

### The Lord Appears to Abraham Again and Rebukes Sarah

#### Genesis 18:1-15

Genesis 18:1-15 - *"Then the LORD appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. <sup>2</sup> So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, <sup>3</sup> and said, "My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant. <sup>4</sup> Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. <sup>5</sup> And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant." They said, "Do as you have said." <sup>6</sup> So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes." <sup>7</sup> And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it. <sup>8</sup> So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate.*

*<sup>9</sup> Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" So he said, "Here, in the tent." <sup>10</sup> And He said, "I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." (Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him.) <sup>11</sup> Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. <sup>12</sup> Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" <sup>13</sup> And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?' <sup>14</sup> Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." <sup>15</sup> But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh!"*

#### Background Notes

Abraham was 75 years old and Sarah was 65 years old when they moved from Ur (in Iraq today) to the land of Canaan (Israel today). At that time God promised Abraham that he would become a great nation and all the families of the earth would be blessed through him (Genesis 12). But Abraham and Sarah had no children, so they tried to help God out by having Sarah's maidservant Hagar become Abram's concubine (Genesis 16). The plan worked all too well, and a son, Ishmael, was born. But even though this arrangement was practiced in the culture at that time, it certainly was not right in God's sight! Ever since that time, there has been friction between Arabs, Ishmael's descendants, and Jews, Isaac's descendants. In fact, the bloodshed in the Middle East is evidence of that friction. It continues even to this day. A number of years passed, and Abraham and Sarah were living near Hebron, about 20 miles south of Jerusalem. Abraham was now 99 years old, and Sarah was 89, but the promised son had not arrived.

One day three men showed up at Abraham's tent. With typical "Bedouin" hospitality, Abraham urged the travelers to stay for a meal. It wasn't long before Abraham realized that these were no ordinary men. In fact, two of them were angels who had taken on the appearance of men. The third was the Lord Himself who had taken on the appearance of a man! When God takes on the appearance of a man we call it a *"theophany."* So this was a *theophany* - the Lord appeared as a man. And by the way, this was not a manifestation of the Trinity: it was two angels and the Lord Himself who all took on the appearance of men.

Hebrews 13:2 says, *"Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly [not realizing it] entertained angels."* The writer to the Hebrews was possibly thinking of this Old Testament event when he wrote this verse. Have you ever entertained angels without knowing it? Careful now! If you say yes, you just contradicted yourself - because the verse says "without realizing it"!

When my mother was in her late eighties, the state of New Jersey finally convinced her to give up her driver's license. However, her family was convinced that in the last few years that she was driving, the Lord sent out extra guardian angels whenever she got behind the wheel!

Seriously speaking, any of us who have been Christians for any length of time would say there were times when angels were involved in our lives. Hebrews 1:14 says, *"Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?"*

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The life of faith is not 100% doubt-free.

Hebrews 11, that great chapter on faith, says, *"By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised"* (v11).

Now compare that verse with Genesis 18:12-15: *"Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, 'After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?'"* And the LORD said to Abraham, *"Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?' Is anything too hard for the LORD?' ... But Sarah denied it, saying, 'I did not laugh,' for she was afraid. And He said, 'No, but you did laugh!"*

It certainly sounds like Sarah didn't have a lot of faith, does it? Sarah was listening behind the tent partition as the Lord spoke to Abraham, and she laughed when the Lord said she would have a son. It was a laugh of unbelief. In fact, her unbelief led to fear, which led to lying, as we see in verse 15. So does Hebrews 11 contradict Genesis 18? No! The answer is that Sarah changed. Yes, she doubted in Genesis 18, but overall her life was characterized by faith rather than doubt.

Abraham was known for his faith. He is the father of the faithful. But Abraham was not 100% doubt-free. He had lapses in faith. In a time of famine, he went down to Egypt because he didn't trust God to provide for his needs (Genesis 12). He lied about his wife because he lacked faith that the Lord could protect him. Then years later he repeated that same lack of faith in the land of the Philistines (Genesis 20).

Here's the point: Abraham and Sarah weren't 100% doubt-free, but they lived lives that were characterized overall by faith. That encouraging, isn't it? The fact that Hebrews 11 commended both Abraham and Sarah for their faith, when we know that they were not 100% doubt-free, should be very encouraging to us.

Is there any Christian who has never had any doubts? I'm so glad that the Lord looks at the **overall pattern** of our lives – and that a life of faith does not have to be 100% doubt free.

## 2. Is anything too hard for the Lord?

Verse 14: *"Is anything too hard for the LORD?"* Verse 11 says, *"Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing."* Naturally speaking, it was impossible for Abraham and Sarah to have a son - but they did!

Is anything too hard for the Lord? The Hebrew word that is translated "hard" here can also be translated "extraordinary" or "marvelous" or "wonderful." In fact, it's the same word that's used in the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 9:6 *"His name shall be called Wonderful."* So is **anything** too hard or wonderful for the Lord to accomplish?

Maybe you're not a Christian, and you think that there's no way that God can save you because of your terrible sins, either now or in the past – perhaps sins that no one knows about. Guess what? God **can** save you! Nothing is too hard or wonderful for the Lord! Commit your life to the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, and you will be saved today. Or maybe you think that nothing can be done to turn your marriage around, or turn your family in the right direction. Guess what? God can do it! Nothing is too hard or too amazing for the Lord to do! God can help you break bad habits. He can give you the strength to cope with your job.

Maybe you doubt the Lord, just as Sarah doubted. The Lord's word to us is the same as it was to Sarah: **Is anything too hard for the Lord?**

## Practical Application

### Do I pass the “hospitality test”?

Suppose Abraham had not shown hospitality to the three men who came to his tent? I think one reason why the Lord and the angels appeared to Abraham as ordinary travelers was to test Abraham. The Lord came to him, appearing as a man, and I believe the Lord would have passed by if Abraham hadn't invited the men to stay. This may have been a test of hospitality for Abraham.

If Abraham had let the three travelers keep going, he would have missed out on a personal visit from the Lord! That may be the reason why the writer of Hebrews drew on this event in Hebrews 13 - to encourage us to brotherly love, and not to forget strangers. When we provide hospitality for others, God will bless us.

Hospitality is not just an Old Testament cultural habit. Romans 12:13 teaches that Christians are to be hospitable: *“distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.”* 1 Timothy 3:2 says *“a bishop then must be...hospitable”* and Titus 1:8 also says that spiritual leaders are to be hospitable. 1 Peter 4:9 teaches that we are to *“be hospitable to one another without grumbling”!* Do we pass the “hospitality test”?

When I was growing up, my parents were always inviting people over to our house for a meal. One Sunday we planned to have a family birthday dinner - just the family. But a man showed up at our church that morning - a complete stranger - and he was invited to share in our birthday celebration. He enjoyed Christian hospitality that day – and fellowship he hadn't experienced for a long time! My parents passed the “hospitality test.” Let's ask ourselves: Do I pass the hospitality test?