

Sarah and Hagar

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Bereishis 16

- 1) Abram's wife Sarai had not born him any children. She had an Egyptian slave-girl by the name of Hagar.
- 2) Sarai said to Abram, "God has kept me from having children. Come to my slave, and hopefully I will have sons through her". Abram heeded Sarai.
- 3) After Abram had lived in Canaan for ten years, his wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian her slave, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife.
- 4) [Abram] came to her, and she conceived. When she realized that she was pregnant, she looked at her mistress with contempt.



- 5) Sarai said to Abram, "it's all your fault! I myself placed my slave in your arms! Now that she sees herself pregnant, she looks at me with disrespect. Let God judge between me and you!"
- 6) Abram replied to Sarai, "Your slave is in your hands. Do with her as you see fit". Sarai mistreated [alternatively: oppressed, answered] her, and [Hagar] ran away from her.
- 7) An Angel of God encountered her by a spring in the desert, in the oasis on the road to Shur.
- 8) [the angel] said, "Hagar, maid of Sarai! From where are you coming, and where are you going"? I am running away from my mistress, Sarai", she replied.
- 9) The angel of God said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her".
- 10) [Another] angel said in God's name, "I will grant you many descendants. They will be so many that they will be uncountable".
- 11) [Still another] angel of God said to her, "You are pregnant, and will give birth to a son. You must name him Ishmael, for God has heard your prayer [alternatively: oppression]".

Questions:

How could Sarah mistreat Hagar so badly? Was her conduct justified?

Why did the angel instruct Hagar to 'Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her'?

What did the angel mean by 'G-d has heard your prayer/oppression'?

Justified or Sinful?

Ramban considered Sarah's actions unjustified and indeed sinful¹. In the above translation the angel is quoted as having told Hagar that 'G-d has heard your prayer', however the Hebrew word 'Anyech' is more commonly interpreted as 'oppression'. This interpretation implies the wrongfulness of Sarah's conduct².

(1) רמב"ן (בראשית טז, ו): "ותענה שרי ותברח מפניה - חטאה אמנו בענוי הזה, וגם אברהם בהניחו לעשות כן".

(2) רמב"ן שם: "ושמע ה' אל עניה ונתן לה בן שיהא פרא אדם לענות זרע אברהם ושרה בכל מיני הענוי".

