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## Tsiyon News

Tsiyon Messianic Radio Newsletter - Vol 8.02 - 10/28/6012 TAM - 1/10/13 AD



Abram - Profile in Righteousness

Genesis 13 + 14



### Abram - Profile in Righteousness

Genesis 13 and 14 give us insight into the character of Father Abram. As we examine the deeds and wisdom of this friend of YHWH in the light of Psalm 15, we see a picture shaping up of the sort of man YHWH chooses to bring into His intimate company. All of this has important implications for the remnant of Israel today.

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## Tsiyon News

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## Tsiyon Listener Q+A

**Was Sarai Abram's Half-Sister or was she his Niece?**

**Q.** I heard your Midrash last shabbat about Abraham and Sarai. About 3 months ago I did my own study on Abraham and the genealogies of Terah. Two extra biblical sources that I looked at were the book of Jasher and Antiquities of the Jews. I have read online we cannot be totally sure of the accuracy of Jasher. I have also heard that we can accept the historical accuracy found in Josephus. One interesting thing that I saw was that Jasher and Josephus both indicate that Sarai was Abraham's niece (i.e. the daughter of his brother Haran) and not his step sister. I know that when extra biblical sources contradict the Scriptures that you always go with what the Scriptures say. But when I went back to Genesis 11 I found that the genealogies do not state whose daughter Sarai was. In fact if you look closely at the entire genealogy in Genesis chapter 11 you will notice that it states that each man had "other sons and daughters" for everyone except Terah. The genealogy says twice that Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran, but says nothing about him having other sons and daughters like everyone else who came before him in this genealogy. Is the Genesis account really saying that Terah had only 3 children?

*The only place in Genesis that says Sarai was Abram's half-sister is in Genesis 20:12, but in this situation Abraham is caught not being truthful with Abimelech about being married to Sarai. Here Abraham tells Abimelech that she is his sister in order to preserve his life when Abimelech desired to have Sarai. Once Abimelech learned that Sarai was his wife Abraham never backs down from the story that she was also his sister. Could it be that Abraham stuck with the story that Sarai was his sister to avoid being accused of lying to the king? If Abraham would have come clean and said that she was his niece he would have been found guilty of lying to the king. I'm sure there would have been a stiff penalty for that. I'm wondering if Abraham thought that Abimelech had no way of knowing his family's genealogy and felt that he could get away with this lie to get him out of this trouble he was in?*

*Have you come across any of this information in your studies? I'm not being critical of you, but just want to compare study notes. I found this so interesting a few months ago when I discovered this but have not seen any commentaries that have discussed this possibility. You seem to be very thorough in your studies and I was wondering if you came across this.*

*I have been criticized by a lot of friends by even suggesting that Sarai was not Abraham's sister. Some have said what difference does it make. My response has been that to Christians and Jews whether Sarai was Abraham's sister or niece makes no difference since this was an acceptable practice at the time. But Abraham being married to his sister does make a difference to the Muslims. I found a few Muslim apologetics sites online that claim that Isaac could not be the "promised son" because he was born of incest and that therefore Ishmael must be the "promised son." One of these Muslim sites points out that Christians and Jews find no problem with Abraham marrying his sister and having relations with her but are abhorred when Lot had relations with his daughters. In their eyes both cases are incest. They use Leviticus 18 to back up their argument. Perhaps that is a valid argument. Yes it is true that the marriage of Abraham and Sarai was before the Torah was given, but if Sarai was indeed Abraham's niece then Abraham can be accused of no guilt even by Leviticus 18; it would have been a legitimate marriage from God's point of view.*

**Tsiyon Answer** - Its great to see you and others looking deeply into the Torah.

I am aware of the controversy you mention regarding the parentage of Sarai. The Rabbinical view is that she was Abram's niece, Iscah, although the Scriptures do not identify Iscah as Sarai. The rabbis see the name Iscah, meaning "to watch, observe" as an indication of Sarai's beauty. However, the name does not indicate one who is watched, but one who watches or observes. This better describes Lot's wife, who, against divine instruction, turned to watch the destruction of Sodom and was then turned to a pillar of salt. While admittedly also a speculation, this strikes me as more fitting to the meaning of the name than the rabbinical speculation. (Gen 11:29, 19:17-26)

Next comes "The Book of Jasher" which seems to give more fuel to the rabbinical speculation. However, the "Book of Jasher" in circulation today is clearly proven to be something other than the book of the same name cited in Scripture. It is a rabbinical creation which shamelessly re-writes much of Genesis in the rabbinical mold. While not useless, all it amounts to in this case is another telling of the rabbinical view, which is not a true witness to the facts. (See Modern Apocrypha, Famous "Biblical" Hoaxes by Edgar J. Goodspeed, The Beacon Press, Boston, 1956, Library of Congress number 56-10075)

