

# OUR MOTHERS<sup>1</sup>

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May 9, 2015

There is no more influential or powerful role on earth than a mother's. As significant as political, military, educational, or religious public figures may be, none can compare to the impact made by mothers. Their words are never fully forgotten, their touch leaves an indelible impression, and the memory of their presence lasts a lifetime.

If you were blessed with a good mother, you will reap the benefits the rest of your days. If your mother neglected your needs and failed to support your dad, unfortunately, much of what you suffered cannot be erased. For good or ill, a mother's mark is permanent.

Abraham Lincoln was right: "No one is poor who had a godly mother." Mothers shape the future of our country. Here is a positive challenge. Ladies, this is your hour. A harmonious marital partnership and a solid, unselfish commitment to motherhood have never been of greater importance to you or, to our nation. Talk about a challenge worth your effort! In spite of what you may have heard, this role is the most dignified, the most influential, and the most rewarding in all the world.

I am not surprised to see that our society puts down the role of motherhood. Since when did society ever pull for the highest ideals?

Homemakers have been disrespected and ridiculed for years. Women who find fulfillment in

being supportive partners alongside their husbands and encouraging mothers to their children have often been the brunt of jokes and sordid humor. Many mothers let that negative propaganda get to them—and begin to entertain feelings of disenchantment.

The media is full of negative and misleading propaganda about the value and contribution of full-time homemakers. If you fit into that role, what sources of communication are you receiving to balance that distorted and cynical campaign of misinformation? Let every subtle slam you hear against stay-at-home moms remind you of the need to balance the world's perceptions with God's point of view.

Let's take this opportunity to review some of "our" mothers from the Bible.

## MOTHER EVE

How did evil get started in the perfect world which God created "in the beginning"? The answer is astonishing: Human beings invited the devil in, opened the door to him, welcomed him. And those human beings were our first parents, Adam and Eve. The devil could not push himself in unless our first parents should invite him into their home. We can understand this even today, for evil cannot intrude into a person's heart and control her unless she first gives her consent. In creating man "in his own image," the Creator endowed her with the ability to reason and to choose. The enemy took advantage of this freedom and deceived her.

The account is found in varied form among almost every ancient people, but the pure original is in the

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 3:15. 191, 242.

Book of Genesis. The name that our enemy has earned for himself is “the great dragon, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan” (Rev. 12:9). This key unlocks the account in Genesis so that we can understand how Satan was able to deceive our first parents of the human race. God had faithfully warned them:

“The LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:16, 17).

Disguised as a creature of great beauty and intelligence, and pretending to express concern for our happiness, “the serpent” intruded himself at the forbidden tree. “He said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? . . . God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods [Hebrew, God], knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:1, 5). Note the path by which Satan found entrance: a temptation to taste something which God had wisely forbidden, “the knowledge of good *and evil*.” The temptation was not a bald attack on “good.” It was to invite evil in also. Satan knows better than to tempt us to renounce “good” completely. *All he needs is to get us to combine good with evil.*

Our mother Eve embraced the deception, seized the fruit and ate, and then persuaded her husband to join her in the experiment. Thus mother Eve herself became the first person to believe that evil must always balance good, even for all eternity. No

question about it the idea is *very* ancient!

Descendants of Adam and Eve heartily repented of Eve’s folly and maintained a firm loyalty to the original truth of God. Genesis calls them “the sons of God” (Gen. 6:2). They became the progenitors of an unbroken line of generations of faithful worshippers of God who believed that man had forfeited immortality by rebellion against Him and could obtain it only through faith in a divine Saviour to come and in His sacrifice. These faithful believers in God’s truth cherished the promise that He made to the serpent in the presence of the guilty pair in Eden: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel” (Gen. 3:15). Here is the acorn of Good News in seed-form that developed through the ages until the grand oak of truth was fully matured in the New Testament. Let us analyze this precious assurance that has brought hope to the human race:

This “enmity” against the serpent is something not natural to the human heart. No one is born with it.

God puts this enmity against evil in the heart through the grand sacrifice mentioned in this promise. It is a gift of grace.

Satan will have his followers known as “thy seed.” “The woman” will also have “seed.” And there will be “enmity” or war between the two “seeds.”

