

Resting in God's Faithfulness: Ishmael & El Roi

In my [previous posts](#) on this topic, I shared how Yehovah demonstrated his faithfulness to me by replacing my fear with faith and carrying my burdens, goals and plans for a year.

The next perspective he showed me, I call Ishmael and El Roi. These are two descriptions of God in the Bible. Yehovah revealed himself to me through the names Ishmael and El Roi in such a way that it changed my whole perspective and empowered me to live continuously in a place of peace and righteousness.

Genesis 16

These names both appear in [the story of Hagar](#). There's a lot that goes wrong in this story. People took the things of Yehovah into their own hands and the consequences of that started to compound.

This is the account of how Sarai had Abram (before Yehovah changed their names) impregnate Hagar, her maid, because Sarai was not getting pregnant herself. She knew Yehovah had promised her a son, but she was getting old, and it still hadn't happened. She was becoming impatient and discontent. Have you ever felt like that with promises Yehovah has given you?

Sarai decided to take matters into her own hands. So she gives Hagar to Abram, and Hagar becomes pregnant. Sarai then feels like Hagar has a haughty attitude toward her. Sarai begins to treat her harshly until one day Hagar walks away into the desert on her own.

Hagar - pregnant at Sarai's order, a surrogate mother carrying a child that will be raised as Sarai's - is now rejected by Sarai to the point that she's willing to go into the desert alone, risking her own life and the baby's, walking away from everything she has.

How many times have you felt like you did the right thing, only to be punished for it? Maybe even by the person you were trying to help? Maybe you've felt alone, like no one understands what you've been through, no one knows what you've sacrificed or sees how you've been wronged or sinned against. The list goes on, leaving us lonely and wanting to set things right. Maybe you feel like walking away from the situation - it's too painful, too stressful,

too much to bear or not what you signed up for. Where's God and why hasn't he intervened?

Here's what happened to Hagar: ([Genesis 16:7-13](#))

7Now the angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. 8He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid (explain Sarai) where have you come from and where are you going?" And she said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai." 9Then the angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her authority." 10Moreover, the angel of the LORD said to her, "I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count." 11The angel of the LORD said to her further, "Behold, you are with child, and you will bear a son; and you shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has given heed to your affliction. 12"He will be a wild donkey of a man, his hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand will be against him; And he will live to the east of all his brothers." 13Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "You are a God who sees"; for she said, "Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?"

Yehovah shows up for Hagar. For Hagar - the one who was wronged. There's no record of him speaking to Sarai about her part in the problem. Yehovah comes to Hagar even though Sarai will be the mother of the promised son and the matriarch of his chosen people. He comes to Hagar, the servant, the foreigner.

And notice he doesn't try to smooth things over between Sarai and Hagar. He just says, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her authority." Have you ever had to submit to a boss or leader or authority figure you knew was wrong? Or someone you didn't respect? Or maybe someone who had mistreated you?

Yehovah Sees our Future

Yehovah doesn't change Hagar's situation. He may have dealt with Sarai, but he doesn't tell Hagar about it. He doesn't promise her any change. He does something better - something that circumstances, no matter what they might be, can never take away: He gives her a future. He says, "I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count."

He speaks to her Jeremiah 29:11:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

This changes everything! I can withstand a bad boss or a hard situation, rejection, sacrifice or loss, when I know Yehovah has something good for me ahead, something no one can ever take away or diminish.

Where I work, many of the people I’m around often swear and use coarse language. I found myself pleading with God, “How long will I have to endure this? I know you put me in this job, but this? Really?”

Once, not long ago when I was lifting that again to him, he reminded me of Joseph. Remember Joseph - sold as a slave to the Ishmaelites (coincidentally) by his brothers and then to the Egyptians, then falsely accused and put in prison, where he stayed for 13 years. I’ll bet he heard some coarse language over those 13 years. He was surrounded by a lot of rough characters who I’ll bet had mouths to match. For 13 years what did Joseph do? He applied his skill even in prison. He became the second in charge, the warden’s assistant. And, at just the perfect time, Yehovah called him up to meet with Pharaoh and put him second in command of the entire country.

