

GROUNDS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Genesis” (Subtitled: Is there a snake in your Garden too?) Further subtitled: Lessons from the Garden! Genesis Lesson 15 (17:1 – 18:33): Some Summary Thoughts:

In chapter 15, Abram queries God about how God’s promise of many descendants will come about: “15:3 And Abram said, ‘You have given me no children; so a servant in my household [Eliezer of Damascus, v.2] will be my heir.’ 4 Then the word of the LORD came to him: ‘This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.’ 5 He took him outside and said, ‘Look up at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring [seed] be.’ 6 Abram believed the LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness.” (Genesis 15:3-6).

So Abram believes/trusts in God’s Word. In chapter 16, God appears to begin to paint us a picture of what a relationship of “faithfulness,” i.e., “man living in a state of trust with God” is, or at least includes.

- The first portrait is man taking God at His Word, and trying to accomplish God’s plan, but in his/her own power/ methodology. Thus, we read the story of Abram and Sarai accepting God’s promise that a son will be born to them as reality, and then, after 10 years in the land, holding a committee meeting to figure out how to make it happen. Their solution is to choose the maid Hagar to bear the [seed]. This is a choice that God does not condemn, for He blesses the son, Ishmael, but not one that is in accord with God’s plan. Interestingly, Abram and Sarai’s choice, even though not condemned by God, will create problems in the future for the physical descendants of Isaac.

Chapter 17, then, moves us to a much more critical aspect of faithfulness and we learn:

- When God commissions man for a task, God empowers man to accomplish that task, by God’s power and by His design. That God can and will wait (in this case for an additional 13 years so that Abraham is, “past age – and Sarah herself was barren” – Hebrews 11:11) to complete His Promise by His Power, despite man’s attempt to achieve God’s purpose through his own means, is an instructive lesson for us all.
- When we enter a “right” relationship with God, God’s expectation is that Abraham (and we) should “walk before God and be blameless” (17:1). In other words, God desires that Abraham and we live our lives in constant awareness of God’s Presence and Persona, in complete surrender or “trust” within that understanding. This involves “*doing righteousness and justice*” (18:19) i.e., modeling for our children what we preach or teach. Later, Paul will talk of the Christian living his/her life “*in Christ*” – a term he uses over 170 times. The concept is the same. By living lives “*in Christ*,” Paul seems to mean that as much as a bird “*in the air*” is one with its environment; so too, we should make our life environment as one with God “*in Christ*.”
- This chapter also shows us that God, as He did with Noah (Gen 6:12-13), establishes a sign of the covenant promise. God never leaves His people guessing whether He is serious or not. In this case, God requires circumcision of Abraham, all his male descendants, and foreigners joining themselves to the later-to-become Hebrew nation (17:12). Circumcision reminded the Israelites of God’s promises to them and of the duties they had assumed. The prophets often reminded them that the outward rite, to have any significance, must be accompanied by a “*circumcision of the heart*” (Deuteronomy 30:6; Leviticus 26:41; Ezekiel 44:7; Jeremiah 9:25-26). Jeremiah says that his countrymen are no better than the heathen, for they are uncircumcised in heart. Paul uses the word *concision* [mutilation] for outward circumcision not accompanied by spiritual change (Phil 3:2).
 - In Romans, we read “*A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code.*” (Romans 2:28-29).
 - As can be seen in the addendum to these summary thoughts, later in the “New Covenant” through Christ, God will internalize His sign as He gives the Holy Spirit for His seal (Eph 1:13).

Chapters 18-20 juxtapose stories of God continuing to honor Abraham’s trust regarding God’s promises of descendants and land, and protecting the promised seed. This is contrasted against God’s judgment against the unfaithful in Sodom and Gomorrah, and the birth of future enemies of Israel – Moab and Ammon – out of the incestuous activities of Lot’s daughters with their father. Thus we see in chapter 18:

- 18:1-15: God’s heavenly messengers reaffirm His Promise of the promised seed from the barren woman renamed “Sarah.” This begins a consistent sub-theme, i.e., the Godly seed is frequently born of a barren woman, again reinforcing that it is by God’s power, not man’s ability or power that God’s Promises will be fulfilled.
- 18:17-19: God’s heavenly messengers reaffirm His promise that Abraham will become a powerful nation through which all nations will be blessed, and that God “chose/elected” Abraham for this purpose.