מפרשים

Classical Commentaries

RAMBAN

Why did Sarai treat Hagar harshly, and was it wrong

Genesis 16:6

Ramban treats Sarai's harsh treatment of Hagar, and Abraham's acquiescence in it, as a genuine sin, for which G-d's measure-for-measure response was the birth of Yishmael, a "wild-ass of a man" destined to afflict the descendants of Abraham and Sarah throughout history. Sforno, by contrast, reads Sarai's action not as a moral failing but as a calculated, justified act meant to put Hagar in her place as a slave and to establish a pattern whereby any gentile who demeans Israel will ultimately be humbled before it, as in Isaiah's prophecy that Israel's scorners will one day prostrate themselves at her feet. AI SUMMARY

"Abram said to Sarai, "Your maid is in your hands. Deal with her as you think right." Then Sarai treated her harshly, and she ran away from her."

AND SARAI DEALT HARSHLY WITH HER, AND SHE FLED FROM BEFORE HER FACE. — Our mother did transgress by this affliction, and Abraham also by his permitting her to do so. And so, G-d heard her [Hagar's] affliction and gave her a son who would be a wild-ass of a man, to afflict the seed of Abraham and Sarah with all kinds of affliction.

SFORNO, WHO READS IT DIFFERENTLY

שפחתך בידך — for she has not been given her freedom by you who are her mistress.

ותענה שרי — Sarai's objective in maltreating Hagar was to remind her of the fact that she remained her slave. She was not to insult her mistress any more. She meant to make clear that any gentile who insults Israelites will experience similar harsh treatment. Compare Isaiah 60,14 והשתחוו על כפות רגליך כל מנאציך, "all those who reviled you shall prostrate themselves at your (Israel) feet."