

# Beth Tephila Messianic Jewish Congregation

(Under same management for over 5772 years)

October 30th-- 10 AM Lolo Community "Synagogue"

12:30 PM Oneg Shabbat



"Chayei Sarah"

## The Life of Sarah

"As long as ... Sarah was alive, there was a candle lit from Friday night to Friday night. Her dough was blessed, and a cloud was tied to her tent. When Sarah died, all these things ceased. When Rebecca entered the tent, all these phenomena returned." Midrash Rabbah

**וַיְהִי חַיַּי שָׂרָה מֵאָה שָׁנָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְשֶׁבַע שָׁנִים**

Vayihyu chayei Sarah me'ah shanah v'esrim shanah v'sheva shanim

And Sarah lived one hundred twenty-seven years.

**שְׁנֵי חַיַּי שָׂרָה:**

Sh'nei chayei Sarah.

(These were) the years of the life of Sarah.

Sarah, the wife of Abraham, is considered in Jewish thought to be emblematic of the "wife of excellence" of Proverbs 31:10-31. As the matriarch of the Jewish nation, Sarah is considered in Jewish thought to be the greatest of the 22 Biblical "women of valor", whose life should be emulated by all Jewish women. According to Lori Palatnik's "Blessing the Children" from [www.aish.com](http://www.aish.com), Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah are considered the mothers of the Jewish people. Each one possessed unique qualities that played essential roles in the strength and future of the nation. Yet there was something they all shared, something that Jewish women for all time would strive to emulate. They recognized that their ultimate fulfillment as wives of the patriarchs was enabling others to realize their potentials as individuals and as members of the Jewish people. An ancient prayer still said over children asks for God's blessing that girls should become like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah. This Torah portion, "Chayei Sarah" - The Life of Sarah, details the fulfillment of the life of Sarah: The passing of the Jewish heritage of Abraham and Sarah to Isaac and Rebecca.

## The Death of Sarah, the wife of Abraham

Sarah's death and burial are recorded in Genesis, Chapter 23. Sarah is the only woman in scripture whose age at her death is recorded.... one hundred twenty-seven years. Sarah died in Kiriath-arba, the early name for Hebron. Abraham mourned for his wife. She had lived her life as a

faithful wife, obedient to her husband. Isaac would have been about 36 years old at his mother's death.

"Sarah," Abraham's "princess" (Gen. 17:15), was truly a help-meet to Abraham. She left friends and family in Ur of the Chaldeans and traveled to Haran with her husband. Then she left the rest of her family in Haran and took up the call of God to Abraham to "Go forth from your country... to the land which I will show you..." (Gen. 12:1). Traveling those many miles, Sarah was faithful to her husband. How many divorces occur today due to the wife's refusal to leave family to accompany her husband to a change of residence? Sarah maintained her faithfulness to her husband, even when he repeatedly put her into dangerous situations for his own sake. "Say that you are my sister, so that it may go well with me..." (Gen. 12:13, 20:2). One might even say that Sarah's faith in the promises of God at those times exceeded that of Abraham. The passage of time without children must have made Sarah and Abraham wonder how God was going to keep His promises of descendants to them (Gen.12:2; 15:13; 17:7). Sarah took matters into her own hands by insisting that her husband give her children through her Egyptian maid, Hagar. Then Sarah conceived her own biological child, Isaac, at the advanced age of about 91. Hebrews 11:11 tells us that it was by faith that Sarah "...received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised." Later, God honored Sarah's request to Abraham to "Drive out this maid (Hagar) and her son..." (Gen. 21:10, 12). God told Abraham "whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named." Again it could be said that Sarah seemed to have a greater confidence in honoring God's promises to them through Isaac than did Abraham.

In his grief after Sarah's death, it would have been natural for Abraham to have taken Sarah back to their family in Haran, about 450 miles away, for burial. When their grandson, Jacob, died in a foreign land, he requested that his body be returned back for burial in the land promised to Abraham and his descendants by God. Jacob followed in the footsteps of Abraham, making the decision that he would be buried in the "promised land." By burying Sarah in the land promised by God to him and his descendants, Abraham was stating by his actions that the new home of his family from then on would be the land of Israel. Abraham went to the local Hittite "owners" of the land to inquire about a particular cave and field to use as a burial place. He "negotiated" with the owner for the purchase of the cave of Machpelah, so that there would be no mistake that he owned the burial place that would later be used not only for himself, but also for Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob, and Leah. Abraham publicly paid the full asking price. Besides the tent in which he lived, this was the only land he owned during his lifetime. It was his faith in the covenantal promise of God for future land that made Abraham buy the cave and commit himself and his descendants to live and die in the land of Israel.



