

God's Home Visit to Meet Sarah

Gen 18:1-15 starts off with Abraham's sixth encounter with God but quickly becomes a beautiful and challenging story of God being welcomed into the home to meet Sarah.

The setting is a typical Bedouin sheik's context, lounging outside his tent under some spreading trees in the heat of the day when three visitors suddenly appear.

Abraham invites them to stay for a meal

Gen 18:1-2. *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. ² 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.*

The narrator has alerted us to the fact that this was the Lord paying Abraham a visit, and the text implies that Abraham suspected this, implied by the way he bows in honour and adoration of his guests. As the story unfolds it becomes very clear that this was a God moment.

Gen 18:3-5. *³ He said, 'If I have found favour in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. ⁵ 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.'*

This was a customary display of hospitality and respect for travellers, and foot-washing was the accepted way of welcoming someone into one's home. In this encounter, we see further evidence of growing intimacy within the relationship between God and Abraham.

It is worth noting that this is the first mention of eight Old Testament references to the custom of foot-washing. What they show is that the washing of feet was the first act of honouring guests on their entering a home. The Orientals wore only sandals, so foot washing was both refreshing and an act of cleanliness, but most of all, it signified an accepting and welcoming someone into the home, which invariably then involved sharing a meal together.

Gen 18:6-8. *⁶ So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. 'Quick,' he said, 'get three seahs of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread.' ⁷ Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. ⁸ 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.*

Abraham, as the host, is the principal player in this welcome and invitation to stay and eat. Now, we must realise that this was not a 10-minute procedure – many hours would have to

be involved in the preparation for this meal. In itself, Abraham's committed activity is a demonstration of his serious attention to the significance of this encounter with these three strangers whom he suspects involve God, even though God has not announced himself to him as he has in previous encounters – Abe is spending quality time in the presence of God!!!

However, Abraham is not the one they are wanting to speak to because they have an important announcement to make that will directly involve Sarah, and ultimately, she needs to be able to respond to God in faith. So, the question is asked:

Gen 18:9-12. ⁹ *'Where is your wife, Sarah?' they asked him. 'There, in the tent,' he said. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ *Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, 'After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?'*

It is worth recalling that up to now, God has only appeared to Abraham. Therefore, Sarah has only heard second-hand, so to speak, from Abraham, and faith cannot be generated second-hand. It requires first-hand hearing – faith only comes by hearing a word from God!!!

However, Sarah simply does not believe this is possible for them both now.

Gen 18:13-14a. ¹³ *Then the LORD said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh and say, "Will I really have a child, now that I am old?"' ^{14a} Is anything too hard for the LORD?*

This is the key point that both Abraham and Sarah have to be confronted with, and us also: 'Is anything too hard for the Lord?'

Is there any stated purpose of his that is impossible to God???

Can God be trusted to fulfil his word???

It is an open question that required an answer from Abe and Sar, and also from us!!! What will be their response to this question from God?

Their difficulty lay in the fact that they had settled in the comfort of their own limited solution to their interpretation of what the problem was, their childlessness, and their current inability to see God's perspective of an eternal covenantal relationship.

If their answer is, 'Yes, some things are too hard for God' they are choosing to live in their own closed world bounded by natural human thinking rather than acknowledge God's free sovereignty to act in his grace.

If they are willing to answer, 'No, nothing is too hard for God', then they can entrust themselves and their world to God alone, and so enter through faith into God's freedom to act sovereignly.

Gen 18:14b - 15. *I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.'* ¹⁵ *Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, 'I did not laugh.'* But he said, 'Yes, you did laugh.'

Both Abraham and Sarah were confronted with their inability to accept and believe God's stated purpose for them without a supernatural faith being imparted to them.

Sarah hears for the first time herself that God intended to visit again next year 'at the appointed time', and she will have a son. God calls Sarah's unbelief out when he challenges her lie about not laughing by simply responding, 'Yes, you did laugh!'

The conclusion of this story is told in **Gen 21:1-7:**

Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. ² Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. ³ Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. ⁴ When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. ⁵ Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. ⁶ Sarah said, 'God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.'⁷ And she added, 'Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.'

Heb 11:11 confirms that it was ultimately by faith that they were able to trust God for the outworking of his promises to them.

There is a beautiful irony in this story – both Abraham and Sarah, in their own ways, laughed at the idea that God was going to give them a son in their old age, and they were instructed to name him as Isaac, with means 'laughter', and the implication was not lost on Sarah – God had the last laugh.

The Significance of Jesus Washing his Apostles' Feet

From our Christian perspective, Jesus washing the feet of his disciples on the eve of his crucifixion is the classic example of this custom. There is a beautiful connection between Abraham's expression of hospitality in welcoming God's presence into his home and Jesus' expression to his twelve apostles, eleven of whom remained faithful.

This is best seen as Jesus taking the role of a servant and welcoming the apostles into his Father's house, which was soon to be confirmed at the Last Supper when the church was initially instituted, and then after his resurrection when he would present his perfected, as in completed, human life to his Father at his throne, resulting in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the Church being constituted by the now indwelling Holy Spirit.

Questions for us to ponder and learn from in Abraham and Sarah's experiences

- How intentional are we about actively welcoming the presence of God in our daily lives?
- How willing are we to freely acknowledge the sovereignty of God and surrender to him?
- Looking at Jesus as our example, how willing are we to welcome others into our circle of friendships – Jesus even washed Judas' feet before releasing him to go to the H. P.