

# Abraham and sarah



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Abraham and Sarah The story of Abraham and Sarah is an important one, especially because Abraham is the father (and Sarah the mother) of the Israelite nation. When looked at from a broad point of view, this story of an ancient family and their relationship with God becomes a parable which teaches others to put their trust in God and provides examples of how to live a righteous life in the eyes of this God. When looked at from a narrower point of view, one can examine the motivations and personalities of the individuals this story focuses on.

Abraham is born blessed because he is the ancestor of Shem and Sarah shares in this blessing because she is his wife. However, Abraham receives an even greater blessing from God, after the death of his father, when he is promised not only a blessed life, but also a multitude of descendants who will share in his blessing and come to make up God's chosen people. Though Abraham and Sarah express a deep faith in their God, they show difficulties in trusting his words, but this lack of trust allows for their relationship with God to be developed through acts by both parties.

God intervenes on their behalf, constantly affirming his covenant with Abraham, and Abraham and Sarah consistently act in ways which prove their righteousness and that they are deserving of this great blessing. The development of Abraham and Sarah, through the story of their lives, not only demonstrates the power and emotions of God and the maturation of their relationship with God, but also the maturation of themselves and their faith in God. Abraham is an essential character, not only in the biblical story of his life but, more importantly, in the biblical history of the Israelite nation.

However, Abraham was not a flawless person and it is through the choices and actions that he carried out, both right and wrong, that his character can be understood. On one hand, Abraham represents an ideal follower of God, not only is he personally chosen to be blessed by God but, he also listens obediently and shows a strong concern for the well-being of others. Abraham is initially blessed because he is a descendent of Shem who was blessed by Noah, however, he receives a much greater blessing than the one he was born with at the age of seventy-five.

It is at this time that God tells Abraham “ Go from your country, your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ” (Genesis 12. 1-3) Abraham, along with his wife Sarah, his nephew Lot, his slaves, and his possessions, left Haran, where he had settled, and went to the “ land of Canaan. ” (Genesis 12. 5) This instance is also the first show of Abraham’s obedience to God.

Abraham’s next show of obedience comes after God grants Abraham an even greater blessing. When Abraham is ninety-nine years old, God comes to him with a covenant to make him “ the ancestor of a multitude of nations... and kings” and along with this blesses Sarah with the promise of a son and a blessing equal to Abraham’s for her descendents. Because of their blessings, God gives Abram the name Abraham and Sarai the name Sarah and as a sign of his covenant, God asks that Abraham and all the males in his household be circumcised.

Abraham “ circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day,” once again showing his obedience to God. Abraham’s greatest show of obedience to God

comes when God tests Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his only son Isaac as a burnt offering and Abraham sets out to do so the next morning. Abraham, once again, demonstrates exceptional obedience to God, not only proving his character but also his faith, “ for it is Abraham’s actions that gave shape and substantive reality to the God to whom the action was directed.

Abraham’s action established his faith as well as the traditions of faith it set in motion. ” (Delaney 22) Abraham’s story does more than to present him as thoughtful of God; it also provides examples of Abraham’s thoughtfulness of others. When Abraham hears that his nephew, Lot, has been kidnapped, he quickly set out with three hundred and eighteen trained men to retrieve him. Abraham shows his thoughtfulness of others again when God tells him of his plans to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham barter with God in an attempt to save the lives of the people living there.

These events and Abraham’s reactions to them show what a considerate person Abraham was which also helps to solidify his worthiness as the ancestor of God’s chosen people. Though Abraham demonstrates an exceptional amount of faith in God, it is not unwavering, however, this occasional lack of faith helps to expand on his character. Twice in his travels, Abraham asks Sarah to pretend to be his sister because he is fearful that he will be killed so that she may be taken as a bride, even though God reminds Abraham that he is safe from harm after the first instance.

These events help to remind readers of Abraham’s humanity, he faces normal challenges for someone with his lifestyle including “ the vulnerability of the nomad to the whims of nature on the one hand, and, on the other, his

desperate need for the foodstuffs of the settled culture with the implied powerlessness which goes with such dependency. " (White 178-179) When looked at from this perspective, Abraham's lapses in faith become reasonable, but the choice of the author to include these instances can be explained further.

When Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they forever changed the thought processes of humankind, and as part of this, "[Abraham] now lives out of his anticipation of the future. " (White 179) Humans are now aware of evil and Abraham's fears represent this. Through this further examination, it becomes evident why these less proud moments of Abraham's life are included in his story, because of the way in which these choices help to humanize him and further explain his character.

Though Sarah is developed much less than her husband, she is still a pivotal character in both this biblical story and the biblical history of the Israelite nation. Sarah is presented as a strong woman, she shows faith in God and devotion to her duties as a wife and it is through her struggle with motherhood that her character is most developed. Though Sarah is not born blessed, she comes to share in Abraham's blessing by God for themselves and their descendants, however, the events of Sarah's life presented in the Bible make her life seem like much more of a struggle than Abraham's.