Yehovah heard my cry and gave me this picture of Joseph. He didn’t answer my prayer by muting everyone’s mouths when they swore, he met my greater need – giving me a hope of what can happen when we stay on the path that Yehovah has for us. He answered my prayer by reminding me that I have a hope and a future that lifts me beyond the here and now. Praise God!

Do you notice it’s easier to forgive others when you’re focused on Yehovah’s plans? I find that things people do, or don’t do, don’t seem to faze me or irritate me nearly as much when I know it’s not them holding the key to my future. They’re going to do what they do and that’s between them and God. I have a hope and a promise. Yehovah is bigger than anything other people might throw at me. Yehovah sees my future.

In our story he just lifted Hagar to this place of understanding.

Ishmael

Look back at Genesis 16:11:

“The angel of the LORD said to her further, “Behold, you are with child, and you will bear a son; and you shall call his name ^{1b}Ishmael, because the LORD ^{1c}has given heed to your affliction.”

In Hebrew culture people were named specific names for a reason. Their names often had to do with a certain event - either past, present or future. Remember when the angel told Joseph that Mary would have a son and he should name him Yeshua, because he will save people from their sin? The word Yeshua means “salvation”. He would save people from their sin, so he was named salvation. This is how Hebrew names are throughout the Bible.

Yehovah names Hagar's baby as a memorial to her experience in the dessert. Every time Hagar says his name or thinks of him, she’ll remember this situation, when Yehovah paid attention to her affliction and gave her a promise.

This is one of those verses where the footnotes matter. The footnotes for vs. 11 are k and l:

k. Genesis 16:11 i.e. God hears

l. Genesis 16:11 Literally has heard

These tell us that Ishmael means God hears in Hebrew. The word Ishmael is made up of two words: the word “El” meaning God, and the word “shema” meaning to hear. The angel instructed Hagar to name her son “the hearing God,” because Yehovah was reassuring her that he heard her cries. Some translations say he “paid attention” to her difficulties.

Here’s where it all started for me. My husband is a photographer. One day he was photographing military jets practicing take-offs and landings on a nearby airstrip. At one point a jet flew right over him and his ears popped. From that point his hearing started to decline.

One day, as I was praying about his hearing, frustrated that he couldn’t hear me, I distinctly heard in my spirit, “I hear you.”

Wow! Yehovah hears me! If no one else in the world hears me, the creator of the universe hears me, Ishmael – God hears. That’s more than enough

to satisfy me. While my husband eventually got hearing aids, Yehovah immediately met my deeper need to be heard. Yehovah, my loving Father.

As I let that sink in, I realized how life-changing it is when we live in the reality of Ishmael – God hearing - every day. Those things I’ve never said out loud – he hears me. Those dreams I’ve never told anyone about – he hears me. Those times when I’m completely misunderstood or feel that no one understands – he hears me. He gets me, he’s with me, he completely understands me. I’m never left alone in a situation, he’s always in my experience, with me every moment.

That was so simple, but so profound for me. It reminded me of this verse about Ishmael. When I looked up this passage, not only did I find that Ishmael means God hears, but I saw something else.

El Roi

Look back at Genesis 16:13:

“Then she called the name of Yehovah who spoke to her, ‘^(o)You are ^(p)a God who sees’; for she said, ‘Have I even ^(q)remained alive here after seeing Him?’”

This verse has three footnotes in it that give us the language as it was written in the original Hebrew. The second footnote includes the Hebrew name for the God who sees: El Roi.

- o. Genesis 16:13 Or You, God, see me
- p. Genesis 16:13 Heb Elroi
- q. Genesis 16:13 Lit seen here after the one who saw me

Not only does Yehovah see my future and hear me, but he sees me in my personal struggles. Those good things I do that no one else sees – he sees them. Those things I see that disturb me – he sees them with me. Those times when things are hard and I’m persevering – he sees me, he’s with me.

God told Samuel in 1 Samuel 16:7:

“For God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but Yehovah looks at the heart.”

El Roi sees our heart when no one else can.

This isn’t a difficult or new concept, but it’s bigger than we think. Just like in this story of Hagar, Yehovah always saw her, he always heard her. Her

problem with Sarai had not gone away. The only thing that changed for her was that now she now *understood* that God heard her and God saw her. She could now live in the awareness of that fact. That changed everything for her.

