

Genesis 18:1-15

The Birth of Isaac is Promised

We all know what it is like to wait for something promised to us

- Perhaps you remember times as a child when your parents would promise you something

It is such a joy to have a promise issued

- But it is even better when a promise is fulfilled

Each of us knows the pain that exists when someone promises something but never fulfills that promise

- Bitterness can creep into our mind
- Resentment can creep into our relationships
- Anger toward those individuals can become a reality

Imagine someone making you a promise but not telling you when it would come about

- You wait and wait and wait
- But there is no fulfillment

You wait five years

- Then ten years
- Then fifteen years
- Then twenty years

This would either strengthen your faith

- Or it would show just how small your faith is

For Abraham, this wasn't a hypothetical situation

- It was reality

He had, indeed, waited twenty years since God promised a son to him

- A lot has taken place during these 20 years

Now God is ready to fulfill the promise of a son to Abraham through Sarah

- We saw some of these details in chapter 17

Why was God repeating some of the same information to Abraham?

- Doesn't this seem unnecessary?

The focus of Genesis 17 was on Abraham

- But chapter 18 has the focus on Sarah

She will be confronted over her doubts in a way that would be very meaningful

Let's read Genesis 18:1-15

This passage in the first half of Genesis 18 teaches two essential truths about God

- God assures His people to enjoy His presence (18:1-8)
- God expects His people to trust His promise (18:9-15)

I. God assures His people to enjoy His presence (18:1-8)

Now the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day.

We know that in chapter 17, God appeared to Abraham

- We know from 17:1 that “when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram” (emphasis mine)
- The same word used in 17:1 is the word used in 18:1

Once again, God appears to Abraham

- But not in a vision
- Not in a dream

God appears to Abraham in the form of a human

- Along with two other angels who also have the form of a human

We notice that Abraham is “by the oaks of Mamre” when God appears to him

- This is the same location described back in 13:18, “Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and there he built an altar to the LORD”

With this repeated emphasis on Abraham’s location, the reader is reminded that Abraham hasn’t moved since then

- He has pretty much settled in the land of Canaan for the timebeing

The Text also informs us that Abraham “was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day”

- During the hottest part of the day, it would be quite common for work to cease
- Some would take a nap
- Everyone would take a break in the shade from the blazing heat

² And when he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him;

It was in the context of this rest period that Abraham noticed he had visitors

How these visitors arrived to Abraham’s location, we are not sure

- But we know that Abraham recognized “three men” who were “standing opposite him”

There is nothing in the outward appearance of these men that would suggest they had come from heaven

- But Abraham certainly views them as being very special¹

As the story progresses, we will see that these are not ordinary men

- But we will examine that more as we study this passage

¹ Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 338.

and when he saw *them*, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the earth, ³ and said, “My lord, if now I have found favor in your sight, please do not pass your servant by.

As soon as Abraham notices these three men, he takes action

- He runs from the tent door to meet them
- He bows himself down to the earth
- He refers to one of these men as “my lord”

The language that is used is clearly that of a person talking to a superior

- Abraham recognized that these men – especially one of them – was a higher rank and station in life than he

The physical act of bowing oneself down to the Earth is the first clue toward this recognition

- This is a physical gesture of respect

This word is oftentimes used of a person worshipping God²

The manner in which Abraham addresses one of these men is also significant, “My lord”

- This is can be a Divine name when used of God³
- Or, it can refer as a title of respect
- Context will tell us which is true

Also the phrase, “if not I have found favor in your sight” gives us a hint that Abraham realized that he was in the presence of someone greater than he⁴

- Abraham views himself as a servant to these men if they would stay

The New Testament tells us to “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Heb 13:2)

- Abraham personified this verse!
- Little did he know that he was entertaining angels

⁴ Please let a little water be brought and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree; ⁵ and I will bring a piece of bread, that you may refresh yourselves; after that you may go on, since you have visited your servant.”

