

GROUNDS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Genesis” (Subtitled: Is there a snake in your Garden too?) Further subtitled: Lessons from the Garden! Genesis Lesson 20 (26:1-35): Some Summary Thoughts:

As we continue our study of the Jacob cycle in Genesis 25-36, we should be struck by just how similar our actions are in comparison to others.

- Like his father, Abraham, Isaac acts out of fear and places his own security above that of his wife so no harm will come to him (26:7-11; cf. 12:10-20).
- And, like his father, Abraham, God has to educate Isaac through a foreign king (26:7-11, 26-29; 12:10-20).
- Despite these apparent “faults,” Isaac appears to experience blessings by God, even beyond the blessings received and realized by his father, Abraham (26:3-4). Not only is the promise reaffirmed to Isaac that his descendants will receive the “promised land,” but God expands the promise to include portions of the territory held by the Philistines. Part of God’s reason for this has little or nothing to do with Isaac’s actions. Rather, God states it is: “*because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws*” (26:5)

Some interesting lessons seem to emerge from these realities:

- (A) Repeatedly, the Scriptures point out that Isaac is the beneficiary of Abraham’s faithful obedience. This should give us pause regarding how we, like Isaac, are blessed by God. If we are honest with ourselves, we too surely must acknowledge that we also stand on the shoulders of those before us who lived faithful lives “in Christ.” Like Isaac, quite often the blessings in our lives derive less from our own endeavors than from the faithful choices and actions of those who have gone before us. And like Isaac, we can derive great comfort from the fact that even though we too are often weak and appear to “fail” to live up to our own God-given potential, God faithfully wills to protect and continue to care for us, often because of those who have gone before us.
- (B) The second point that seems to grow more pointed as we journey together with Abraham and his household is that “faith” in Scripture is not a simple equation of man’s blind obedience to the commandments of God. Failures and actions out of fear abound. Thus, it seems that God does not just want “right” things done (although that probably would be a definite bonus). What God really wants is for us to become a willing vessel for Him to do His Right Things through. Again, Abraham’s and Isaac’s journeys are instructive in this respect. Both listen to God’s Word; both embrace and put their trust in God’s Promises; both exercise initiative to help God and/or protect themselves as they conform their lives to follow God’s call; both acknowledge Who has blessed them and dedicate their blessings back to God as they build altars and worship Him.
- (C) The third point is that how we treat our “possessions” often is linked by others to our attitude toward God. Our actions can be interpreted, either as selfish (in effect denying God’s provision and seeking credit on our own) or selfless/blessing (giving credit to God and giving witness so that new believers emerge). Again, the text is very instructive in this regard. First, Abimelech was afraid because of Isaac’s obvious blessings (26:13-16) and asked him to depart from his land. However, Isaac’s peaceful, cooperative behavior placated the king to the point that he comes to acknowledge God’s blessings upon Isaac and asks for a covenant of peace (26:28-31). As king Abimelech states of Isaac: “*You are now the blessed of the LORD*” (26:29). This recognition provides powerful witness to those who seek any “god” in whom they can put their trust.
- (D) The final point in this context is that our choices help determine the path we ultimately take. Esau provides a case study of someone who could have had it all but just doesn’t get it. Our first exposure to him makes it abundantly clear that he is a son who takes lightly the precious promise made to his grandfather and reaffirmed to his father. Esau lives only for the present. He thinks only of his immediate needs and they take precedence over any future realization of promises. His choices put him in conflict with God’s people, and the “*elder will serve the younger*” (25:23).
 - He sacrifices promises for a meal (25:27-34)
 - He marries local women who jeopardize the promise and make his parents’ lives miserable (26:34-35).
 - Like Cain, he will seek his brother’s life (27:41)
 - Though he is one who could be blessed by his family place, his choices make him more akin to Ishmael than his father Isaac. As a consequence, he (and his descendants) will ultimately live outside the land of promise. This lesson is instructive for us all.