

Hagar – God Sees and Sets Free

A midrash-style monologue from

Promises at the Crossroads of History and Hope, a series for worship, preaching, and teaching

This monologue is intended to be shared as a first-person story. Costuming is not necessary or essential, but may be utilized should a given context believe it helpful to the interpretation of the story. It is written as poetic prose. The line and paragraph breaks may help the performer understand the nuance and perspective intended in the script.

To be seen

Can be a terrible thing.

To be seen

Can be a beautiful thing.

I have known both ways of seeing,

And I am here to tell you my story.

I am Hagar –

Mother of Ishmael,

Grandmother of 12 princes,

Egyptian by birth,

Property of Abraham,

Slave of Sarah,

Receiver of a divine promise,

Set free from bondage,

And the only person

In the Hebrew Bible

To give God a name.

Mine is a story

That is wrapped up

In other stories.

So much so that

Often,

I am forgotten,

Not considered important,

A minor character

In a holy

And divine drama.

Often,

No one gives much thought

To who I was,

What my life was like,

The hand that was dealt to me –

And the role that I played.

But my story is holy, too.

*My story
Tells you something about God, too.
My story is essential
To understanding
Both
What was
And
What is.*

*So,
Where to begin?*

*I will begin when trouble arrived in Egypt.
Trouble because of a famine,
Trouble in a man and a woman.*

*Abraham and Sarah –
Then they were called
Abram and Sarai –
Came to Egypt
When the rains stopped falling
And the crops in Negeb refused to grow.*

*Abram and Sarai,
This man and this woman -
They sought to live there,
In my beautiful country –
What you call the cradle of civilization –
Until the famine passed.
Many people did that,
Not just at that time,
But at other times, too.
When food was scarce,
And survival depended upon
Those who had grain,
Egypt became the place of survival --
And salvation.
And so, Abram and Sarai came
Seeking to be saved
From starvation
And death.*

*But this Abram –
He was a coward –*

*He came begging
For a home and for food,
But he was afraid.
He was afraid of the Pharaoh
He was afraid of what might happen to him,
He was afraid for his life,
This foreigner in a strange land.
And so, he convinced Sarai,
His wife,
To pretend to be his sister
So that it would go well with him,
So that no harm would come near him.
Have you ever heard of such a thing?
Such things were not done in my land.*

*But they were done by Abram –
And by Sarai, too.
You see,
Sarai was very beautiful,
and Abram was afraid
that if the Pharaoh knew
that she was his wife,
Abram would be killed
and Sarai would be taken
into the Pharaoh's household
to be one of the Pharaoh's many wives.
To save his own neck,
Abram plotted to just give Sarai away.*

*Their plan worked,
And the Pharaoh –
The most powerful man in all Egypt,
In all the world –
Took Sarai as his own,
To live as his wife,
And in gratitude,
Pharaoh gave to Abram
Sheep and oxen,
Donkeys and camels,
And slaves –
Both men and women,
Including me.*

Such things may have pleased Abram,

*But such things did not please the LORD.
 The LORD afflicted Pharaoh's entire household with plagues,
 And when Pharaoh figured out what Abram had done,
 He sent Abram
 And his entire household from Egypt,
 And I –
 Who was now a part of that household
 Was sent away, too.*

*I was sent away with foreigners.
 I was sent from my homeland.
 I was sent away from my history
 With no hope for what was to come.*

*There could have been other tasks assigned to me,
 But Abram put me under Sarai's authority.
 I became what you might call
 A house-slave.
 It was hard, never-ending work,
 But to begin with,
 Sarai was kind.
 She treated me fairly,
 Until she began to age,
 Until her monthlies ended
 And it ceased to be with her after the manner of women.
 Oh, how Sarai wept in those days.
 She grieved for the children she never had.
 She grieved over her aging body,
 She grieved over the land that had once been home,
 And she grieved the day
 That God had spoken to her husband
 And promised him sons.*

*In Sarai's grief,
 She grew impatient.
 The more impatient she grew,
 The more fearful she became.
 She told me that they had left everything
 Because God had promised –
 Land
 Descendants
 Blessing,
 She said –
 That was the promise of God,*

*But how could it be?
How could any of it be true,
For the days when she could have carried a child
Were over.*

*To begin with,
I listened to her laments.
I dried her tears.
I held her when she woke in agony in the middle of the night.
And then one day,
After a long and sorrow-filled night,
Sarai looked at me
As if seeing me for the first time.
“You,”
She said.
“You will carry
And labor for my child.
And when the labor is done,
The child will be delivered for me,”
she said.
“That is how it is among us.
As my slave,
Any child of yours, would be a child of mine.”
You, Hagar –
Right here in front of me –
You are the answer.
Perhaps you are the reason we went to Egypt.
Perhaps you were God’s plan all along.
Yes, Hagar, you will carry the child
That shall be my child.”*