Abraham asks if he might serve these men before they leave on their business

- We can assume that Abraham didn’t know why these men were stopping by his tent
- We can also assume that he didn’t know where these men were going afterwards

But in typical custom of his day, Abraham offers to serve these visitors

- He brings them water so they can wash their feet
- He provides a place for them to rest
- He supplies food to refresh them

These are rather simple accommodations for Abraham to provide

- But they would have been greatly appreciated by anyone walking during the heat of the day
- Remember, most people were resting or taking a nap during this time

² Morris, 338.

³ Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 2*, 46.

⁴ John J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison*, 197.

Walking in a hot, dusty climate would have been wearing for the feet

- Dirt, mud, and clods would have caused one's feet to become calloused
- Having the opportunity to rest and wash one's feet would have been a welcomed privilege

Having a few moments to rest under the shade of a tree would have been inviting as well

- Perhaps there weren't that many trees in this area
- So it would have been a welcoming place for visitors

Also the fact that a little food was brought out was a gesture of kindness

- Visitors might travel great distances in those days
- It is a very real possibility that food was scarce
- Even a little piece of bread would have provided some nourishment for their journey

Serving as a host, Abraham was responsible for the needs and safety of his guests as long as they were in his care⁵

And they said, "So do, as you have said."

After Abraham presents his plan of hospitality, the men agree to it

- We can assume that these men rest under the shade of one of the oak trees
- Abraham, of course, is about to set into motion his plans

⁶ So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Quickly, prepare three measures of fine flour, knead it, and make bread cakes." ⁷ Abraham also ran to the herd, and took a tender and choice calf, and gave it to the servant; and he hurried to prepare it. ⁸ And he took curds and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and placed it before them; and he was standing by them under the tree as they ate.

From the Text, we know that Abraham was eager to serve these men

- The idea of Abraham being hurried was an understatement
- From the second that he left the presence of these men, he wanted everything to be done fast

He first went to Sarah and told her to prepare some bread

- But this wasn't just any bread

This "fine flour" was ground exclusively from the inner kernels of the wheat

- It was expensive and considered a luxury by many⁶

The amount of this "fine flour" that was prepared was astounding

- Sarah is told to prepare "three measures of fine flour"

One measure would be equivalent to two gallons

- So three measures would be 6 gallons of fine flour⁷

When Elijah was on Mt. Carmel, he dug a trench around the altar that he constructed

- This trench was filled with 12 jars of water

⁵ Victor P. Hamilton, *NICOT, Genesis 18-50*, 8.

⁶ Willem A. VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of OT Theology & Exegesis*, Vol. 3, 269..

⁷ Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 267.

- This same trench, according to 1 Kings 18:32, was big enough to hold “two measures” of seed

Now imagine how big that trench much have been

- And that was to hold two measures of seed

Abraham tells Sarah to prepare “three” measures of flour for his three guests

- This would have been an extremely large amount of flour for three persons⁸

To have bread meant that God was taking care of His people

- In order to have bread, there had to be a good harvest
- In order for there to be a good harvest, there had to be grain
- Therefore, having bread was a sign of God’s blessing⁹

Not only did Abraham tell Sarah to make bread cakes, he also ran to his herd and selected “a tender and choice calf”

- Immediately this animal was killed and prepared

Normally, you would not kill an entire calf for feeding three people

- A lamb or goat would have been sufficient¹⁰

In addition to the bread and the calf, Abraham took “curds and milk” to his guests

- This yogurt-like side dish was designed to intensify the taste of the meal and satisfy their thirst¹¹

As you can see, this was a royal feast

- Abraham was going out of his way to entertain his guests

Nowhere in this chapter do we read that Abraham ate with his guests

- He was the host and waiter

Neither does Sarah join the meal

- In those days, it wasn’t proper for females to eat with males

Abraham is the only person in Scripture given the title, “friend of God” (James 2:23; cf. 2 Chr 20:7; Isa 41:8)

- There was a deep sense of fellowship that existed between God and Abraham

When the LORD wanted to convey a message to Abraham, He appeared personally to him¹²

The fact that the LORD and the two angels ate a meal shows a deep amount of fellowship¹³

- Those in peaceful relationships would often share a meal with one another

God does assure us to enjoy His presence

- As those to whom He has made a covenant, He desires that we fellowship with Him

God wants us to have a meaningful relationship with Him

- Not just to have a ritual or habit of reading God’s Word and praying

⁸ Hamilton, 11.