A Deliverer will come in the person of the woman’s “seed,” a descendant of Adam and Eve. This is a prophecy of the coming of Jesus.

Satan will succeed in wounding or “bruising” the woman’s seed on the “heel”—an “acorn” prophecy

of the eventual crucifixion of the Son of God on His cross.

But Christ's apparent defeat will prove to be a glorious victory He will crush the serpent's *head* and kill him.

God's people cherished this promise for thousands of years, waiting for the coming of the Deliverer.

Satan (the serpent) has been defeated by the sacrifice of Christ, and the long reign of sin and evil is to be brought to an end.

### **MOTHER SARAH**

One of the most encouraging stories of all time is the one about the Bitter Lady who held in her heart the success or failure of the great plan of salvation. Her decision to go one way or the other was pivotal for the world. According to respected Oxford Bible chronology, Abraham and Sarah were born in 1996 B.C., entered Canaan in 1921 B.C. Shem was still alive for many years after they were born, but it appears that they were the outstanding worshippers of the true God in the younger generation of the time. Jewish history tells of their loyalty even as children to the God who made the moon, Abraham sought to help his father Terah who still worshiped the moon in the old city of "Ur of the Chaldees." In fact, says Jewish history, Abraham as a monotheist made himself unpopular in Ur so that God's call to him to leave coincided with their banishing him from their city. If even Terah was still an idolater in spite of Shem living somewhere, and if his age prevented Shem from being the aggressive "evangelist" of the day, it appears that Abraham and Sarah were indeed God's sole witness to her generation.

Sarah and Abraham were very important! If they were to fail in their witness, could it be that the knowledge of God and His plan of salvation might disappear from the world? It makes you tremble to think of it. Jesus and the apostles publicized Abraham as the "father" of all who believe. Sarah and Abraham were the world's example of what it means to believe in God. The gospel of justification by faith will live or die with them.

The Bible story of Sarah and Abraham is no glowing hagiography concealing their sins and mistakes. Their half-lies to the pharaoh of Egypt about Sarah being his "sister," and again the same failure of faith in his affair with Abimilech (slow learners), are all told openly. Not a very good beginning for the world's parents in believing.

Then they demonstrate old covenant half-and-half faith (which ends up as legalism) in their attempt to help God keep His fantastic promise that Abraham shall be the "the father of many nations" by suggesting to God that he make Eliezer, his trusted servant, his legal heir. God emphatically refuses this lame old covenant effort to help Him. No, God says; "one who will come from your own body shall be your heir" (Gen. 15:2-4).

But Sarah and Abraham still don't get the point. Again they stumble and stagger in unbelief. "Your own body" means with Sarah his lawfully wedded wife, because away back in Eden God has decreed that man and wife shall be "one flesh." No third party shall enter that "one flesh" intimacy.

Sarah was bitter at one time, as only a woman could be in her circumstance. She and Abraham

were one flesh, as is true of all genuine marriages. It would have been impossible for God's promises to Abraham to be fulfilled if his wife had chosen to block the way through unbelief (those promises in Gen. 12:1-3 included the coming of the Messiah through whom "all families of the earth [should] be blessed").

Both Abraham and Sarah were old and childless, and everybody thought the problem was Sarah—she was incapable of becoming pregnant—a shameful thing for a woman in those days. As the years and decades ground by slowly with no pregnancy in sight, Sarah felt the blame keenly. Undoubtedly she had prayed and prayed, yet nothing happened. When you believe that God is Almighty and you pray and pray about a problem and nothing happens, what do you do? Sarah blamed God. She vented her bitterness on her husband: "See now, the Lord has restrained me from bearing children" (Gen. 16:2). She realizes that she is standing in the way of God's fulfillment of His promises to Abraham, and it's not her fault! God is to blame! The entire affair of Hagar, the slave-girl turned second wife, is programmed by Sarah's bitterness.

Meanwhile, there is no way that "all families of the earth [can] be blessed" except that Abraham must have a "child of promise." When Hagar bore Ishmael, Sarah's bitterness only got worse. Hagar lorded it over her in subtle ways (women are capable of treating women that way!) until Sarah couldn't stand it any longer. She blew up in her husband's face: "My wrong be upon you! . . . The

Lord judge between you and me" (vs. 5). If there were any doors in their tent, she probably slammed them as she walked out.

