

# Is Anything Too Hard for the LORD?

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Bible with you this morning, please open it up to Genesis chapter 18. Genesis chapter 18. We're continuing on through the story of Abraham, and there's been a lot of that journey. I'm not going to sum it all up again, but essentially God has made some amazing promises to Abraham and Abraham has trusted God, but he's also had difficulty and struggle all along the way.

Two Sundays ago, we saw how the Lord renewed the covenant or not renewed, but confirmed the covenant that he had made with Abraham and gave him the very specific promise that Abraham was probably waiting for. About this time next year, you will have a son by Sarah. Finally, a date to circle on the calendar by which God would do what he had promised to do or begin to bring all of this to pass. And it's not long after this that we come to our story for this morning, which is in Genesis 18.

The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. He said, if I have found favor in your eyes, my Lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought and, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat so you can be refreshed and then go on your way. Now that you have come to your servant.

Very well, they answered, do as you say. So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah quick. He said, get three seeds of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread. Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice tender calf and gave it to a servant who hurried to prepare it. He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree. Where is your wife, Sarah? They asked him. They're in the tent, he said. Then one of them said, I will surely return to you about this time next year and Sarah, your wife will have a son. Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him.

Abraham and Sarah were already very old and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, after I am worn out and my Lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?

[ 3 : 1 3 ] Then the Lord said to Abraham, why did Sarah laugh and say, will I really have a child now that I am old? Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son. Sarah was afraid. So she lied and said, I did not laugh. But he said, yes, you did laugh.

So here we have another appearance from the Lord, not long after his most recent one. And it's quite the story. It begins with Moses telling us that the Lord appeared to Abraham. And as soon as we hear that, we're kind of, we're ready to know more about this encounter with God. What was this like?

But the first thing that he tells us is that Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. This is different than some of the other ways that God has appeared in the past through visions, through just speaking to him with a, with a voice. God, the Lord Yahweh appears to Abraham in human form or in human form or in human appearance. And we get confirmation of that further down in the passage. In verse 10, we find out that one of them says the very same promise that the Lord had said in the previous chapter. And then in verse 13, then the Lord said to Abraham, this conversation just kind of continues on. And it's, it's, it's, it's kind of partway through that we realized that one of these men is the Lord himself. If we continue to read through the story for the rest of the chapter and into the beginning of 19, we discover there that the two other men were angels. And this is, this is a, a, a very strange kind of thing. I mean, can you imagine what Abraham might have

been thinking in all of this?

We're kind of left to wonder at what point did he realize that this was the Lord? Was it right at the beginning? Did he recognize him right away? Or was it kind of partway through? And there's kind of back and forth over this. And at the end of the day, I'm not sure we can really confidently say this is the moment where it clicked, where it dawned. But at the end of the, all of this, what an amazing thing to have happen. I mean, imagine this, there you are standing at the door of your house, looking out and you see three men on the driveway. And one of them is the Lord himself, God himself, God himself, the one who we have, we know from before this spoke the universe into being in his righteousness and justice. He flooded the whole world. He's the, he's the one who confused the languages of the people, the builders at Babel. This God, Yahweh, the Lord was standing there in human appearance. He came stooped down in a sense to pay a visit to Abraham face to face and confirm. Yes, I am going to keep my promise to you.

Can you imagine what Abraham must've been thinking in that moment? Like quick, we got to get the best we have of everything. Like this is, this is not just a once in a lifetime thing for some people. [7:18] They'd never get this opportunity to meet with the Lord like this, to have a visit like this quick. Let's get the finest flour, bake, bake some bread, get the best calf that we have, kill it, make a feast and set it before the guests.

Well, this visit was not without purpose. The Lord came with a very specific purpose in mind and very quickly the Lord turns and the angels with him. They turn the conversation to Sarah.

Verse nine, where is your wife, Sarah? They asked him. Oh, they're in the tent, he said. Then one of them said, I will surely return to you about this time next year and Sarah, your wife, will have a son.

We get this detail. Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. You've probably seen that moment in the movies. I love that moment where someone important comes to the house to meet with someone and they go into the room to privately have their conversation and then the whole rest of the family goes up against the door and they're all listening. You know, this is kind of the picture we get of Sarah. She's, she's out of sight. She's in the tent, but she's, she's, she's listening in to this conversation. And then she hears the wildest thing.

The Lord says about this time next year, Sarah will have a son and it rises up within her. She, she laughs.

[9:11] But notice what it says in the story. It says she laughs to herself. Like we've probably all had a moment like that too, where we just at a moment found something really funny, but it maybe wasn't appropriate to laugh out loud. And so we're kind of just trying to like stifle it and keep it in.

This is, this is Sarah in this moment. The thought of having a child at 89 years old. You've got to be kidding me. Like this is, she laughs to herself, literally laughs within herself silently.

Nobody heard a thing. And then the craziest thing ever from Sarah's perspective happens.

The Lord says to Abraham, why did Sarah laugh and say, and then he basically just repeats the very words that she was thinking in her head silently in that moment.

Can you imagine how Sarah must've felt in that moment? Like, Whoa, she kind of comes out and I didn't laugh. Yes, you did laugh.

