

Women of the Church Study Month 9 Week 1

Hagar

We first learn about Hagar in Genesis 16. Sarai, wife of Abram, had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar. Sarai, who had not been able to conceive children, took things into her own hands. She took her maid, Hagar, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife. She told Abram “The Lord has kept me from bearing children. Have intercourse with my maid; perhaps I will have sons through her.” Abram obeyed Sarai. And Hagar became pregnant.

As soon as Hagar knew she was pregnant, her mistress lost stature in her eyes. Sarai became upset with the situation and said to Abram: “This outrage against me is your fault. I myself gave my maid to your embrace; but ever since she knew she was pregnant, I have lost stature in her eyes. May the Lord decide between you and me!” Abram told Sarai to do what she thought was right with Hagar. Sarai then mistreated her so much that Hagar ran away from her.

After Hagar ran away, The Lord’s angel found her by a spring in the wilderness. He asked her, “Hagar, maid of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?” She answered, “I am running away from my mistress, Sarai.” But the Lord’s angel told Sarai to go back to her mistress, Sarai and submit to her authority. I will make your descendants so numerous,” added the Lord’s angel, “that they will be too many to count.”

Then the Lord’s angel said to her: “You are now pregnant and shall bear a son; you shall name him Ishmael, For the Lord has heeded your affliction. He shall be a wild ass of a man, his hand against everyone, and everyone’s hand against him; alongside all his kindred all he encamp.” Hagar listened to the Lord who spoke to her and she she gave a name, saying, “You are God who sees me”. Hagar returned to Sarai and bore Abram a son, Ishmael.

Later in Genesis 21, we are told that Hagar and Ishmael were sent away from Abraham’s family. By this time Isaac had been born. Sarah said to Abraham, “Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac.” The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. But God said to Abraham, “Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you. As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring.”

Hagar and Ishmael left and went into the wilderness. Hagar was concerned that Ishmael would not live. She cried out to God. God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him.” God was with the boy, as he grew up.

Ishmael is considered the patriarch of Islam and the forefather of Muhammad.

Reflections

The story which surrounds Hagar can seem complex; its different people, situations and issues can each be understood from different perspectives. The following are beginning points of reflections on this biblical narrative. There is much more which can be thought about and reflected upon.

--Reflect upon Hagar herself and her role. She was an Egyptian slave, in service to Sarai, an older Hebrew woman. A “foreigner”, it appears Hagar had few choices in her life at the time, other than following through on what Sarai directed her to do. As a result, her life changed dramatically at two different points—first to become Abram’s wife in order to bear a child, and second and later to be sent into the wilderness to live alone with her child.

-How did Hagar manage these two dramatic life situations? How might she have felt with each?

-How did Hagar respond to God’s presence with her (through the angel)?

-How have I managed unexpected and difficult life situations?

-How has God made his presence known to me during these times?

--Reflect upon Sarai's role. She was past typical child bearing years and had not been able to conceive a child. Despite God's promises to her and Abram, she decided to take things into her own hands by offering Hagar to Abram in order to have a child. Sarai is noted to have mistreated Hagar after she conceived the child through Abram.

-What was Sarai's level of trust in God? Did her "desperation" lead her away from God?

-Did Sarai possibly regret her decision? Could this be part of the reason why she mistreated Hagar?

-Have I ever "taken charge" of a situation, rather than truly waiting on God or his direction?

-What might have been or might be a better choice for me?

--Think about Abram/Abraham's role. He believed God's promise about becoming the father of many nations, yet he went along with Sarai's plan to have a child through her maidservant Hagar. Although distressed, he later acted upon Sara's request to have Hagar sent away with her child Ishmael. (God spoke to Abraham assuring him this was what he should do). Abraham provided food and water for Hagar and Ishmael as he sent them on their way.

-Does it appear there was some confusion or mixed feelings on Abraham's part?

-Did Abraham depend on or listen to Sara, himself or God in his decision making?

-Who or what do I depend upon most when faced with a decision?

Prayers and Devotionals

Hagar found herself in life situations where she had very little choice or control. The only solution at one point seemed to be to run away. Later the only "solution" offered to her was to be sent away. Hagar experienced despair in both of these situations. In the end, Hagar was a woman alone with a child—a refugee of sorts, hopeless and desperate with no apparent means.