Next comes Josephus. There is no denying the importance of his work, since it offers much historical data from a first century Jewish perspective. This is especially useful in matters pertaining to the affairs leading up to and including the fall of Jerusalem, of which Josephus was an eye-witness. Of those events it is generally true that "we can accept the historical accuracy found in Josephus." However, his telling of events from centuries before himself can only be as good as the information then available to him. Since his work is not inspired, it must be understood that the veracity of his sources range from reliable to total speculation. It has been said of Josephus; "From an archaeological perspective his works have been absolutely vital and are considered the definitive source for every site for which he gave a firsthand account. As a political commentator and transcriber of hearsay he was less reliable but is still a useful source." Bottom line: Josephus is often helpful with history, but does not compare in any sense with the accuracy of Scripture. ([http://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/15exsc/how\\_reliable\\_is\\_josephus\\_flavius/](http://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/15exsc/how_reliable_is_josephus_flavius/))

Next comes the Muslims, whom I must simply ignore here, since what they think is a religiously motivated opinion that is not relevant to the facts one way or the other.

Next comes the reason rabbinical sources prefer Abraham to be married to his niece rather than his half-sister. Leviticus 18:9 says; "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your sister, the daughter of your father, or the daughter of your mother, whether born at home, or born abroad." The rabbis cannot accept that the Father of our race be guilty of incest, as they would otherwise be required by their religion to see it, in the case wherein Abram was the husband of his half-sister. Since the Torah does not specifically forbid marriage to one's niece, this seemed to them a solution.

The truth is, early in the human gene pool marriage to a half-sister did not present the problems that later called for its ban when Leviticus was written centuries later. When we look back to these early days and call Abram's marriage to his half-sister "incest" we are applying a moral standard to Abram that did not exist in his days. That is unfair as well as misleading.

Next comes what Abram actually says regarding the identity of Sarai in Scripture;

"And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my woman." Gen 20:12

For me, this is definitive and unmistakable. Sarai was Abram's half-sister. The argument that Abram was a habitual liar so that these words can't be trusted as truthful is one view, but not my view. I see Abram as consistently telling the truth, i.e. that Sarai was indeed his sister. The most he can rightfully be accused of is withholding the additional information that she was also his wife. However, is

withholding information the same as lying? That seems to be the view of many today, who think we should live our life telling everything we know to everyone who asks, even if they may use that information to do us or others harm. Based on this ridiculous definition of lying many German Christians during the Nazi era felt justified in fingering the identity and whereabouts of their Jewish neighbors when ordered by the Nazis, thereby becoming accomplices with the Nazis in the murder of millions of Jews. Clearly, such a definition of lying is from the devil, not YHWH, to make it easier for the enemy to kill us. We all should smarten up and stop accepting the moral code programmed into us by the world regarding the definition of lying, considering the events prophesied for the days just ahead.

Just to be clear, it is equal to lying to withhold vital information from those who are entitled to know. That's not everybody. Do enemies who may use that information to kill you or someone else fit that category? Abram didn't think so, nor did Jacob, nor did many other heroes of faith in Scripture. YHWH never condemned Abram or any of his men for making this distinction, and thereby withholding vital information from those who would use it against them and the Kingdom. This is yet one more case where we must learn from righteous Abraham.

Bottomline: Abram was not a liar but was a truth teller. Therefore, because of that and because it is inspired Scripture, I feel very safe in accepting the truth of Genesis 20:12 at face value - Sarai was Abram's half-sister.

As a side point, that the Scripture does not say Terah had "other sons and daughters" does not mean he did not have them. Interestingly, the Scriptural record stops using that term specifically with Terah, and does not regularly use it from Terah forward. That is probably because, from Terah forward, the Biblical line of significance narrows down to the line of Abram, so that "other sons and daughters" fade from importance in the Biblical narrative.

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#### **From Eliyahu**

What sort of man was Abram? Various sources criticize Abram, painting him to be a coward, a liar, and an incestuous adulterer. Some Christian sources say this picture of Abram is not inconsistent with Scripture since Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness." Galatians 3:6

In other words, in their view what Abram actually did in his life didn't matter, even if evil, since he had faith and was justified as "righteous" on the basis of his faith with no regard to his works. To them his works, good or bad, are irrelevant. Is this true? Not at all. To make such a claim we must ignore much of the rest of Scripture, for example, this passage from James:

But do you want to know, vain man, that faith apart from works is dead? Wasn't Abraham our father justified by works, in that he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith worked with his works, and by works faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him as righteousness"; and he was called the friend of God. You see then that by works, a man is justified, and not only by faith. Jas 2:20

It is indeed one's works that prove the reality of their faith. That Abraham was "accounted as righteous" therefore implies that he was the sort of man who backed up his faith with righteous deeds. Abram was a righteous man and is not guilty of all the evil slander raised up against him by those who should know better. In fact, Abram is an example of righteousness that we can and should emulate in our own lives. This is the position I'm coming from in the latest EBD Bet Midrash, as we consider Genesis 13 and 14. Join me, and consider the implications of the righteousness of Abram in your own life, this Sabbath.

Shalom!

Eliyahu ben David  
[www.tsiyon.org](http://www.tsiyon.org)

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