

Bible Study for June 02, 2021

[adapted from The Serendipity Study Bible]

Read Genesis 18.1-15

The LORD appeared to Abraham^[a] by the oaks^[b] of Mamre while^[c] he was sitting at the entrance^[d] to his tent during the hottest time of the day. ² Abraham^[e] looked up^[f] and saw^[g] three men standing across from^[h] him. When he saw them^[i] he ran from the entrance of the tent to meet them and bowed low^[j] to the ground.^[k]

³ He said, “My lord,^[l] if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by and leave your servant.^[m] ⁴ Let a little water be brought so that^[n] you may all^[o] wash your feet and rest under the tree. ⁵ And let me get^[p] a bit of food^[q] so that you may refresh yourselves^[r] since you have passed by your servant’s home. After that you may be on your way.”^[s] “All right,” they replied, “you may do as you say.”

⁶ So Abraham hurried into the tent and said to Sarah, “Quick! Take^[t] three measures^[u] of fine flour, knead it, and make bread.”^[v] ⁷ Then Abraham ran to the herd and chose a fine, tender calf, and gave it to a servant,^[w] who quickly prepared it.^[x] ⁸ Abraham^[y] then took some curds and milk, along with the calf that had been prepared, and placed the food^[z] before them. They ate while^[aa] he was standing near them under a tree.

⁹ Then they asked him, “Where is Sarah your wife?” He replied, “There,^[ab] in the tent.” ¹⁰ One of them^[ac] said, “I will surely return^[ad] to you when the season comes round again,^[ae] and your wife Sarah will have a son!”^[af] (Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, not far behind him.^[ag] ¹¹ Abraham and Sarah were old and advancing in years;^[ah] Sarah had long since passed menopause.)^[ai] ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, thinking,^[aj] “After I am worn out will I have pleasure,^[ak] especially when my husband is old too?”^[al]

¹³ The LORD said to Abraham, “Why^[am] did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really^[an] have a child when I am old?’ ¹⁴ Is anything impossible^[ao] for the LORD? I will return to you when the season comes round again and Sarah will have a son.”^[ap] ¹⁵ Then Sarah lied, saying, “I did not laugh,” because she was afraid. But the LORD said, “No! You did laugh.”^[aq]

Footnotes

- a. Genesis 18:1 **tn** *Heb* “him”; the referent (Abraham) has been specified in the translation for clarity.
- b. Genesis 18:1 **tn** Or “terebinths.”
- c. Genesis 18:1 **tn** The disjunctive clause here is circumstantial to the main clause.
- d. Genesis 18:1 **tn** The Hebrew noun translated “entrance” is an adverbial accusative of place.
- e. Genesis 18:2 **tn** *Heb* “he”; the referent (Abraham) has been specified in the translation for clarity.
- f. Genesis 18:2 **tn** *Heb* “lifted up his eyes.”
- g. Genesis 18:2 **tn** *Heb* “and saw, and look.” The particle הִנֵּה (*hinneh*) draws attention to what he saw. The drawn-out description focuses the reader’s attention on Abraham’s deliberate, fixed gaze and indicates that what he is seeing is significant.
- h. Genesis 18:2 **tn** The Hebrew preposition עַל (*‘al*) indicates the three men were nearby, but not close by, for Abraham had to run to meet them.
- i. Genesis 18:2 **tn** The pronoun “them” has been supplied in the translation for clarification. In the Hebrew text the verb has no stated object.
- j. Genesis 18:2 **tn** The form וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ (vayyishtakhu, “and bowed low”) is from the verb הִשְׁתַּחֲוּהוּ (*hishtakhavah*, “to worship, bow low to the ground”). It is probably from a root חָוָה (*khavah*), though some derive it from שָׁחָה (*shakhah*).
- k. Genesis 18:2 **sn** The reader knows this is a theophany. The three visitors are probably the LORD and two angels (see Gen 19:1). It is not certain how soon Abraham recognized the true identity of the visitors. His actions suggest he suspected this was something out of the ordinary, though it is possible that his lavish treatment of the visitors was done quite unwittingly. Bowing down to the ground would be reserved for obeisance of kings or worship of the LORD. Whether he was aware of it or not, Abraham’s action was most appropriate.
- l. Genesis 18:3 **tc** The MT has the form אֲדֹנָי (*‘adonay*, “Master”) which is reserved for God. This may reflect later scribal activity. The scribes, knowing it was the LORD, may have put the proper pointing with the word instead of the more common אֲדֹנִי (*‘adoni*, “my master”).
- m. Genesis 18:3 **tn** *Heb* “do not pass by from upon your servant.”
- n. Genesis 18:4 **tn** The imperative after the jussive indicates purpose here.

