

## Hagar: African Foremother and Biblical Matriarch

**Afolarin Olutunde Ojewole, Ph.D.**

Department of Religious Studies  
Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo  
Ogun State, Nigeria

### Abstract

*At least twenty-nine (29) women are mentioned by name in the book of Genesis. These biblical matriarchs were not primitive, childish, and lacking in vision, but many of them were learned, wise, and highly spiritually-developed. An African foremother among this group is Hagar, the Egyptian. Hagar is not a “throw-away” character in any way. God did not abandon her, but spoke with her one-on-one. She recorded a lot of “firsts” in biblical corpus. She overcame numerous cultural obstacles. As a surrogate mother, she had a part in the divine plan and secured a strong future for her offspring. She mothered nations and birthed a world religion. Her indefatigable enviable spirit is a lesson for African women today. This African foremother demonstrates the inalienably high-status God places on the female gender.*

**Keywords:** Hagar; Ishmael; Matriarch; Foremother; Surrogate Mother; Firstborn; Wilderness; Angel of the Lord; Abraham; Sarah.

### Introduction

“In the patriarchal narratives, male and female slaves are frequently listed along with domesticated animals as an indication of personal wealth and divine blessing” (Schultz, 1997: 1185). Hagar was the name given to the Egyptian slave girl owned by Sarah and most likely acquired by Abraham during his sojourn in Egypt some ten (10) years before (Gen 12:20) the events of Genesis 16 (Smith, 1993). She might have been the dowry paid by the Pharaoh of Egypt when he confiscated Sarah from Abraham in order to marry her (Gen 12:16; Gen. Rab. 45.1). Upon receiving God’s rebuke, the Pharaoh returned Sarah to Abraham and greatly enriched him with possessions including Hagar, who might have been a princess herself. (Mathews, 2007; Paschall & Hobbs, 1972). Islamic tradition has it that she was given in order to appease Abraham’s God (Bukhari, 1981; Tabari, 1987).

Within the first ten (10) years that Hagar lived with Abraham and Sarah, she would have come to share their monotheistic faith in one true God. God attested to Abraham’s success in teaching his household in the way of Yahweh: “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him” (Gen 18:19).

Hagar was a religious, God-knowing, strong black woman, a survivor par excellence. Her significance has been widely celebrated (Darr, 1991; Exum, 1993; Gordon, 1985; Teubal, 1990; Waters, 1991; Weems, 1988; Wiesel, 1986). Hagar’s story is that of use, abuse, repression, affliction, abandonment, rejection, absconding, and wilderness (Shelly, 1993; Tribble, 1984). She became “more highly honored in some respects than almost any other figure in the Bible” (Dennis, 1994, p. 176).

### Word Study

The name “Hagar” appears twelve (12) times in the book of Genesis (16:1, 3, 4, 8, 15[2x], 16; 21:9, 14, 17[2x]; 25:12). Apostle Paul used it two (2) times, as typology, when arguing against Galatian Judaizers (Gal 4:24-25; Mathews, 2000; Mathews 2007). Her name is “Hajjar” in Arabic and in the Islamic tradition (Bukhari, 1981). The name “Hagar” is Semitic rather than Egyptian and it means “flight” (Wood & Marshall, 1996, p. 439). Agar (a’-gar) is to be understood as “Hagar,” from the root word, “to flee,” meaning “flight, fugitive, immigrant, and sojourner” (Smith & Cornwall, 1998, p. 8). The term used to describe the status of Hagar in Abram’s household seven (7) times is “maid,” *šifhâ* (Gen 16:1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8; 25:12); and it is used a total of twenty-eight (28) times in the book of Genesis.

It consistently referred, in this book, to a woman whom a wife offers to her husband to legitimately bear children in her stead. It is used in connection with surrogate motherhood for Abraham and Sarah and for Jacob and his two wives, Leah and Rachael. It is different from, not interchangeable with, and not synonymous to the term *ʿāmâ* which is rendered “female slave” or “female servant” (Bird, 1997). In the book of Genesis, when such women are not needed (or used) to bear children for their masters and mistresses, they are only referred to as *ʿāmâ* “female slave/servant.” When Hagar’s fortune changed and she was to be sent away, she was intentionally reduced to and addressed merely as *ʿāmâ* “female slave/servant” (Gen 21:10, 12, 13). Similar situation is also provided for in the Code of Hammurabi (Reyburn & Fry, 1997).

