

The Heart that Mocks God

Genesis 16:1-6 HCSB Abram's wife Sarai had not borne him children. She owned an Egyptian slave named Hagar. (2) Sarai said to Abram, "Since the LORD has prevented me from bearing children, go to my slave; perhaps I can have children by her." And Abram agreed to what Sarai said. (3) So Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar, her Egyptian slave, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife for him. *This happened* after Abram had lived in the land of Canaan 10 years. (4) He slept with Hagar, and she became pregnant. When she realized that she was pregnant, she looked down on her mistress. (5) Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for my suffering! I put my slave in your arms, and ever since she saw that she was pregnant, she has looked down on me. May the LORD judge between me and you." (6) Abram replied to Sarai, "Here, your slave is in your hands; do whatever you want with her." Then Sarai mistreated her so much that she ran away from her.

Father Abraham's faith, like ours, had its ups and downs. In the previous chapter we see his tremendous, soul-saving faith:

- **Genesis 15:6 HCSB** Abram believed the LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness.

And yet immediately upon the heels of this wonderful spiritual high we come to this tragic low. It reminds me of the instance when Peter made the Spirit-induced deduction,

- **Matthew 16:16 HCSB** Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!"

Unfortunately, very soon afterwards the Lord had to rebuke Peter,

- **Matthew 16:23 HCSB** But He turned and told Peter, "**Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me because you're not thinking about God's concerns, but man's.**"

Do you recall the incredible depression and suicidal ideation that Elijah experienced after his tremendous experience on Mount Carmel?

We need to be very cautious when we gain great victories in life. We need to practice equanimity. We needn't get too excited when good things come, nor get too depressed when faced with calamity. All things pass and fade. Only the Lord and His mitzvot remain the same.

Nevertheless, Abraham, after committing himself to the tender mercies of the Lord, now falls prey to a humanistic plot hatched by his wife Sarai. The Scriptures do not explicitly condemn Abraham for heeding his wife on this matter. Keeping "*binyan av*" – analogy by common theme or concept - in mind, compare the following two passages:

- **Genesis 16:2 HCSB** Sarai said to Abram, "Since the LORD has prevented me from bearing children, go to my slave; perhaps I can have children by her." And Abram agreed to what Sarai said.
- **Genesis 3:17 HCSB** And He said to Adam, "Because you listened to your wife's voice and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'Do not eat from it': The ground is cursed because of you. You will eat from it by means of painful labor all the days of your life.

The obvious allusion to humanity's experience in Gan Eden and the parallels that can be drawn between Eve's deception and Adam's decision to follow her ...and Sarai's confusion and Abraham's decision to follow HER cannot be overemphasized. Sarai and Abram were repeating the Edenic sin of doubting the word of the Lord.

The outcome in Eden was the perpetration of inherited sin upon all of humanity. The outcome in Abram and Sarai's case was the birth of Ishmael, whose descendents became a grave threat to Isaac's lineage (Genesis 21:9-10; 37:25-28; Judges 8:24; Psalm 83:5-6).

Many of us are familiar with the passage in which faithless Sarai laughed at Yahweh's affirmation that she would bear Abraham's child in her old age. However, I would like to spend some time with you today examining her character. I would like to determine what got her to the point where she could laugh at a pronouncement of God and lie about it directly to the Son of God.

There is a pejorative acronym that is common in the United States for rich Jewish girls; JAP which stands for Jewish American Princess. According to the Urban Dictionary a Jewish Princess is: *a woman of either Jewish faith and/or descent who displays at least two of the following criteria: viciousness, greed, arrogance, vanity, social-dominance, inability to do minor tasks (i.e. cooking, cleaning, laundry), fragility, dishonesty.*

As far as I can tell, Sarai fits the bill! However, as you well know, there are appearances and then there's reality. What we're referring to here is the Napoleonic complex. You know – the little dog that barks constantly... or the little short man who overcompensates for his shortness by being hyper aggressive (not that I would know anything about that!)

It's often called the "short man syndrome." It's not always true (especially in my case) but it is useful in describing people who are driven by any self-perceived handicap to overcompensate in some aspect of their lives.

- Compensation is: "*consciously or unconsciously covering up weaknesses, frustrations, desires or feelings of inadequacy or incompetence in one area of life through the gratification or drive towards excellence in another area.*"
- Overcompensation is: "*being **characterized** by a superiority goal.*"

Furthermore, overcompensation usually leads to striving for power, dominance, or self-esteem, but it stems from self-devaluation.

Let's look at how Sarai APPEARED on the outside.

She was the wife of an enormously wealthy man.

- [Genesis 12:5 HCSB](#) He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated, and the people he had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan,
- [Genesis 12:16 HCSB](#) He treated Abram well because of her, and Abram acquired flocks and herds, male and female donkeys, male and female slaves, and camels.
- [Genesis 13:2 HCSB](#) Abram was very rich in livestock, silver, and gold.
- [Genesis 13:6 HCSB](#) But the land was unable to support them as long as they stayed together, for they had so many possessions that they could not stay together,
- [Genesis 20:14 HCSB](#) Then Abimelech took sheep and cattle and male and female slaves, gave them to Abraham, and returned his wife Sarah to him.