[10:33] It's understandable in a sense that she's afraid. It says she lied because she was afraid. I mean, how, when does this happen to you that, that someone else repeats your very thoughts in front of you? It's in a sense, we, we, we, we have to expect that she's going to try to cover up the reality that the Lord knew what happened in that moment in her heart.

It's right about here that we start to wonder, well, why did she laugh? Just what was so funny about this? And in the story, we're given a few different reasons. The first comes to us.

Verse 11. The narrator reminds us Abraham and Sarah were already very old. Abraham was 99 years old.

Sarah was 89 years old. So don't just picture a woman hiding behind the tent flap. That's young. Picture an elderly woman.

The second reason. And verse 11, Sarah was past the age of childbearing. The Hebrew euphemism there makes it quite clear that she got her membership to the menopause club a long time ago.

[12:04] And for those of us men who maybe don't really think about that a lot, let me translate that for you. When it comes to reproducing, Sarah was no longer producing her half of the equation that's required for there to be offspring, a child conceived.

Biologically, physiologically, it's impossible for her. That's the second reason she laughs. I mean, this doesn't happen.

It got me thinking, you know, what is the kind of the oldest age at which you could become pregnant? And I just did a little bit of googling.

I was curious. And I was shocked. Apparently, the oldest one we have on record, aside from this one, which is not included in that for some reason, is a person in 1881.

This is like last century. At the age of 62, she conceived naturally. And that is like a once in a century kind of thing.

[13:18] Like this is extremely rare. And so here Sarah is 89 years old. It's impossible.

This doesn't happen. I mean, she's barren. She hasn't had children yet. She's already been through the range of emotions over and over and over again. I imagine a woman in that place would be very quick to search out and look for those stories of women who have conceived later in life.

But it's not that it was unlikely for her. Like it was over. She had long moved on from that idea of having it happen the natural way.

Like, what are you talking about? There's a hint of cynicism in her voice.

Skepticism. She asks this question. She says, or she thinks, After I am worn out and my Lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?

[14:24] Like, yeah, right. It's not even possible. And the Lord kind of confirms that this was her attitude in the way that he phrases the question.

Why did Sarah laugh and say, Will I really have a child now that I am old? Like, really? Like, yes, really. The Lord said it and he meant it.

And she's questioning whether it's really true, whether it's truly going to happen. The Lord himself says, Is anything too hard for the Lord?

And it's a good translation, but kind of bound up in the sense of that question, too hard is the idea. Is anything too wonderful, too miraculous, too marvelous, that the Lord can't do it?

The reason the Lord asks that question is because Sarah thinks it is. This is impossible. This is just not going to happen.

[15:32] And yet the Lord affirms again. He says it again. I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son.

Notice the way that the Lord phrases his question to Abraham. Sarah is kind of back in the tent at this moment, still in verse 13. He says, Why did Sarah laugh and say, Will I really have a child now that I am old?

Of course, the Lord knows the answer to that question. It's a rhetorical question. What's the statement beneath that? I think the statement is simple.

The Lord expects that his people will take him at his word. He said that he would do it. And this is not the first time Sarah's heard it either.

He said that he would do it. And he expects that we, that she would take him at his word. At the same time, I think we, you know, we understand Sarah.

[16:43] We understand the laughter. We understand, like, this is impossible. Notice the Lord's claim in verse 14.

This is, these are my favorite words in the whole story. Will I really have a child now that I am old? Why did she say that? Is anything too hard for the Lord?

What a thing to say. Her getting pregnant at 89, restarting that stuff in her body and enabling her to conceive, that's nothing.

Of course I can do that. There's, that's easy. That's not too hard for me. That's not too wonderful or miraculous for me. But notice that it's not just that, that he, that the Lord claims.

He says, is anything too hard for the Lord? Like anything, that, that's, that's, that's a whole lot more. Think about that.

[17:52] Is there anything that I cannot do? Says the Lord. What a thing to say. It reminds me of my days back in Bible college and I don't know who brought this up, but this ridiculous question, if God can do anything, can he create a rock that's so heavy that he can't lift it?

I don't know if you've ever heard that question. Ridiculous question, you know, because if he can't create a rock that's too heavy for him to lift, then he can't do everything. Or if he can create it, but he can't lift it, then he can't do everything.

Like, what a load of hooey. Listen to what the Lord says. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Answer, no. I can do anything.

I can create a rock of any size and I can lift it too. Anything. This is the Lord's claim to being all-powerful, all-mighty.

So the year goes by and I imagine there's great expectation both Abraham and Sarah.

[19:18] The story continues in chapter 21, verse 1. Now the Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised.

Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave him the name Isaac, gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him as God commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Sarah said, God has brought me laughter and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.

And she added, who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children yet I have born him a son in his old age. The year goes by, there's some events that Sodom and Gomorrah, some other things, a journey down to southern Judah and then the time comes.

She's pregnant. This pregnancy is going forward and finally the long-awaited son of promise has come. 25 years plus after the initial promise that he would be the father of a great numerous offspring.

[20:44] A long time in the making, but what a sweet moment. It must have been for this elderly couple. Notice the emphasis of the one telling the story.