It is noteworthy that Hagar’s status was summarily adjusted by Sarah herself when Sarah “gave her to her husband Abram to be his *ʾiššâ*” (“woman, wife,” Gen 16:3). Hagar does not become Abram’s concubine or harlot, but his wife (Bird, 1997). The name Ishmael means “God hears” or “may God hear” (Biblical Studies Press, 2006; Gen 16:11). God had expressed that He saw Hagar’s affliction and heard her painful anguished groans (Gen 16:11). A wordplay is evident between God’s statement to Hagar and the name He gives to her unborn son: Ishmael’s name will constantly remind Hagar that God is attentive to her agonizing cries.

### ***Seed and Surrogate Motherhood***

As prosperous as Abraham had become, he was yet to possess either the land or children promised by God. Childlessness has been considered a stigma, disgrace, humiliation, curse in many cultures. Such barren women could be taunted by others or even sent back to their parents as childless widows (Niditch, 1992). The stakes and tensions were high and the pressures often unbearable. The barren wife could either provide a surrogate or the husband would provide a concubine for same purpose of child rearing. Hence, both polygamy and concubinage were not uncommon (Neufeld, 1944).

This issue would have been a serious concern for the entire household of Abraham and Sarah. Hagar may have been desirous of playing the role of surrogate mother in helping God fulfill His Promise to her master. Hagar must have distinguished herself in Abraham’s household enough for her to have been the chosen one by desperate Sarah, out of the many household maidservants and slaves, to bear seed for the couple. In this gracious surrender for surrogacy, this supposed “virgin” Hagar was a type of virgin Mary. Mary’s giving birth to Jesus was an example of surrogacy (Gotz, 1989). Further parallels are observable between them in the naming-annunciation of their first-born sons in Genesis 16:8-12 and Luke 1:28-32. They share these components: greeting or form of address (Gen 16:8; Luke 1:28); the exclamation “Behold” (Gen 16:11; Luke 1:31); announcement of pregnancy and birth of a son (Gen 16:11; Luke 1:31); name of the son and its meaning (Gen 16:11; Luke 1:30b, 31b); and the future of the child (Gen 16:12; Luke 1:32; Reyburn & Fry, 1997).

In contrast to her barren mistress, Sarah, Hagar was filled with fruit, such that she became pregnant with Ishmael very quickly. Sarah who resided in a fertile land was barren, while Hagar who was shoved to the barren wasteland was fertile. As a surrogate mother for Sarah’s son, Hagar put her life on the line. This was heightened by the unfortunate reality of the high risk of death of child bearing women in ancient times. Unfortunately, as a slave girl, she had no choice or control over the usage of her own womb (Bailey, 2002). The resultant jealousy from Sarah became unbearable to Hagar (Knowles, 2001). It is unfortunate that Abraham refused to protect this princess-bearer of his seed from such maltreatment. Her servitude turned so sour until she sought refuge through flight and exile (Thompson, 1997). It is apparent that Abraham, Hagar’s “husband,” violated the biblical law of treating a slave-turned-wife well and providing for her needs (Exod 21:7-11; Deut 21:10-14). However, Abraham might have followed common Mesopotamian law (particularly the Code of Hammurabi) in that regard (Weber, 1999), coupled with the divine concession (Gen 21:12-14).

In order to regulate the common use of slaves and concubines as surrogate mothers, several detailed legislations were promulgated to safeguard the rights of those involved, most especially, the wife and the surrogate. For instance, the wife was to remain pre-eminent in the home, the surrogate could not be maltreated, and the baby was owned in perpetuity by the wife. Such were found in the ancient law code of Hammurabi (ca. 1792-1750 BCE) and other laws attested in tablets from Ur and Nuzi. The surrogate’s motivation could be financial or just the vicarious desire to graciously help couples to become parents (Frymer-Kensky, 1981; Hackett, 1989; Smith, 1993; Wood & Marshall, 1996).

***Hagar, the Indefatigable Bearer of Abram's Firstborn***

The Mosaic law is clear on the status of Hagar as the bearer of Abram's firstborn: If a man has two wives, and he loves one but not the other, and both bear him sons but the firstborn is the son of the wife he does not love,<sup>16</sup> when he wills his property to his sons, he must not give the rights of the firstborn to the son of the wife he loves in preference to his actual firstborn, the son of the wife he does not love.<sup>17</sup> He must acknowledge the son of his unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double share of all he has. That son is the first sign of his father's strength. The right of the firstborn belongs to him (Deut 21:15-17).

According to Nuzi law, Hagar's child, Ishmael, legally belonged to Sarah and natural son, Isaac, would be given the right of the firstborn (Weber, 1999). Hagar should not be blamed for rejecting this arrangement because she was a strong African woman who was already pronounced as wife ʾiššā of Abram by Sarah herself (Gen 16:3).