Tomb over the Cave of Machpelah



Tourists' view of the inside of the "Cave"

### **Guidelines For "Shidduch," finding a Wife**

Chapter 24 is given to the search for a bride for Isaac. With the death of Sarah, Abraham must now perform a "shidduch;" find a wife for Isaac, so that he would have descendants to populate the "promised land." Abraham's trusted servant, Eliezer (Gen. 15:2), was commissioned to ... "go to my country and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son Isaac" (vs. 4). Thus was established the "prime directive" for all of God's people then and still today. One must only marry a believer in the God of Abraham. One should never be "unequally yoked" (Numbers 25:3; 2nd Corinthians 6:14). Today's thinking would be that Abraham, himself, would take Isaac back to his relatives and give Isaac time to "fall in love" and then return with his bride. The reason this was not done is the same reason that Abraham did not bring Sarah back to the family for burial. Abraham was stating by his actions his faith in God's promises.

Instead, Abraham's trusted servant, Eliezer, was given a most solemn charge and dispatched back to Abraham's family. Humanly speaking, Abraham committed his posterity to the possible random decision-making of his servant. Abraham could have faith in Eliezer to perform such an important task because Abraham had faith that God would be the one providing the wife of His choosing.

As Sarah could be said to be the "model wife," so Eliezer could be said to be the "model servant." This is quite important for us to appreciate, since we, too, are servants of God! "Eliezer" means "God is my help!" In this task, Eliezer would rely entirely on the help of God. One might rightly expect that Eliezer was overcome at the awesomeness of his task. He had to have been very nervous by being put into this position as intermediary for Abraham with his family. Abraham had made Eliezer take a most solemn oath, guaranteeing that if the task were not completed, Abraham's descendants would take revenge on the descendants of Eliezer. Eliezer knew that he would have to travel over 450 miles without an army escort past those who made their living preying upon caravans. If he arrived safely with the gifts of Abraham to the family intact, Eliezer would have to convince the "right" girl to leave her friends and family and travel with him all the way back home to a new family and a stranger to marry. How does one overcome his own perceived inadequacies and nervousness to accomplish a difficult task; one that you know is God's will? First, one must take note of the instructions of our Master. Eliezer's master told him that under no circumstances was he to take Isaac away from the "promised land," nor was he to bring back a girl, who was not from his family. Abraham promised Eliezer that God would send His Angel with him to make his task successful. Each day of the journey brought incremental success, as Eliezer traveled safely under God's protection closer to his destination. Then as he approached the city of Nahor, Abraham's

brother, Eliezer prayed that God would show him "chesed," God's covenantal loving-kindness that would find just the "right" girl, who would go back home with him.



Eliezer asked that God's "appointed" girl would show "**chesed**" to him giving him water and also by watering his ten camels. This would have been quite a chore for one girl to accomplish, since camels can drink a lot of water after a long journey. Just as he finished praying, Eliezer saw a girl approaching and asked her for water. "Miraculously," she gave him water and offered to water his camels too....and then invited him home to meet her father, Abraham's relative. There was nothing strained about Rebecca's act. It was free of ulterior motive, unblemished by thought of recompense. Rebecca embodied a core value of the Torah which became known as "**gemilut hasadim**" - the doing of acts of loving kindness. Eliezer's God-given success must have made him more bold because, when he arrived at the home of Rebecca's father, Bethuel, and brother, Laban, he introduced himself, promptly told of his mission from Abraham, and immediately asked whether they would allow Rebecca to go with him. When they responded that this mission was from God and they would send Rebecca with him, Eliezer knew God had made him successful.

