

HAGAR --- WHO FOUND A WELL IN THE WILDERNESS

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And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs. . . And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water, and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink (Gen. 21:14-15, 19).

The story of Hagar the Egyptian maid who was given by Sarah to Abraham is one of the most pathetic in the Scriptures. When Abraham and his wife were called by God to leave Ur of the Chaldees and proceed to Canaan, they were promised their seed would inherit the land to which they journeyed. After ten years of fruitless waiting for their first child, the would-be parents believed their prayers would never be answered. Sarah then decided to give her servant to Abraham so that the maid could bare a child.

Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. . . And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife (Gen. 16:1-3).

Clay tablets discovered by archaeologists in that part of the world have revealed this practice was common during Sarai's lifetime. It provided barren women with a chance to become foster mothers; furthermore, the real mother could not be expelled from the family. When Abram yielded to his wife's persuasion, it was evident that he believed she was too old to become a mother. Unfortunately, his conduct caused serious repercussions and resulted in the tension which now exists between Jews and Arabs. It is reported that after Hagar conceived her child, she despised her mistress and ruined the tranquillity of the family. Many years later, Solomon said that a handmaid who became heir to her mistress could become a source of annoyance (see Prov. 30:23). A spiteful, nagging woman is a pest, and Sarai, seeing scorn in the eyes of Hagar, began to detest her servant. Probably the maid suffered because of the treatment of Sarai, and finally ran away. An angel of the Lord discovered her close to a well in the wilderness and instructed her to return to Abram's camp where she remained for several years after her son was born. Coming events were casting their shadows before. Alas, the lad grew to be like his mother, and that led to trouble.

And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking. Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac. And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son (Gen. 21:9-11).

Perhaps Abraham would have refused to do as his wife suggested had not the Lord solved the family problem. God instructed him to do as his wife desired. He therefore gave food and drink to Hagar and sent her into the wilderness. That was a difficult decision, for Abraham loved Ishmael. As was to be

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expected. the supply of water soon disappeared, and as despair and thirst overwhelmed the distraught mother, she placed her son in the shade of a bush and wept. Her tumultuous world apparently was about to end in disaster, and she could not prevent the catastrophe. Life teaches that when people reach the end of their resources, God is never far away.

And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the bottle with water and gave the lad drink (Gen. 21:19).

God's well was infinitely better than Abraham's bottle, and that lesson has been demonstrated throughout history. Amid all the tangled skeins of Hagar's life, God was weaving a glittering pattern of kindness that overshadowed everything else. He understood her problems, and, although she did not know it at the

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time. God was making all things work together for her good. Ultimately that woman must have known Jehovah was more to be desired than all the glittering idols seen in Egypt.

Hagar's New Family... Undesired

Now Sarai. Abram's wife, bore him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian. whose name was Hagar (Gen. 16:1).

Somewhere in Egypt lived a young woman who was destined to become the wife of Abraham. Information regarding the circumstances that led to this event is limited. She might have been sold by impoverished parents. or she could have been given by Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt, to his illustrious visitor from Ur of the Chaldees (see Gen. 12:17). Whatever the reasons may have been, the young woman was suddenly confronted by the loss of her family and friends and was compelled to accompany strangers into the unknown. It was never revealed whether this pleased or distressed the girl, but in a realm where women had no authority, she accepted the inevitable and became the personal attendant of Abraham's wife. She worked around the encampment, but her life was without luster until one day she was summoned to appear before her mistress. She was informed a marriage was being arranged; she was to become Abram's new wife in order to bear a child for the barren Sarai. This was customary, but whether or not Hagar was pleased is debatable.

The new relationship with Abraham gained for her a new respect within the family, and she undoubtedly appreciated the increasing interest shown by her master. Her future became bright with prospect and hope, and the pregnancy pleased Sarai. Everybody appeared to be excited, and the Egyptian became a center of attraction within the camp. Each person seemed anxious to help. and she assumed new importance within the family. Unfortunately, the inflation of her ego became a threat, and her attitude was the forerunner of disaster.

Hagar's New Feud... Unappreciated

And when [Hagar] saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes. . . . And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, [Hagar] fled from her face (Gen. 16:4, 6).  
And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking. Wherefore she said unto Abraham. Cast out this bondwoman and her son, for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac (Gen. 21:9-10).

