

# MOTHER'S SCARS<sup>1</sup>

By Paul Penno Jr.

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Ado felt bad when some boys said his mother was ugly. But when he learned why she had scars, his mother became beautiful to him.

Today's story comes from Nigeria.

"Fire! Fire!" the neighbors shouted, alerting Ado's mother that her tiny thatched home was on fire. Flames shot from the roof and walls, and smoke filled the hut. Mother managed to escape, but then she realized that her baby boy was still inside the house. Ignoring the flames and thick smoke that billowed out of the doorway, she ran into the house to rescue her baby.

Neighbors held their breath as seconds passed and the flames grew brighter. At last Mother emerged from the burning hut with her baby held close to her body. The little one was safe, but Mother had been burned on her arms and face. In time most of her wounds healed, but her once-beautiful face was forever scarred by the fire.

## Ado Grows Up

Ado grew to be a strong boy. He noticed that his mother's face did not look like other mothers' faces, but he did not ask why. Someone had told him the story of how his mother had saved him from the fire when he was a baby, but he did not realize that the scars on his mother's face had come because of her love for him.

One day when he was playing with his friends, someone made fun of another boy, but the comment hurt Ado deeply. The boy taunted his friend by saying, "Your face is ugly, like that of Ado's mother." The boys burst into laughter, but Ado stopped in his tracks. Yes, it was true that his mother's face was not pretty to look at. He ran home so his friends would not see the tears forming in his eyes.

## What Happened?

Ado hurried into his hut and sat down to think. When his mother came in, she could see that her happy boy was unusually quiet. "Is something wrong, my son?" she asked.

Ado thought for a moment, and then asked, "Mama, what happened to your face?"

"Why do you ask, my son?" his mother questioned, stiffening a bit but trying to be calm.

"The boys—one of them told another boy that he was ugly—like Ado's mother," Ado blurted out. "What happened to your face?"

Mother was quiet for a moment. Then she stood up and walked to her drawer and pulled something out. She gave it to Ado. It was a photograph of a beautiful young woman. Ado studied the picture and then looked at his mother. "Is this you?" he asked.

"Yes, it was taken before the fire." Ado knew about the fire. He knew that his mother had pulled him from his bed and saved his life. But he had not thought about what her unselfish act had cost her.

Ado stood and hugged his mother. Now he

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 1:27, 28. 12, 655.

understood. His mother had given everything for him. Without her unselfish act, he surely would have died in that fire. He looked up into his mother's face. It was no longer scarred and wrinkled to him. It was beautiful; it was the face of love.

Ado squeezed his mother tightly. "To me you are beautiful—even more beautiful than your picture."

### Jesus' Scars

Boys and girls, Jesus loves us, too. He loves us enough that He carries scars from the day that He saved you and me and everyone in the world from the fire of sin. He has scars in His hands, His feet, and on His side, where the sword pierced Him. And likely He has scars on His back and on His head. Jesus could have gone back to His Father in heaven without dying for us, but He loves us so much that He could not bear the thought of spending eternity without us. He knew that if He did not die for us, we would all die without Him.

When Ado sees his mother's scars, they remind him how much she loves him. And when we think about Jesus' scars, we remember Jesus' love for us. We can say thank You to Jesus by giving our offering to missions every week so more people around the world will learn what Jesus did for them. Then we can all say thank You to Jesus together. I want to do that. Do you?

### The Glorious Privilege of Mothers

The Bible tells the history correctly: when Adam "fell" into sin, he had someone who helped him fall—it was his wife, Eve. But the Bible does not lay a burden of guilt upon her alone. No way!

Our beloved brother Paul was not anti-feminist; he was simply a faithful servant of the Lord. He reviews the history of the fall of Adam, and reminds us, "Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. . . ." (1 Tim. 2:13-15).

On the surface, it sounds like a debit for "woman"; but wait a moment; don't misunderstand: "The fall of man" was the work of *both* Adam and his wife Eve; they share the debit.

*But* the dear Lord has assigned to woman a very special blessing, which we celebrate by our Mother's Day. It's to woman whom the Lord has granted the special privilege of being the first teacher we all have ever known; she is the one who wins our heart in infancy; it's a special privilege that the dear Lord has granted to her, worldwide.

She is the "teacher of the human race," teaching us in simplicity and tenderness; winning our estranged human hearts in infancy at our very beginning.

The dear heavenly Father has granted to her this inestimable privilege of being the first one really to teach us and to guide our infant steps; it may have been "the woman" in Eden who enticed Adam into sin; but that debit in history is vastly overcome and reversed by the privilege that "woman" has been given her of the Lord—to be the teacher of the human race in infancy!