Categorical mention is made three (3) times in Genesis 16:15-16 that this first child borne to Abram by Hagar belonged to Abram. The name of Hagar was mentioned three (3) times, the name of Abram four (4) times, while reference to the son was made four (4) times in these two critical verses. In it worthy of note that the giving of the name to this child was actually done by Hagar even though this text gives Abram the credit. Hagar must have prevailed on Abram to name the child, Ishmael, even though it was Hagar who received the name directly from God, rather than Abram (Gen 16:11). This also proves Abram's acceptance of the revealed divine plan for Ishmael (Gen 16:10-12). This clearly puts Hagar over Sarah, whose son was solely named by Abraham without her obvious participation (Gen 21:3). Nevertheless, Hagar knew that she must fight for this unusual claim to firstborn inheritance claims for her son, Ishmael, which were not automatic (Gen 25:4-6; Mathews, 2007).

Ishmael began his life in Genesis 16, with so many uncertainties hanging over his innocent head as the "other child." By Genesis 21, the text refuses to call him by his God-given name because things had deteriorated in the household in the fourteen (14) years since his birth (Gen 16:16; 21:5). His identity is reduced to "the son of Hagar the Egyptian" (Gen 21:9); Abraham's "son" (Gen 21:11); "the son of the bondwoman" (Gen 21:10 twice, 13), or simply "the child/boy/lad" (Gen 21:12, 14, 15, 16, 17 twice, 18, 19, 20). The African child was a victim of the anger, jealousy, intrigues, afflictions, inhumanity, malfeasance, neglect, scheming, and promises of others (Roop, 1987). It took a strong African woman to attempt to stabilize the traumatized African kid. Hagar was up to the task and more. The angel commanded her: "hold him in your hand" (Gen 21:18). She did. Aply and victoriously. "The blessed mother and child" (Niditch, 1992, p, 18). She earned her place as a legacy-building protective African matriarch.

***Hagar, the Wilderness Explorer, Survivor, and Protector***

When Abraham sent her away, southwards, towards Shur on the familiar road to Egypt (Gen 16:7), she apparently got lost, though an Egyptian (Gen 21:14). This has severe and deadly implication in the desert. Hence, her deliverance was supernatural (Weber, 1999). Hagar left virtually empty-handed along with disinherited Ishmael, having limited bread and water from Abraham, for the journey into the unknown wilderness (Jamieson, 1997). Ishmael got neither consolation prize nor wealth inheritance from his father Abraham. Hagar made Ishmael to become something from nothing. She must be hailed. The story line places the son closer to the mother more than father. Ishmael and all other rival offspring were "sent" *šālah* to the "east" *qēdēmā*, *qedem* (Gen 21:14; 25:6), an imagery reminiscent of the expulsion from Eden and banishing of Cain (Gen 3:23-24; 4:16). Hagar was a poor "divorced" lost wanderer with nothing in her hand but unbeatable strength of character and determination to build a nation through her prowess. Her only possession and life investment was her only son. Desert life offered them lessons of faith, trust, and discipline as they thrived in a hostile environment. They must have learned to listen to God more clearly and receive divine revelation, unimpeded by civilization and human rationalizations.

The life-threatening wilderness became the home to the rejected and dejected duo. However, the divine pledge of deliverance, posterity, and promise reversed their imminent death. The dry land, wilderness of Shur, the Sinai Peninsula desert became the place of divine encounter, refuge, and prosperity for them. It was close to Havilah (Gen 25:18), Red Sea (Exod 15:22) and the Mediterranean. In an eventual twist of fate, the Egyptians, Hagar's people, enslaved the descendants of Sarah (Exod 1:11-14; Negev, 1990). God is fond of training effective leaders in the wilderness, as evident in the stories of Israel's exodus from Egypt to the promised land, John the Baptist (Matt 3:1-2), and Jesus (Matt 4:1:11; 14:13; John 6:15; 11:54).

It is a place of refuge from affliction and oppression of people, as in Moses from the Pharaoh (Exod 2:15-3:1), Benjaminites from Israelites (Judg 20:47), David from Saul (1 Sam 23-26), David from Absalom (2 Sam. 15-17), Elijah from Jezebel (1 Kings 19:1-4; Brubacher, 2000). Hagar, the mother-protector, was relentlessly devoted to Ishmael (Fuchs, 1999). She joins the ranks of compassionate mothers like the Shunammite (2 Kings 4:8-37), the real mother in the story of Solomon's trial (1 Kings 3:16-28), Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah (2 Sam 21:10), and even surrogate mothers like that of Mephibosheth (2 Sam 4:4), to mention but a few. Hagar is sometimes set at contrast with Sarah's apparently selfish and vindictive concern for her only son, Isaac, which motivated her to cast Hagar and Ishmael away (Gen 21:9-10; Fuchs, 1999). The African mother is the most decisive and responsible party in giving birth to, interceding for, and preserving the life of her offspring. Thus, Hagar fights for her son, Ishmael, while the Bible is silent on the roles of some mothers at critical moments in the lives of their children. For example: Dinah's rape story makes no reference to Leah, her mother; Jephthah's daughter saga makes no mention of her mother; and Maacah, the mother of Tamar, is nonexistent in the story of Tamar's rape (Fuchs, 1999).

