

*Sarai –
Daughters of Terah:
Part III*

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Note to Reader

In the opening chapters of *The Daughters of Terah*, we learned that Terah's youngest son, Haran, had deceived his family for more than seventeen years. He secretly taught his three children—Milkah, Iskah, and Lot—to worship the pagan gods of Sumer, and it cost both him and his lovely daughter, Iskah, their lives. When Terah witnessed the gruesome murder scene, he sensed Elohim's command to leave Ur and go to Canaan—but he didn't tell his other sons (Abram & Nahor), his daughter (Sarai), or Haran's remaining children (Milkah & Lot). (Don't worry—there's a family tree on the next page.)

Terah's response to the unthinkable tragedy was to arrange for his sons to marry faithful worshippers of Elohim that very night. The solution may present a hurdle for those of us in Western culture reading the story three thousand years later: the wives Terah chose for his sons were *very* close relatives! Abram married his half-sister and Nahor married his niece. Poor Lot was left without a bride, but he had some growing up to do.

Do you remember the command Terah heard from the Lord when he saw his son and granddaughter murdered? *You must leave Ur. You must go to Canaan.* Though Terah avoided telling his family *immediately*, the Bible confirms that he eventually obeyed God and left Ur. Last month, we pondered together what *might* have caused Nahor and Milkah to remain in Ur while Abram, Sarai, and Lot set out with Terah to obey God's command.

In today's story—*Sarai - Daughters of Terah: Part III*—we'll experience the journey through Sarai's eyes and meet the oldest Sage on earth—Noah's son, Shem. Come with me to ancient Babylon. See what remained of the Tower of Babel and how it might have affected Terah's family in their quest to obey the God of all Creation . . .