- [Genesis 20:16 HCSB](#) And to Sarah he said, "Look, I am giving your brother 1,000 pieces of silver. It is a verification of your honor to all who are with you. You are fully vindicated."

She was very beautiful.¹

As witnessed by Abraham, the Egyptian court officials and the Pharaoh, who surely had very beautiful women in his harem!

- [Genesis 12:11-15 HCSB](#) When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "Look, I know what a beautiful woman you are. (12) When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' They will kill me but let you live. (13) Please say

¹ <http://www.signaturesgallery.com/uploads/gallery/large.Sarai%20oil.jpg>

you're my sister so it will go well for me because of you, and my life will be spared on your account." (14) When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. (15) Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh, so the woman was taken to Pharaoh's house.



Egyptians seem to have been just as influenced by beauty, if not more so, than we are in our modern world. Indeed, it seems at times that beauty may have even been partially related to *ma'at*, the order that Egyptian's saw in their world.

For example, foreign lands were considered by the ancient Egyptians to be a part of chaos, the opposite of *ma'at*, and foreigners were very often depicted in a form very different than the ancient Egyptians themselves, and in a very different and very less than ideal artistic style.

Egyptians, like our postmodern world, idealized youth. In Egyptian art, the ideal form is a youthful and slim figure with narrow hips. The hip to shoulder proportions of ideal

women, according to Egyptian notions, were not greatly different from those found in males.

Furthermore, Egyptians favored fair skin. In their love poetry as well as in their hymns to Hathor (who was the goddess of beauty), we find descriptions of physical beauty include "golden" skin. In fact, the skin of the gods and goddesses were usually represented in gold. Hatshepsut herself is described as appearing before her subjects with skin like electrum (a silver-gold alloy)

In the papyrus of Chester Beatty I, the object of the writer's affections is listed as being "bright" of skin, her arm "more brilliant than gold," long necked and "white-breasted."

In a Third Intermediate Period (25th dynasty) hymn, the priestess (who is extolled for her beauty) is described as having locks of hair black as night and dark as "wine grapes," with "brilliant" arms, firm breasts and a complexion "like jasper".

All these give us an idea of what the Pharaoh was looking for and what he apparently found in Sarai! And Sarai's beauty was also attested to by king Abimelech.

- [Genesis 20:1-2 HCSB](#) From there Abraham traveled to the region of the Negev and settled between Kadesh and Shur. While he lived in Gerar, (2) Abraham said about his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." So Abimelech king of Gerar had Sarah brought to him.

Apparently Abram, a prince in his own right with the ability to either woo or purchase any woman he chose, thought her beauty was sufficient to motivate murder!

- [Genesis 20:11 HCSB](#) Abraham replied, "I thought, 'There is absolutely no fear of God in this place. They will kill me because of my wife.'

Abram was the Ancient Middle Eastern version of a billionaire prince. This would make Sarai his arm candy and we know how those types of girls tend to behave!

She was dominant.

Here, she had a man who was a powerful leader; a man who had no problems facing up to huge armies with nothing more than three hundred or so trained servants. Yet when Sarai cut loose on him, he doesn't say a word. She says, "Abram, you need to go have sex with

Hagar. She'll get pregnant and I'll adopt the kid." He meekly says, "Yes dear – which way is Hagar's tent?"

About a year later, she screams "This is all your fault! Hagar despises me!" Abram answers "Yes dear. Beat on her if you like dear."

She was prone to deception.

She went along with the plan to deceive the Pharaoh.

- **Genesis 12:17-20 HCSB** But the LORD struck Pharaoh and his house with severe plagues because of Abram's wife Sarai. (18) So Pharaoh sent for Abram and said, "What have you done to me? Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? (19) Why did you say, 'She's my sister,' so that I took her as my wife? Now, here's your wife. Take her and go!" (20) Then Pharaoh gave *his* men orders about him, and they sent him away, with his wife and all he had.

She went along with the plan to deceive king Abimelech.

- **Genesis 20:5 HCSB** Didn't he himself say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' I did this with a clear conscience and clean hands."

She was even willing to attempt lying to the Lord God!

- **Genesis 18:12-15 HCSB** So she laughed to herself: "After I have become shriveled up and my lord is old, will I have delight?" (13) But the LORD asked Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Can I really have a baby when I'm old?' (14) Is anything impossible for the LORD? At the appointed time I will come back to you, and in about a year she will have a son." (15) Sarah denied it. "I did not laugh," she said, because she was afraid. But He replied, "No, you did laugh."

She tended to shift blame. She tended to blame others for her problems. She blamed Abram for the results of her own plan.