"We can get to the middle of a season... that has been difficult, one that has hurt, and we leave. It is not just a situation, but we leave where God has placed us. It is easier to walk away, convince ourselves that God did not place us there and that God would never make us walk through this valley."

(<http://theriverchurch.cc/devotions/archives/2376>). "When our heart sinks with grief for Hagar and her losses, we remember our own story of a terrifying moment — a conversation, a call, a traumatic experience — when we knew our life would never be the same. And we can also identify with the millions of women on the run from evil instigated by injustice. In places like Sudan, Syria, and Somalia, women and children right now are experiencing the plight of Hagar. It's a plight that soon shifts from shock to despair, whether we're in Africa or Arkansas. The future stretches out as desolate as a desert, with no water in sight."

(<https://www.faithgateway.com/opening-our-eyes-to-the-well-in-the-desert-hagar-the-refugee/#.XiiQgf5KguE>).

Yet when she ran away and when she was sent away, Hagar found God, or rather God found her, speaking through his angels. Hagar trusted God—how could she not? When we trust Christ and our eyes are opened in faith, for the first time we clearly see God. Like Hagar, we cry, "I have now seen the One who sees me!"

God opened Hagar's eyes to His provision right in front of her through the well of water, which she used to revive her son. We can ask God to reveal solutions we haven't thought of and to open our eyes to see things that we cannot yet see. God will grow us and strengthen our faith through difficult circumstances. Hagar's story should be a reminder that no matter our circumstances, God provides, His promises endure, and He will never fail us.

Dear God, Thank You for seeing me, just as I am, and loving me fully and completely. Thank You for also seeing what I can be in Christ, and transforming me into the image of Your Son. It is such a comfort to know that no matter what has happened, is happening, or will happen, You see it all and You are in control. Help me to trust You more and more each day. (<https://www.touchinglives.org/devotionals/the-god-who-sees-me>).

Help all women Lord, especially those who are refugees—physically, emotionally or spiritually. As we drink deeply from the well of provision in front of us, let us be a voice of comfort for those Hagar's resettling in our own country, some of them moving in next door to us. Let us cry, and then pray with them, asking that You reveal the good future You intend for us all. Open our eyes to the well we often cannot see, and let all of us taste a fresh drink of Jesus Christ, the living water. (Adapted from-

<https://www.faithgateway.com/opening-our-eyes-to-the-well-in-the-desert-hagar-the-refugee/#.XiiQgf5KguE>

In Jesus' name, Amen

Hagar—Practical Applications

--Think of times or situations in your life when you experienced some of the grief, hopelessness, loneliness and/or despair that Hagar experienced in her life situations. Reflect upon how you were able to manage this and make it through to the other side. (If you are experiencing some of this right now, reflect upon how you are managing and making it, because you are and will!)

Now consider someone else you know or know of who may be in situations similar to those of Hagar. Perhaps you know a single parent, a person who has been ostracized by their family, a person who is being asked or expected to do things which seem impossible, a person of minimal means or resources. Based on your own experiences, determine a way to reach out to this person and provide physical, emotional and/or spiritual support—even if it is in just some small way. Offer this in prayer and then try it out. Journal how you felt about the experience and how the other person responded.

--Hagar was a “foreigner” in Sarah and Abraham’s world. She then became a “refugee” as she was sent out into the wilderness. As our world grows smaller, so to speak, we find many people around us from different countries, cultures and/or beliefs. Some of these persons have made voluntary choices to leave or move; we are also aware of the many people around the world, and in our country who have left or fled their homelands due to persecution or lack of means. On a smaller scale, people in general are more mobile. Friends, family and neighbors may move away or may move closer. There are also many homeless persons in our own community. Think individuals or families who are relatively new to your neighborhood, church, work environment or other group of which you are a part. Consider what you might do to welcome them and provide them with support as they make adjustments. Then consider those who may have made significant life changes or moved away. Consider what you might do to help with the transition to a new life circumstance or location. Finally, consider those who are homeless and what you might do to help these persons. Pray and consider talking with others to help implement some supportive strategies in any or all of these situations.