⁹ VanGemenen, *Vol. 4*, 448.

¹⁰ Wenham, 47.

¹¹ Wenham, 47.

¹² W.H. Griffith-Thomas, *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary*, 159.

¹³ Allen P. Ross, *Creation & Blessing*, 342.

- But interacting with God on an intimate level
- Having valuable relationships with Him and other believers

It is an amazing privilege to have fellowship with God

- That only comes about because of Christ

II. God expects His people to trust His promise (18:9-15)

⁹ Then they said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?”

Presumably at the end of their meal, the three men inquire as to Sarah’s whereabouts

Now let’s back up for a few minutes

- It doesn’t seem that Abraham knows these men personally
- But it does appear that these men know Abraham personally

Consider these facts about the knowledge of Abraham by these men

- They knew where he lived
- They knew that he had a wife
- They knew his wife’s name

As we will see later on, this appearance of these men wasn’t primarily for the sake of Abraham

- They appeared for the sake of Sarah

That is exactly where the focus turns as the story develops

And he said, “Behold, in the tent.”

Abraham answers the question of these men about where Sarah is, “**behold, in the tent**”

- Nothing spectacular
- He was just telling the truth

To Abraham, this must have been an interesting question

- In that custom, women typically didn’t eat with the men
- Women would be separated from the men, typically on the other side of the tent

¹⁰ And he said, “I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son.”

Aside from verse three of this chapter, all of the references to these visitors thus far have been in the plural

- But now one of these men becomes the Spokesman for the group

This Person says, “**I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son**”

- What a strange comment to be made by a visitor!
- Once again, we see that these visitors knew much more about Abraham than Abraham did about them

Not only does this Visitor know who the name of Abraham’s wife

- He now tells him that Sarah will have a son this time next year

For Abraham, this may not have been such a big deal

- God Himself had appeared to him in Genesis 17, informing him of this same truth, “My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year” (17:21)

Perhaps Abraham was beginning to put the pieces of the puzzle together

- Perhaps he recognized these visitors are messengers from the LORD
- We are not sure at this point

And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him.

Abraham certainly has had the specific promise of Sarah giving birth within a year given to him twice

- But there is someone else who hears these words

The latter part of 18:10 tells us, “Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him”

She had been listening to the entire conversation between Abraham and these visitors

- Perhaps she overheard these men ask of Abraham, “Where is Sarah your wife?”
- You can see her move closer to the conversation, knowing that her name was mentioned by a complete stranger

Also notice that Moses helps us to understand something very important about where Sarah was in relation to the conversation

- Sarah was “behind” the Man who was speaking

In other words, this Man did not have direct line of sight with her

- As a matter of fact, she was completely behind Him
- This truth will become more important as we near the end of this passage

¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing.

An editorial comment is provided lest we forget some crucial details about this couple

Three specific truths are given about this couple

- They “were old”
- They were “advanced in age”
- Sarah “was past childbearing”

We know that Abraham is 100 years old and Sarah is 90 years old (17:17)

- The Text reinforces that truth

But the Text draws particular attention to Sarah when it says that she “was past childbearing”

- We know that she has been barren all of her life
- She has never had the privilege of bearing children

But this specific phrase draws attention to the fact that at this point in time, it is *impossible* for her to have children

- Physically impossible, that is

Sarah has reached menopause

- “By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised” (Heb 11:11)

¹² And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?”

