

HAGAR: FORGIVEN AND REDEEMED

Genesis 21

I'm sharing my story, that those that may regret their past might have hope! I looked back with sorrow on past behaviour, but learnt that what matters is not the past, but what we think and do now.

It's incredible really. I became the maidservant to one of the most loving couples you could ever wish to meet, let alone work for. Abram and Sarai. They were wealthy travellers from the north, convinced they had a vital role to play in the future of their tribe. Abram had been told by his God that his seed would outnumber the stars, but his wife remained barren, and they were both very old. I could see this was playing on Sarai's mind, - a desperation that she was letting down her husband's aspirations. She went to Abram with an idea, - would I act as concubine! He agreed to her request. And what happened since!

How could I refuse! It was all agreed, and yes, I conceived when she couldn't! How I rejoiced at the expense of poor Sarai, - trying these last ten years in Canaan and nothing to show, and here's me straightway! I look back in disbelief at how I so changed! With pride and arrogance I made Sarai distraught, and did she complain to Abram!. He gave her the authority to deal with me as she wanted, and she certainly did that! I fled in to the wilderness to escape her rage.

HAGAR: I'M
BETTER THAN
SARAI

It was an escape. Away from the anger I had caused, it made me calm down. That's always a good idea! In that stillness, I heard what must have been an angel of the Lord: **"Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands...I will multiply thy seed exceedingly...thou shalt call his name Ishmael because the Lord hath heard thy affliction"**. At that point I felt the presence of God, but the arrogance returned. I did not change my attitude to Sarai, indeed my teasing became even more satisfying, for in Ishmael was now the one and only promised heir. He has always known how special he is. And I never forgot, - and nor did Sarah! - he's not just Abraham's son, but mine too!

During the next fourteen odd years, they kept fast hold with each other and their faith deepened ever more. Responding to the words and promises of God, their names were changed to Abraham and Sarah. To my annoyance Sarah now conceived! She also bore a son, with Abraham just on a hundred years old! They named him Isaac. Ishmael had now reached his teens. I felt that my son had been displaced. God had given them a true heir, and their joy and gratitude was reflected in their daily lives. When Isaac was to be weaned, what a feast Abraham prepared! We were both there, both jealous! Ishmael couldn't control his teenage brashness, wasn't *he* the first heir, wasn't *he* also promised as a leader of nations. He taunted and mocked the innocent young child, became a distraction, and I did nothing because I felt the same! Sarah looked at us both, and I saw in her eyes we were no longer part of her family.

ISHMAEL: I'M
BETTER THAN
ISAAC

She turned to Abraham and spoke against us. Abraham glanced across to us, his head nodding with agreement. The spiritually blessed Isaac had replaced my darling wild boy, and I knew we would be separated.

The next day, after their feast, Abraham came to me early in the morning. He spoke with love, and shared what God had said to him, that Ishmael would yet make a nation, because his seed was in him. But that I had to go. He gave me some bread and a bottle of water, and that was it. Everything I had, anything that Ishmael had, was left behind. There was no changing his mind. Sarah was watching. He placed the sling on my shoulder, and sent us both off out into the wilderness of Beersheba. There was love in his eyes. Ishmael couldn't believe everything could change so quickly, his teenage words betrayed his status. I took his hand, and we moved off, not giving Sarah the satisfaction of my looking back.

The wilderness gave time to think. The steady footfall into nowhere, walking side by side, sometimes apart, each with our own thoughts and questions. He had calmed down, and the fear of the future began to take over. We stopped, ate and drank of the

EXCLUSION
AND
WILDERNESS

dwindling water. The heat of the sun was strong, the water we drank warm. We chatted, trying to make sense of what was happening. On again, ever more lonely. The day passed, we huddled together in the night, watching the distant stars, my thoughts ever questioning, digging deep into all that I and we had done. I felt so close to him, but was scared.

Another day. The bread now stale. It wouldn't last the day anyway. The wind blew dust in our faces, laughing at our aimless wandering. I couldn't believe how quickly everything had reversed. The heat was again severe, and I gave the dregs of the bottle to my dear son, watching him shake the bottle for its final drops. I thought about Sarah. I was no longer jealous...I understood her mother love for her toddler, not wanting my son to be a wild distraction, - they would be very different, but would we even now survive.. We cuddled closer, and slept.

DESPAIR!!

We had nothing to eat or drink. Time stood still. We just wandered alone as two random dots in the desert. We could not survive. I took Ishmael in my arms, his life nearly gone from him, looked him in the eyes, declared my love, and found a shrub to shield him from the baking sun. He lay quietly, and squeezed my hand. A wet tear in the corner of his eye. I turned away to hide my grief, and walked a good way off. I could not watch him die. The sun rose to its maximum, the heat as intolerable as my feelings of despair and wasted love.

My heart and soul and whole being turned to God, a God I had forsaken, ridiculed, the one God that Ishmael and I had both mocked in our disdain of Sarah. I wept in repentance, and so sought forgiveness. I thought of all the good I had received, right back to when Abram and Sarai brought me out of Egypt. I wept in sorrow for all I had done. I wept for my son. The tears ran down. The silly thought, - oh that Ishmael could drink them! I shut my swollen eyes and shuddered. Ishmael must have felt my grief. He called out "Mum!"

**AN ANGEL
SPEAKS TO
HAGAR**

In that heart-breaking moment I heard an angel voice: **"What aileth thee Hagar? Fear not, for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand, for I will make him a great nation."**

A sense of peace swept over me. I felt the presence of a God I had abandoned, but who had not abandoned me. All sense of self had suddenly gone. A new purpose beckoned! I found myself suddenly standing, surprisingly strong. I called out "My son!" and somehow I was with him, lifting him up, hugging him tight, seeing his new life. He hugged me back, all the tensions of the past gone, as if a veil had been lifted. We all had our rightful place, and God, the Father of Abraham and of Isaac was also our Father, watching over us, giving us all we needed. God *is* God. I just had not seen Him! My eyes had been opened. We both experienced a divine power that held us in Love. Love was all around us. And there, right there behind him, was a well of water! I didn't ask how, but just felt even more the presence of God, looking after him, looking after us. I filled our bottle and gave him to drink. I was in awe.

**TRUE
LOVE
WINS**

Oh dear friends, there was such a sense of Love, renewed purpose. We looked again into each other's eyes, - this time with a confidence born of a God we had never really known, but now felt and knew was true. I saw in my child the promise of a new nation, and lost all sense of fear. Instead was the realisation I had changed, and my motherhood was secondary to and now governed by, the Love and Promise of the One God. The blessing God had given Abraham and Sarah with their Isaac took on a new meaning, and I felt for the first time the true meaning of family, that wherever my home, wherever our home, it was with God.

**OBEDIENCE
GAINS
FORGIVENESS**

Whatever I had done did not matter anymore. It was what I felt and did now! The realisation of obedience to God was my true forgiveness. The nothingness of the past was its true and everlasting punishment!

And two nations had their beginnings guaranteed.

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