- o. Genesis 18:4 **tn** The word “all” has been supplied in the translation because the Hebrew verb translated “wash” and the pronominal suffix on the word “feet” are plural, referring to all three of the visitors.
- p. Genesis 18:5 **tn** The Qal cohortative here probably has the nuance of polite request.
- q. Genesis 18:5 **tn** *Heb* “a piece of bread.” The Hebrew word **לֶחֶם** (*lekhem*) can refer either to bread specifically or to food in general. Based on Abraham’s directions to Sarah in v. 6, bread was certainly involved, but v. 7 indicates that Abraham had a more elaborate meal in mind.
- r. Genesis 18:5 **tn** *Heb* “strengthen your heart.” The imperative after the cohortative indicates purpose here.
- s. Genesis 18:5 **tn** *Heb* “so that you may refresh yourselves, after [which] you may be on your way—for therefore you passed by near your servant.”
- t. Genesis 18:6 **tn** The word “take” is supplied in the translation for stylistic reasons. In the Hebrew text the sentence lacks a verb other than the imperative “hurry.” The elliptical structure of the language reflects Abraham’s haste to get things ready quickly.
- u. Genesis 18:6 **sn** *Three measures* (*Heb* “three seahs”) was equivalent to about 20 quarts (22 liters) of flour, which would make a lot of bread. The animal prepared for the meal was far more than the three visitors needed. This was a banquet for royalty. Either it had been a lonely time for Abraham and the presence of visitors made him very happy, or he sensed this was a momentous visit.
- v. Genesis 18:6 **sn** The *bread* was the simple, round bread made by bedouins that is normally prepared quickly for visitors.
- w. Genesis 18:7 **tn** *Heb* “the young man.”
- x. Genesis 18:7 **tn** The construction uses the Piel preterite, “he hurried,” followed by the infinitive construct; the two probably form a verbal hendiadys: “he quickly prepared.”
- y. Genesis 18:8 **tn** *Heb* “he”; the referent (Abraham) has been specified in the translation for clarity.
- z. Genesis 18:8 **tn** The words “the food” are supplied in the translation for stylistic reasons. In the Hebrew text the verb has no stated object.
- aa. Genesis 18:8 **tn** The disjunctive clause is a temporal circumstantial clause subordinate to the main verb.
- bb. Genesis 18:9 **tn** The particle **הִנֵּה** (*hinneh*) often accompanies a gesture of pointing or a focused gaze.

- cc. Genesis 18:10 **tn** *Heb* “he”; the referent (one of the three men introduced in v. 2) has been specified in the translation for clarity. Some English translations have specified the referent as the LORD (cf. RSV, NIV) based on vv. 1, 13, but the Hebrew text merely has “he said” at this point, referring to one of the three visitors. Aside from the introductory statement in v. 1, the incident is narrated from Abraham’s point of view, and the suspense is built up for the reader as Abraham’s elaborate banquet preparations in the preceding verses suggest he suspects these are important guests. But not until the promise of a son later in this verse does it become clear who is speaking. In v. 13 the Hebrew text explicitly mentions the LORD.
- dd. Genesis 18:10 **tn** The Hebrew construction is emphatic, using the infinitive absolute with the imperfect tense. **sn** *I will surely return*. If Abraham had not yet figured out who this was, this interchange would have made it clear. Otherwise, how would a return visit from this man mean Sarah would have a son?
- ee. Genesis 18:10 **tn** *Heb* “as/when the time lives” or “revives,” possibly referring to the springtime.
- ff. Genesis 18:10 **tn** *Heb* “and there will be (הִנֵּה, *hinneh*) a son for Sarah.”
- gg. Genesis 18:10 **tn** This is the first of two disjunctive parenthetical clauses preparing the reader for Sarah’s response (see v. 12).
- hh. Genesis 18:11 **tn** *Heb* “days.”
- ii. Genesis 18:11 **tn** *Heb* “it had ceased to be for Sarah [after] a way like women.”
- jj. Genesis 18:12 **tn** *Heb* “saying.”
- kk. Genesis 18:12 **tn** It has been suggested that this word should be translated “conception,” not “pleasure.” See A. A. McIntosh, “A Third Root *’adah* in Biblical Hebrew,” *VT* 24 (1974): 454-73.
- ll. Genesis 18:12 **tn** The word “too” has been added in the translation for stylistic reasons.
- mm. Genesis 18:13 **tn** *Heb* “Why, this?” The demonstrative pronoun following the interrogative pronoun is enclitic, emphasizing the LORD’s amazement: “Why on earth did Sarah laugh?”
- nn. Genesis 18:13 **tn** The Hebrew construction uses both הֲאֵלֶּיךָ (*ha’af*) and אִמְנָם (*’umnam*): “Indeed, truly, will I have a child?”
- oo. Genesis 18:14 **tn** The Hebrew verb אָלַף (*pala*) means “to be wonderful, to be extraordinary, to be surpassing, to be amazing.”

- pp. Genesis 18:14 **sn** *Sarah will have a son*. The passage brings God's promise into clear focus. As long as it was a promise for the future, it really could be believed without much involvement. But now, when it seemed so impossible from the human standpoint, when the LORD fixed an exact date for the birth of the child, the promise became rather overwhelming to Abraham and Sarah. But then this was the LORD of creation, the one they had come to trust. The point of these narratives is that the creation of Abraham's offspring, which eventually became Israel, is no less a miraculous work of creation than the creation of the world itself.
- qq. Genesis 18:15 **tn** *Heb* "And he said, 'No, but you did laugh.'" The referent (the LORD) has been specified in the translation for clarity.

Questions to Consider

1. When was the last time you laughed? What is your favourite kind of humour?
2. Hospitality of strangers was obligatory and virtuous in the Ancient Near East. How does Abraham show hospitality to the three visitors? What is the reason for these visitors coming to Abraham?
3. Why does Sarah laugh? How does Sarah's laughter differ from Abraham's back in 17.17? Why then does God rebuke Sarah but not Abraham for laughing? Why does Sarah lie about laughing?
4. What do you find laughable in this story? Why?
5. Where in your life is God telling you, "It's never too late?" Or is he saying, "It's O.K. to laugh?"