### ***Hagar Encounters and Speaks with and to God***

In a very patriarchal biblical text and tradition, the voice Hagar is heard by God in the wilderness and she is used to give hope to a near despondent couple: Abram and Sarah (Claassens, 2005). Barrenness seemed to have made Sarah to lose her voice culturally, relegating her to a lowly marginal position. In the biblical text, God never directly, but only indirectly, addresses her. However, Hagar was directly addressed by God alone. She had a unique conversation with the Almighty (Claassens, 2005; Fuch, 1999). God responds to weeping and tears of women in the Bible (Jer 31:15-17; Ezra 10:1; John 11:33-35; 20:11-16). Weeping gives a marginal unanswerable situation, devoid of suitable answer, a divine attention (Plessner, 1970).

Hagar's wilderness encounters with the divine Comforter occur twice in Genesis 16 and 21, bringing comforting words and directions. These are comparable to those of Prophet Elijah during his escape from Jezebel's wrath into the wilderness (1 Kings 19:2-8), and Apostle Paul during his shipwreck (Acts 27:23-24). These gracious visits are glimpses of divine condescension, omniscience, compassion, comfort, grace, pardon, and wisdom for humans. Angels also came and ministered to Jesus in His time of need (Benson, 2003). Hagar had a unique theophanic visit because the "Angel of the Lord" was a manifestation of God. She must have been divinely adjudged and accepted as someone possessing a godly disposition. Firstly, the Divine Visitor called her by name. She was noted by heaven even if earth rejected her. Hagar was sensitive to the voice of the Almighty. She was repentant and corrigible as she retracted to her humble servanthood. Great people serve others. She was truthful, making no effort to conceal her motivation for her flight to an unknown destination. Her integrity and boldness in admitting her runaway status was unprecedented and unusual for such runaway persons. She was bold enough to engage in this conversation without fear (Bailey, 1994).

God took the initiative in Hagar's celestial encounter. God asked her two age-less and relevant questions that reverberate down the millennial: "Where have you come from? Where are you going?" (Gen 16:8). These are the questions African mothers must confront and answer today (Paschall & Hobbs, 1972; Shelly, 1993). Hagar was a woman of courageous and deep faith. Her gratitude of faith made her to create a name for God, to His face (Gen 16:13). "Hagar is not calling on the name of God, she is naming God. She is the only person in the Bible who is recorded as having named God" (Shelly, 1993, p. 267). What boldness and courage! Hagar immediately obeyed the heavenly Messenger's prescription for preserving the fruit of her womb from danger. She is an epitome of the true spirit of preservation of African foremothers. It is in staying with the Abrahamic covenant that Hagar would be blessed with her own blessings. She had an important role to play in God's covenant plan as it unfolded in Abraham's household. She must keep fate with destiny by waiting until God was ready for the next chapter of her experience. Hagar complied victoriously (Smith, 1993).

She spared no efforts to protect her seed. She embraced precious divine promises for a glorious future and enough grace to surpass current frustrations. She cuddled divine encouragement and enlightenment concerning her son's future. She succeeded in securing a brilliant opportunity for him to be free from subservience to his brethren. Subsequently, Hagar taught Ismael to hold his own and hold his head above the waters while conquering every situation and opposition. Hagar was a heroic survivor. She found strength and dignity to leave an abusive situation (Bailey, 1994). She found the strength to cope and flourish in her circumstances after knowing that God sees and hears her. God gave the voiceless a powerful voice (O'Connor, 1997).

She demonstrated sterling strength, durability, initiative, energy, ingenuity, and creativity above her competition. She made so much out of so little. This made her “a pivotal figure in biblical theology” (Trible, 1985, p. 238). Though economically exploited, made a sex object and baby-making machine, a non-person expended to foster other people’s interests, Hagar maintained her personal poise. Matriarch Hagar was “a woman of dignity and value” (Meyer, 1992, p. 146). She was industrious, strong, hardworking, dutiful, beautiful, supportive, submissive, obedient, smart, and prayerful. She would not exchange her African pride and self-esteem for cheap alternatives. If she would not be a wife, she rejected being a slave for life. When she played second fiddle in Abram’s household, she did not settle for second class. It takes a hero to make one. She was a hero-maker who in turn made more heroes. She was a mother of a proud nation. Hagar left “a holy, god-laden legacy” (Meyer, 1992, p. 149).

