



THE GOD WHO SEES

GENESIS 16: 21

Yishmael is also called Ishmael. Yitzhak is also called Isaac. Sarai is also called Sarah. Avraham is also called Abraham.



HE YOUNG WOMAN GRIPPED HER SON'S HAND AND staggered across the sand. With every sinking step, her heavy heart sank too. *I just want to go home. I miss my family. I just want to belong again.*

She squinted against the setting sun and imagined the welcome they'd receive when they got back to Egypt. How good it would be to smell her native dishes, to feel her mother's hug, to hear her true name spoken. *They took away my name, she'd sob into her mother's shoulder. They just call me Hagar.*

The alien.

The foreign one. The stranger.

She had been gone for many years, enslaved in Sarai's (Sarah's) tent. So much had happened.

Even though God chose Sarah and Avraham (Abraham) to start God's great family of belonging, they forgot God's promises. Instead of waiting, they tried to grab what God was giving.





They forced Hagar to start a family with Abraham. Abraham named their son Yishmael (Ishmael) and loved him dearly. But then God's promise to Sarah was at last fulfilled. Sarah had a baby of her own and named him Yitzhak (Isaac). Two sons, one promise. When Isaac and Ishmael were old enough to argue, Sarah saw what the future would be. So once again, she grabbed for God's gifts by send-

ing Hagar and Ishmael away.

"Get rid of that slave woman and her son! That woman's son will never share in Isaac's inheritance!" Sarah's shout still rang in Hagar's and Ishmael's ears as they stumbled through the sand. They felt unnamed, unnecessary, unwanted. God's family of belonging had cast out one of their own.

They trudged for days through the wilderness toward Egypt. The food and water ran out. The young woman's strength and hope wore thin. Finally, she laid Ishmael in the shade of a small bush, weeping as she noticed his cracked lips and shallow breaths. Stumbling a few feet away, she felt despair pull her to the ground. She heard Ishmael crying weakly





and felt her chest fill with fear and sorrow. *We just want to go home,* she thought.

"Don't be afraid," came a voice from heaven, cool and refreshing on her wind-worn skin. "I hear Ishmael crying," the voice continued. "I see you have been crushed by cruelty and injustice. But I'm with you. Go, lift up your son and hold him close. I have big plans for him." God spoke true and beautiful names over the woman and her son, promising them hope and abundance. "I didn't bring you here to die. I brought you here to live freely. Ishmael is not doomed or forgotten! He will





EL ROI, *the* GOD WHO SEES ME

build his own family of belonging, with many descendants. He will be noble and free like the wild donkeys that roam the desert.”

And it was exactly what the mother needed to hear for her son. It was exactly what she needed to hear for herself. After years of feeling unnamed and forgotten, here was her belonging.

God showed her a well, and she rushed to fetch a drink for Ishmael, sobbing with relief.

She turned to God and spoke true and beautiful words back: “And your name is El Roi: the God Who Sees Me. I’ve seen the God Who Sees Me. They took away my name, but you remembered me. I was enslaved, but now I am free.”

And God did see her. God was with her and Ishmael as the boy grew up. They settled in the wilderness and created their own family of belonging.