Twice she risks her well being for the sake of her husband's fears, even though she is pregnant the second time and it is very possible that first time she did not get away without a sexual encounter with the Pharaoh. Her feelings on these events are not presented, though one can only imagine her own fears in being given, so willingly, as an object for other men. It is

important to remember that the connotations of Sarah's treatment were not what they are today, but it seems that Sarah's protection from God was not as whole as Abraham's.

The major issue in the development of Sarah's character is her inability to conceive a child and the struggles she faces because of this. Sarah's initial solution to her dilemma is to give her slave Hagar to her husband so that she may provide him with children in an indirect manner. This decision causes many problems later in the story but it is important to note the reasoning behind Sarah's choice, " legal contracts unearthed at Nuzu make it evident that a childless wife was actually obliged to do what Sarah did, unless she preferred to see her husband choose another wife for himself.

She was unlikely to prefer this-it was a far less evil if the supplementary wife would be someone over whom she had some control, that she might keep her superior position in the household. " (Vawter 139) The difficulties Sarah must have faced in making this decision and the added " slap in the face" that she must have felt from Hagar conceiving after only being with Abraham on one occasion, when she was not able to conceive after ten years is unimaginable for most and demonstrates the true emotional strength that Sarah must have had.

Sarah's challenges affect more than just her, " Sarah holds Abram responsible for Hagar's treatment of her, and a rift develops between Sarah and Abram as is evident by the strong language with which she addresses him. Sarah's first words to her husband are accusatory. She exclaims: ' May the wrong done to me be upon you. '" (the word wrong having violent

connotations) (Jeansonne 20) Though most of Sarah's life is made difficult by her barrenness, she gets a reprieve from God in her old age.

When Sarah is ninety years old, God blesses her with a promise that she will conceive a son and that God will establish a covenant with that child " as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. " (Genesis 17. 19) Both Sarah and Abraham laugh when they hear that Sarah is to conceive at such an old age. This reaction is represented by the name God chooses for their son, Isaac, which translates as " he laughs. " This laughter is also a good example of how Abraham and Sarah are like every one else, they " believed the substance of God's promise but doubted the details. (Vawter 146) Having Isaac is perhaps the greatest accomplishment of Sarah's life and after giving birth to him, " Her response is one of joy an personal triumph...Her words imply that no one will again be able to deride her for being childless, but they also indicate that she recognizes the incredible reality she has conceived and given birth. " (Jeansonne 27) The difficulties Sarah has faced throughout her life with her inability to conceive in a time when bearing children was the main purpose of a wife, were finally over, at a time in her life when she had completely given up on any hopes of it.

This fulfillment of Sarah's wishes is only made better by the fact that her son has a blessing from God for a good life and important descendants. When Sarah gave birth to Isaac she became not just a mother to him, but also a mother to the nation of God's chosen people. With the birth of Isaac, Sarah gains another thing that is important to her; she regains her power in her household. With this power, Sarah chooses to make Hagar and Ishmael leave, " Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave

woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac. " (Genesis 21. 0) Sarah is not mentioned again after this until her death at age one hundred twenty-seven, However, " although Sarah will no longer figure in Abraham's life, her death prompts him to procure an important title to the land...Although all of the land of Canaan was promised to Abraham by God, this is the first instance in Genesis where Abraham has legal possession of a portion of it. Sarah's death plays a genuine part in Abraham's procurement of this portion of the covenantal promise. " (Jeansonne 29) Abraham and Sarah are the father and mother of God's chosen people, a title that can be held by only two people in the history of mankind.

Their story serves as an example and a reference to God's followers and their descendants. Though Abraham and Sarah are presented as having lived a righteous life in the eyes of their God, they are, by no means, presented as flawless and it is through further examination of their flaws that they can be understood more completely. Abraham and Sarah were not divine and perfect beings, they were two human beings that faced many difficulties, had many fears, and struggled to find happiness.

The sense of normalcy about Abraham and Sarah does more than just allow for an expansion of their character; it provides a realistic example to other followers of this God. This story shows that a blessing by God does not mean a life without difficulty and that God is watching out for his followers, even when it may not seem that way. The story of Abraham shows others to put their faith in God, and he will provide, and no matter how precarious the situation seems, God is watching over those whom he has promised to look out for.



The story of Sarah shows others that “ good things come to those who wait,” and to never give up on God, no matter how things may seem, God can always execute his plans. Their story represents the beginnings of the Israelite nation and is a history for those who believe in it, but it transcends the historical as a parable for others who wish to follow the example that Abraham and Sarah have provided so that they may live a righteous life in the eyes of their God. Bibliography 1. Delaney, Carol. Abraham on Trial. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998.

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