But then the story changes and becomes beautiful. Sarah did some thinking. Hebrews 11:11 says that she reconsidered and "she judged that He who had promised would keep faith," and so "by faith even Sarah herself received strength to conceive, though she was past age" (NEB). The blessed result: "Therefore from one man, and one as good as dead [Sarah?], there sprang descendants numerous as the stars or as the countless grains of sand on the sea-shore" (vs. 12). Among them: One who "saved the world." It's time for you and me to "judge that He who has promised will keep faith."

But Abraham and Sarah got themselves into a tight spot; he has already been "declared" to the world and to the universe that he is to be the "father of many nations" in faith, and they must live up to that divinely given reputation, or God Himself is in trouble. If they fail utterly and completely in the end, God Himself will be disgraced.

Some may complain that it was cruel and unfair of God to subject Abraham to that final test of his faith when he was 120 in being commanded to offer up Isaac his "only son" (Gen. 22:1, 2). Abraham should have challenged God on this issue because He had always condemned this barbaric, pagan custom.

Think a moment; if Abraham had refused, he would have proved God wrong. We can't say God was proud, but God has risked His reputation on Abraham, and the plan of salvation, too. He has already risked it all on Job, whom Satan declared

would surely “curse [God] to [His] face” if He permitted Satan to torture him sufficiently (Job 1:11). But Job has passed the test; now Abraham is a new category of risk. He too must suffer this excruciating test, or the entire story fails.

And Abraham does pass the test; thereby he “saw [Christ’s] day, and was glad” (John 8:56). He knew as much as any of us mortals can learn, what it meant for the Father to give His only Son for eternity, for us; it wasn’t only a loan of 33+ years. He gave Him to the horrors of hell. Abraham and Sarah taste a tiny bit of that self-sacrificing love.

Abraham at last confirms God’s faith in humanity. We can overcome! God will have a people, 144,000 in number, all “Abrahams” who have overcome as he did (Rev. 3:20; 14:1-5). All will enter the New Jerusalem through one of the gates of Abraham’s descendants.

### **MOTHER REBEKAH**

In olden times, marriages were happy according as the two parties believed that God had brought them together, rather than their own mutual chemical or social attractions for each other. Their love for each other was rooted in their primary faith in God’s leading. When they had the horse before the cart, their faith in each other grew into happy, permanent love.

Isaac, for example, never laid eyes on Rebekah until his father’s servant brought her to him from Mesopotamia and was told how she was God’s choice for him. His faith concurred with God’s leading, and we read that “he loved her.” In fact,

Isaac and Rebekah’s marriage is one of the happiest recorded in the Bible (see Gen. 24:66, 67).

If you’re married, this story is beautiful to think about; if you’re not married, it will do your soul good to consider how the God of heaven brought Isaac and Rebekah together for what was the happiest marriage we read about in the Bible. But then—

Consider the tragic results of unbelief as revealed in the later experiences of Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Esau. God had said concerning the twins in Rebekah’s womb, “Two nations are in your womb, Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, And the older shall serve the younger” (Gen. 25:23). As the boys grew and developed, Isaac favored Esau—he was a “man’s man.” But Rebekah favored Jacob because he was more domesticated. Thus there developed two less than honorable desires. Isaac determined that Esau should receive the birthright in spite of what God had said and Rebekah determined that she must secure it for Jacob because of what God said.

These desires represent the two classes of rebellion which exist in our world today. On the one hand Isaac’s desire represents transgression of the will of God. This is easy to recognize as sin. But superficially Rebekah’s desire was to do the will of God. This is almost never recognized as sin. How could doing God’s will become sin? Isn’t that what it means to “please” the Lord? In this second act of rebellion we find the essence of the old covenant.

When one considers the prospect of doing that which is pleasing to God the normal tendency is to

seek to determine God's will and then do it. That was all Rebekah thought she was doing. God had said, "The older shall serve the younger." And this was interpreted by her to mean the birthright should be bestowed upon Jacob. And nothing would please her more. After all Jacob was her favorite son. The ironic truth that comes out in this story is that we are in just as much danger of failing when God's perceived "will" is pleasing to our natural desires as we are when they are not. Our only safety is in walking by faith.

