

Reflections on the Wilderness Journeys of Hagar and Sarai

Genesis 16:1- 11, 13 *Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had not been able to bear children for him. But she had an Egyptian servant named Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, "The Lord has prevented me from having children. Go and sleep with my servant. Perhaps I can have children through her." And Abram agreed with Sarai's proposal. So Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian servant and gave her to Abram as a wife. (This happened ten years after Abram had settled in the land of Canaan.)*

So Abram had sexual relations with Hagar, and she became pregnant. But when Hagar knew she was pregnant, she began to treat her mistress, Sarai, with contempt. Then Sarai said to Abram, "This is all your fault! I put my servant into your arms, but now that she's pregnant she treats me with contempt. The Lord will show who's wrong—you or me!"

Abram replied, "Look, she is your servant, so deal with her as you see fit." Then Sarai treated Hagar so harshly that she finally ran away.

The angel of the Lord found Hagar beside a spring of water in the wilderness, along the road to Shur. ⁸The angel said to her, "Hagar, Sarai's servant, where have you come from, and where are you going?"

"I'm running away from my mistress, Sarai," she replied.

The angel of the Lord said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit to her authority." ¹⁰Then he added, "I will give you more descendants than you can count."

And the angel also said, "You are now pregnant and will give birth to a son. You are to name him Ishmael (which means 'God hears'), for the Lord has heard your cry of distress.

Thereafter, Hagar referred to the Lord, who had spoken to her as, “the God who sees me,” for she said, “I have seen the one who sees me!”

Genesis 21:8-20

When Isaac grew up and was about to be weaned, Abraham prepared a huge feast to celebrate the occasion. But Sarah saw Ishmael—the son of Abraham and her Egyptian servant Hagar—making fun of her son, Isaac. So she turned to Abraham and demanded, “Get rid of that slave woman and her son. He is not going to share the inheritance with my son, Isaac. I won’t have it!”

This upset Abraham very much because Ishmael was his son. But God told Abraham, “Do not be upset over the boy and your servant. Do whatever Sarah tells you, for Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted. But I will also make a nation of the descendants of Hagar’s son because he is your son, too.”

So Abraham got up early the next morning, prepared food and a container of water, and strapped them on Hagar’s shoulders. Then he sent her away with their son, and she wandered aimlessly in the wilderness of Beersheba.

When the water was gone, she put the boy in the shade of a bush. ¹⁶ Then she went and sat down by herself about a hundred yards^[c] away. “I don’t want to watch the boy die,” she said, as she burst into tears.

But God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, “Hagar, what’s wrong? Do not be afraid! God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. ¹⁸ Go to him and comfort him, for I will make a great nation from his descendants.”

Then God opened Hagar’s eyes, and she saw a well full of water. She quickly filled her water container and gave the boy a drink.

And God was with the boy as he grew up in the wilderness

Two women with a host of desert/wilderness experiences; some of their own making and some forced on them by others; but all intertwined. Sarai’s wilderness is centered around her infertility; Hagar is a servant. Sarai takes

matters into her own hands trying to provide an heir for Abram. Pregnant Hagar flees into the wilderness to escape her mistress. God sees Hagar in her time of distress and provides relief. She returns to the home of Sarai and raises her son, Ishmael; but she is forced to flee into the wilderness a second time as Sarai's wilderness journey comes to an end with the birth of her son, Isaac. How often do we create or prolong our wilderness experiences by taking matters into our own hands instead of calling on God or waiting for His answer?

Father God, creator of all; both the deserts and the green pastures; may we seek your will, wisdom and guidance in all areas of our lives. Help us to avoid the deserts and rest in the green pastures by calling on you before making decisions. In your Name we pray. Amen