

GROUNDS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Genesis” (Subtitled: Is there a snake in your Garden too?) Further subtitled: Lessons from the Garden! Genesis Lesson 16 (20:1-21:34): Some Summary Thoughts:

Thoughts on chapter 20: Earlier in chapter 12, Abram obediently traveled to Canaan pursuant to God’s call; however, a famine forced him and his entourage to Egypt where he deceived Pharaoh who sought Sarai for his harem. In chapter 20, Abraham finds himself apart from the land of promise again. And again he identifies Sarah as his sister rather than his wife. In contrast to Genesis 12, where he scripted Sarah’s speech, here Abraham stretches the truth himself. Like Genesis 12, his actions bring a foreign king and country to the brink of disaster. Other differences are striking:

- In chapter 20, this time God engages directly in the conversation.
 - God declares Abraham a “prophet.” The role is clear – the prophet is first and foremost a spokesperson for God.
 - God calls his prophet Abraham to intervene on behalf of innocent Abimelech who almost experienced the wrath of God rather than God’s blessings because of Abraham’s actions!
- Abimelech, quite properly, chides this prophet for his behavior saying: “*what did you see that you did this thing?*” (20:10 ESV). In response, Abraham feebly states:
 - Sarah is technically his sister, even though this is not the primary relationship (20:12)
 - Abraham also gave voice to his own fear that there was “*no fear of God at all in this place*” (20:11). Ironically, this foreign king displays more “fear of God” than God’s prophet!
- Again, a foreign king enriches Abraham, this time, not just providing for his departure but allowing him to select whatever portion of land he desires for a possession.
- More importantly, we learn a valuable lesson about “righteousness” when “righteous Gentiles” call God’s prophet (spokesman) to account. Imagine – a foreign king delivering a lesson about ethical behavior to the premier father of God’s people! Like Abraham, we cannot be righteous by ourselves:
 - Only in a proper relationship with God, when we truly revere or “fear” Him can we become “righteous”!
- Chapter 20 closes with Abraham interceding for Abimelech, and the land of Gerar returning to its former productivity. Chapter 21 closes with Abimelech confirming God’s blessing of Abraham and covenanting with Abraham for future assurance. As usual, Abraham “worships” God at the end.

Chapter 21 thoughts: The two stories involving Hagar in chapters 16 and 21 draw an interesting portrait for us of the need to really “see” God for who He is so that we can see the “reality” of His blessings even when we are in dire straits. We recall that Abram and Sarai had 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 was a decidedly mixed blessing. Hagar would not carry the promise of Abram, but she would 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). In chapter 16, God “heard” (paid heed) to Hagar’s affliction, and tells her to return to Sarai in submission (16:9). In chapter 21, God “heard” the voice of Ishmael (21:17). In both instances, God “appears” in response to the cries of despair. Hagar recognizes a powerful aspect of who God is. She declares He is “*El-Roi*,” “God of my seeing,” in 16:13 adding: “*Truly here I have seen Him who looks after me.*” (16:13). In 21:19, *El-Roi*, the God who looks after her “*opened her eyes*” to see the well that was there all the time. Apparently Hagar was blinded to the reality that was present until God revealed it to her. A couple of points seem clear at this point:

- (1) The first is that God’s plan will be fulfilled in His timing and by His Strength. Chapter 21 gives us the promised birth we have been waiting for. Abram has waited 25 years from the declaration of God’s promise, but in God’s timing and by God’s Power, the promise comes true.
- (2) The second is that God intends to teach us to “see” what is necessary for us to meet our needs of the moment – the essence of “faith” (Heb 11:1). In chapter 21, the God of “seeing” opens Hagar’s eyes to the reality of salvation in her very grasp. This reinforces that how we “see” our world depends on our relationship with God. We need to learn to open our eyes to the hope already present in your world – a world that, through our personal perceptions or experience, we may “believe” or “see” to be bleak and futile.
 - 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; Job 42:5-6; 1 John 1:5-7).