Faith is essential to pleasing God. "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). If Rebekah desired to please the Lord, if she desired to do His will, she must first be committed to walking by faith. For without faith her objective is unattainable. This is the first principle that we should recognize if we are to truly do God's will, lest we find our "obedience" is nothing but rebellion in the final analysis.

Rebekah no doubt assumed that she had faith in God's word. That is she gave mental assent to it. She agreed with it on an intellectual level. And more than that, she determined that the "will of God" must be fulfilled.

Thus she set about scheming and plotting to prevent the overtly rebellious wishes of her husband, Isaac, from being fulfilled. Employing great measures to deceive her husband, she and Jacob succeed in stealing the birthright. The wonder of it all is God seems to have respect for

their diabolical accomplishment. We must therefore conclude that the apparent blessing of God is no proof of righteousness. He makes His sun to shine on the just and the unjust. The birthright blessing did go to Jacob, in spite of his participation in his mother's sin to secure it. Yes. They sinned in order to "do God's will." This should be an enlightening and revealing record for us today. If we must break God's law in order to do His will, even in the slightest departure from absolute honesty, integrity or brotherly love, we can be certain that our act of "doing God's will" is in reality camouflaged rebellion against it. A mere mental assent to the word of God and a desire to see it accomplished is not faith.

This is what Rebekah and Jacob should have done. Repudiating all works, plans, devices, and efforts of their own, they should have relied upon the word of God. Thus they would have seen the blessing of God. Had they relied upon the word of God, Rebekah would have avoided sending her favorite son away never to see him again in this life. Jacob would have avoided the sorrow and remorse of guilty conscience. He would have avoided twenty years of exile from his father's house and the terror of hearing that his brother comes to meet him with four hundred men upon his return. He would have avoided the night of wrestling with God, believing Him to be a mortal enemy. He would have still received the blessing and avoided the terrible consequences of self-dependence.

If only we would learn the lessons this record is designed to teach us, how many separations, how many years of exile, how many terrifying messages,

how many nights of wrestling against the One who loves us most, could we avoid? God longs to bless us with our birthright possession, but He cannot confer the final bestowal of His blessing upon those who are conniving to gain it by stratagem. It cannot be conferred upon those whose quest to obtain it is itself rebellion against it. It will only be bestowed upon those who receive it by faith, those who depend upon the word of the God who promised it, and the word only.

### **MOTHER NAOMI**

Let's pay a visit to the lady who repented in sorrow for her husband's Old Covenant unbelief. Naomi's husband (her name means "Pleasant") was fortunate to be born an Israelite, which meant he was heir to all the promises God had made to their father Abraham. Best of all, his inheritance was in the most favored spot of all the twelve tribes—Bethlehem, "the House of Bread." Elimelech should have remembered how Abraham's faith was tested in temporary famine in the "land that [God said] I will shew thee" (Gen. 12:1). Surely, Abraham's God would not permit Elimelech's family to suffer if they hung on by faith in Bethlehem until the economic recession was over!

But no, Elimelech heard there was prosperity in the heathen land of Moab. Let's provide for our children better than we've had for ourselves, he told Naomi; and the dear, sweet "pleasant" lady went along with his plans. Taking their two young sons, Mahlon and Chilion, they packed up and moved. She probably cheerfully told everybody goodbye; no

more hard times for us! They would never give up the message.

Well, Naomi's dear husband died. It was a terrible blow to her faith. But she still had her two fine young Israelite sons. And then the inevitable: growing up in worldly schools, they fell in love with worldly girls, and married Orpah and Ruth, pagan girls. Oh yes, they were good upright girls, but "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel." The boys had "married out of the truth."

And then they both took sick, and—horror of horrors—they died! Naomi was devastated. All the wealth they had accumulated was now a painful burden to her. She gave herself a new name—Mara, "Bitter." "The Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty. . . . The Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me" (Ruth 1:20, 21).