And that’s how it was for me. When I really absorbed Ishmael and El Roi into every situation, it changed my whole perspective. It altered how I saw things, how I reacted to things, because I knew that he was with me in my experience and my emotions. My ups, downs, confusion, joy, excitement, disappointment – every emotion, he sees each one and understands me.

Yehovah Sees and Hears Others

Not only does Yehovah see me, he sees other people as well. He not only hears me, but he hears everyone else I’m interacting with.

When someone insults me or belittles me – Ishmael – he heard them. When someone mocks me or laughs at me – Ishmael hears them. When someone takes advantage of me – El Roi – he sees them. When someone sins against me – El Roi sees them.

What does that mean; how does that change things?

When I know that he just heard that conversation, or he just saw what happened, I don’t have to come unglued and set the other person straight. I don’t have to teach them a lesson. I don’t have to react in any punitive or defensive way at all. I don’t even have to hold it against them. He saw them, he heard them. He will set things straight. He will teach them. He will be the one to respond on my behalf. Yehovah’s got this. Ishmael and El Roi can handle it.

That is so freeing! When I keep Ismael and El Roi at the forefront throughout my day, it completely changes how I interact with other people.

Not long ago I was at the post office and there was a long, slow line. I was probably ninth in this line the stretched out the door. I wasn’t even trying to mail anything, I just had a question I needed to ask about my package.

After probably 15 minutes, I got up to second in line. In front of me was a lady holding a sleeping baby, and pushing along a large box that she was trying to mail. When it was her turn, I offered to put the box on the counter for her. Then I went back to my place at the front of the line – I was next.

But while I was taking the box up to the counter, the lady behind me had come to the front of the line. She now stood right on that marking on the floor that means “I’m next” as though she hadn’t seen anything that had just happened or noticed that I was in front of her for the last 15 minutes. Sure enough, as soon as a one of the agents was available, she went right up to the counter.

In times past, I would’ve said something. I would’ve been nice or made a joke, but I would’ve tried to correct her. But now – El Roi. I can afford to wait a little longer, because I know that Yehovah just saw what happened. Just knowing that he saw that made all the difference for me. I didn’t need to react or try to set things straight. I could let it go. I could relax, knowing that he saw that and is probably shaking his head right along with me.

El Roi keeps me in a place of peace. I can rest in Yehovah, knowing that not only is he seeing my complete experience, but that whatever needs to take place with the other person, he will manage much more competently and effectively than I ever could. He will deal with them in his perfect way, in his perfect timing. I don’t have to worry that “it’s not fair” or that “they’re getting away with something.” He is the God of justice; he will deal with them fairly.

I think David understood this principle. Look at Psalm 25:16-21:

“Turn to me and be gracious to me, For I am lonely and afflicted.¹⁷ The troubles of my heart are enlarged; Bring me out of my distresses.¹⁸ Look upon my affliction and my trouble, And forgive all my sins.¹⁹ Look upon my enemies, for they are many, And they hate me with violent hatred.²⁰ Guard my soul and deliver me; Do not let me be ashamed, for I take refuge in You.²¹ Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, For I wait for You.”

David prays, “Look up on me, and look upon my enemies.” He knows El Roi. He understands this concept. Because he then says, “let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you.” He decides he’s going to do the right thing while he waits for Yehovah to respond to his enemies.

That brings us to another principle of this concept:

When we refrain from reacting, Yehovah will respond on our behalf.

Just as with David, El Roi sees us in our loneliness, troubles, distress, affliction; and He sees others who act hatefully toward us. When we take refuge in him and let him respond, we can continue to walk in integrity and uprightness. We don’t need to take on the offense and start arguing with someone who’s put us down, or gossiped about us, or berated us for something we didn’t do. El Roi will ensure justice prevails for his faithful ones.

Romans 12:19

“Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,’ says the Lord.”

Isaiah 13:11

“Thus I will punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud and abase the haughtiness of the ruthless.”

Thank goodness we don’t have to do that on our own. El Roi sees peoples’ hearts and will correct and bring things under his righteous justice.

Isaiah 64:4

“For from days of old they have not heard or perceived by ear, nor has the eye seen a God besides You, who acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him.”

Hallelujah! We can let it go – Ishmael and El Roi has our back. Nothing will go unheard or unseen. We can trust that Yehovah’s response will more than set things straight.