When Sarah heard this Man speak of her having a child in a year, her natural reaction was one of laughter

- She knew the condition of her body
- She knew that she had never been able to have children

But this was not an audible laughter

- The Text says that she “**laughed to herself**” (18:12)
 - o It was under her breath

In her mind – unheard by those around her – she said, “**After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?**”

- In her own mind, it is unfathomable that she could give birth

Sarah mentions her own physical condition first then she mentions Abraham’s condition

- She is looking at her physical circumstances around her
- She is limiting God’s actions to what seems best to her

From Sarah’s perspective, her situation was hopeless

In both instances where God has promised a son to Abraham and Sarah, both of them have laughed

- You remember from last week that their son would be named Isaac, which means “he laughs”

The initial reaction of Abraham and Sarah was one of laughter

- God would use their son’s name to reinforce this response

¹³ And the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?’

As soon as Sarah laughed and spoke these words, the LORD asks Abraham, “**Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?’**”

Abraham, of course, didn’t hear Sarah laugh

- He didn’t even know that she had been listening

So this question from God must have taken him off guard

- He had no idea how to answer

In reality, this question wasn’t even designed for Abraham

- God was asking this question out loud for the sake of Sarah

God knew that Sarah had been listening

- He knew that Sarah laughed
- He knew that Sarah had doubts about what He could do

For the first time in the chapter, we understand that the Speaker of the group is none other than the LORD

- This is a personal appearance of Jesus Christ before His incarnation

The other two men are angels

- We know this from the fact that the Lord departed from the presence of Abraham
- But the other two men are called angels in 19:1

Angels are spirits; however, they can be clothed in human form when the occasion requires

When Hagar was in the wilderness by herself, the Angel of the LORD appeared to her

- She didn't know His identity at first
- But He allowed her to see His identity over a period of time

Likewise, Abraham didn't have a full comprehension of who these three men were

- But over time, God opened his eyes to see the true identity and nature of Himself and the two angels

¹⁴ Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son."

But the LORD does not stop with the one question

- He asks another question, "**Is anything too difficult for the LORD?"**

This is one of the monumental verses in the Bible

- It succinctly portrays God as the Almighty One

Sarah came to realize that nothing is too difficult for the LORD

God had shown her two qualities about Himself

- He was all-knowing
 - o He knew Sarah's name
 - o He knew where she was
 - o He knew she was listening
 - o He knew she laughed
 - o He knew she had doubted
- He was all-powerful
 - o He could do what was humanly impossible

For a woman who was highly skeptical about giving birth to a child when she was 91 – past menopause – this was exactly what she needed

- God gently but firmly rebuked her doubts and assured her that nothing is too difficult for the LORD

Sarah needed to be reminded of Who was making this promise

- God could be trusted
- God was faithful
- God was all-powerful

Sarah's doubts did not sidetrack or slow down the promise of God

- We are reminded that God alone would bring this promise to fulfillment¹⁴

¹⁵ Sarah denied *it* however, saying, "I did not laugh; for she was afraid.

Knowing that this Man was more than a human, Sarah denied that she laughed

- But in her denial, she lied

Not only had she doubted but now she lied about it

- She was not coming clean with God about her sin

Of course, throughout Genesis, we have seen individuals lie and blame others for sin instead of coming clean and confessing sin to God

We are told that it was out of fear that Sarah made this brash move

- Adam hid from God because of fear
- Abraham acted deceitfully toward Sarah out of fear in Egypt
- Now Sarah is afraid

And He said, "No, but you did laugh."

God's response to Sarah is a simple affirmation of truth, "No, but you did laugh"

This must have been a really painful experience for Sarah

- To be a mother had been a long-term desire and goal of hers
- But God had prevented her from bearing children

It was this sense of desperation that caused her to confess in 16:2, "**Now behold, the LORD has prevented me from bearing *children*. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children through her**"

- She knew that God was the One who could open or close the womb

Perhaps there was a real sense of bitterness toward God for not allowing her to have children

- Then when Abraham had a child through Hagar, this confirmed the fact that she was the problem

But now the LORD had initially sought her out in order to confront her over her sin of doubt

- God had intentionally waited until it was humanly impossible for her to have children
- Then – and then only – did God appear to promise her a son

At long last, Sarah was brought to believe the promise regarding her son

- The One who had read her mind is the same God who would open her womb¹⁵

No longer would Sarah be barren

- Instead, she would be blessed

We know from the NT that Gabriel – an angel of God – appeared to Mary, a virgin

¹⁴ Hamilton, 14.

