

Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child

Genesis 16, 21

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Sometimes I feel like a motherless child. Sometimes I feel like a motherless child. Sometimes I feel like a motherless child a long way from home, a long, long way from home.

That's me, a motherless child, and I am certainly a long way from home. I was born in Egypt. I still remember some things there, but I was barely a teenager when I was sold into slavery, to Abraham. He dragged me all the way back here, wherever THIS is. I must serve his wife, Sarah, and I like that about as well as any enslaved woman has ever liked it. If you are thinking that there were people who were nice to their slaves, think again. Sarah is not a gentle mistress, and Abraham is no gentle master, either. They use me, and I have no way out.

They call me Hagar. It means Foreigner. I didn't even get to keep my own name.

"Hey, Foreigner, come here! Kill that lamb. Cook my dinner, and be quick about it." "Hey, Foreigner, rub my skin with oil and brush my hair." "Hey, Foreigner, go get that heavy bag of grain and bring it over here." "Hey, Foreigner, do this. Do that." Foreigner. I am a long, long way from home, and they never let me forget it.

One day Sarah sent Abraham into my tent to rape me. She couldn't have children of her own, so she thought I should do that for her. No one asked me about it. No one asked me. No one asks me about anything.

No home. No name. No freedom. No control over my own body. I am a motherless child indeed.

Well, I did get pregnant. One day I muttered something under my breath about Sarah not being able to have children. At least I can do that. She blamed Abraham for making me pregnant, when she's the one who sent him in to me. Then she beat me mercilessly. She WANTED me to be pregnant. She WANTED to take my baby away from me and raise it as her own. This is what she wanted, and she beat me for it. I was covered in bruises and scratches. My ribs hurt so bad I could hardly breathe. I had to get away, so I ran out into the wilderness.

I ran and ran, not knowing where I was or which way to go. I was lost and alone, with no way to survive or take care of myself or this child that was growing inside me. I was thirsty and lonely and terrified and ... just terrified, really. Eventually I stumbled on a spring of water and just sat down there and cried.

Somehow, an angel found me. He knew who I was. And he told me to go back to Sarah and Abraham. Go back! Go back to being a slave! How could he ask that of me? But then he told me that I would have a son, and I would name him Ishmael. The angel told me that God had heeded my affliction.

I didn't know where else to go, so, I did what he said. I went back. Back to Sarah. Back to Abraham. Back to being a slave. Back to a life I hated with every fiber of my being.

And Ishmael was born there. I had a son. I had that much.

Sometime later, old Sarah became pregnant herself, if you can believe it! When her son Isaac was finally weaned, he liked to play with Ishmael, but Sarah couldn't stand that. She was worried that Isaac's inheritance would be less if Ishmael was around. So, Sarah told Abraham to send Ishmael and me away.

Abraham gave me a little bread and one skin full of water and sent me back out into the wilderness. That's all he could give me? Not two skins of water? Or five? Not three loaves of bread? Not a camel? Or a donkey? Not even a blessing? No, he sent us off into the wilderness on foot with just one meager meal of bread and water.

It was hot out there. Really hot and dry. And the water ran out pretty quickly. I knew we would die, and I couldn't stand to see death come to my little boy. I just couldn't watch. So, I put him under a bush where he would at least have some shade, and I sat down a little way off.

Ishmael cried, of course. I was crying, myself. God heard my child's cries and sent another angel. This time the angel didn't tell me to go back. No, this time the angel told me to take my son by the hand, and the angel showed me a water well that I had not seen before. The angel said that my son Ishmael would survive. He would have a hard life, but God would make a great nation of him!

He was right. We did survive. We lived in the wilderness for a long time. When my son grew to be a man, I found a wife for him, a wife from Egypt, my home.

This wasn't the life I wished for when I was growing up. It wasn't what I dreamed of. So much was taken from me that can never, ever, ever be returned. Nothing makes that right. There is nothing in this world that will make it okay to be taken from my home, stripped of my name, enslaved, raped, beaten, and sent into the wilderness to die.

But God saw me. God knew my misery and responded to it. And so, I praise God. I praise God who saw my suffering. I praise God who took me by the hand to the water that would save my life. I praise God who found a future for my child and me, when I could not see beyond the terrifying moment I was in. I praise God who knows me by name. I praise God who is my home when I have no home. Praise the Lord!

Amen