

**GROUNDS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Genesis” (Subtitled: Is there a snake in your Garden too?) Further subtitled: Lessons from the Garden! Genesis Lesson 14 (16:1-21): Some Summary Thoughts:**

**Last week we read Genesis chapter 15. Two dichotomies emerged:** 15:2 “gift” (promise) versus 15:8 “knowledge.” Interspersed between these two tensions was Abram’s declaration of trust:

- 15:6: Abram “*believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.*” We recall:
  - Righteousness is not a moral term, but one of relationship
  - Abram is “right” in his relationship with God because he embraced fully God’s “call.”
  - In God’s interaction with Abram in chapter 15, we see not only Words, but God’s action and willingness to be vulnerable – a precursor to His ultimate sacrifice on the cross.
  - “*Faith,*” as evidenced by Abram, is founded in great part upon his growing ability to “see” God for who He is (His character and Promise is sure), trust in that promise, and act in that “knowledge.” Simply put, Abram’s “faith” is recognizing God as the Promise maker and Promise keeper and acting upon that recognition – something Hagar also will realize.
  - Our faith is the same: recognizing Jesus as God, and the fulfillment of God’s Promise of the Messiah, and acting upon that recognition. (Rom 4:3, 20-24; Gal 3:6; James 2:23 all record the appropriate response to a promise keeping God.)
  - “Faith” acts in assurance; “Fear” involves taking the matter in your own hands
  - Thus, faith/ belief is a matter of “seeing the unseen” (Hebrews 11:1) with proper sight. [The example of Hagar, Gen 16:7-14, and Gen 21:14-20 helps clarify this understanding]

Scripture tells us that Abram and Sarai have been in the “promised land” 10 years (16:3) when they decide to “help” God accomplish His purpose of providing descendants. God clearly allows this; however, the result will be a decidedly mixed blessing. Hagar will not carry the promise of Abram, but she will experience the blessing of multiple descendants (16:10). However, the child (*Ishmael*; “God hears”) will live a tumultuous life – conflict will be the nature of his existence (16:12). God has “heard” (paid heed) to Hagar’s affliction, and tells her to return to Sarai in submission (16:9). Hagar recognizes a powerful aspect of who God is, declares He is “El-Roi” (“God of my seeing”), and obeys. A couple of points seem clear at this point:

- (1) The first point is that God does not necessarily just want right things done. He wants us to be the medium/ vessel of right things He is doing! It is not just “ability” that interests God; more importantly, it is “availability.”
- (2) The second, which is a corollary to the first, is that God’s plan will be fulfilled in His timing and by His Strength. Chapter 21 will give us the promised birth we have been waiting for. Abram will have now waited 25 years from the declaration of God’s promise, but in God’s timing and by God’s Power, the promise comes true. The scene between Sarah and Hagar is basically replayed. Again God “appears” to Hagar (for Hagar He is *El-Roi*, “God of my seeing”).
  - This time, the God of “seeing” opens her eyes to the reality of salvation in her very grasp. This reinforces that how we “see” our world depends on our relationship with God.

In answer to Abram’s and our question, “How can I know?” (15:8), Scripture appears to say through the example of Hagar in chapter 16 and the subsequent one in chapter 21:

- You need to open your eyes to the hope already present in your world – a world that, through your personal perceptions or experience, you “believe” or “see” to be bleak and futile.
- This would suggest that one purpose of God’s intended relationship with His people is not simply to force commitment to ethical behavior, i.e., force obedience to His Laws. Rather, God intends to teach us to “see” what is necessary for us to meet our needs of the moment.
  - *But, to “see” our world properly, Hagar’s example shows we need first to “see” God for who He is. A true relationship with God begins with an appropriate sense of reverence, recognition of God’s greatness and our limitations. Then, like Hagar, when we reach our own power limits, we have but to turn to the Power greater than ourselves. A correct view of the Holiness of God leads to a proper view of the sinful self (Ps 66:18; 1 John 1:5-7).*

In the story of Abraham, we can take courage as we realize that life is never as simple as a single declaration of faith – never to need shoring up or re-visiting. Abraham’s life is a journey marked with twists, unexpected turns and seemingly endless delays and hazards. Still God expects him, Hagar, Sarai and us to walk by revelation and become the source of that revelation to his children! (18:19).

We also realize that “seeing” is critical to the process. The really critical questions for man are not “Does God exist?” or even so much of “What is God like?” The text draws us deeper into the persona of God as the questions of “*What does the existence of God mean to me?*” and “*What can we become by embracing the call of God?*” are presented. Jacob will learn this lesson later. So will all the major characters of faith.