

Genesis 18:1 – 15

¹ 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. ² When he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him; 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. 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.' And they said, 'So do, as you have said.' 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 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. ⁹ Then they said to him, 'Where is Sarah your wife?' And he said, 'There, in the tent.' ¹⁰ He said, 'I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son.' And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him. ¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. ¹² Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?' ¹³ And the LORD said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?' ¹⁴ Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.' ¹⁵ Sarah denied it however, saying, 'I did not laugh'; for she was afraid. And He said, 'No, but you did laugh.'

Historical and Cultural Background

- God had just renamed both Abram and Sarai, and promised them a son (Gen.17:15 – 27)
- The oaks of Mamre: Abraham had pitched his tent there when Lot first departed from him for Sodom (Gen.13:18).
- The meal: Think of the original garden of Eden as the place where God wanted people to eat in His presence (Gen.2). Then, Noah built an altar and offered a burnt offering after the flood as symbolic of sharing a meal with God (Gen.9:19 – 21). Apparently, Abraham also built altars and offered sacrifices which represented sharing a meal with God.
- Three measures (*seah*) of fine flour is a great quantity. A seah is about two gallons (de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, p.202) and a calf for just three visitors shows great generosity, since a lamb or a goat would have been more than adequate (cf. 2 Sam 12:4; Lk 15:27 – 30).
- 'Pleasure' (*ednah*) in Sarah's question (Genesis 18:12) is a cognate of 'Eden'

Questions

1. What do you think this visit was like? We as the readers know it was 'the LORD'. How did Abraham experience it?
 - a. It seems sudden that the three men appeared. He was sitting in the doorway of his tent, when 'behold,' three men were standing opposite him. Three men can't just sneak up on you like that. They seem to appear suddenly.
 - b. Abraham addresses the three men as 'My Lord,' in the singular. Why? What does he sense or know that we don't? Now the tables are turned in terms of us as readers and Abraham as character in the story. Abraham seems to know something we don't. How did these men appear? Was Abraham addressing all three of the men as one entity? Or was there a central figure? I lean towards the latter since in the next chapter, two of the men go to Sodom and Gomorrah.
 - c. 'They' also speak as one.
 - d. The three men also know Sarah's name. And this appears to be a very short time after the event of Genesis 17. Who else would have known that Sarai's name is now Sarah?
2. That explains why Abraham prepares a meal fit for royalty! Imagine what the meal is like! Six gallons of fine flour would make a huge amount of bread. A whole calf is a huge amount of meat. Plus milk and curds. Perhaps other things that aren't stated explicitly, like figs, dates, and olives.
 - a. What does a meal mean in the Bible? Intimate friendship, enjoyment of each other, hospitality, honor.
 - b. Certainly it means that here, as God shares an intimate moment with Abraham, and even draws Sarah into the conversation as if there were no physical distance between them.
 - c. Later, in Jesus' day it also comes to mean economic sharing and radical inclusion (Lk.14).
 - d. Application: What does it mean to share a meal with God? How do you welcome Him into your life?
3. How does God express concern for Sarah and relate to Sarah throughout this meal?
 - a. God calls her by her new name, Sarah. Abraham would have to think that that confirms his suspicions that this is God or an angel of God.
 - b. God gets more specific than He did in Genesis 17. The birth will happen within the year.
 - c. Sarah laughs because she thinks of her own body at 90 years and Abraham's body at 100 years. The meaning of her words shows she thinks that Abraham's penis isn't even working much anymore, and perhaps her own sexual stimulation is gone, too. Both she (v.12) and the biblical narrator (v.11) say that they are old and past childbearing age.
 - d. God reads Sarah's secret thoughts from a distance! 'The LORD speaks directly to Sarah's silent laughter. It's a dangerous thing to carry on a secret conversation within your soul in the presence of the LORD. He exposes her hidden thoughts with the penetrating question, "Why did Sarah laugh?" But notice that when he repeats her internal reasoning, he graciously edits out the description of her withered body, and politely removes the reference to her "old man." When God speaks about us, he places us in the best possible light.' (Brian Morgan, *Entertaining Angels*, sermon from April 8th, 2001, www.pbcc.org)
 - e. God speaks directly to Sarah in v.15. Notice by that point, He has drawn her fully into the conversation.
 - f. God gives Sarah the opportunity to laugh and feel joy, just like Abraham laughed and felt joy in Gen.17:17.
 - g. How does God show concern for Sarah's faith? He wants her to completely trust Him also. It's not just about Abraham's faith. He wants two willing and faithful partners in this venture. As Peter will later say, 'a fellow heir of the grace of life,' where 'fellow' means 'equal' as it does in Ephesians 3:6.
 - h. This means that God treats husband and wife, and man and woman, as co-equal because that is His creation order from Genesis 1 and 2. Both are made in His image. He calls both to trust Him so that His image would be manifested by them.
 - i. Illus: story of the equality of women in God's sight.