### ***Salient Parallels between OT Patriarchs and Matriarch Hagar***

1. Hagar’s significance is shown in Genesis 16 by the repetition of her name seven (7) times in the narrative: six (6) times by the author in verses 1, 3, 4, 15 (twice), and 16; and once by God Himself in verse 8 (see also 21:17). The calling of her name by God denotes divine dignity bestowed on her, in view of the fact that Sarah and Abraham refer to her as “slave” (16:2b etc.).
2. Mother Eve was the first woman God addressed, though in a punishment context. Hagar is the notable second, wherein God offers encouragement, deliverance, and assurance of a victorious future. It is amazing that God bestowed such honor on the lowest of the low in her society (Thomas-Smith, 2008). While no human being ever spoke to her in the text, she won the personal admiration and conversation with God Himself (O’Connor, 1997).
3. The “Angel of the Lord” that appears to Hagar in Genesis 16:7-11 and Genesis 21: 17-19 is identified as Yahweh Himself. This is the first time in biblical history that God appeared to humanity since the expulsion from Eden. It ought to be significant that this divine appearance of Yahweh was to Hagar, a rejected African woman (Gen 21:17; Davidson, 2002).
4. Furthermore, “only two times does the Hebrew Bible describe an angelic messenger ‘calling from heaven’ directly to a human recipient—here in 21:17 and in the account of Abraham’s trial on Mt. Moriah (22:11-12)” (Davidson, 2007, pp.228-229).
5. The Angel mentions Hagar’s pregnancy and names the child (Gen 16:11-12). Similarly, God announces Isaac’s birth and names the child (Gen 17:19). This standard birth-naming annunciation reflects those of Isaiah 8:3; Hosea 1:3-4, 6, 9; and Luke 1:13. However, Hagar is the first female recipient of such annunciation in biblical record.
6. The promise of descendants given to Hagar is similar to that given to Abraham: “I will also greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude” (Gen 16:10; cf. 22:17).
7. The announcement made to Hagar in Genesis 16 was also a covenant, similar to the covenants in Genesis 15 and 17. This was “the only time a covenantal-type promise is announced to a woman” (Davidson, 2007, p.229). “Genesis 16 functions as an example of the far-reaching effect of the covenant between God and Abram in Chapter 15. . . This covenant is fulfilled in Genesis 16 through Hagar. . . Abram . . . will be blessed with countless descendants—including those of Ishmael” (Drey, 2002, p. 195).
8. The Genesis 16:7-15 birth narrative is an apparent female counterpart to the covenant relationship (Jarrell, 2002).
9. Genesis 16:11 is similar to the Immanuel prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 and Jesus’ birth announcement to Mary in Luke 1:31-33.
10. While God must have given name to the first human being, Adam, the text does not record the naming. However, Ishmael, Hagar’s son was the first divine naming annunciation, being the first person that God directly gave a name in the biblical text.
11. Hagar is the only human being in the Bible to give God a name: “So she named the LORD who spoke to her, ‘You are El-roi’” (Gen 16:13). She is also the only human being who used that name “El-Roi” (Gen 16:13a) to call God in the Bible. “It is Hagar’s name for God, and Hagar’s alone. It arises out of, and speaks eloquently of, her own private encounter with him” (Dennis, 1994, p. 71). “This passage employs the usual naming formula used for naming individuals in the Bible” (Davidson, 2007, p. 229).
12. Hagar was the first human being to initiate the tradition of memorializing each divine manifestation with a new name for God (Smith, 1993).

13. Hagar was also the first female to give a name to a place of divine visitation. She gave the appellation “Beer-lahai-roi—the well of the one who lives and sees” to the well (Smith, 1993).
14. God’s promise of making Ishmael a great nation (Gen 21:18) uses language parallel to the covenant promises to Abraham (22:18).
15. Several parallels are noted between Hagar’s experience and Abraham’s trial on Mt. Moriah. (See Nakaido, 2001, pp. 221-229).
  - Both stories begin with exactly the same statement: “So Abraham rose early in the morning” (Gen 21:14; 22:3).
  - Abraham is described in both stories as “taking” items needed for a journey and “putting/laying” them on Hagar/Isaac (Gen 21:14; 22:3-6)
  - “Both culminate with a journey to a desolate place where the child’s life is threatened but spared through divine intervention” (Nikaido, 2001, p. 223).
  - The call of the angelic messenger is central to both narratives (Gen 21:17-18; 22:11-18).
  - Both used the similar language of “seeing” God’s provision for their immediate needs: “God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water” (Gen 21:19); “Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns” (Gen 22:13).
  - Both stories include a naming speech (Gen 16:14; 22:14).
16. The travail and deliverance of Hagar has intertextual echoes, lexical correspondences, and thematic parallels with the theophany and deliverance of Moses and Israel in the Exodus. This makes Hagar a “prototype” of Israel (Reis, 2000, pp. 103-109; Tribble, 1984; Tsevat, 1980). With Sarah’s punishment and eviction of Hagar echoing Pharaoh’s maltreatment and forceful ejection of Israel (Exod 1:11,12), Hagar is a type of Israel (Gen 21:10; Exod 12:39; Daube, 1963). As Hagar was both a slave and a surrogate wife (Gen 16:1-5), Moses was both a Hebrew slave and an Egyptian prince (Exod 2:1-10; Dozeman, 1999).

