

Hagar: Good Guy or Bad Guy?

In Parashat Hayei Sarah, we see a lot of important history. There are a lot of significant events that happen so most people tend to not pay attention to those of lesser importance. Did you know that after Sarah dies Abraham gets remarried to a woman named Keturah and has six more children? Personally, I don't remember ever learning about this. I was bothered by the fact that I never knew this and it led me to wonder who this mystery woman was. Who is she and why does she deserve to have kids with Abraham? And why isn't it more widely known and discussed?

I tried doing some research, but there weren't many sources that mention anything about this new wife. A couple of sources say that Keturah was actually Hagar (Rashi 25:1, Rambam 25:6). If this is true, then what is the reason for the name change? Rashi says that she was called Keturah because after she left Abraham she "waited" for him which made her seem as beautiful as the ketoret. Hashem loved her so much that she was given a second chance.

Most view Hagar in a negative light. Have you ever stopped to think why she's perceived as that? Hagar didn't treat Sarah with respect after she found out she was pregnant (Bereshit 16:4). Hagar realized that she was going to be the mother of Abraham's child and Sarah wasn't, so she started viewing Sarah in a lower regard. On the other hand, Sarah treats Hagar harshly and ultimately kicks her out of the home, so why do we put a double standard on Hagar?

When Hagar was being treated horribly by Sarah, she decided to run away (Bereshit 16:6). An angel then found her and told her to go back and suffer and she would have a lot of children. As the pasuk states:

"וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַלְאָךְ יְקֹוֹק הַרְבֵּה אֲרָבָה אֶת־זַרְעֶךָ וְלֹא יִסְפָּר מִרְבּוֹ"

And the messenger of Hashem said to her (Hagar), "I will greatly increase your offspring, and they shall be too many to count". (Bereshit 16:10)

Why would Hagar even be worthy enough for this gift of God if she was such a bad person? We learn from the blessing she was given there must have been something special about Hagar's character.

Up until this point in the text, prior to the birth of Ishmael and Yitzchak, Hashem told Abraham that a great nation will come from his children but originally never

specified which child will continue on that nation. Could He have been talking about Ishmael? When Hashem speaks to Hagar and commands her to return home, He is testing her. Perhaps, Hashem hadn't decided yet if the nation would come from Sarah or Hagar. He was telling Hagar, through the angel, to trust Him that her future will all work out. As seen in the pesukim below, the angel addresses Hagar three times and yet we don't see any response from Hagar.

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַלְאָךְ יְקֹוֹק שׁוּבִי אֶל־גְּבוּרְתְּךָ וְהִתְעַנִּי תַּחַת יָדֶיהָ

And the messenger of יהוה said to her, "Go back to your mistress, and submit to her harsh treatment." (Beresheit 16:9)

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַלְאָךְ יְקֹוֹק הֲרַבָּה אֶרְבָּה אֶת־זַרְעֲךָ וְלֹא יִסְפָּר מֵרֹב

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וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה הִנֵּה הָרָה וְיִלְדֶת בֵּן וְקָרָאת שְׁמוֹ יִשְׁמָעֵאל כִּי־שָׁמַע יְקֹוֹק אֶל־עֲבִירָךְ

The messenger of Hashem said to her further, "Behold you are pregnant and shall bear a son; You should call him Ishamel, for Hashem has paid heed to your suffering. (Beresheit 16:11)

We see from these Pesukim, and the lack of Hagar's response after, that Hashem had given Hagar the opportunity to be great but she seemingly never took it.

Growing up, we can't help but compare ourselves to others. We may not realize that we are given the same opportunities, we just need to open your eyes to it. We see that Hagar and Sarah may have been given the same opportunity at first, Hagar just didn't notice until it was too late. My original exploration of the identity of Keturah, coupled with analyzing Hagar's actions show that there was definitely something special about Hagar. She was not necessarily the "bad guy" we make her out to be, rather Hashem loved her, and we see that with her later marrying Abraham. If Hagar took the opportunity handed to her at first we don't know how different this story could have turned out.

Ruthy was born into a religious and learning-oriented community in Brooklyn. She attended Yeshivah of Flatbush Elementary School and High School. Through her four years of high school, Ruthy enhanced her love for Torah and Mitzvot through after school activities, such as learning in the Beit Midrash with her favorite Judaic teachers. Ruthy is constantly looking for new opportunities to learn as much as she can, which resulted in her devotion to finding different approaches to religious inquiries. Ruthy's strong foundation in Judaic studies allowed her to understand and undertake challenging notions. Ruthy frequently searches for different perspectives in order to facilitate her growth and understanding. After Ruthy learned with the Allegra Franco program in her high school, she is excited to continue her journey with them while attending Midreshet Moriah in Israel.