I’m not saying that we should never respond when something is wrong. There are situations where it’s appropriate and necessary to confront someone, or to stand up for someone else, or defend yourself.

But knowing that God hears, God sees - that takes away my need to react. I can step back and gather my thoughts and do what’s right. I can choose my words deliberately and respond at the appropriate time, because I know ultimately this is in God’s hands. He saw it and he will respond to it when we lift it to him and wait on him. And he may or may not include us in his response to that person.

Storing up Treasure

Another aspect of this is the reward that comes when we choose to wait on Yehovah instead of reacting.

1 Peter 2:20

“For what credit is there in bearing up under a beating you deserve for doing something wrong? But if you bear up under punishment, even though you have done what is right, God looks on it with favor.”

Yehovah takes note of the times when you’ve done the right thing and are belittled or mistreated in return. He will approve of you. This word “favor” means to lean toward, as in coming near to you, to be inclined toward you. Yehovah comes closer to us when we do what’s right even in the face of injustice. Isn’t that amazing? El Roi sees them and he sees us; he sees our reaction or our forbearance.

This also affects our heavenly rewards.

[Matthew 6:1-20](#)

“¹Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.”

Here we see that trying to get attention for our good deeds actually diminishes our eternal heavenly reward.

“²So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. ³But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

Here’s the contrast – when we do what’s right when no one else sees it, El Roi sees it and he rewards us. Wouldn’t you rather have Yehovah’s rewards than man’s?

“⁵When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. ⁶But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to

your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

Here it is again – we have a choice. We can either bring attention to our good deed or how we’ve been wronged or how much we’ve sacrificed or given, or we can acknowledge that El Roi has seen us and trust him for the reward.

“And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.”

Again, this is about seeking others’ approval. But Yehovah is the one who rewards us. We can simply do the right thing and Ishmael will hear the full extent of what’s in our heart.

Skip to vs. 16

“¹⁶Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.¹⁷But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face ¹⁸so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

This is the same principle. When you’re doing what Yehovah has asked you to do, let Ishmael and El Roi be your only audience. Trust that his rewards are better than anything man can ever give you.

One day on my job, I had done a favor for one of the people there. When I got done he said, “You’re awesome! I’m going to tell everybody.” I replied, “You don’t need to do that.” To which he said, “why not?” I answered, “I just don’t need it.”

That didn’t go over too well, but what I meant was, “El Roi – Yehovah saw what I did, and that’s all I need. I’ll save up my rewards in heaven instead of taking man’s.”

That person doesn’t owe me; I don’t care if anyone else knows what I did for him. I’m glad he was happy about it, but mainly because I know it pleased Yehovah. El Roi thinks I’m awesome – that’s all I need to know.

With Ishmael and El Roi, gone is my need for approval from others or human accolades for my accomplishments; gone is my need to teach someone a lesson when I'm wronged; gone is the

feeling of loneliness, that no one else understands me or my situation. My God is with me, beside me, seeing and hearing everything I experience at all times.

How shall we then live?

As I've incorporated Ishmael and El Roi into my daily life, I've learned that He covers a multitude of situations that could steal my peace, my abundant life and get me off track or stressed out. Ishmael and El Roi:

...lifts our burden – we're not carrying it alone.

...joins us in rejoicing over big and small things alike – he completes our joy by sharing it with us.

...fills our lonely places – those places no one else can understand. We're not alone there anymore.

...feels our pain – the pain we try to hide or deny or avoid thinking about. He's with us and knows what that feels like.

...sees our heart when no one else does - he sees the true person we are and how far we've come in what he's making us to be.

...rewards us with heavenly treasure when we choose to wait for him to act instead of reacting ourselves.

...is intimately with us in every single experience and emotion, understanding us even better than we do ourselves.

...knows our future and gives us a purpose that raises us above the here and now.

...is present with us in a way that only Yehovah can be.

...completely satisfies our every emotional need - and he's the only one that can.

I've come to love these names – Ishmael and El Roi. I sometimes say them out loud in situations where I want to remind myself not to react or not to get discouraged or feel alone.

Knowing Yehovah in this way makes it possible for us stay in a place of peace, to trust him with everything, and not get distracted or tempted by our emotions, but stay focused on him and what he's doing, living in integrity and righteousness.