**These include:**

- Both Hagar and Moses were fleeing (Gen 16:6; Exod 2:15).
  - Both Moses and Hagar encountered the Lord in the desert (Gen 16:7; 21:14-18; Exod 3).
  - Both Moses and Hagar were told to return to the place from which they fled (Gen 16:8; Exod 3:10).
  - Both returned reluctantly (Gen 16:9; Exod 3:11-4:26).
  - Both Hagar and Israel were thrust out of the house of their bondage and rescued in the desert (Gen 21:10-14; Exod 2:15; 4:19).
  - Both Hagar and Israel were divinely provided for in the desert--water (Gen 21:15-19; Exod 17:1-6; Num 20:2-11).
  - Both receive a word of promise in the desert.
  - Both leave the desert with a special name for God. Hagar names God as El Roi (Gen 16:13); and Moses receives the God’s name as “I am that I am” (Exod 3:14).
  - Each returns back to take up a new role: Hagar as wife, slave, and mother of Ishmael (Gen 16, 17, 21) and Moses as Hebrew liberator rather than Egyptian prince (Exodus 5-10).
  - Lexical correspondences include: “send” (Gen 21:10; Exod 7:2; 12:33 “cast out” (Gen 21:10; Psa 80:8), “strong hand” (Gen 16:12; 21:20; Exod 6:1; 13:9), “strangers” (Gen 15:13; 16:1), “slaves” (Gen 16:1; Deut 5:15 “afflicted” (Gen 16:6, 11; Exod 1:12; 3:7), etc. (Frymer-Kensky, 2002:231-237).
  - “Hagar is the embodiment of the downtrodden ‘other.’ She is not the demeaned and reduced woman . . . but the prototypical stranger in name and in fate, an everlasting memorial to mold the conscience of the world” (Reis, 2000, p. 109).
17. Hagar is the only woman mentioned in the Bible as choosing a wife for her son (Gen 21:21). This shows her “power, skills, strength, and drive and inner strength” (Bailey, 1994, p. 226). As a strong African woman, she single-handedly raised her son. Hagar was a keeper of African culture, giving an Egyptian wife to Ishmael. Ishmael turned out great as the Angel promised!

### ***Hagar Built Nations and a World Religion***

Hagar was both mother and “father” to Ishmael, with no known male figure in his life anymore. Hagar never fanned the flame of bitterness in Ishmael, in spite of the abandonment issues. No wonder, Ishmael fully shared in Abraham’s burial rites at Machpelah (Gen 25:9). Ishmael lived to the ripe of 137 years old (Gen 25:17), being the progenitor of twelve (12) tribal rulers (Gen 17:20), ancestor of desert-dwelling tribes like the Bedouins, and is venerated forefather of the Arabs (Smith, 1993). Thus, Hagar, the Egyptian, became the foremother of the Ishmaelites (or Midianites; Gen 25:13-16; 1 Chron 1:28-31) and the Hagarites (1 Chron 5:18-22) in northern Arabia, reaching from the “River of Egypt” to the Euphrates. Some Ishmaelites occupied exalted offices in David’s cabinet, such as Amasa, his commander-in-chief (2 Sam 17:25) and Obil, the superintendent of his camels (1 Chron 27:30). “Ishmael is the historical conjunction between Muslims and ancient Semitic monotheism. Muslims, since, have known their spiritual heritage to be Ishmaelite” (Brenneman, 2000, p. 654). In Islamic legend, Hagar is the direct ancestress, a great-great-great-grandmother of Mohammed and a foremother of Islam (Newby, 1989). Hence, both Hagar and Ishmael were buried in the sacred Kaaba in Mecca (Myers, 1987). While the Islamic world continues to celebrate and honor Hagar and proudly give her name to female children, the Christian tradition, contrariwise, continues to “cast her out” as the spiritually-rejected slave woman of Paul’s Galatian discourse (Thomas-Smith, 2008). Islamic tradition transports this biblical story from its Beersheba biblical location in the Judean wilderness to the region of Mecca. Hagar’s frantic search for water for Ishmael is reenacted by countless devout pilgrims to the yearly Hajj (Scudder, Jr, 1990).

