Culture



Natacha Karam, left, and Minnie Driver as Hagar and Sarah in "The Faithful: Women of the Bible" (Fox)



by Alli Bobzien

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

April 11, 2026

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

"The Faithful: Women of the Bible," a multi-episode biblical drama from Fox now streaming on Hulu, spends a good deal of its run time on the intersecting stories of Sarah and Hagar. While the inclusion of Hagar, the enslaved woman who bore Abraham's son Ishmael, initially delighted me, I was left sorely disappointed with the subversion of her story.

A great deal of my own scholarship and writing has centered on Hagar, who is one of my favorite biblical characters. Had my knowledge of her story not been informed by womanist scholars like Wilda Gafney, I might have assumed that "The Faithful" honored Hagar's experience. But Black female theologians such as Gafney and Renita Weems note elements of abuse and liberation sometimes missed in theological scholarship. To overlook their insight is to tell a slanted and incomplete version of the narrative, a mistake which Fox made in their retelling.

The show's presentation of Sarah (Minnie Driver) as a savior who freed Hagar (Natacha Karam) from bondage is an inaccurate sidelining of Hagar's story, one that frames the Israelite matriarch as a hero by justifying her actions. This choice begs a vital question: How does our representation of "the Hagars" in Scripture impact how we see outsiders today?

> How does our representation of 'the Hagars' in Scripture impact how we see outsiders today?
>
> Tweet this

The first subtle shift in the storyline of "The Faithful" occurs during Sarah and Abraham's sojourn in Egypt. Hagar is portrayed as enslaved to the Pharaoh, rescued by Sarah and led to freedom in the household of Abraham. But the assertion that Hagar was a slave in Egypt is murky at best. In her book *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne*, Gafney explains how some rabbinic midrash purport that Hagar was a daughter of Pharaoh given to Sarah as recompense when the Egyptians discovered she was married to Abraham. While Hagar's status in Egypt is unclear, her enslavement to Sarah is not.

Hagar's birth name was stripped from her when she became subjugated to Sarah. Gafney writes, "HaGar means 'the foreigner,' 'alien,' or 'sojourner' in Biblical

Hebrew" and the name is masculine in Hebrew. This was clearly not her given name, but rather the name she was called by Sarah and Abraham's people instead.

Advertisement

This leads to the next egregious shift in the plotline of the show, which is the presentation of an equal partnership between Hagar and Sarah regarding Hagar's surrogacy. The biblical account in Genesis 16 makes no mention of Hagar agreeing to the arrangement that she will bear Abraham's child for Sarah (listed in Genesis as Abram and Sarai, respectively). The relationship between an enslaved woman and her mistress was inherently unequal; consent cannot be freely given under such a power imbalance. Hagar's surrogacy was likely a command, not a contract signed by both parties, as "The Faithful" idealistically presents. Weems explains in *Just a Sister Away: Understanding the Timeless Connection Between Women of Today and Women in the Bible* that Hagar is essentially trapped in a cycle of bondage between Abraham and Sarah. She was viewed as property; her permission would have been unnecessary.

Once Hagar gets pregnant, Sarah becomes possessive and jealous, a fact shown in "The Faithful" through bizarre scenes such as Sarah worrying over whether Hagar "putting Egyptian spices on everything" will harm the unborn child. After Sarah and Abraham argue over whether Hagar is showing Sarah the proper respect, Abraham places Hagar back in Sarah's possession. But the impact of this action fails to land in the show due to the omission of the latter half of the verse: "then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she ran away" (Genesis 16:6). While Fox portrays Hagar as fleeing because she wants to keep the baby for herself, Scripture is clear that it was due to Sarah's abuse.

In *Womanist Midrash*, Gafney writes that "Sarai's oppression of Hagar in Genesis 16:6 is the same as Egypt's oppression of Israel in Exodus 1:11." The theologian also explains how the Hebrew verb, *'anah*, used in both Scriptures is the same — and indicates brutal, physical violence.

While I can't know for certain why the makers of "The Faithful" chose to leave out the true reason for Hagar's flight, I suspect it was to keep Sarah in the position of likeable heroine. Even after Sarah banishes both Hagar and Ishmael in the second episode, the showrunners attempt to justify her actions through an imaginary scene

at Sarah's deathbed, where she claims she did this for Ishmael's good. That episode concludes at Sarah's funeral, where Hagar gratefully praises Sarah's strength and faith, frankly a ridiculous and insulting characterization.

In Scripture, the woman called Hagar fled from Sarah in fear for her life. She only returned because of a mystical encounter with God in the desert in which she sees and names God, making her the first female theologian. There, Hagar receives the first annunciation given directly to a woman, as well as a promise from God that she and her son will live if they return to Abraham's house. Hagar's value never lay in a misguided appreciation for Sarah, but through her faithful trust in, and vision of, God.

Hagar's story holds beauty, wonder and faith all on its own. Though linked to Sarah, Hagar is the woman who saw, named and chose to follow God. The real, courageous Hagar is the woman I had hoped to see portrayed on screen: the faithful outsider who has a great deal to teach us all.

Official trailer for "The Faithful: Women of the Bible" (YouTube/Fox)