

READ

Genesis 16

REFLECT

Some parts of scripture are beautiful and hope filled; others are hard, so hard we wonder how good news could ever be found in them. Genesis 16 is the later. It begins with a very unglamorous introduction of Hagar, Sarai's servant given to Abram as a second wife because Sarai was upset that she didn't have any children. It's hard not to feel for Hagar. She assigned to be Sarai's servant during their stay in Egypt but was whisked away when Sarai and Abram's deception was discovered, and so she was forced to move to a new land with Abram and Sarai. Then she was given to Abram to be his wife with no say in the matter. And, finally, she was abused because Sarai, who'd given her to Abram for the express purpose of giving him children, was jealous that she'd fulfilled her duty. Her story is a hard one to hear (and it will only get harder later in Genesis).

Despite that difficulty, good news is present in her story, even knowing that things will continue to be hard for her. Hagar, understandably, ran away after experiencing Sarai's abuse. She was in a strange land, pregnant and alone. Hope seemed lost, but God saw her and refused to let her go. An angel met her in the desert and told her to go back. While she'd have to deal with the abuse for a little while longer, she was given a promise – the very same promise God made to Abram, of children so numerous they can't be counted. This promise was (and is) good news for a myriad of reasons: it was assurance that the difficulty she was facing wouldn't be her undoing, it was a promise of a huge progeny (which was of huge importance in that time), and it assured her that she had been claimed by God. She took this promise to heart and gave God a name of her own, "El Roi," meaning, "the God who sees me." The well at that location would go on to carry the significance of the meeting, called "the well of the God who sees me." In hard times we, too, can remember that God sees us, and not only does God see us, but God has made promises to us that will not be forgotten. While our future may also be difficult, God's presence and promise goes with us.

REACT

- When you encounter difficult stories in the Bible, how do you react? Do you try and quickly move on, looking for something easier? Or do you seek to understand it better?
- Hagar wouldn't have had any say in whether she married Abram or not; she was commanded to, therefore she had to. It sounds awful to our ears, but we have to remember that the ancient world was very different than ours, and thus shouldn't be judged by the norms by which we operate. Though you don't have to like it, how might you seek to understand Abram receiving a second wife who wasn't given agency in the matter?
- Hagar was given the same promise as Abram, which is an oft overlooked, but revolutionary, thing to have happened. Hagar was a female slave from a foreign place. These facts worked against her in every conceivable way. But God still saw her, and not only did God see her, God chose to claim her life and give her the same thing as the very faithful Abram. If God will break rules of what's socially acceptable to love the people made in God's image, how might we take God's cue to be more loving and seek the justice God demands?

RESPOND

See as God sees: Hagar called God "El Roi," which means "The God who sees me." We trust that God sees all of us, though we aren't always so good at seeing each other. Take time this week to drive down a street you'd normally avoid or a neighborhood which has a bad reputation. Take in what you see. What are the needs? What's going well? How might you move from the preformed ideas you had before your sojourn and the quick judgements you make in your brief visit and find out the deeper issues facing the people of that area. How can you be a partner for their flourishing? How can you show God's love?