

## Genesis 18:1-15 - Is Anything Too Hard For The Lord?

CONTEXT NOTE: This episode should not be divorced from the wider context. The three “men” who stop at Abraham’s camp are on their way to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. The two episodes share significant contrasts.

CONTEXT NOTE: This event takes place recently after chapter 17. In chapter 17, God says within a year Abraham will have a son. He repeats that promise in chapter 18.

- I. Abraham Has Unexpected Visitors (1-2a)
  - A. The Lord Appeared To Abraham (1a)
    1. A Summary Statement of The Entire Encounter
      - a. The Lord Appeared To Abraham
        - i. Abraham is camped at Mamre where he built an altar and called upon the name of the Lord in 13:18.
        - ii. It is not clear when Abraham recognized that his visitor was the Lord Himself
        - iii. Perhaps Abraham knew from the start. More likely, he realized it as the conversation went on.
        - iv. Theophany = A manifestation of God that is tangible to the human senses (i.e. a man, a cloud, a burning bush, etc.)
      - b. God has “appeared” to Abraham several times before. This will be the last time that language is used of Abraham
    2. Abraham is Sitting in the Door of His Tent At Midday
      - a. During the hottest part of the day, the workers rested from the heat
      - b. Remember Abraham is living in desert conditions
        - i. The visitors show up at a most inopportune time
        - ii. Abraham and his house would have to forego their rest time to care for the visitors
  - B. Abraham Sees Three Men Standing (2a)
    1. The language seems to indicate that Abraham lifted his eyes and the three visitors were standing there (not that he watched them walking up)
    2. The text says the men were standing “before” him
      - a. This seems mysterious to us, but it was common practice for strangers / travelers entering into another’s household. They stood and waited to be acknowledged.
      - b. Notice that Abraham “ran to meet them” in v. 2 – so they were not standing too close to Abraham
- II. Abraham Demonstrates a Hospitable Heart (2b-8)
  - A. Abraham Earnestly Offers Simple Provisions (2b-5)

1. NOTE: Hospitality customs in the ancient Near East were more than just “being polite.” They were an important (even sacred) code of conduct that governed the culture – called
  - a. Traveling in general (especially in the desert) was extremely dangerous. Access to food and water is limited. Settlements cropped up around water sources so it was important to welcome travelers and give them access.
  - b. Today some still practice these “Bedouin Honor Codes”
  - c. In Scripture, this is an issue of morality (right and wrong)
    - i. Abraham’s generosity and hospitality will be contrasted with the men of Sodom
    - ii. Lot offers his daughters to the men of Sodom rather than betray the strangers in his house. This scenario also happens with a traveling Levite in Judges 19:23.
    - iii. The writer of Hebrews refers to this episode when he commands us to – “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” – Hebrews 13:2
2. Abraham Rushes Out and Bows To His Visitors (2b-3a)
  - a. Abraham will continually speak to, and treat these visitors as his superiors
  - b. It is not at all clear that Abraham understands who they are until later in the passage.
  - c. “If I have found favor in your sight” is an entreaty that is always used by a subordinate speaking to a superior (See 30:27; 33:10; 47:29; Exod 33:13; 34:9; Judg 6:17; 1 Sam 27:5).
3. Abraham Offers The Visitors Common Hospitality (3b-5a) – These things are the least that is expected
  - a. Abraham Offers Water For Their Feet (3b-4a)
  - b. Abraham Offers The Visitors Rest (4b)
  - c. Abraham Offers A Morsel To Eat (5a)
- B. Abraham Serves An Extravagant Banquet (6-8)
  1. He Has Sarah Prepare A Large Amount Of Cakes (6)
    - a. Sarah is told to make cakes from three “measures” (i.e. seahs) of flour.
    - b. “1 Sam. 25:18 tells us Abigail made sufficient provisions for David and his band of outlaws with five seahs of parched grain. The trench Elijah dug around the base of the altar at Mt. Carmel, which was then filled with twelve jars of water, was large enough to hold two seahs of seed (1 Ki. 18:32). These two references suggest that Sarah’s three seahs is a large amount,

which will yield much more bread than the three visitors, Sarah, and Abraham can possibly eat.” – Victor Hamilton

2. He Has a Servant Prepare a Choice Calf (7)
  - a. Abraham has a servant prepare the best of his herd
  - b. Abraham doesn't just give them a morsel of bread but a banquet.
3. He Serves The Visitors Himself (8)
  - a. Abraham stands by them under the tree while they ate
  - b. Abraham is the perfect host, serving the needs of his visitors with humility and love.

