

**GROUNDS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Genesis” (Subtitled: Is there a snake in your Garden too?) Further subtitled: Lessons from the Garden! Lesson 14. (Gen 16:1-16). For lesson copies, go to <http://www.montgomerychurch.org/resources8.html>**

**Overview:** Beginning with Genesis chapter 12, we have been following the “journey” of Abram, called by God to leave everything he knows behind and told to go forth “in faith or trust” to a “*promised land*” which will be given to the “*promised seed*,” who will become a *great nation* and thus a *blessing to the nations* (12:1-3). Obstacles abound: “Canaanites” (social designation meaning “commercial traders”) now possess the land (12:6; 13:7) and Abram’s wife, Sarai, is barren (11:30). Activities mark Abram’s journey and are instructive. But important lessons emerge from the *relational interactions*. So, for example, Scripture pictures for us:

- What the characters “hear.” More importantly: *whose voice they listen to* and what happens as a result.
- The characters “see” various things and make decisions accordingly. But *whose “sight”* do they rely on? And, again: what is the result?
- There is tremendous emphasis on “*trust*” or “*faith*.” But, again, what is the foundation for their “trust”? Do they “trust” in their own strength and understanding? Or is their “*trust walk*” based on what they “*hear*” from God and the *revelation* or “*sight*” that He provides?
- In 15:5-6, Abram responds to God’s *revelation* about promised descendants. He “*sees*,” “*And he [Abram] believed the LORD, and he [God] counted it to him [Abram] as righteousness.*” God “*counted*” or “*reckoned*” Abram as “*righteous*” – a relational term that characterizes the nature of a relationship between two persons. God pronounced his relationship with Abram “*right*” because Abram embraced God’s Call. He left land and kin to embark on his journey of faith. Abram struggles with understanding aspects of what God’s expectation is and, as the following story illustrates, tries to help God out when his help is not needed; *however he never abandons the call.*

**Read 16:1-16 completely through:** This is the first of two stories involving the relational interactions between Abram, Sarai and their Egyptian maid, Hagar (in the context of fulfilling God’s promise of descendants). The stories in chapters 16 and 21 both appear prior to God’s “test” of Abram’s “trust” or “faith” in chapter 22 – a pivotal chapter where Abram stays the course. After his faith-filled declaration, “*God will provide...*” (22:8), Scripture states that Abraham “*raises his eyes*” (22:13) and “*sees*” the sacrifice revealed to him by God. Chapter 16 continues the theme of God’s Promise of descendants. Pay particular attention to the numerous references to whose voice is heard and what the characters “see.”

- **Re-read 16:1-6.** Briefly summarize the scene. Whose voice does Abram listen to? Does the result end up in “blessing” or “contempt/ despise”? What lesson do you draw from this?
- **Re-read 16:7-12.** Hagar flees the *bearer* of God’s Promise (Abram), but note that she is not separated from the *giver* of the promise! Note also the references to what is “heard.”
  - 16:7-8: Whose voice does Hagar hear? What is Hagar asked and what is her response? Do you find anything revealing about Hagar’s response? Discuss
  - 16:9-12: What does the “angel of the LORD” tell Hagar? Do you think Hagar is being “blessed,” “cursed,” or maybe it is a mixed blessing? Explain. [Note: the name “*Ishmael*” means “*God hears*.” Also, if your translation reads “*the LORD has given heed to your affliction*” (16:11), the word in Hebrew is “*heard*”].
  - Now read 1 John 5:13-15: In light of this Scripture and the interaction between Hagar and God described above, what do you conclude about what God “hears” and how He acts?
- **Re-read 16:13-16.** What is Hagar’s response to what she hears from God? [Note: Before departing, she “names or designates” God as “*El-Roi*” – “God of my seeing” and the place “*Beer-lehai-roi*” – “Well of the Living One who sees me”]. What do you think she has learned about God at this point?
- **Read Romans 10:11-15.** Hearing, believing, “calling upon the name of the Lord,” carrying that revelation to others – all apparently important in God’s design. Now read Gen 18:19. What will God expect of Abram? What lesson, if any, do you draw for yourself? Discuss.

**Reflection.** Someone has written that Godliness-in-action, i.e., putting full trust in God to guide our steps through life, is a process of removing the blinders in order to “see” what God is offering, and then actualize the potential God plans for us. What blinders? Paul would suggest that they are blinders to “*the eyes of your heart*” (Eph 1:18). For when they are released, Paul states that the “believer” will “see” three blessings:

- “The hope of His calling” (Eph 1:18)
- “The riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (Eph 1:18)
- “The surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe” (Eph 1:19)

In light of Paul’s teaching and Hagar’s example, what have you learned (or re-learned) about your own relationship with God? Discuss.