Glossary

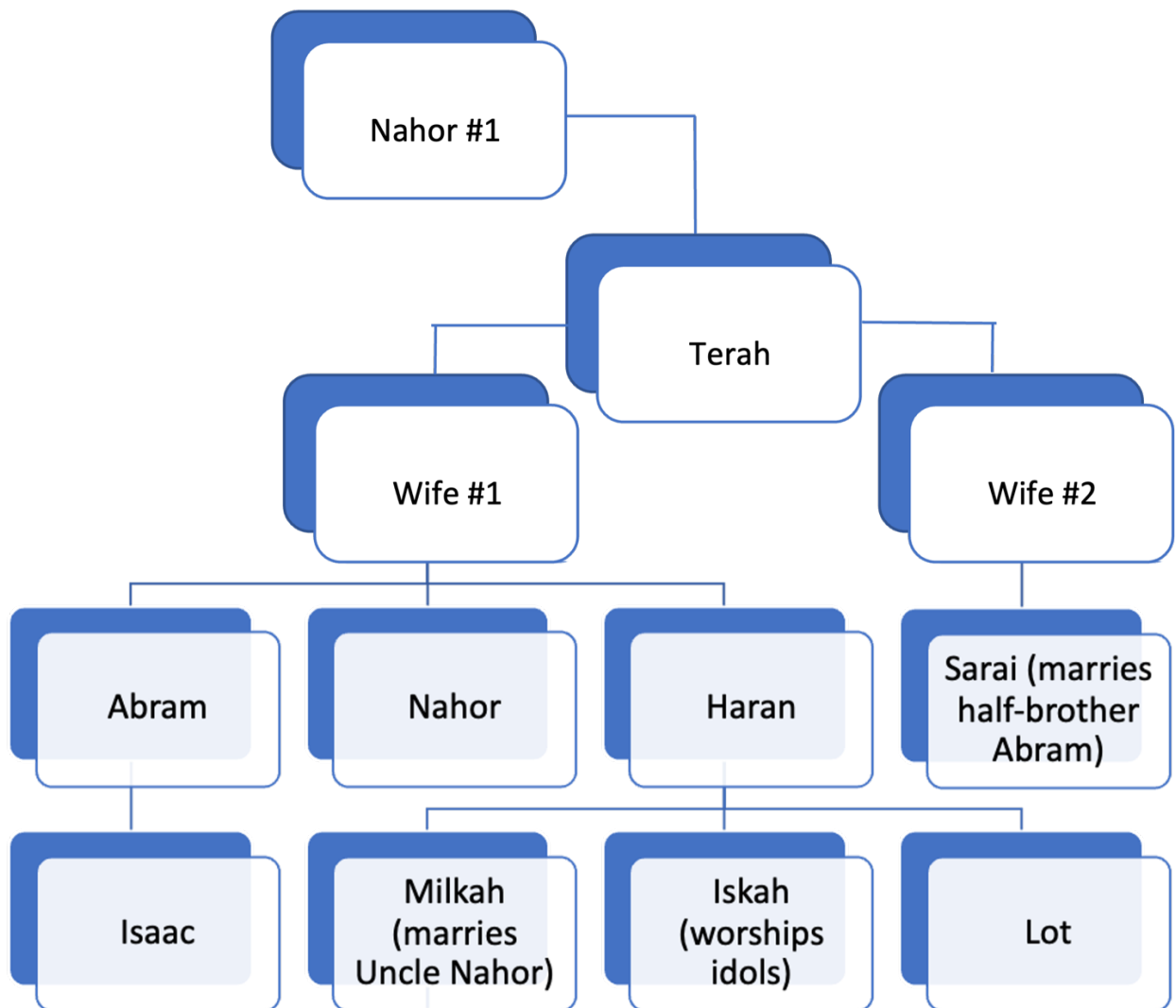
Adda – Father

Addadda – (paternal) Grandfather

Ama – Mother

Glyptic – the cutting or carving of images on precious or semi-precious stones or cylinder seals.

Sage – a person of advanced age in ancient Sumerian culture, sometimes thought to be semi-divine, who possessed great wisdom and authority.



Chapter One

*“As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there . . .
Then they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches
to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves;
otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.’”*

Genesis 11:2, 4

Sarai

The Tower of Babylon loomed in the distance. I nearly wept with relief. The dark hood covering my head and face was already soaked with sweat. Who would notice my tears?

“Show me a little peek, Mistress. No one need know.” The same oily caravan guard had taunted me for ten days. He slowed his donkey to ride beside my cart. “I must see your face before we reach Babylon.”

“Go away, or I’ll shout for my husband.”

“I’m not afraid of your shepherd boy.” His sneer made him even more frightening. “Show me your face now—before we enter the city—or I’ll find you inside those gates and see *all* of you.” His features darkened with the promise.

“Leave, Dagrím.” Adda Terah stood in the road with his donkeys, creating a blockade. I steered my ox, Palma, to the right. Dagrím was forced left.

“Grow eyes in the back of your head, old man.” The guard kicked his donkey’s sides, prodding it to a canter, and rode ahead. I would have carried my ox *and* the cart to Babylon’s gate if it meant we’d be rid of caravan guards sooner.

Inhaling a shaky breath, I willed my trembling to cease as Adda approached, still leading his two donkeys. “Can you forgive me, daughter?”

“It’s all right, Adda. You came to my rescue quickly and—”

“I meant, can you forgive me for failing our family.” He clicked his tongue and led the donkeys away, unwilling—or unable—to hear my answer. His gait was slower, his shoulders more slumped since we’d left Ur. So certain of Elohim’s urgent calling to leave, he’d chosen a caravan quickly: twenty merchants, fifteen guards, and an experienced caravan master. I was the only woman in the train, leaving behind the city of my birth, my family, my life.

We followed the western branch of the Euphrates with mountains flanking our left side. Beyond them stretched a sea of uninhabited wasteland; the seedbed for pagans’ dark legends. Hopefully, the Sages in the tower ahead would clarify Adda’s calling to Canaan. We’d rest the animals for a few days. And Abram would choose the next caravan with new guards to escort us for the second, longer portion of our journey.

Tapping Palma’s hind quarters, I coaxed the trusty beast. “A bucket of grain awaits you in Babylon, sweet girl.” She tossed her head as if nodding cooperation and hastened her steps.

I kept my face covered but pulled the linen away from my nose to breathe more freely. The thought of uncovering my face completely and walking among other women in Babylon’s market felt like a dream. I’d worn the protective garment since we’d left Ur, obeying my husband’s precaution after he discovered I’d be the only woman in the caravan. Adda’s poor judgment choosing our caravan guards had forced Abram to make many hard decisions to keep us and our property safe on this journey.

“Watch for bandits!” The caravan master shouted as we drew nearer the city. He’d warned that thieves hid in the jagged cliffs within a half-day’s ride since Babylon was the only major trade city on the road from Ur. Each night, when our family huddled around a separate campfire to guard our flocks and eat dried meat and nuts, Adda justified choosing this caravan

because of its low-valued goods. Flax, leather, and wool were necessary wares but, hopefully, common enough to make a bandit sigh.

