

The Desperate Present

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Hagar in the Wilderness by Camille Corot
(1796-1875)

<https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/38.64/>

Title: The Desperate Present

Text: Genesis 21:8-21 (NRSV)

8 [Isaac] grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. 9 But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. 10 So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac." 11 The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of



his son. 12 But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you. 13 As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring." 14 So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

15 When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. 16 Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, "Do not let me look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. 17 And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. 18 Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him." 19 Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink.

20 God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. 21 He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. (1989). (Ge 21:8–21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Intro: The Desperate Present

Last time we read about Hagar, she had fled to the wilderness.

This time, she is exiled there.

Last time, she was pregnant. So in one sense, on her own.

This time, she has a son. Being in the wilderness is bad enough, but it's even worse when those you love, those who depend on you, end up in the wilderness with you.

When we live in the past, we are filled with nostalgia or regret, or both.

When we live in the future, we are consumed with worry.

God meets us in the present. Yet sometimes it's a desperate present.

When you are in the wilderness, give yourself to the "desperate present":

1. Cry out. (Vs 16) Make your need known. There is no shame in crying out. Raw honesty makes for the truest prayers.

2. Take hold (don't cast off). Make the most important thing the ONLY thing. The wilderness always brings clarity to our priorities.

3. See anew. Allow God to open your eyes to surprise provision. The well of water. How "moving away – the distance of a bowshot" becomes ironic because Ishmael will not only survive but thrive as a master of the bow.

The Painting

Hagar in the Wilderness by Camille Corot (1796-1875)

The picture captures the grief and the vastness of the wilderness powerfully! Ishmael in crisis is held, as it were, between Hagar on the left and the Angel on the right.

If you are in the wilderness, I give you this assurance: Your cry has been heard. As you hold, so you are held. God is on the way.

Benediction

The blessing of the God of Sarah, Hagar and Abraham, the blessing of the Son born of Mary
the blessing of the Holy Spirit who broods over us
as a mother over her children, be with you all. Amen.