many animals in his flocks, and she just my maid.

When I could bear it no longer I complained about the way Hagar was behaving. Did I get sympathy and support from my husband? No! He just dismissed it as my problem, since she was my maid. Well I gave her a taste of her own medicine. Treated her without my normal kindness. And what did madame do then? Just ran away – that’s all.

But Hagar came running back, tail between her legs and of course Abe was all smiles as her belly grew rounder still. Then when baby Ishmael was born I didn’t know what to do. One minute I was delighted that Abe now had a healthy son to inherit his wealth, to father the nation that God promised. The next I was wallowing in misery that it was her child and not mine. How could an all-powerful God make such a promise and then keep it in such a way?

Time passed. I grew too old for childbearing although Abe still clung to the idea that God would fulfil his promise through me. Would he never give up this idea? Then one day three travellers appeared. Ever hospitable he invited them to break their journey and their fast, to rest awhile with us and to eat. He came into the tent with instructions to make bread and to prepare meat and cheese. I was busy with the meal so didn't get a proper look at the men. Imagine my surprise when I heard one of them say that in a years' time I would have a baby myself. Are you surprised I laughed out loud? We were both far too old for that. But I was afraid of what God would see as my lack of faith, and denied that I had said it.

Sure enough. The following year our Isaac was born. I laughed again, It seemed absurd but there he was, finally the son that Abe had longed for and God had promised. His father was overjoyed and there was feasting like I can't remember before or since.

But there was Hagar causing trouble again. Letting her Ishmael play with my Isaac as if they were equals when he should come first as the son of the master's wife. It was too much. So I marched into Abe. 'Send her away', I said, 'She is trying to get Ishmael a share of Isaac's inheritance'. I thought he might ignore me again but the very next morning she was gone. Now nothing could stand in my Isaac's way.

I was used to Abe's cranky behaviour especially when he was doing God's work but did not quite know why. But that one morning he was different, somehow full of sorrow like it was a burden too heavy to carry. I urged him to stay at home, to tell me what the matter was but he would go. There were just the four of them set out, Abe and Isaac, and two of the men. And a bundle of sticks.

When they came back it was as if a great burden was lifted from Abe's shoulders but Isaac looked so pale and scared. I asked him what he had been doing with his father, and slowly, reluctantly he told me. Abraham was going to use Isaac as a sacrifice, had built the fire, even put him onto the sticks. But mercifully there was a ram caught in a bush, so they freed him and sacrificed him instead. I was so angry. How could he even think that God would expect him to kill the son we had waited so long for. The son who was a gift in our old age. But Abe, as usual, just sat as my anger raged and insisted that it was God's will. Hadn't he been merciful and sent the ram instead? Ahhh.

It was all some time ago now as I sit outside our tent at Hebron wondering at the strangeness of it all. God has been truly generous to us both, but he doesn't make it an easy path to follow, or the man who follows it easy to live with'.