*As she spoke, a knot began to form in my stomach.
Abram was an old man.
He was not my husband.
I was his property,
And while I knew that such things happened
With masters and slaves,
I knew that he could do whatever he wanted –
It felt unthinkable.
“Please, God, no,”
I begged in my heart.*

*But Sarai could be as cunning as Abram,
And she who had once been convinced*

*To go along with Abram's scheme,
Now convinced Abram to go along with hers.*

*I was but a slave.
I had no power.
No voice.
I did as I was told –
And I gritted my teeth when I was taken --
Or my life would have ended.*

*And after,
Sarai changed.
She forgot that I bore her laments.
She forgot that I had dried her tears.
She forgot about all those nights I held her in her sorrows.*

*As Sarai saw my belly grow,
all kindness evaporated.
She looked upon me with malice and hatred in her heart.*

*Did I look with pride back at her?
Did I caress my belly in a way
That stirred her anger
And reminded her of her emptiness?
Did I sense my station rise,
Even as Sarai's station diminished
In Abram's eyes?*

*Perhaps.
Perhaps not.
Maybe.*

*Regardless,
Sarai turned all of our grief,
All of her sorrow,
All of her rage,
All of her anger upon me.
She,
Who had forced me upon her husband
So that I would bear his child –
Her child --
She turned her fury upon me.
And Abram?
He shrugged his shoulders*

And told her she could do whatever she wanted.

*And so, I fled.
Bruised and broken,
Beaten and battered,
I fled.*

*In that household,
It didn't seem to matter what one did:
Do as you are not told,
And you suffer.
Do as you are told,
And you suffer.*

*When I couldn't take it any longer,
I ran away.
I would rather die in the wilderness
Than continue to be seen by Sarai,
And in being seen,
Bear the brunt of her wrath.*

*I thought that the wilderness would be my end,
But –
How do you say –
In the wilderness, everything changed.
It is still hard for me to describe it to this day.
In the wilderness,
God saw me.
God found me there.
God spoke to me.
And God made me a promise.*

*Did you know that?
You know that God made promises
To Abram and Sarai,
But did you know that God made a promise to me, too?
And my promise,
It was not that different from Abram's.
God told me that
God would give me many offspring,
Many descendants –
So many, God said,
That no one would be able to count them!*

*Since going to Abram's household,
I had heard that God promised Abram descendants –
And now God promised the same to me.
Maybe I was indeed supposed to be
Abram's wife after all!*

And then God said something else:

"Return,"

God said.

"Go back to Sarai,"

God said.

"Submit to her,"

God said.

And so I did –

With Ishmael growing in my belly,

And God's promise in my heart,

I went back,

Back to Sarai,

Back to Abram,

Back to my child's father.

And I did something else that day.

I gave God a name.

I called God,

El-Roi –

God who sees –

Because in my distress,

God saw me,

And it was beautiful.

To be seen by God –

What a gift,

What a gift!

When my son was born,

Abram was so happy!

Oh, the feast that was spread,

Oh, the joy that he knew.

Finally, he was a father!

Finally, he thought,

God's promises were moving toward fulfillment!

What joy!

He named our boy,

Ishmael –

God hears –

*Just as God had told me that he should be named.
At the time,
I'm sure that Abram thought that he was naming our son
After his own answered prayers.
In time,
I would come to learn that Ishmael
Was named for himself
And the God who would hear his cries
In the valley of the shadow of death.*

*Ishmael will tell you
That part of our story,
But let me tell you a little.*

*As time passed,
It became apparent that I had been mistaken.
I was not the wife of the promise.
I was not to be the mother of the nations
That God had spoken about
In God's covenant with Abraham.
That role was for Sarah.
It was miraculous that she,
Who had been barren,
Became pregnant in her old age.
Everyone laughed-
Was it with her, or at her?
You can answer that for yourself.
What would you have thought
About this old woman bearing a child?*

*But anyway,
Once Isaac was born,
Sarah's old, bitter spirit
Did not dissipate at all
When it came to Ishmael and me.
She would no longer tolerate us
In her household.
What a sorrowful day it was
When Abraham –
The father of my Ishmael
Who loved his son –
Sent us out into the wilderness
With nothing but bread and water.
Did he hope that God would find us there?*

*Did he hope that the God of promise
 Would not leave our bones
 To become desert sand?
 I want to believe that it is so,
 For he loved my son,
 And my son loved his father Abraham.
 But,
 I do not know.*

*What I do know
 Is that to be seen by the living God
 Is a beautiful thing.
 What I do know
 Is that Abraham kicked us out,
 But God set us free.
 What I do know
 Is that it is that
 At the crossroads of history and hope
 The promises of God
 Define my story.
 I suspect that the same may be true for you.*

*I imagine that others
 Will tell you of the same things
 In a different way,
 But isn't that the way of things?
 Our stories are our own –
 Lived, remembered, and told
 Through who we each are becoming.
 I hope you receive my story as gift.
 May it help you know the God who sees and sets free.*