In modern day Judaism some take the "**shidduch**" just as seriously. Rabbi Osher Jungreis provides the following guidelines for finding one's soul mate, acknowledging..." Even as Abraham, we must trust G-d to send us our destined soul mate and we do not divert from His road map." The following are shidduch guidelines from the *parsha* to follow: **Prayer: 1)** It was with prayer that Abraham sent Eliezer off to find the shidduch, and it was with prayer that Eliezer launched his mission, and it was with prayer that Yitzchok greeted his bride, teaching us that the most important thing that we can do is to appeal to G-d to guide us to the right one. **Chesed 2)** The litmus test that Eliezer used to find the right girl was *chesed* - loving kindness, something that we would do well to remember in our materially obsessed culture in which men are often measured by the depth of their pockets and women by their appearance. **Get On With It 3)** Avoid procrastination. Eliezer very clearly challenged Rivka's family - "Yes or no? he demanded, so I may know whether I should turn left or right?"(Genesis, 24:49). Once again, something we would do well to bear in mind in a society in which procrastination has become vogue, and critical years are wasted in futile relationships. Follow HaShem's road map - stay the course, and you won't go wrong."

In one of my weekly conversations with an orthodox Jewish Rabbi from New York, he told me that in their community "dating" consisted of parents (usually mothers) getting together to pair their children of marriageable age, according to life commonalities. The children would be given several "dates," where under supervision they would talk about their lives and whether they might be compatible. After only a few "dates," they would make up their minds either way. The purpose of the

"date" was not to "fall in love". That would happen after marriage. The purpose was to ascertain if it was God's will for them to marry. In their community divorce is exceedingly distasteful, and therefore the marriage commitment is a commitment for life, nurtured and sustained by the whole community. According to W.G. Plaut's The Torah, A Modern Commentary, "But, for Biblical man, the ideal was not 'first love, then marriage,' as it is today, but the reverse, 'first marriage, then love.' The older system rested on the assumption that two persons will have a proper foundation for marriage if their backgrounds are generally compatible and if they set themselves to establish a home in which each partner plays his expected role. The two will come to know each other through marriage, and it is hoped that in time love will follow."

### **The Arrival of the Bride**

After a little more negotiating with Rebecca's brother, Laban, Eliezer tells him, "do not delay me, since the Lord has prospered my way. Send me away that I may go to my master (56)." Although Laban has already given his consent (vs.51), according to Hurrian law in that location, the bride must also consent. Rebecca says, "I will go." The nurse of Rebecca, Deborah (35:8), went along too. After making her decision to follow God's leading, Rebecca took action....she left her home, family, and everything she knew behind. Heeding the call of God through Eliezer, she, like Sarah, set out for "parts unknown".....with the "faith of Abraham."

Continuing on the caravan route past Beersheba, they journeyed into the Negev, where Isaac was living at **Beer-lahai-roi** ("well of the Living-One, who sees me"). This was the well where God provided water to Hagar (16:13), which has now become home for Isaac. As a known place where God provided sustenance, Isaac had gone there to live and was meditating in the field, when the caravan with Rebecca arrived. Rebecca must have been smitten with the physical appearance of the "man" she saw in the field because "**vatipol me'al hagamal....**" "she fell off her camel." As the "man" approached, she inquired who he was. She was told that this was Isaac, the man whom she would marry. Immediately she veiled herself, as was proper for a bride on her wedding day. After Isaac received the report of Eliezer, he began the marriage ceremony. Publicly he took Rebecca into the tent of his mother, Sarah, which had been set up, ready for the anticipated marriage. They consummated the marriage, and Rebecca became Isaac's wife, and he loved her. Even today, as a reminder of this wedding ceremony in Sarah's tent, a Jewish wedding ceremony takes place under a wedding canopy ("**Chupah**").

Although Abraham did not personally make the journey to find a wife for his son, Isaac, Abraham made provision for his mission to be successful. He chose a Godly servant to accomplish his mission. He had sufficient confidence in God's promises to allow God to intercede for his servant to find the right wife. Abraham's faith had grown to trust God to accomplish His will, rather than again (as with Hagar) taking matters into his own hands. We should emulate the faith of Abraham. Just as Abraham made provision for the success of his servant, so God makes provision for our success, both for living on earth and for living on the "earth" to come. We become successful servants by apprehending God's provision and trusting in His promises.....just like Abraham! And like Abraham, our earthly testimony should be, "Abraham breathed his last and died in a ripe old age, an old man and satisfied with life; and he was gathered to his people" (Gen. 25:8).

## **SHABBAT SHALOM**

