

CHARITY MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH BIBLE STUDY
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20, 2024
Women's History

Dr. Renita Weems's book "Just a Sister Away" compares and contrasts women's relationships in the Bible. Please review and answer questions in the narrative.

1. Dr. Renita Weems wrote numerous books. Can you name at least three of the books she wrote?

ANSWER:

- Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible (1988).
- I Asked for Intimacy: Stories of Blessings, Betrayals, and Birthings (1993).
- Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets (Overtures to Biblical Theology) – 1995.
- Amor maltratado.matrimonio, sexo y violencia en los profetas hebreos, Spanish Edition | by Renita Weems (1997).
- New Proclamation Year C, 2000-2001: Advent Through Holy Week by Renita J. Weems, John Stendahl, et al. (Jan 1, 2000).
- What Matters Most: Ten Lessons in Living Passionately from the Song of Solomon (2004).
- Listening for God: A Ministers Journey Through Silence and Doubt (2005).
- Showing Mary: How Women Can Share Prayers, Wisdom, and the Blessings of God (2008).
- Praise is What We Do! Worshiping God with Head to Feet (2010).
- Vacation Bible School (VBS) 2020 Champions in Life Adult Student: Ready, Set, Go with God (2020)

Read Genesis 16:1-16

2. Who are the two main female characters in the storyline?

ANSWER: Hagar and Sarah

3. Considering our society's racial and cultural divide, how would you describe the ethnic/racial differences between the two female characters in the storyline?

ANSWER: One woman is an Egyptian woman and the other is a Hebrew/Jewish woman. Dr. Weems described it as “a story of exploitation and persecution suffered by an Egyptian slave woman at the hands of her Hebrew mistress.”¹ Weems goes on to state that black women know this storyline all too well. The divide between the two women are economic and sexual misuse, women deceiving women, mothers plotting against mothers, and public competition.²

¹ Renita Weems, Just a Sister Away, A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible, (Innisfree Press, Inc. Philadelphia, PA, 1988), 1.

² Ibid.

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4. Both the handmaiden and Abraham's wife had sexual relations with Abraham, but does that mean their relationship is equal? The situation has created tension and conflict, and finding a resolution is essential. Can you suggest one way to resolve the issue? Are there any indications of a hostile environment between them? Would you say that Abraham is at fault for their dispute?

ANSWER: No, Sarah is the wife, and Hagar is the slave woman who bore the child.

One way to resolve the matter could have been for Sarah to approach Hagar with compassion and respect and discuss the terms of the agreement instead of simply offering her to Abraham. If they had communicated well, the result could have been different. Let's learn from this and strive for better communication and empathy in our own lives to avoid similar mishaps.

There is an indication of a hostile environment.

- 1) Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham without real consent (vs. 3).
- 2) After conception, Hagar despised Sarah (vs. 4).
- 3) Sarah is offended (vs. 5). Abraham turns Hagar back over to Sarah and Sarah mistreats her (vs. 6).

God had a special relationship with Abraham based on an agreement or covenant. As part of this relationship, Abraham had specific responsibilities. For example, he was expected always to do what was right and to seek guidance from the Lord before making important decisions. When Abraham chose to sleep with Hagar without seeking God's guidance, he failed to fulfill his responsibilities. Additionally, Abraham was responsible for communicating with Sarah and Hagar and helping them resolve any conflicts or differences that arose between them.

5. What are the concerns about the handmaiden as a surrogate mother to Abraham's wife denouncing the child after birth? Do Christians have a responsibility to provide for the child of a surrogate mother? Find Scriptures to defend your answer.

ANSWER: Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar should have had boundaries set for the surrogacy. Surrogacy brings ethical issues around labor, gender, payment, exploitation, and inequality, as with Hagar and Sarah. Sarah mistreated Hagar and kicked her and the child out.

