

Let Freedom Ring
Read Genesis 16

The Egyptian slave Hagar could find no way of resolving the situation. No one saw that her circumstances were horrendous. Not a one heard her unbearable groaning. She was alone without anyone to provide for her wellbeing. Thus, for the slave-girl, there was only one pathway to freedom—flight.

The flight of the slave-girl was prompted by an ill-advised decision made by Abraham and the childless Sarah. It was not that they were faithless, for they believed God's promise of a son. Years were passing, however, and they were aging without the hoped-for offspring. Sarah may have concluded that the child promised to Abraham was not to be biologically hers. Perhaps she hoped that her slave could be used to satisfy the pledge committed by God. Sarah's rash decision to insist that her husband take her slave to bed, unthinkable by current standards, was as common in her day as the use of a surrogate mother is today.

As a result of the union between Abraham and Hagar, the slave-girl conceived, disharmony erupted, and Abraham was saddled with a domestic quagmire. According to Genesis 16, Hagar instigated the hostility between her and Sarah, but Sarah contributed to the inevitable rift. When Sarah's slave "saw that she was pregnant," Sarah became worthless in Hagar's "eyes" (Gen. 16:4). Perhaps Hagar haughtily strutted, preened, or even disobeyed. Whatever happened, Sarah vehemently accused Abraham of culpability, declaring, "Now that Hagar sees that she is pregnant, I have become worthless in her eyes" (v. 5). Abraham, striving to extract himself from the dispute, unknowingly placed Hagar in jeopardy. He gave Sarah the authority to do to her slave whatever seemed good in her "eyes" (v. 6). Agonizing oppression was heaped upon Hagar. Her only option, in her perception, was to flee.

The repetition of words that have to do with seeing, such as "saw" and "eyes," prepares us for the next scene in the narrative. When Hagar ran away from Sarah who had been "afflicting her," she arrived at what was called in Old Testament times the "eye of a spring" (v. 7). The angel of the LORD who met her there had heartening and disheartening news for the young, pregnant woman. The angel informed her that through the child that she would bear would come many descendants. This was good news. On the other hand, she was directed to return to her mistress to permit herself to "be afflicted under her hand" (v. 9). Hagar was about to learn that freedom would not be gained by fleeing an intolerable situation.

Instead of a license to flee, the angel presented Hagar with another option. The angel instructed Hagar that she was to name the babe she carried "God hears" (Ishmael) when he was born. Thus, every time she called Ishmael's name, she would be reminded that "the LORD has heard" of her affliction (v. 11). The climax of the story, however, arrives with the continued duplication of words having to do with seeing, as though the author of the narrative has been preparing the reader for this moment. Hagar, having received a name for her son, proceeded to give "the LORD who spoke to her" a name. She named Him, "You are a God Who Sees" (v. 13). And, according to Scripture, whenever God "sees," He provides.

Additionally, Hagar gave a name to the "eye of the spring." The name would become permanent--a memorial of God's presence in the life of a lone slave-girl. She named the

place “Well of the Living One Who Sees Me” (v. 13). Hence, it may have been that each time Hagar would take a drink from a spring, she would remember, “God ‘sees me.’”

For Hagar, flight was no longer an option. Yet, though her circumstances were undesirable, she was not alone. There was One who had promised to provide for her. He heard her. He saw her. Perhaps, for Hagar, this knowledge had the ring of freedom.