Three times he makes it crystal clear. The Lord visited Sarah as he had said. And the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised.

She became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age at the very time God had promised him. God kept his promise and he did it exactly as he said he would.

Three times he emphasizes it. The triple whammy. Yes, God did what he said he would do. And we see this kind of come full circle when it comes to this laughter.

You remember how this all started? Abraham falling on his face before the Lord and laughing at the thought of his wife becoming pregnant and bearing a son in her old age. God goes along with it graciously.

[21:54] All right, we're going to call him Isaac which means he laughed. Then the laughter passes on to Sarah. A little different kind of laughter. Cynical, kind of unbelieving, skeptical, doubting laughter.

And finally it comes full circle. The child is born and look at Sarah's words. God has brought me laughter. This is the gift of God, this son.

And not only do I have him but I have the laughter, I have joy. And even when it, you know, the people around me they're going to laugh with me.

I'm going to laugh with me. After all those years of trying and trying and trying and not getting her heart's desire and then trying to do it through Ishmael with Hagar, at last the son of promise is here and Abraham and Sarah are filled with great joy.

I love the picture that we get of God in this story. He's the God who knows exactly what we're thinking. He hears the silent thoughts of our hearts just as he did for Sarah.

[23:22] I love the picture that we get of his, just how powerful he is. Is anything too hard for me? I can do anything. I love the picture that we get of his graciousness graciousness and mercy towards Sarah.

She laughs in the face of his promise and then lies to his face and yet the Lord is merciful and gives her, blesses her with what he promised anyway.

This great God, the Lord, Yahweh, and yet he stoops down and comes to pay Abraham a visit in the most personal and intimate way possible in human form right to the dinner table of Abraham.

I can't help but see in some of those things a picture of a pointer to Christ.

This is not unlike how God would do it again thousands of years later. More and more promises made throughout the years, more and more years waiting patiently for what God has promised until that time when the ultimate son of promise would be born into our world in human form, the most personal and intimate way possible, this time permanent humanity.

[25:04] Stooping down to our level, coming to the table with us to affirm the promises of the new covenant over a meal with his people.

Just as the Lord is patient and bears with Abraham and Sarah, so Jesus was patient and bore with the doubt and unbelief of his disciples.

Like, where are we going to get all the, enough bread to feed 5,000 people? And the same statement is made through Christ again and again.

Is anything too hard for the Lord? As he heals the sick, as he walks on the water, as he multiplies the loaves and the fish to feed multitudes, as he speaks to the storm and calms it, as he causes the lame to walk, the blind to see and the dead to be raised to life?

Are all these parallels just coincidence? Or does God have a wonderful way of pointing to the end from the beginning?

[ 26 : 26 ] Where do we find ourselves before this God, this Lord, of Abraham? I hope that we find ourselves trembling in fear as Sarah did, a good fear, a right fear, at the realization that he knows us inside and out even better than we thought possible.

And I hope that those words is anything too hard for the Lord strike right to the core of our hearts. We have a God who can do anything, who can do everything.

As you look at the difficulty of the situations that you're in in your life, we have a God who is all powerful. God is powerful. But he doesn't always do things the way that we expect.

This story is not here to tell us God is all powerful and so he will do whatever you need him to do or want him to do in your life. This story is here to tell us God is all powerful and so there is nothing that can interfere with him keeping his promises to his people.

He did it for Abraham and he will do it for you. And so the question that we're left with all of this at the end of all of this is what has the Lord promised to us?

[ 28 : 05 ] If it's that certain that we will receive what has been promised to us then shouldn't we make it top priority to know just what the Lord has promised to us?

what has he said? Sometimes I wonder if as Christians we just kind of float through life with just kind of an empty wish or hope that Jesus will save us and nothing more.

We can do better than that. We can have confidence because the Lord has made specific promises to us through Jesus. What are those promises?

Do you know them? We could talk of the promise of eternal life. We could talk of the promise of resurrection body. We could talk of the promise of his return. We could talk of the promise of his great heavenly kingdom which he will bring on this earth someday and the list goes on.

We could talk about being blameless and spotless before the throne of God because of what Christ has done and on and on and on.

[ 29 : 13 ] Do you know those promises? We could talk about specific situations in our lives for which God has given us promises in here for each and every one of those kinds of situations.

Times when we're anxious, times when we're fearful, times when we're sick, where we're going through great difficulty and struggle, trials, relationships aren't going the way that we hoped that they would.

there's a promise for everything that we need to live a godly life. This was our verse for VBS this summer. 2 Peter 1 verse 3 His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life or for life and godliness.

How? Through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these, through his glory and goodness, he has given us his very great and precious promises.

So that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. Do you know the promises that have been given to you?

[ 30 : 39 ] And do you know that there is absolutely nothing in heaven and on earth that can stop the Lord from keeping them to you? What an amazing God we have.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we stand in awe of you.

we stand in awe of all you are, of all you have done, of your great love, of your grace, which you have freely offered to us.

Thank you. Teach us to walk by faith, to take you seriously, to take you at your word, just as Abraham and Sarah learned.

Lord, we ask this in Christ's name. Amen.