



ADULT RESOURCE

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER FOR VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Use this biblical reflection to facilitate deep discussions amongst your group, corps and communities.

GENESIS 16:1-16

It is likely that Hagar, who was Egyptian, was either purchased by Abram or was given as a gift from Pharaoh to Sarai. The Hebrew laws (Exodus 21:1-7) that offered some protection to Hebrew slaves did not apply to foreigners. Those laws were reserved for Hebrew girls that had been purchased or Gentiles who had been taken captive in war. Foreign slaves were unrecognised and unprotected.

Hagar was in a position where she belonged to someone else and was considered a possession. She was a handmaiden, owned by Sarai, under the control and power of Sarai, without lawful protection. She was considered inferior to Sarai and had no authority in the household.

Sarai took matters into her own hands when she was not falling pregnant by trying to get a family out of Hagar (Genesis 16:2). When Sarai gave Hagar to Abram to try and conceive a child she became a wife of secondary rank, a concubine. Hagar, without power or protection, becomes a surrogate without a choice. She is a means to an end for Sarai.

We know from verses 5-6 that Sarai was abusive to Hagar. The Hebrew word translated into abusive here, (*ānā*) is the same word used in Exodus to describe the oppression of the Israelites by the Egyptians. It means to afflict, oppress, humiliate, chasten or hurt. Social justice advocate Danielle Strickland says: 'Fear is the currency of oppression.' It possible that Sarai's own situation was one of powerlessness, lack of control, fear and shame and her mistreatment of Hagar was motivated by her desire for power, control and in a sense, success.

Hagar runs away seeking refuge and encounters God before returning to Sarai.

As Hagar meets with God, she discovers that in the midst of her pain and turmoil:

- God hears her.
- He answers her.
- He instils hope with a promise.

And her response is to name God. El-Roi 'the God who sees me'.

Here is a woman who was not recognised in her household, who was powerless, who had no control, who was forced into things, who was abused, oppressed, treated harshly, but she is heard and seen by God. God saw her long before she saw him.

In the same way that he saw Hagar, our God sees each person trapped, trafficked, in slavery, he sees the powerless, those without control, the abused and the oppressed.

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The Hebrew laws (Exodus 21:1-7) that offered some protection to Hebrew slaves did not apply to foreigners. What are the laws in my country that offer protection for those who are vulnerable to exploitation and slavery? Could I be advocating in some way for legislation that protects the vulnerable and prosecutes the persecutors?

If fear is the currency of oppression, is there any fear that I carry that has the potential to oppress others?

Am I holding any power that I could potentially relinquish?

Considering Hagar...

Am I aware of the truth that I am seen by God, in my own circumstance and situation?

How do I think God sees those who are exploited, trafficked and in slavery today? Do I see them in the same way?

What can I be doing in my own community to respond to modern slavery and human trafficking?

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