The whole caravan fell silent, the guards watchful. I was more awed by the looming tower ahead. Storytellers had renamed the ziggurat *Tower of Babel* since its builders had hoped to use it as a stairway to heaven and Elohim foiled their plan by making their language *babel*.

“What do you think, my girl?” Adda nodded toward the tower, waiting with his donkeys at the side of the road. “Ur’s ziggurat seems like a hill compared to this mountain, eh?”

I reined Palma to a stop and tipped my head back, straining to see the top. “I want to see the heavens.” But the highest level was lost in low-level clouds.

“It’s that kind of arrogance that drove Ama Eve to eat the forbidden fruit.” I turned to Adda, stung by the words, but he, too, was staring into the sky. His words hadn’t been a reprimand but gentle wisdom. “No one can reach Elohim through striving on this earth, my girl. Great Ama Eve couldn’t become equal to God by eating fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, nor could the tower-builders reach Him through their skill.”

But they’d tried. “If Elohim knew their hearts were impure, why didn’t He strike them dead?”

He turned to me with lifted brows. “If Elohim struck everyone dead whose heart was impure, there’d be no one left. Our God is great in mercy.” He placed his hand over mine on the reins. “Can you show mercy, Sarai, and forgive me for taking you from your home, from Milkah and Nahor, from everything you’ve known?”

“Adda, there’s nothing to forgive. Elohim called you to leave Ur. Abram, Lot, and I *chose* to obey God with you.”

He swiped at his cheeks with a little huff. “But you didn’t realize what a stubborn old

man I was.”

“You’ve always been stubborn.” I grinned, trying to lighten his burden, but we both knew his stubbornness had nearly cost Abram his life. Our first night in camp, Dagrím tried to steal one of our sheep. When Abram defended our property, the guards defended Dagrím. “Family keeps no record of wrongs, Adda.”

“You’re so like your ama,” he said. “You love the imperfect with perfection and face the unknown with courage.” He patted Palma’s hindquarters and continued on his way. Many of the merchants in our caravan had filed past us.

I prodded Palma forward, anxious to shed the covering on my face and hands. Adda and Abram were likely as eager to meet with the Sages and determine our standing among Elohim’s faithful. With the Sages’ blessing, we could establish a trade in Canaan and buy land. Without it, we’d be outcasts among the descendants of Adda Shem’s brother, Ham. Ham’s tribes were a wild and unpredictable people, whose pagan worship had all but destroyed Elohim’s worshipers in their land. The Sages remained only within Great Adda Shem’s boundaries and within his bloodline.

Nearing the *ziggurat*, I realized the awful reality of men’s splendor. Humankind had used baked-clay bricks, not mere rocks, to build a sleek, uniform mountain that bordered on perfection. *Only Elohim should create something so spectacular!*

Evidently, He agreed.

Four walls—arranged in a wide, square foundation—slanted inward to an unfinished pinnacle. Only as we drew closer could I see the half-finished bricks near the top, and God’s horrifying judgment came alive in my mind. I could see the heavens peel open. A sudden, blinding Light pierced the clouds, touching the lips of soldiers, builders, and spectators below.

Perhaps searing. Perhaps simply warming. Maybe no sensation at all. The Light disappeared, and people cried out in shock. Chaos reigned. The Sages say the change was instantaneous: humanity's languages confused. Tribes divided by their understanding. Unknown dialects forced unwelcome diversity, and lifetime neighbors became strangers in a moment.

When people don't understand, they scatter. The truth of it resonated with all I'd experienced. *People exile those who are different.* I fought ragged emotions as we drew near the city gates. The Sages—Shem and six of his descendants, imbued by Elohim with wisdom and supernatural longevity—had somehow misunderstood our family and scattered us. The Sages exiled us from Ur though Adda Terah had represented Elohim boldly and faithfully there for years. Adda knew nothing of my half-brother, Haran's, pagan worship, or that he'd led his children to do the same. Hadn't Haran's and his daughter, Iskah's, horrifying murders been punishment enough for their sins?

“Sarai?” I startled at the sound of Abram's voice. “Are you all right?” He walked alongside the cart, his brows drawn together. “Has Dagrim threatened you again?”

“I'm fine,” I said, swallowing the lump in my throat. A little sympathy could reduce me to tears. “Why aren't you with the flocks?”