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Hagar's sun had been eclipsed; darkness was spreading through her world. The displeasure that commenced with her pregnancy increased enormously after the birth of Ishmael. Her sudden, but temporary, flight from Sarah had been interrupted by the angel of the Lord, but years later this was followed by total banishment from the camp. The infuriated Sarah demanded her expulsion, and Abraham yielded to the demand. When Hagar and her teenage son were homeless and hopeless, she placed her weary boy in the shade of a bush and went away to weep and wait for death. There is no fury that can equal that of a woman scorned! Perhaps it is safe to assume that Hagar was responsible for her distress, but there may have been another reason for Sarah's antagonism. Laws regarding a family inheritance were explicit. The firstborn son received twice as much as any other son. This was known as the birthright. Ishmael was the first son of Abraham and consequently after the father's death would have received more than Isaac and would have been the leader of the family. Sarah could not tolerate that possibility. Apparently, neither woman had much faith in the providence of the Almighty. Hagar could not believe her life was still of interest to the Lord, and Sarah could not believe Jehovah could control His own affairs without her interference. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1).

#### Hagar's New Freedom... Unparalleled

Self-pity had made Hagar blind to several facts. She failed to see the well in the wilderness because she could not see beyond her personal need. People who stare at the earth seldom see stars, and those submerged in an ocean of grief sometimes fail to see a hand outstretched to help. Maybe the well was hidden by bushes, for that was, and still is, customary in the desert. When the angel of God called to her, he said: "What aileth thee, Hagar?" He knew her by name! Had she been a Hebrew, the daughter of a priest or even the wife of a prophet, God's action would have

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been understandable, but she was an outsider—a pagan, an Egyptian. Perhaps that was one of the earliest revelations—that God was capable of loving the whole world. When that forlorn mother filled her bottle with water and went to alleviate her son's thirst, a new world opened before her. God did not recognize racial barriers; he saw her plight and supplied what was needed. The ancient account tells that God heard the voice of the lad. Had the Almighty desired their death, He would not have helped them. Suddenly the woman began to know that in spite of circumstances, there was hope for them in that inhospitable wilderness. The darkest night may be followed by a glorious dawn. Malachi was correct when he wrote: "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall" (Mal. 4:2). For the first time in her life Hagar was a free woman, and as the Gospel says: "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

#### Hagar's New Future... Unprecedented

And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer. And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran: and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt (Gen. 21:20-21).

The word "well" has also been translated "fountain and spring." It was close to this supply that life began anew for Hagar and her son. Water in a desert is a rare commodity, and it may be assumed many animals went there to drink. Possibly that was the

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chief reason why Ishmael became an archer. The boy's skill with his bow and arrows guaranteed there would always be a plentiful supply of meat. Somewhere near to this oasis they built their first home; it might have resembled a Bedouin tent made of animal skins, or it could have been made of mud bricks baked in the sun. Time passed and the lad became an adult.

Normally, most marriages were arranged by fathers, but Hagar accepted this responsibility of finding a wife for Ishmael. Probably she and her son discussed this project when they talked together in the evenings. They could not return to Abraham's camp, and since her native country was close at hand, it was decided to seek a bride in Egypt. Through trading skins, they had ceased to be poor, and were able to purchase a slave. If Ishmael accompanied his mother into Egypt, he might have won the affections of a young lady. It would be interesting to know the answers to questions that might be asked. The Scriptures simply say: "His mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt" (Gen. 21:21). Later, in the seclusion of their primitive home, Ishmael's wife gave birth to their first child whom they named Nebajoth, which meant High Place.

Whether or not there was special significance in that name is uncertain. Perhaps Hagar regarded the birth of her first grandchild as the greatest experience of her life, the highest plateau of happiness she could ever reach. Their proximity to Egyptian villages made trading profitable, and Ishmael had no difficulty in supporting his family. The kindness of Jehovah was apparent. His promise to make Ishmael a great nation was beginning to be fulfilled. Hagar had progressed magnificently since her expulsion from the employment of her former mistress. She was beginning to believe that even dark clouds had silver linings.

Hagar's New Fame... Unique

And these are the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to their generations: The first born of Ishmael, Nebajoth; and Kedar, and Adbeel, and Mibsam, and Mishma, and Dumah, and Massa, Hadar, and Tema, and Jetur, and Naphish, and Kedemah: These are the sons of Ishmael, and these are their names, by their towns, and by their castles; twelve princes according to their nations. And these are the years of the life of Ishmael, an hundred and thirty and seven years: and he gave up the ghost and died; and was gathered unto his people (Gen. 25:13-17).

When the twelve sons of Ishmael grew to manhood, they married and had their own families, and the influence of the Ishmaelites spread throughout the wilderness areas. The men formed an alliance which struck terror into the hearts of enemies. They turned unproductive areas into farmlands, and every high place became heavily fortified. Their castles were impregnable. Throughout the entire area Hagar was regarded as a queen. The aging grandmother was adored by her children, and respected by her descendants. Nothing is known of her death, but when

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reviewing her life, she could have expressed similar sentiments to those uttered by Paul: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). It is almost beyond comprehension that a girl who had been ejected from the camp of Abraham should have reached unimaginable heights of eminence. God had truly blessed Ishmael, and the proud grandmother re-

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joiced when she saw the promises of God were being fulfilled!

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