

GENESIS: Where Grace Begins

Is Anything Too Hard for the Lord? – Genesis 18:1-21

INTRODUCTION

In Genesis 18:1-15 nothing is added to the promise from chapter 17. What's new is the _____, and the _____. Sarah needs to be brought into believing participation with God and Abraham.

Both Abraham and Sarah had a hard time getting on board with God's plan of an heir through them. Each of them came up with an alternative plan to obtain an heir.

Abraham's alternative plan (Gen.15:2-3):

Sarah's alternative plan (Gen. 16:2):

They both made alternative plans *and* they both shared the same response at the thought of them having a child together at their age. Their common response was _____. As unbelievable as it was to them, Abraham and Sarah were God's appointed couple for future blessing.

ABRAHAM AND THE THREE VISITORS

1 And the Lord appeared to him [Abraham] by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. 2 He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth 3 and said, "O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. (Gen. 18:1-3)

Who were these three men?

This is the only place in Scripture where a trio of _____ occurs. This points to the magnitude of the announcements that are occurring.

ABRAHAM: THE MOST EXCELLENT HOST

4 Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, 5 while I bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you

may pass on—since you have come to your servant.” So they said, “Do as you have said.” **6** And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, “Quick! Three seahs of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes.” **7** And Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, who prepared it quickly. **8** Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them. And he stood by them under the tree while they ate. (Gen. 18:4-8)

Hospitality was common for the day, but Abraham’s hospitality was _____ and _____.

The writer of Hebrews commemorates Abraham’s hospitality with this famous advice: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (13:2).

Hospitality is a basic expectation of all believers today (1 Peter 4:9; Romans 12:13; Titus 1:7-8; 1 Tim. 3:2)

Don’t miss this: the Lord _____ to eat at Abraham’s table. This is the only place in Scripture before the Incarnation that the Lord ate a meal with a human being.

“This is a singular instance of condescension—the only recorded instance of the kind before the incarnation. On other occasions, this same illustrious being appeared to the fathers and conversed with them; and meat and drink were brought out to him. But in these cases, he turned the offered banquet into a sacrifice, in the smoke of which he ascended heavenward (Judges vi. 18–24, xiii. 15–21). Here he personally accepts the patriarch’s hospitality, and partakes of his fare,—a greater wonder than the other; implying more intimate and gracious friendship,—more unreserved familiarity. He sits under his tree, and shares his common meal.” - Robert Candlish

THE LORD ADDRESSES SARAH

9 They said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?” And he said, “She is in the tent.” **10** The Lord said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. **11** Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. **12** So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?” (Gen. 18:9-12)

Abraham's laugh in the last chapter was likely one of joy, but Sarah's laugh is probably one of _____, _____, and _____.

IS ANYTHING TOO HARD FOR THE LORD?

13 *The Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?'"* **14** *Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son."* (Gen. 18:13-14)

Sarah now realizes who is speaking. In a moment, Sarah's **unbelief** is stripped away and her faith is strengthened. Sarah realizes that her unuttered thought is fully known to the Lord. Whereas Hagar learned that God sees her, Sarah now learns that God sees *inside* her. Sarah's future son David would record this reality in Psalm 139:1, 2, 4:

*O Lord, you have searched me and known me!
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar...
Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.*

To ask the question, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" is to answer it with Matthew 19:26, "With God, all things are possible."

God did the impossible for Abraham and Sarah, but how is this story relevant today? God's promises were never just to Abraham. His promises include the _____ of Abraham. (Gal. 3) If you are in Christ, you are the offspring of Abraham!

EXCURSUS ON THE PROMISES OF GOD

We can learn from all of God's promises in Scripture. All Scripture is beneficial to us. However, we cannot claim all promises in Scripture for ourselves. As we read any portion of Scripture, we should ask these basic questions:

Is there a command to obey?
Is there an example to follow?
Is there a sin to avoid?
Is there a promise to claim?

Gospel Promises

John 3:16: *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

John 3:36: *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*

John 8:36: *So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*

Rom. 10:9: *if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

Other Promises

When things don't seem to be going our way, we lean on **Romans 8:28:** *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*

When we need rest for our souls, we remember **Matthew 11:28:** *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

When we feel weak and helpless, we turn to **2 Corinthians 12:9:** *But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

When we're anxious, we go to **Philippians 4:6-7:** *do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

When we have a need, we remember **Philippians 4:19:** *And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*

When we need wisdom, we go to **James 1:5:** *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.*

When we feel tempted by the devil and his forces, we trust **James 4:7:** *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

When we're concerned about providing basic needs for our families, we remember **Matthew 6:31-33**: *Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

_____ on our end is assumed as we rest in God's promises. (John 15:7)
But, even as we obey God's commands, we should not _____.
(Rom. 2:4)

SARAH'S RESPONSE

15 *But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. He said, "No, but you did laugh."* (Gen. 18:15)

Probably out of _____ or _____, Sarah denied laughing, but the Lord corrected her with the last word.

One commentator said, "The remembrance of the laughter preserves the divine rebuke for mistrusting the Lord's omnipotence." God ended the dialogue with a subtle reference to Isaac, whose name means "laughter." The great laugh would be Isaac, Sarah's firstborn.

Despite her initial skepticism, Sarah's faith was strengthened and she did come to believe the promise as Abraham did. The writer of Hebrews states, *By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.* (Heb. 11:11)

THE THREE MEN BEGIN THEIR NEXT MISSION

16 *Then the men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way. 17* The Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, **18** seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? **19** For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him." (Gen. 18:16-19)

Treating Abraham as a prophet (Gen. 20:7) and friend (Js. 2:23), God did not want to keep Abraham in the dark about what he intended to do to the place where his nephew lived. God gave two reasons for revealing his plans to Abraham, the patriarch:

- 1.
- 2.

THE INVESTIGATION OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH

20 Then the Lord said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, 21 I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know." (Gen. 18:20-21)

God revealed to Abraham that he would investigate Sodom and Gomorrah for two reasons:

- 1.
- 2.

We naturally think of the sins of these cities as largely sexual in nature. Sodom provides the basic word (sodomy) for sins outside normal sexuality. But if we imagine the sins of these cities only in sexual terms, we miss the depth of their depravity.

The Hebrew word for "outcry" is used in Scripture to describe the cries of the oppressed and brutalized. It is used for the cry of the oppressed widow or orphan (cf. Exodus 22:22, 23), the cry of the oppressed servant (cf. Deuteronomy 24:15), and the cries of the Israelites in Egypt (cf. Exodus 2:23; 3:7, 9). Jeremiah uses it to refer to the scream of terror by an individual or city when it is attacked (cf. Jeremiah 18:22; 20:16; 25:36; 48:3–5, 34; 49:21; 50:46; 51:54).

The sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was especially offensive to God because they, more than any of the other cities in the land of Canaan, had seen the power of the Lord.