



The Nourishing Vocation Project

Engaging the Living Word

Hagar – [Genesis 16](#); [Genesis 21:8-21](#)

What are these particular texts?

- [Genesis 16](#)
 - Patriarchy and Power
 - Story/Narrative
 - Story-within-a-story (overall narrative is God's promise to Abraham of descendants)
 - Manipulation of the promise
 - A different Promise and blessing
 - Intimacy with God
 - Naming of God
- [Genesis 21:8-21](#)
 - Story
 - Family story
 - Story-within-a story (overall story is the birth of Isaac)
 - Story that has its own merits
 - Theology
 - Promise and blessing
 - Oppression and Freedom
 - Holy Messenger (angel) story

How do these texts function within the scriptural story?

- Humanity seeks to manipulate God's promise
- An "other-ized, outcast woman" receives a promise from God
- Blessing given and repeated for descendants of Ishmael
- Expansive understanding of God's blessing – not just for Abraham's descendants through Isaac
- Example of God "making a way where there is no way"
- Reveals God's preferential option for the oppressed
- Gives voice to the voiceless
- Hagar is the only person in the Bible to name God
- Hagar is the first enslaved person in the Bible to be freed

How can these texts function in the church today?

- Teach about the complex origins of the three Abrahamic faiths – beneficial in interreligious understanding and dialogue
 - Invitation to learn about interreligious siblings and contemporary conflicts

- How does the church sometimes seek to “take matters into our own hands” and manipulate God’s promises?
- How has jealousy harmed inter-religious relationships?
- How has jealousy harmed the church’s ministry?
- Who has the church “cast out?”
- How can the church be the presence of God that hears the cries of the oppressed?
- In what ways can the church work for real liberation?

What do these texts do to you? How do you react to these texts? What feelings do these texts engender in you?

- Sorrow for Hagar and Ishmael
- Anger at Sarah and Abraham
- Empathy
- “Aha” story about interreligious conflict

What do you have to say to these texts?

- In many ways, this story explains a lot
- The families in the faith origin stories are just like every other family
- I wonder how Hagar would tell these stories
- I wonder how Sarah would tell these stories
- I wonder how Ishmael would tell these stories
- Is this a “making sense out of human experience” story?

What do you see through these texts from the story itself?

- Jealousy plays out in awful ways with awful results
- God works God’s ways, in spite of human failings
- God’s relationships are not subject to human boundaries
- God is known by names beyond the names we may have for God

What do you see from within your church/community/world? (2024)

- The church has too often been in the role of Sarah – hoarding the promises of God
- The church has too often been in the role of Abraham – manipulating the promises of God
- The “us and them” mentality is tearing us apart
- Invites us to consider whose voices need to be “decentered” and whose voices need to be “centered” in church/community/country/world today
- Crises of today
 - War between Israel and Hamas
 - Slavery
 - Human trafficking
 - Bodily autonomy
 - Women and children bear the brunt of forced displacement
 - Young people harmed / cast off by families (including the church) particularly 2SLGBTQ+

What do you see within yourself?

- Mirror – when have I been Sarah?
- Mirror – when have I been Hagar?
- Mirror – when have I been Ishmael?
- When have I not wanted God’s blessings to fall upon someone else?

What is the context – textual and historical?

- Follows the [cutting of the covenant](#)
- An “in between” story
 - Set amid the birth of [Isaac narrative](#)
 - Precedes the [command to sacrifice Isaac](#)

What questions do these texts raise for you?

- How could you, Sarah?
- How could you, Abraham?
- How could you let this happen, God?
- When do we question if God’s promises are big enough for others?
- What were the boys told about each other as children and as they grew up?
- What happened to the relationship between these half-brothers?
- What was Ishmael told about his father as he grew up?
- When is bread and water enough? When is it not?
- What does it mean to receive a blessing?
- What does it mean to be set free?
- How does this family narrative, in all of its complexity, still “live” today?

What words/themes seem of particular import?

- [Genesis 16](#)
 - Listened
 - Took and gave
 - Conceived
 - Contempt
 - Dealt harshly
 - Ran away
 - Found
 - Return
 - I will greatly multiply
 - El-roi
- [Genesis 21:8-21](#)
 - Cast out
 - Inherit
 - Distressing
 - I will make a nation of him *also*
 - Bread and water
 - Wandered
 - Cry of Hagar
 - God hears; God promises
 - With – holy “withness” of God

What is the Gospel / transforming Good News within these texts?

- God finds
- God blesses

- God hears
- God answers
- God promises
- God is with
- God sets free
- God's vision is greater than our own

What is the as-over-againstness of these texts?

- We try to manipulate God
- We get jealous of others whom God loves
- We get in the way of God's promises
- We hoard God's promises
- We cast others out and away from God's promises
- We try to decide who can "inherit" and who cannot
- The wilderness wanderings are real
- Bread and water are not much sustenance upon which to survive in the wilderness

Who do these texts say that Jesus is, or if not Jesus, then who do these texts say that God is? What do these texts say about God?

- God makes a way
- God sees
- God sets free
- God hears
- God cares
- God responds
- God's embrace is wider than we can imagine

What have others said about this text [Genesis 21:8-21](#)?

- ["For the second time in her life.](#) Hagar is visited by God (or an angel of God; often in Genesis the line between the two is blurred). "And God heard the voice of the lad" (21:17). In Hebrew, the first few syllables of this verse are the name "Ishmael" — "God heard". And it is the only time in the whole story that Ishmael's name appears, as if to emphasize the meaning of that name — God hears. God hears the cries of the outcast and abandoned. God hears and has compassion." Working Preacher Commentary on Genesis 21:8-21, by Kathryn M. Schifferdecker
- ["Through the story of Ishmael,](#) we know that no matter how we are treated by others, no matter how uncertain our future may look, no matter how hopeless things may seem- God hears." Theological Stew, "Abraham 3- Hagar and Ishmael in the Desert- I See You," by Linda Pepe
- ["Ishmael, the heir of Islam,](#) cousin to Jews and Christians (all three trace their ancestry to Abraham), bears a name that signals a promise to every human being. God is not deaf, dumb or blind. He is not implacable, impersonal, or impassible, without feeling or emotion." "Ishmael: God Hears and Sees," by Daniel Clendenin

What will I teach or proclaim?

- God sees, God hears, and God frees you
- God's promises are expansive
- God's blessings cannot be limited or confined to human boundaries
- God is with you
- God calls us to see, hear, and act to relieve suffering

- The promises of God are for greater than we can imagine
- The church is called to be the voice of God – and embodiment of God – responding to human suffering today
- The church is called to see, called to hear, called to set free, called to help