¹⁵ Waltke, 268.

- He told her that God would intervene in her life and cause her to bear a child, even though she had never known a man

Gabriel told Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God” (Lk 1:35-37)

- God’s power was seen clearly in the lives of two women
 - o Mary – God allowed a virgin to conceive
 - o Elizabeth – God allowed this woman to conceive in her old age

This is the time of the year when we celebrate Christmas

- The human birth of our Lord Jesus Christ

What greater time to be reminded of God’s power!

- God is the God of the impossible!

He can open the womb of an older lady

- He can allow a virgin to conceive

The word used for “difficult” in Genesis 18:14 literally means “wonderful”

- It is the same term used in Isaiah 9:6, “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace”

It is also the term used in Psalm 139 to describe God’s knowledge as being “wonderful” (139:6, 14)

- It is beyond our comprehension and imagination

The One who promised a son to Sarah is the Almighty God

- He specializes in things that are humanly impossible

Consider some of the magnificent events that we have seen about God’s power in Genesis thus far

- God created the heavens and the earth
- God destroyed humanity in the Flood
- God confounded the languages at Babel

“Is anything too difficult for the LORD?”

- No, Sarah, nothing is too difficult for the Lord

Other events in the Old Testament tell of God’s great power

- He brought about great plagues in Egypt
- He parted the Red Sea so that the children of Israel could cross over
- He supplied the needs for Israel as they wandered in the wilderness

“Is anything too difficult for the LORD?”

- No, Israel, nothing is too difficult for the Lord

The New Testament bears out similar truth

- Christ healed the sick, raised the dead, and cast out demons
- God the Father raised Christ from the dead

- The Gospel was taken to the ends of the Earth

“Is anything too difficult for the LORD?”

- No, Church, nothing is too difficult for the Lord

The question that the LORD asked Sarah is a question that we need to answer ourselves

- “Is anything too difficult for the LORD?”
- Of course, to ask the question is to answer it

Your answer to that question will show a lot about your view of God

- Is He the Almighty God of Scripture?
- Or have you redefined Him according to your own terms?

There may be times in your life when God does something spectacular

- Your first response may be one of shock
- You may be taken off guard

But don't limit your perspective to what makes sense to you

- The apostle Paul could write in Ephesians 3, “Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, ²¹ to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen” (3:20-21)

I don't know what you think is impossible in your life

- I don't know what you think God could never do in your life

But I am here to tell you that God delights in doing things that are humanly impossible

- He does this so that He will get the glory

For those of us who are in the New Covenant because of Christ, know that

- He wants you to enjoy His presence
- He expects you to trust His promise

Are you enjoying the fellowship with God?

- Do you enjoy looking to God for direction and counsel as you make decisions or do you think you are smart enough to figure things out on your own?
- Do you look to Him for strength or do you attempt to do things on your own?

How do you normally react to God's Word?

- Do you respond with doubt?
- Or do you respond with expectancy, waiting to see what He will do next?

Over the last two weeks, we have seen God confirm His promise of a son to Sarah and Abraham

- This is the result of over twenty years of waiting on their parts

This wasn't an overnight decision

- Abraham and Sarah have been through a lot together

Each has attempted to come up with a human solution to a Divine promise

- Instead of finding fulfillment, they only found frustration

You see, there are great promises for those of us who look to God

- But we must be willing to wait on His timing

By nature, we are impatient people

- We want instant everything

But friend, sanctification is not instantaneous

- It is a long-term process in our relationship with God