

1. James Tissot, Sarai is taken to Pharaoh's Palace (Wikimedia Commons)



2. Genesis 11:26-29

And Terach lived seventy years, and he produced Avram, Nachor and Haran. And these are the offspring of Terach: Terach produced Abram, Nachor and Haran, and Haran produced Lot. And Haran died before Terach his father, in the land of his birth, Ur Kasdim. And Abram and Nachor married women; the name of Abram's wife was Sarai and the name of Nachor's wife was Milkah, daughter of Haran, who was father of Milkah and father of Yiskah.

3. Sarah's biblical resume

- Genesis 12 Sarai is taken by Pharaoh of Egypt, who is struck with mysterious wounds; he releases her
- Genesis 15 Sarai cannot produce children. She gives her maid Hagar to Abram. Hagar mocks her childlessness, and she is harsh to Hagar. Hagar flees, but then returns at Gd's command.
- Genesis 17 Gd changes Sarai's name to Sarah – from "My queen" to "The queen"
- Genesis 18 Sarah prepares a large meal for mysterious guests. She laughs when she hears them say that she will have a child. Gd rebukes her, through Abraham.
- Genesis 20 Taken by Abimelech of Grar, whose household is "stopped up"; he releases her
- Genesis 21 Sarah births a son, Isaac, at the age of 90. When she believes infant Isaac is endangered by his adolescent half-brother Ishmael, she evicts Ishmael and his mother Hagar. Gd endorses her.
- Genesis 23 Sarah dies. Avraham ages.

4. Code of Hammurabi #146 (L. W. King translation)

If a man take a wife and she give this man a maid-servant as wife and she bear him children, and then this maid assume equality with the wife: because she has borne him children her master shall not sell her for money, but he may keep her as a slave, reckoning her among the maid-servants.

5. Genesis 12:11-18

And it was, when Abram drew near to Egypt, and he said to Sarai his wife, "Behold, I know you are a woman of beautiful appearance. And when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'She is his wife.' They will kill me, and keep you alive. Say that you are my sister, so that I will benefit due to you, and I will live because of you."

And it was, when Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. And the officers of Pharaoh saw her, and praised her to Pharaoh, and the woman was taken to the house of Pharaoh. And he was generous to Abram because of her, and [Abram] had sheep, cattle and he-donkeys, and male and female slaves, and she-donkeys and camels. And G-d struck Pharaoh with great marks, and his house, because of the matter of Sarai, wife of Abram. And Pharaoh called to Abram and said, "What have you done to me? Why didn't you tell me that she was your wife?"

6. Rabbi Joshua Boaz (16th century Italy), Shiltei Giborim to Avodah Zarah 20a

Know and understand that there are three paths in midrash:

1) Some [midrashim] exaggerate, as Chullin 90b says, "The Torah spoke words of emptiness, the prophets spoke words of emptiness, the sages spoke words of emptiness," such as in Deuteronomy 1:28 "Great, fortified cities in the heavens," and Kings I 1:40 "The earth split due to their voice."...

2) Some of the midrashim present miracles, in which Gd demonstrates His might and displays amazing and shocking deeds, as in Daniel 10:7, "And I, Daniel alone, saw the vision, and the people with me did not see, etc." And Jonah ben Amitai who was swallowed by the fish and spat out. And many others like this...

3) In some of the midrashim the sages intend to analyze Scripture with any means possible, relying on Psalms 62:12, "Gd said one thing; I heard two." And so Jeremiah 23:29, "For My words are as fire; this is the word of Gd. And they are like a hammer, splitting stone." They learned from this that one sentence may lead to many meanings, as explained in Sanhedrin 31a. Do not be shocked by this; you often see that even a normal person speaks a complex message with two facets, and certainly words of wisdom spoken with Divine inspiration.

7. Key sentence: Genesis 12:17, in Hebrew

וַיִּנְגַע ד' אֶת-פְּרֵעָה נְגָעִים גְּדֹלִים וְאֶת-בֵּיתוֹ עַל-דִּבְרֵי שְׂרָי אִשְׁתֵּי אַבְרָם:

8. Bereishit Rabbah 41:2, Part 1

Reish Lakish cited Bar Kappara: Pharaoh was struck with *ra'atan*. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said: An elderly man, who was struck with boils, encountered me in Tzippori. He told me that there are 24 types of boils, and none of them are as bad for conjugal relations as *ra'atan*. This is what Pharaoh had.

Rabbi Acha said: Even the beams of his house were struck with it, and everyone said it was because of the matter of Sarai, wife of Abram.

9. Bereishit Rabbah 41:2, Part 2

Rabbi Berechiah said: Pharaoh's officers went to remove the matron's shoe, and that entire night Sarah was stretched out on her face, saying, "Master of the universe! Abraham left [Babylon] with a promise, while I left on faith! Abraham left outside the prison, and I am imprisoned!" G-d said to her: Everything I do is because of you, and all will say, "It is because of Sarai, wife of Abram."

Rabbi Levi said: For that entire night, an angel stood with a rod in hand. He said to her, "If you say to strike, I will strike. If you say to let up, I will let up." Why do so much? Because she said, "I am a married woman," and he did not stop.

10. Bereishit Rabbah 41:2, Part 3

Rabbi Elazar cited Rabbi Elazar ben Yaakov: We have heard that Pharaoh was struck with *tzara'at*, and Abimelech with constipation (see Genesis 20:18). How do we know that each was also struck with what the other had? Genesis 20:18 says, "On the matter of Sarah" – "on the matter of" and "on the matter of" are linked.

11. Genesis 21:12

And Gd said to Abram: Do not be upset regarding the youth and regarding your maid. All that Sarah tells you, listen to her voice, for through Isaac shall your children be called.

12. Genesis 20:18

כִּי-עָצַר עֶצֶר ד' בְּעַד כָּל-רֵחֶם לְבַיִת אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ עַל-דִּבְרֵי שְׂרָי אִשְׁתֵּי אַבְרָם:

Because Gd closed up every womb in the house of Abimelech, because of the matter of Sarah, wife of Abraham.

13. Genesis 16:1

וְשְׂרָי אִשְׁתֵּי אַבְרָם לֹא יָלְדָה לוֹ וְלֵהָ שִׁפְחָה מִצְרִית וְשִׁמָּה הָגָר:

And Sarai, wife of Abram, had not birthed a child to him. And she had an Egyptian slave, and her name was Hagar.

14. Midrash, Genesis Rabbah 45:1

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said: Hagar was the daughter of Pharaoh. When Pharaoh saw what was done for Sarah in his house, he took his daughter and gave her over. He said, "Better for my daughter to be a maid in this house than to be a matron in another house." Thus it says, "And she had an Egyptian slave, and her name was Hagar" – *Ha agreich* ["here is your reward"]. Abimelech, too, when he saw the miracles performed for Sarah in his house, he took his daughter and gave her over. He said, "Better for my daughter to be a maid in this house than to be a matron in another house." Thus Psalms 45:10 says, "The daughters of kings will be among your precious ones; the queen will stand at your right, in fine gold."