“Lot will stay with them until I hire shepherds in the city.” He nodded toward the imposing structure. “Adda and I will arrange for servants to guard our animals and belongings at the tower overnight.”

The thought of meeting the Sages suddenly terrified me. “I'll go to the market while you and Adda meet with the Sages. We could meet at the city gate after your meeting and decide where we'll spend the night.”

He tilted his head, looking at me as if I'd grown a third eye. “We're staying at the tower

overnight.”

Overnight? “Why didn’t you tell me?” The panicked words came out on a breath. “What will I do there? Do they have a kitchen? A cook? Will I help serve meals? Are they—”

In a single fluid leap, he was on the bench beside me. “Peace, Sarai. Peace.” Brows furrowed, he lifted one side of a smile. “You’re to be my wife. Simply be at my side.”

Had he no idea that *simply being a wife* was never so simple? “It’s my duty to provide you, Adda, and Lot with a sense of home and comfort,” I said with forced calm. “Adda made it clear that was my *only* purpose on this journey, while you provide me with survival and protection.”

“Sarai, I’m sure he regrets saying those things now.”

Tears close to the surface again, I shook my head and turned to the road ahead. Whether Adda regretted his words or not, I’d understood my role and was sick unto death of it. I’d packed Adda’s favorite crimson cushion, his fox-fur blanket, and the curly goatskin headrest on which he laid his head to sleep. I’d brought a gift for each day of travel for Lot—sent from his sister, Milkah—so he could remember her love for him while she remained in Ur with her husband, Nahor.

I was ready to push my gentle ox, Palma, through Babylon’s gates to be free of this caravan. “I’ll prepare this evening’s meal as my gift to the Sages, but I should go to the market first.”

“I’m sure they’ll have a cook, my love. We don’t know if the market is safe—”

“Am I to be a prisoner, Abram? First this shroud over my face, and now I can’t go to the market alone?”

He couldn’t have looked more shocked if I’d slapped him. “You’re a treasure, not a

prisoner, Sarai.” He took Palma’s reins and laid his shepherd’s crook across our laps. “Tell me what’s really troubling you.”

I hid my face against his shoulder, holding his strong arm like a lifeline. “Will we still have our nights together? Why must we stay at the tower? Why not sleep with the flocks outside the walls?” Each night, after our family had eaten together, Abram and I retired to our small tent. The darkness had been the only reprieve from my shrouds.

He pressed his lips against my hooded forehead and spoke quietly. “Lot will stay with our flocks outside the city. I’ll make sure we have a private chamber at the tower, but I can’t allow you to visit the market alone, my love. Perhaps after Adda and I meet with the Sages, I could—”

“I need to be with other *women*.” I straightened, meeting his eyes. “A city’s market is the hub of a woman’s world, and after ten days with a pack of jackals, I need to hear women’s voices. I need to hear old women’s laughter. Wives and amas haggling with merchants to feed their families. I must see something that reminds me of the world I left behind in Ur.” He was already shaking his head to deny me, so I pleaded, “Abram, *please*. How can a market full of women be unsafe? *Please*.” My voice broke with the begging, and he gathered me into his arms. His love had kept me from despairing on this journey, but I was so tired of being brave.

“I’ll go with you to the market,” he whispered, “but you must not remove your face coverings.”

I pulled away, skewing my hood. “Women never cover their faces at the market.”

By the time I rearranged the eye holes to see him again, he waited with a handsome grin. “You don’t realize how beautiful you are.”

I was too sweaty to be charmed. “Women don’t care how I look, Abram. You’re being overly cautious.” Or was he? Dagrim’s threats came to mind, but Abram had proven his mastery

with crook and dagger on the first night when Dagrím tried to claim one of our lambs for the guards' meal.

“I'm cautious because I love you.”

“Then show your love by trusting my judgment. A woman is perfectly safe to buy food for her family in a city market.”

He wrapped my shoulders and pulled me close. “I hope you're right. We'll find somewhere private to uncover your face when we enter the city but then it's straight to the market and then to the tower.”

I muted a squeal and kissed his cheek.

His charming smile was gone. “There will be no dawdling.”

“Thank you, Abram.”

We reached the gate. He reined Palma to a halt and jumped to the ground. “Stay on the cart,” he commanded, suddenly tense.

I heard shouting and realized Adda was in trouble—again.