IS KETURAH HAGAR
Rabbi Dan Moskovitz – 11/15/2014

1. Abraham has 3 wives and 8 children
    a. Hagar was his wife through carnal relations together they had Ishmael
        i. Hagar if you recall is banished at Sarah's behest with the young child.
    b. Sarah of course was his wife from the time they left Haran and together they had Isaac
    c. Keturah is the woman he marries after Sarah dies at the end of this week's parsha. We read that they had six sons who would go on to become Arab tribes in the Red Sea Area.
2. Our Torah and so much of Jewish tradition takes its lead and builds the story of our people from Sarah.
3. **But who was Keturah?**
    a. The great commentator Rashi boldly suggests that Keturah is Hagar:
        i. "She was called Keturah because her deeds were as pleasing as incense and because from the day she left Abraham, she did not couple with any man."
        ii. Targum Yonatan, an Aramaic translation/commentary, which is attributed to Yonatan ben Uziel, makes an even stronger statement to suggest that she was Hagar:
            1. "She was Hagar, who was bound to him from the start."
    b. Not everyone agrees that she was Hagar, but none question the legitimacy of the relationship.

i. Keturah is a Cushite woman – a woman of color from another religious background.
    1. Moses marries a Cushite in Numbers, it's the impetus for Miriam and Aaron's gossip about him and subsequently being stricken with tzaraat – skin disease.

4. In the midrashic depiction, after Abraham divorces Hagar and sends her into the wilderness she sits by the well and cries to God: "See my shame!" Hagar's demand for justice was accepted by God, who revealed Himself to Abraham after Sarah's death and commanded him to take back his divorcée, Hagar-Keturah (Gen. Rabbah loc. cit.).
5. A different story has Isaac initiating his father's marriage.
    a. When Isaac married Rebekah, he said to himself: I have taken a wife, while my father is without a spouse! What did he do? He went and brought him Keturah. This tradition is based on Gen. 24:62: "Isaac had just come back from the vicinity of Be'er-la-hai-ro'i"—he brought back with him Hagar, who had been at "Be'er-la-hai-ro'i," and had also given this place its name.
6. But there is more. Abraham has 6 children with Keturah, what ever became of them and their relationship to the faith of their father?
7. Some rabbinic commentators argue that these offspring express the fulfillment of the blessing given by God to Abraham in Gen. 12:3:
    a. "and all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you," for three families came from Abraham: the twelve chieftains from

Esau, the sixteen descendants of Keturah, and (Gen. 25:23) “two nations are in your womb”.

b. But a more problematic reading comes from other commentaries. These argue that the children of Abraham and Keturah are a perpetual threat to Judaism and that is why Abraham does not give them a blessing or inheritance, instead sending them, along with Ishmael away before he dies.
    i. He said to himself: “If I bless Isaac now, I will also have to bless the children of Ishmael and of Keturah; but if I do not bless them, how will I be able to bless Isaac? Surely what He wants in His world will happen.” And so it happened that after Abraham’s death, God revealed Himself to Isaac and blessed him, as his father had intended to do (Gen. Rabbah 61:6).

c. Gen. 25:6 relates that Abraham sent the sons of Keturah away from Isaac “eastward, to the land of the East.” He told them: Go as far eastward as you can, so you will not be burnt by the burning coal of Isaac (Gen. Rabbah 61:7).

d. In another tradition, Abraham sends the sons of Keturah away with a writ of divorce, as a wife is sent away from her husband.

8. We have here the root of a historic conflict, and it would seem irreconcilable and justified. Who started it, was it deserved is all noise to the clear underlying hurt that was done.
9. But then at the very end of the parasha after all this is said and done we read:

a. Abraham breathed is last and was gathered to his kin. And together his sons, Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave a Machpelah in the field he had purchased from Ephron.