### ***Conclusion***

Hagar, the Egyptian, was a heroine, standing higher than most women in the Judaic and Christian text. She parallels notable Old Testament patriarchs with her first-rate achievements. She found her place among the firsts in several biblical exploits. Casting her away or aside is an injustice to the biblical text. She is an integral part of the covenant relationship that God established with those who diligently seek Him. The story of Hagar needs to regain its proper place of honor in the biblical text. Hagar was not a low-life. Hagar was never one of those “‘throw-away’ characters whose history had little or no intrinsic significance” (Gordon, 1985, p. 271). Her life is a glowing evidence of “the inalienable worth of the human individual” and glistening proof that women in the Bible are “moving forces rather than passive endurers” (Gordon, 1985, p. 277). The richness of the Hagar character in the Bible will continue to elucidate fascinations if we are faithful to the biblical text that espouses her. Christianity needs to reevaluate the Pauline bias expressed in the allegorical illustration he struggled with as he juxtaposed law and grace and the two covenants in Galatians 4. Hagar is not trapped in the law. She is an epitome of grace personified. God’s dealings with her are some of the best examples of “unmerited favor” for the unlikely person; judging from her ordeals. Hagar represents all the needy multitudes living around the planet: “wandering, weary, thirsty, blind, and giving up in despair. How we need to tell them the good news that the water of life is available and the well is not far away! (John 4:10-14; 7:37-39) God is kind and gracious to all who call on Him” (Wiersbe, 1996, p. 105). Her story teaches us to bless those who curse us or spitefully use us. She teaches us to obey God and continue to bless others (including our oppressors), confident in the God who sees and hears us! God defines us, not people or circumstances! She teaches us never to give up fighting evil with good.

### ***References***

- Bailey, W.A. (1994). Hagar: A model of an Anabaptist feminist? *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 68(2), 219-228.
- Bailey, W.A. (2002). Black and Jewish women consider Hagar. *Encounter*, 63(1-2), 37-44.
- Benson, C.H. (2003). *Biblical faith: Doctrines every christian should know*. Biblical Essentials Series. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.
- Biblical Studies Press. (2006). *The NET Bible full edition notes*. Richardson, TX: Biblical Studies Press.
- Bird, P.A. (1997). *Semeia 78: Reading the Bible as women: Perspectives from Africa, Asia, and Latin America*. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature.
- Brenneman, J.E. (2000). Ishmaelites. In: Freedman, D.N. (ed). *Eerdmans dictionary of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, pp. 653-654.
- Brubacher, G. (2000) Desert. In: Freedman D.N. (ed). *Eerdmans dictionary of the Bible*. (340). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, p. 340.
- Bukhari, M. I. (1981). *Sahih Al-Bukhari: The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari, Arabic-English*. Trans. Khan, M. M. Vol. 4, Bk. 55, No. 278. Medina: Dar al-Fikr.