It is the Christian's responsibility to protect and cherish the children, and not toss them around like pieces of fruit. It is essential to remember that children are a precious gift from God and not to be treated carelessly. Psalm 127:3 states, "Children are a heritage from the Lord and offspring a reward from him."

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6. Read Genesis 21:17 NIV. Whose voice did God yield to when Hagar was in the wilderness?

ANSWER: God yielded to Ishmael's voice (Hagar's son).

*¹⁷ God heard **the boy crying**, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. ¹⁸ Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for **I will make him into a great nation.**"*

Read Luke 1:5-56

7. How do you view the relationship between Elizabeth and Mary?

ANSWER: The relationship between Elizabeth and Mary is truly inspiring. Their love and kindness towards one another are evident in how they greet each other with respect and joy. Elizabeth's unwavering support for Mary during her pregnancy, despite her struggles with infertility, is a testament to the power of selflessness and compassion. Her reassurance to Mary that her child was a gift from God is a beautiful reminder that love and faith can overcome any obstacle. The bond between Elizabeth and Mary is a shining example of what it means to be a true friend.

8. How does Elizabeth and Mary's relationship differ from Sarah and Hagar?

ANSWER: Elizabeth and Mary's relationship vastly differs from that of Sarah and Hagar. While Elizabeth and Mary's bond is one of love, respect, and support, Sarah and Hagar's relationship is of jealousy, competition, and strife. Sarah, unable to conceive a child, gave her maidservant Hagar to her husband Abraham to bear a child for her. Sarah and Hagar's relationship led to a power struggle between the two women and caused great tension in the household. In contrast, Elizabeth and Mary's relationship was one of mutual care and encouragement despite their challenges.

9. How can you control envy, jealousy, and bitterness from filtering over to another person? Share Scriptures for your answers.

ANSWER: Galatians 5:22-23 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.* James 3:14-16 *But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵ Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.*

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Bonus question

10. Who is Dr. Renita Weems? Could you share some of her accolades?

ANSWER:

Family and church affiliated

- Her husband: Rev. Martin L. Espinosa, Senior Pastor of the Ray of Hope Community Church.
- Adult Daughter: Savannah Nia
- Co-Pastor and Co-founded in 1997 of Ray of Hope Community Church in Nashville, TN
- An ordained elder in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church since 1984.

Awards

- Weems is featured in *Black Stars: African American Religious Leaders* (2008).
- Her 1999 book, *Listening for God: A Minister's Journey Through Silence and Doubt* (Simon & Schuster), won the Religious Communicators' Council's 1999 Wilbur Award for "excellence in communicating spiritual values to the secular media".
- Weems received the President's Award for Excellence in Faithful Leadership in 2023 under the presidency of the Rev. Vashti Murphy McKenzie and the National Council of Churches.
- The first African-American woman to deliver the Lyman Beecher Lecture at Yale University in 2008.

Contributions

- Best known for her contribution to womanist theology, feminist studies in religion and black religious thought.
- Recognized as one of the first scholars to bring black women's ways of reading and interpreting the Bible into mainstream academic discourse.
- Received her Ph.D. in Old Testament/Hebrew Bible studies from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1989, making her the first African American woman to earn a Ph.D. in the field.
- Taught at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, 1987-3002
- Served as the 2003-2005 William and Camille Cosby Professor of Humanities at Spelman College in Atlanta, Ga
- Vice President, Academic Dean, and Professor of Biblical Studies at American Baptist College in Tennessee, ending her time in 2017.
- She has taught part time and has served as a senior visiting professor at several divinity schools and seminaries across the country since 2017.

Publications:

- Wrote for *Essence* and *Ms. Magazines*.

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Bonus

View at least one of Dr. Renita Weems' sermons.

Sermon title: Where? Over There?

https://youtu.be/1Oo040NYrOw?si=a-AFKRY2Yh3_CqnV

Sermon title: Hidden Figures

<https://youtu.be/7RULHHGWB6M?si=OXot9WkLNDwKGaDD>