

Women in the Bible: Hagar

Scripture: Genesis chapter 16 and 21

- Grab your Bible and read through the scripture
- What parts of the story jump out to you?
- How have you traditionally read the story of Hagar and Ishmael? How can we read her story in a positive and lifegiving way?

Background Information:

- Egyptian (African) servant of Sarah, Abraham's wife
 - o Hagar is a revered figure in the black church because she is a racial outsider, slave, and woman who endures a wilderness experience and encounter with God
- Mother of Ishmael, Abraham's first son
 - o Matriarch of Islam as Muslim's trace the roots of Muhammad through Ishmael
- Recorded, Hagar spoke 33 words in the Bible
 - o Hagar is the only person in the Bible to name God (Genesis 16:13)

Things to Consider:

- Hagar is a black slave in an abusive household who liberates herself from her situation by running away (Genesis 16:6-8)
 - o God sends Hagar back into the abusive household, which makes this a text of terror used against women experiencing gender-based violence. God promises to be with Hagar and to multiply her descendants. This part of the text I continue to wrestle with.
- Hagar is the first woman to cry (Genesis 21:16) and she is also the first and only person to name God (Genesis 16:13).
 - o For Hagar, faith and a basket case of emotions go hand in hand.
- Sarah is the one constantly fighting against Hagar through abuse (Genesis 16:6) and casting her out (Genesis 21:10), yet it is also Sarah who turned to Hagar to bear her a child in the first place (Genesis 16:2).

Reflection Questions:

- Hagar and Sarah never get reconciliation with one another. Do you think the two women could ever find common ground and build a relationship together? Where might there be room for reconciliation in your own life?
- The spiritual roots of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam spring from this story with angst and despair, going back to the very conception of Ishmael and Isaac. What might this say about, or how might this continue to impact our world religions today?
- How do your own experiences and emotions impact or influence your faith and relationship with God?
- What are the names you use for God? How do they change or adapt? Is there a story behind the names you use?
- Hagar spends a lot of time in the wilderness, which is also where she finds God. Where do you experience the wilderness or the presence of God in your own life?

If you are interested in reading or discovering more about the story of Hagar, check out some of these resources. I own all of the books and used them in the making of this project. I also included art to look at for those of you interested in looking at the ways art and interpretation influence each other. Feel free to send me any questions or resources that you have!

Further Reading:

- Consider the Women by Debbie Blue
- Bible Women: All Their Words and Why They Matter by Lindsay Hardin Freeman
- All of the Women of the Bible by Edith Deen
- Women's Bible Commentary by Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley
- Life: Women of the Bible special edition magazine printed in 2019
- Article: <http://www.womeninthebible.net/bible-paintings/slave-hagar-sarah/>

Art to Consider:

I love looking at the way art can influence our perspective on stories. Check out some of these artistic representations of Hagar and her story. How do they change or impact how you view the story?

Clear Vision by Lauren Wright Pittman (A Sanctified Art)

Hagar in the Wilderness by Camille Corot (The Met)

Abraham Expels Hagar and Ishmael by Lucas van Leyden (Women in the Bible Article)

The Expulsion of Hagar by Adrien van der Werfft (Women in the Bible Article)

El Roi - The God Who Sees by Joseph Emanuel (YouTube video)