

GROUNDS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Genesis” (Subtitled: Is there a snake in your Garden too?) Further subtitled: Lessons from the Garden! Genesis Lesson 19 (25:1-34): Some Summary Thoughts:

As we enter into the Jacob cycle in Genesis 25-36, we continue to see a pattern whereby God deliberately circumvents man’s cultural norms to carry out His purposes. So, for example, earlier we saw that Seth, not Cain served God’s purpose (4:25-26). Later it is Isaac, not Ishmael; Jacob, not Esau; Judah, not Reuben as God regularly bypasses the firstborn son. New Testament Scripture will teach us that these contests represent not just physical encounters, but also spiritual struggles.

- Isaac, for example, pictures a “child of promise.” The apostle Paul writes, “*At that time the son born in the ordinary way [Ishmael] persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit [Isaac].*” (Galatians 4:28-29). This will become increasingly important in several ways. On a physical level, it reminds us that conflict/ strife is a part of life – even within families. Spiritually, it:
 - (A) reminds us that it is God who births us both physically & spiritually, and
 - (B) teaches us that it is only by God’s power that authentic life with Him is possible.

Several critical lessons seem to emerge from these depictions:

- (A) God can and does use the younger/ weaker/ most unlikely person to carry out His Will, e.g., bear the righteous seed. We see this played out even in the New Testament in Jesus’ “election” of His disciples/ apostles and in God’s choice of the apostle Paul. This point is powerfully reinforced by Paul when he writes: “*But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him*” (1 Corinthians 1:27-29).
- (B) The chosen persons are not selected out of any righteousness, ability, goodness, or power of their own – a point particularly well illustrated in the choice of Abram/ Abraham – note 12:10-20 where he lied about his wife to save himself – and in further descriptions of his descendants – pointedly in Jacob – as their flaws are open for all to see. The literary structure of the chapters we are beginning to study show us Jacob’s movement from deceit to reconciliation which may help us better accept God choice of Jacob to carry out His Will. It reveals that God does not choose people because of their inherent character. Rather, what makes them the Godly seed is that in the end they trusted God and His promise that they would be His people – an exceedingly numerous people – and that they would inherit the land to which they first came as aliens.
- (C) 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. Thus we see the promise of the birth of Isaac to the barren Sarah (11:30; 18:11-12); Isaac praying to the LORD “*on behalf of wife [Rebekah], because she was barren...*” (25:21); Isaac’s son, Jacob, whose wife Rachel is barren (29:31); John the Baptist (Luke 1:7), etc. This element sets the stage for a fourth point – again powerfully illustrated in the story of Abram, who, after bemoaning his state of childlessness, is assured by God that an heir will come from his own body and that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars (15:2-5). So “*Abram believed the LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness.*” (15:6).
- (D) The final point in this context is that it is “trust/ faith” in God and His Promises that will become the critical component in man’s response to the offer of God’s various gifts. (Gen 15:6; Heb 11:11; Rom 4:3)
 - The first portrait God paints of “faithfulness” is man (Abram and Sarai) taking God at His Word, and trying to accomplish God’s plan, but in their own power – a methodology not condemned by God, but one that brings difficult consequences over time for them and their descendants (Gen 16). One could say that their decision is a choice conceived in sincerity, but not of God. One could even make the argument that it becomes the devil’s reasonable alternative to faith.
 - The second portrait, God’s birth of Isaac, illustrates that when God commissions man for a task, God empowers man to accomplish that task, by God’s Power and by His design (Gen 17:20-22). Isaac pictures for us the compliant, subservient, prayerful receiver of God’s gifts and blessings – a total contrast to Jacob who connives, deceives, but then finally reconciles at the end.