- **Genesis 16:5 HCSB** Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for my suffering! I put my slave in your arms, and ever since she saw that she was pregnant, she has looked down on me. May the LORD judge between me and you."

She was even willing to blame God for her infertility.

- **Genesis 16:2 HCSB** Sarai said to Abram, "Since the LORD has prevented me from bearing children, go to my slave; perhaps I can have children by her." And Abram agreed to what Sarai said.

Now, let's move to the inner, real Sarai. Let's examine her probable, self-perceived failings, her personal demons for which she was overcompensating.

She likely doubted herself and the love of others.

As the rich often doubt that those around them love them unselfishly, so the beautiful often doubt that people consider them truly competent. "I'm more than just a pretty face" is a common complaint. Sarai struggled with a double whammy, being both rich AND beautiful. However, when such a person, with such a predisposition, particularly a woman, is faced with infertility... her greatest fear is actually realized.

- **Genesis 16:5 HCSB** Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for my suffering! I put my slave in your arms, and ever since she saw that she was pregnant, she has looked down on me. May the LORD judge between me and you."

She probably tended to consider herself chattel. On several occasions she is listed cheek by jowl with Abraham's possessions.

- [Genesis 12:5 HCSB](#) He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated, and the people he had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan,
- [Genesis 12:20 HCSB](#) Then Pharaoh gave *his* men orders about him, and they sent him away, with his wife and all he had.
- [Genesis 20:14 HCSB](#) Then Abimelech took sheep and cattle and male and female slaves, gave them to Abraham, and returned his wife Sarah to him.

This was only exacerbated by the fact that Abraham was twice willing to forfeit her honor, basically giving her away in exchange for his life and for the accumulation of wealth.

- [Genesis 20:16 HCSB](#) And to Sarah he said, "Look, I am giving your brother 1,000 pieces of silver. It is a verification of your honor to all who are with you. You are fully vindicated."

Note: The second half of this verse literally reads in Hebrew "Look, it is for you a covering of the eyes (i.e. a veil), for all who are with you, and with all, and you are set right." The exact meaning of the statement is unclear. Apparently, it means that the gift of money somehow exonerates her in other people's eyes. They will not look on her as compromised.

Gesenius explains that the present was offered as an expiation for the man's fault in order that he may shut his eyes to it.

She probably struggled with frustration.

The Scriptures never indicate God speaking to her (other than the famous rebuke for laughing) even though Abram often spoke to God. Shoot! Even her slave Hagar got to speak to the Lord God!

She kept hearing, "God is going to do this, God is going to do that" but she never saw results! She was in her nineties, still didn't have a child and God kept talking to her silly star-gazing husband out in the fields somewhere.

Small wonder she was prone to anger and abuse!

- [Genesis 16:6 HCSB](#) Abram replied to Sarai, "Here, your slave is in your hands; do whatever you want with her." Then Sarai mistreated her so much that she ran away from her.
- [Genesis 16:9 HCSB](#) Then the Angel of the LORD said to her, "You must go back to your mistress and submit to her mistreatment."
- [Genesis 21:8-10 HCSB](#) The child grew and was weaned, and Abraham held a great feast on the day Isaac was weaned. (9) But Sarah saw the son mocking--the one Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham. (10) So she said to Abraham, "Drive out this slave with her son, for the son of this slave will not be a co-heir with my son Isaac!"

Small wonder that when God showed up one more time and basically said "I know it's been ten years since I made the promise and you're now in your nineties, but trust me – you're going to get pregnant." – that Sarai laughed!

Derashot

- **Do not put your hope or self-worth in material wealth.**
- **Do not overemphasize beauty – either in yourself or in the minds of your children.**
- **Recognize narcissism in your children and correct it.** Narcissism is characterized by three primary traits: power fantasies, vanity and richness. Allow me to explain.

Narcissistic children try to compensate for their jealousy and anger by: fantasizing about power (they try to dominate by force or by emotional tantrums); beauty (they are vain or need constant praise); richness (they must always have the latest, newest or best).

- **Recognize and resist narcissism in our society.** A narcissistic society fears dependency (power fantasies); fears aging and death (vanity); worships consumption (richness). These three elements explain the American fascination with fame. The famous are viewed as strong and independent; they are referred to as “the beautiful people”; they enjoy luxurious lifestyles. This also explains our sick need to read tabloids’ lurid descriptions of aging stars wrinkles, sags and cosmetic surgeries. It’s why we are excited when one of them goes down in moral flames or is arrested.
- **Make no room for deception.** As John F. Kennedy said, “The great enemy of the truth is very often not the lie – deliberate, contrived and dishonest – but the myth – persistent, persuasive and unrealistic.” Or as Virginia Woolfe put it, “If you do not tell the truth about yourself you cannot tell it about other people.”
- **Take personal responsibility for yourself.** If you cannot take responsibility for your mess ups you will not be able to take responsibility for your victories either.