### III. Abraham's Wife Has The Promise Impressed Upon Her (9-15)

#### A. The Lord Repeats His Promise In Sarah's Hearing (9-10a)

1. The Lord Asks Where Sarah Is (9)
  - a. Now Abraham starts to realize who his visitors are.
  - b. How did these visitors know that Abraham is married?
  - c. How did these visitors know the new name that the Lord has given Sarah in chapter 17?
2. The Lord Repeats The Promise of a Son (10a)
  - a. The Lord promises to return and Sarah will have a son
    - i. "According to the time of life" – (lit. when the time revives) – means "at this time next year"
    - ii. The promise is fulfilled in Gen. 21:1 - And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken.
  - b. The Lord repeats the promised date he gave to Abraham in chapter 17 – now in the hearing of Sarah
    - i. The Lord is including Sarah in the promise
    - ii. The Lord is allowing Sarah to hear the promise from His own mouth

#### 3. Sarah Overhears The Lord's Promise

#### B. The Lord's Promise Is Doubted By Sarah (11-12)

1. Abraham and Sarah Are Elderly (11)
  - a. Abraham and Sarah are said not only to be old, but to be advanced (stricken) with age
  - b. The narrator makes sure we know that they were extremely past the point of having children
2. Sarah is passed the point of childbearing
  - a. She has ceased "after the manner of women" means she had passed menopause
  - b. Sarah is now doubly unable to have children. She had been barren her whole life, and now even if she had been fruitful in her youth, she was past the point of childbearing age
  - c. God loves to work in such impossible circumstances.
3. Sarah Laughs At The Lord's Promise (12)

- a. Like Abraham, Sarah laughs at the promise
    - i. Notice she laughs “to herself” or “in her heart”
    - ii. Her laugh denotes a frustrated amusement with what this man (she is probably unaware that it is the Lord) is saying.
  - b. Sarah’s Laugh shows the Attitude of Her Heart
    - i. After I am old? – Sarah has heard the promise of a son for twenty years. NOW, you say I am going to have a son...after I am worn out?
      - Question: Did Abraham tell Sarah what the Lord said about having a son within a year in Chapter 17?
    - ii. She can see no possible way that she could have a child. She has been barren for 89 years and now well past the point of childbearing.
    - iii. The statement of her bearing a child is not just impossible, it is absolutely ridiculous.
  - c. The Lord will now reveal Himself to Sarah
- C. The Lord Gently Rebukes Sarah (13-15)
  - 1. The Lord Questions Abraham About Sarah’s Response (13)
    - a. This visitor has heard what Sarah said in her heart!!
    - b. Sarah is not spoken to directly. Notice that he asks Abraham why Sarah laughed.
      - i. Sarah overhears the Lord ask Abraham why she laughed
      - ii. Sarah also overhears the Lord tell Abraham what she said in her heart
  - 2. The Lord Questions Sarah’s Understanding of God (14)
    - a. The Lord turns his attention to Sarah and makes the promise to her
    - b. Is anything to hard (the word literally means wonderful or marvelous) for the Lord?
      - i. He addresses Sarah’s doubt by questioning her understanding of God
      - ii. The Lord is all powerful and can certainly do what she thinks is impossible
      - iii. The Lord will work in such a way that He alone receives the glory – childbirth for them is absolutely impossible from a natural standpoint
    - c. The Lord repeats the Promise to Abraham (in Sarah’s hearing)
      - i. I will return to you...Sarah will have a son
      - ii. The promise of the all powerful God
      - iii. I wonder what Abraham is thinking throughout this conversation
  - 3. The Lord Demonstrates His Omniscience (15)

- a. Sarah Denies Laughing At the Promise
  - i. Now terrified that the Lord has heard her doubt, Sarah denies laughing
  - ii. Remember, she laughed in her heart. It was not audible. From outward appearances, she could legitimately say that she had not laughed.
  - iii. But God knows her inside and out
- b. The Lord Heard Her Heart
  - i. Finally, the Lord turns his attention to Sarah, looks her in the eyes and says, “No. But You did Laugh.”
  - ii. The conversation abruptly ends here as the men get up to leave

God has brought Abraham a long way in his faith. Abraham has failed miserably and has succeeded mightily. Abraham has grown in his faith and obedience, and now God comes to bring Sarah along with him. Perhaps Sarah needed to hear the promise for herself and have her own sinful doubts exposed.