- Classens, L. J. M. (2005). Laughter and tears: Carnivalistic overtones in the stories of Sarah and Hagar. *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 32(3), 295-308.
- Davidson, J. (2002). Genesis matriarchs engage feminism. *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 40(2), 169-178.
- Davidson, R. M. (2007). *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.
- Daube, D. (1963). *The Exodus pattern in the Bible*. All Souls Studies 2. London: Faber & Faber.
- Dennis, T. (1994). *Sarah laughed: Women's voices in the Old Testament*. Nashville: Abingdon.
- Dozeman, T. B. (1998). The wilderness and salvation history in the Hagar story. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 117(1), 23-43.
- Drey, P. R. (2002). *The role of Hagar in Genesis 16*. *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 40(2), 179-195.
- Frymer-Kensky, T. (1981). Patriarchal family relationships and near eastern law. *The Biblical Archaeologist*, 44(4), 209-214.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2002). *Reading the women of the Bible: A new interpretation of their stories*. New York: Schocken.
- Fuchs, E. (1999). The literary characterization of mothers and sexual politics in the Hebrew Bible. In: Bach, A. (ed). *Women in the Hebrew Bible*. New York: Routledge, pp. 128-129.
- Gordon, C. (1985). Hagar: A throw-away character among the matriarchs? In: Richards, K. (ed). *Society of Biblical Literature 1985 Seminar Papers*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, pp. 271-277.
- Gotz, I. L. (July 1989). Surrogate motherhood. *Theology Today*, 45, 18-19.
- Hackett, J. (1989). Rehabilitating Hagar: Fragments of an epic pattern. In: Day, P. L. (ed). *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, pp. 12-27.
- Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R. et al. (1997). *A Commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.
- Jarrell, R. (2002). The birth narrative as *female counterpart to covenant*. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 97, 3-18.
- Knowles, A. (2001). *The Bible Guide*. 1st Augsburg books edition. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg.
- Mathews, K. A. (2000). Hagar. In: *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, pp. 531-532.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2007). Genesis 11:27-50:26. Vol. 1B, electronic ed. Logos Library System. *The New American Commentary*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.
- Meyer, L. H. (1992). Hagar's holiness: Genesis 16 and 21. *Brethren Life and Thought*, 37(3), 145-157.
- Myers, A. C. (1987). *The Eerdmans Bible dictionary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Negev, A. (1990). *The archaeological encyclopedia of the Holy Land*. 3rd ed. New York: Prentice Hall Press.
- Neufeld, E. (1944). *Ancient Hebrew Marriage Laws*. London: Longmans, Green & Co.
- Newby, G. D. (1989). *The Making of the Last Prophet: A Reconstruction of the Earliest Biography of Muhammad*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.
- Niditch, S. (1992). Genesis. In: Newsom, C. A. and Ringe, S. H. (eds). *The Women's Bible Commentary*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, pp. 13-29.
- Nikaido, S. (2001). Hagar and Ishmael as literary figures: An intertextual study. *Vetus Testamentum*, 51(2), 219-242.
- O'Connor, K. M. (1997). *Abraham's unholy family: Mirror, witness, summons*. *Journal for Preachers*, 21(1), 26-34.
- Paschall, F. H. and Hobbs, H. H. (1972). *The teacher's Bible commentary: A concise, thorough interpretation of the entire Bible designed especially for Sunday School Teachers*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman.
- Plessner, H. (1972). *Laughing and crying: A study of the limits of human behavior*. Trans. Churchill, J. S. and Grene, M. Evanston, IN: Northwestern University Press.
- Reis, P. T. (2000). Hagar requited. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 87, 75-109.
- Reyburn, W. D. and Fry, E. M. (1997). *A Handbook on Genesis*. UBS Handbook Series. New York: United Bible Societies.
- Roop, E. F. (1987). *Genesis*. Believers Church Bible Commentary. Scottdale, PA: Herald.
- Schudder, L. R., Jr. (1990). Ishmael and Isaac and Muslim-Christian dialogue. *Dialog*, 29, 29-32.
- Schultz, R. (1997). Servant, slave. In: VanGemeren, W. A. (ed). *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 4. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, pp. 1183-1198.
- Shelly, P. (1993). Hagar and the God-Who-Sees: Reflections on Genesis 16:3-13. *The Conrad Grebel Review*, 11(3), 265-268.
- Smith, J. E. (1993). *The Pentateuch*, 2nd ed. Joplin, MO: College Press.
- Smith, S. and Cornwall, J. (1998). *The exhaustive dictionary of Bible names*. North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos.
- Tabari. (1987). *The history of Al Tabari: An annotated translation*. Vol 2, prophets and patriarchs. Trans. Brinner, W. M. Suny Series in Near Eastern Studies. Albany, NY: The State University of New York Press.
- Thomas-Smith, K. (2008). Seeing through the eyes of our sister, Hagar: An expository sermon on Genesis 16:1-16, 21:1-21 and John 4:5-14. *Review & Expositor*, 105(1), 135-138.



- Thompson, J. L. (1997). Hagar, victim or villain? Three sixteenth-century views. *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 59(2), 213-233.
- Trible, P. (1984). *Texts of terror: Literary-feminist readings of biblical narratives*. Philadelphia: Fortress.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1985). The other woman: A literary and theological study of the Hagar narratives. In: Butler, J. T., Conrad, E. W. and Ollenburger, B. C. (eds). *Understanding the word: essays in honor of Bernhard W. Anderson*. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement* 37. Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, pp. 221-246.
- Tsevat, M. (1980). Hagar and the birth of Ishmael. In: *The Meaning of the book of Job and other biblical studies: Essays on the literature and religion of the Hebrew Bible*. New York: Ktav, pp. 53-76.
- Weber, C. P. (1999). הַגֵּר. In: Harris, R. L., Archer, G. L., Jr and Waltke, B. K. (eds). *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Electronic edition. Chicago: Moody Press, p. 206.
- Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be obedient*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- Wood, D. R. W. and Marshall, I. H. (1996). *New Bible dictionary*. 3rd ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.