

Depth of our Need

Hagar's Story
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God never adjusts His commands to fit the customs of nations, no matter how deeply ingrained they are. Furthermore, His immutable standards prove right every time—and for each party involved. A perfect Bible example is Hagar. An old Assyrian marriage contract included this instruction: *“If within two years she (the wife) has not procured offspring for him (the husband), only she may buy a maid-servant and even later on, after she procures somehow an infant for him, she may sell whatever she pleases.”*

Hagar's personal rights and choices were never figured into Sarai and Abram's alternative plan. Hagar was just a “servant,” a “her,” a “she.” Surely the intensity of Hagar's aloneness was almost unbearable. She never expected to encounter Yahweh herself. Don't you suppose she assumed Yahweh was Abram and Sarai's God? Not an Egyptian maidservant's. No, Hagar wasn't looking for God. God was looking for Hagar. As Hagar ran from the wrath of her mistress, she had a personal encounter with God.

God said, “Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?” “I'm running away from my mistress Sarai,” she answered. Then the angel of the LORD told her, “Go back to your mistress and submit to her.” The angel added, “I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count.” The angel of the LORD also said to her: “You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery. 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.”

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”* (Genesis 16:8-13, NIV). Yahweh called Hagar's baby by name and prophesied over him. Ishmael means God has noticed your humiliation. In the same way, God notices YOU, even when you bring humiliation upon yourself.

The Lord knew that the Ishmaelites would exist as surely as the Israelites. Then something happens in this passage that is unparalleled in Scripture. Hagar gave God a name. No other character in the Old Testament, male or female, ever does such a thing. Only Hagar, the Egyptian maidservant. She calls Him, El Roi, the God who sees.

God sees when no one cares to look. He sees through the smile we wear when we're dying inside. He sees our hurt when we're mistreated. He sees us when we cry into our pillow because we feel unloved. **He sees beyond into the depth of our need.** He sees when we are hiding. Running. He sees when we continue to sow the seed of His Word even in the floodplain of our grief.

Sometimes we don't realize we've encountered God until our vision clears. Maybe that's what seeing His back means. After all, He is the God who sees YOU.

Beth Moore, The Patriarchs. Nashville, Tennessee: LifeWay Press, 2005, pp. 36-37.