Thank Jesus for His tender fidelity in giving to "woman" this glorious privilege.

We honor "her" on Mother's Day; and not only that, we thank the dear Lord for giving "her" to us!

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.

"Home is a place where somebody lives; above all it is a place where mother lives."<sup>2</sup>

Penned in 1923 by Clovis Chappell, these words convey a truth befitting Mothers' Day and every day of the year—that mothers and home are nearly synonymous.

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<sup>2</sup> Clovis Chappell, *More Sermons on Biblical Characters*, p. 147.

This is not to say that a home cannot be formed without a mother present, for indeed fathers and single men and women can build warm homes and families. But Chappell speaks of that special touch wrought by mothers to make a house a home—a shelter from all that harms, a place of acceptance no matter what, an institution that shapes the world.

"If tomorrow we are to have a Christian nation," wrote Chappell, "and if tomorrow we are to have a Christian church, we must have Christian homes today. . . . To be queen here is to be queen of the vastest empire in existence. To rule rightly here is to rule aright everywhere; and to fail here is to fail everywhere."<sup>3</sup>

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>4</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.

#### **Mother's Greatness**

In Shunem of old lived a "great woman," at least that is what 2 Kings 4:8 says. Some versions translate great as "prominent" or "wealthy," but I prefer the word great, for indeed she was a great

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>4</sup> *The Adventist Home*, p. 15.

person—a compliment given few biblical characters, whether men or women—and a great mother.

Now, her greatness didn't consist in wealth or social graces or whatever society would have deemed great. Her greatness, according to the biblical writer, seemed to lie in her determination to be a devoted and courageous mother, for she fought death itself and won the battle for her son.

In the heat of the day, her son—a gift of God through the word of His prophet Elisha—fell sick among the reapers in his father's field. "Oh, my head, my head," he cried to his father. Quickly the helpless father said to his servant, "Carry him to his mother" (verse 19, RSV).

Where else "is there a bed in all the world so comforting as her lap? Where is there such another physician as Mother? Where is there such healing in a touch and healing in a kiss, surpassing all the remedies that science ever dreamed of?"

The biblical record tells us that the lad "sat on her lap till noon, and then he died" in his mother's arms (verse 20, RSV).

But now her greatness shines, for she had no time for weeping, but immediately placed her limp and lifeless son's body on Elisha's bed upstairs and set out herself with a servant in search of Elisha at Mount Carmel. "Urge the beast on; do not slacken the pace for me unless I tell you," she said to her servant (verse 24, RSV). So great was her faith that even in death she would not give up.

At the mountain the Shunammite mother grasped hold of Elisha's feet. Elisha's servant Gehazi came

to push her away, but Elisha said to let her alone, for "she is in bitter distress" (verse 27, RSV).

At once Elisha sent Gehazi to lay his staff upon the child, but the woman remarked: "'As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.' So he arose and followed her" (verse 30, RSV).

By evening her resolute faith had rewarded her with a living lad once again in her arms. She fought with death, and won.

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 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.

The birth of Isaac as a "triumph of faith." Sarah and Abraham were indeed "one flesh" as husband and wife. But they were also one in their old covenant unbelief, overcoming together in the end again as "one." Abraham laughs derisively at the promise of God, in sinful unbelief (Gen. 17:17); then when Christ promises in her hearing in the tent that "according to the time of life" (9 months) she,

Sarah, will bear a son, she laughs in unbelief, derisively, flippantly. But as the wife of Abraham, the father of the faithful, she must also become "a mother of nations" (Gen. 17:16).

She needed a direct sharp rebuke from the Visitor, Christ, for lying in His presence (Gen. 18:15), before she was able to discern the fatal nature of her bitter unbelief. Hebrews 11:11 supplies the missing link in the Genesis story: she repented. 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" (Heb. 11:12). Among them: One who "saved the world." It's time for you and me to "judge that He who has promised will keep faith."

"Through faith ... received strength to conceive ..." and bear Isaac. There was laughter when the child was born, but laughter smothered in mutual tears of repentance for weary decades of old testament unbelief.

But Abraham and Sarah got themselves into a tight spot. Abraham 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 and Sarah at last confirms God's faith in humanity. We can overcome! God will have a people, 144,000 in number, all "Abrahams" and "Sarahs" who have overcome as they did (Rev. 3:20; 14:1-5). All will enter the New Jerusalem through one of the gates of Abraham's descendants.

In our moments devoted to Mother's Day, can we learn a lesson from this story? God has a special regard for every struggling mother; and her prayers have a special place at His throne.

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<sup>5</sup> *The Adventist Home*, p. 15.