

Gather March 31 Handout: Hagar's Story in Genesis 16

Let's read Genesis 16 NIV

16 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; 2 so she said to Abram, "The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her."

Abram agreed to what Sarai said. 3 So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. 4 He slept with Hagar, and she conceived.

When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. 5 Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me."

6 "Your slave is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her.

7 The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. 8 And he said, "Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?"

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

9 Then the angel of the Lord told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." 10 The angel added, "I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count."

11 The angel of the Lord also said to her: "You are now pregnant and you will give birth to a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard of your misery. 12 He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers."

13 She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me." 14 That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered.

15 So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. 16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

Three things this story teaches us about God's promises:

1. God's promises create a future the present cannot generate.

Gather March 31 Handout: Hagar's Story in Genesis 16

- a. The promises of God are God's disruptive commitment to create an alternative future in the midst of a broken present.
 2. The worthiness of the promise comes from the promiser, not the promisee.
 - a. hesed: steadfast love, covenant faithfulness
 - b. Grace is not a reward for faith. It's the thing that makes faith possible in the first place.
 3. God's biggest promise is Himself.
 - a. In Genesis, naming is an act of authority and intimacy — God names the stars, Adam names the animals, parents name children. And here a slave, a foreigner, a person with no standing in Israel's story, names God. And God accepts it.
 - b. *"You are the God who sees me, for I have now seen the one who sees me."* There's a mutuality there. God's seeing is not surveillance. It's the kind of seeing that opens itself to being seen in return. It creates relationship. God makes Himself known in the act of knowing her.
 - c. When God says to Abraham in Genesis 15, *"I am your shield and your very great reward"* — the reward is not what God gives. The reward is God. The promise underneath every specific promise is God Himself. He is the God who sees you. There is no greater promise than that.
-

Discussion Questions

1. Hagar is the only person in the entire Old Testament to explicitly give God a new name: El Roi, 'The God who sees me'. She named Him for His attention rather than for the specific gifts He gave her (descendants, future, freedom). Why do you think the act of 'being seen' was her most profound revelation?
2. What does it mean for you to be seen and known by God?
3. Thinking on your own journey, can you identify a specific moment when God met you in your darkest circumstances?
4. God asks Hagar two questions: *"Where have you come from? Where are you going?"* She can only answer the first. If God asked you those two questions right now, how would you answer each?
5. "Sin is never isolated — it disorders every relationship it touches." Sarah's resentment, Abraham's passivity, Hagar's contempt. Have you ever seen sin ripple outward and affect people who had nothing to do with it? What did that look like in your life?