But the dear Lord is not harsh. "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord" says another man who repented bitterly for his people's Old Covenant unbelief (Jeremiah, Lam. 3:40). God had simply been forced to leave Elimelech to have what he had chosen—a pagan culture, and Naomi, one with him, had to suffer.

But read the story in the Book of Ruth to the end, and behold the goodness of the Lord. She "came back to the church," and did the Lord ever receive her!

### **MOTHER HANNAH**

Hannah was the mother of the prophet Samuel. She knew exquisite sorrow; a first wife of Elkanah

and truly loved by him, she was childless and deeply pained by his taking a second wife, Peninah, in order for him to have children. It was a solemn duty for every Israelite man to have some male progeny, otherwise there was an idea that his name would somehow be blotted out of the book of life.

Hannah was the “fall guy” in this drama. For a wife not to be able to get pregnant was tantamount to a slap in the face from God. Hannah bore this disgrace humbly, which was sorrow enough for any woman to endure; but now with fecund Peninah mocking her and strutting over her even at the dinner table with taunts and ridicule, it became more than Hannah could bear.

Husband Elkanah tried to comfort her with his love but did not know how to comfort her with God’s love; so Hannah took a desperate step. She challenged God with a vow: if He would give her what every Israelite wife yearns for, a male child, she would give him back to the Lord. For any mother this was a prodigious, life-long sacrifice to make!

It happened; and in her joy she wrote her magnificent poem of triumph over Peninah who to her represented the taunts of Satan (1 Sam. 2:1-10). And Hannah’s poem was later quoted as an encouragement by another mother in the New Testament.

#### **MOTHER MARY**

Another woman in the Bible story later appropriated Hannah’s poem of gratitude over humiliation reversed, and re-wrote it as her “Magnificat” in Luke 1:46-55, expressing her burst

of joy over the reversal of what had been her particular “low estate.” The human mother of our Savior was herself already “acquainted with grief.” Jesus is the divine Son of God; but He is also in a very intimate sense “the Son of man.” Close to you.

She is the greatest mother of all time—and I don’t refer to Eve. She is the mother to whom the angel Gabriel announced, “Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women” (Luke 1:28).

Most people interpret the “highly favored” to mean that the virgin Mary was a super-Hollywood beauty star. But the Bible makes plain that “favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth [reverences] the Lord, she shall be praised” (Prov. 31:30). For an angel to tell Mary that she was “highly favored” of the Lord did not mean cosmetics, but “the hidden adorning of the heart,” a beautiful spirit (see 1 Pet. 3:3, 4). Mary herself discloses that she had a problem involving humiliation for she sings in her poem that the Lord “hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden” (the Greek word is translated “humiliation” in Acts 8:33, and as “vile” in Phil. 3:21). Mary evidently knew sorrow and rejection, even as her Son was “despised and rejected of men” (Isa. 53:3). At last, Joseph married her to be the step-mother to at least six motherless children, four boys and no one knows how many girls (Mt. 13:55, 56). The aged Simeon predicted that a sword as big as Goliath’s would pierce her soul (Luke 2:35, “*romphaia*,” LXX).

No mother in all history has ever been called to endure the terrible pain that Mary went through,

even though it is probable that many pagan mothers in the Roman Empire were forced to watch their sons being crucified; but none was forced to watch the Son whom she knew to be the Son of God, crucified! The sight tore at her soul, for with His death she thought she saw the death of all mankind.

In our moments devoted to Mother's Day, can we learn a lesson from this story? Yes, those words, "The Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women" are God's Mother's Day message to every mother in the world who will simply believe the Good News. Why? Her Son is "the Saviour of the world" (John 4:42), and that includes you. God has a special regard for every struggling mother; and her prayers have a special place at His throne.

From the pen of Ellen White come similar words of respect: "The well-being of society, the success of the church, the prosperity of the nation, depend upon home influences."<sup>2</sup>

So to mothers we pay tribute. To those mothers who have chosen to make Christian homes their ambition in life, we pay special honor. In a society in which home has often become only a stopping place to sleep, eat, and watch TV, Christian mothers (and fathers, too) who choose to make it a haven of Christian love deserve our honor—and they surely reap heaven's richest blessings.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Adventist Home*, p. 15.