

**Text:** Genesis 18:1-15

**Title:** Isaac Promised

**Truth:** God reiterates the Abrahamic Covenant via the promise of a son.

**Date/Location:** Sunday January 8, 2023 at FBC

## Introduction

Take a moment to review what we have studied lately in Genesis.

Start with chapter 12—God’s initial description of the terms of the Abrahamic covenant. Abram moved to Egypt temporarily.

In chapter 13, Abram moved back to the promised land and had to split from Lot because of their combined herd size. Lot moved toward Sodom, a decision that would prove devastating in two separate incidents in the future.

The first such incident was in chapter 14, where Lot was kidnapped by a coalition of kings that came against Sodom and other allied cities. Abraham retrieved him, and Melchizedek came out and blessed Abram who had returned from defeating the kings.

In chapter 15, God officially made (“cut”) the covenant with Abram and promised the land to his descendants.

Hagar bears Ishmael in chapter 16, the result of a hare-brained (rash or ill-judged) plan to get Abram an heir since he and Sarah could not seem to make that happen. God’s tender care toward Hagar is shown.

Finally, in chapter 17, God reiterates the covenant a third time and gives a physical sign—male circumcision—to remind the nation of the blessings of the covenant (Abram will multiply, nations and kings will descend from him, the land grant) and of their responsibilities in it (walk blamelessly, keep the covenant).

Notice the cyclical nature of this portion of Scripture: God’s promise, man’s failure and God’s rescue, God’s promise confirmed, man has another failure, God remains faithful, and then God promises—and requires faithfulness in His people.

## I. Three Unannounced Visitors, v. 1-5

- A. The location was the terebinth trees of Mamre. This was a grove of trees owned by Mamre the Amorite (14:13), southwest of Jerusalem 19 miles, and at an elevation of about 3,000 feet above sea level. Abram had built an altar there to worship God (13:18). Trees would have been prized as a source of shade, shelter, wood, and perhaps indicative of a source of water.
- B. Abram was at home in his tent at the hottest part of the day, around mid-afternoon. He observed three men nearby who evidently had appeared rather suddenly, but at a bit of a distance because he had to run out from the tent to meet them. Now, Abram was nearly 100 years old at this point, so we might wonder if he really could “run.” But the text does say “run,” so Abram moved as spryly as he could.
- C. Note the humility of Abram, as great as he was. He bowed to the ground and addressed the evident leader of the group by offering hospitality, including water, a foot washing, rest, and some food to refresh them. “Since you are here, let me serve you. It will not take you any distance out of your way.” Of course, it would use up time, but the three visitors were not concerned about that. They had all the time in the world, and in that culture, time was not nearly as much of an issue as was interaction with other people.
- D. The visitors agreed to stay for a spell.

## II. Abraham and Sarah’s Hospitality, v. 6-8

- A. Notice Abraham’s hospitality (he “ran” in v. 2, “hurried” in v. 6, and “ran” in v. 7). He was concerned about these visitors, and not lazy about serving them.
- B. What is hospitality? Hospitality is using your home to minister to people. The Greek word from whence *hospitality* comes means “loving strangers,” so it is not just hosting your family or extended family. Also, hospitality is not merely using your home; it is using it to *minister to people* to provide rest, fellowship, edification, teaching, and a model for how the Christian home functions—*your* home. It is ministry, also known as service. It is serving others. It

helps those people, it generates and sustains interpersonal connection, it provides encouragement. What's not to like?! Abraham was certainly using his home to minister to strangers.

- C. Abraham quickly arranged for the food to be prepared. He asked Sarah to make cakes or bread. He took a young calf and gave it to a servant to prepare it. He then set out butter, milk, bread, and meat for the strangers to enjoy a bit of a picnic under one of the trees.

### **III. Strangers Make a Strange Promise, v. 9-15**

- A. The guests naturally inquired about Abraham's wife, figuring she had something to do with the meal they were enjoying, wondering why she has not yet appeared, or why she is absent now. She was behind the guests, in the tent. At a time when the reader would be expecting the leading visitor to make a statement of thanksgiving to the hostess for her wonderful food, he said something unexpected: I will come back in about a year, and Sarah will have a son. What a house-warming gift that is!
- B. In terms of natural procreation, this was very unrealistic. Abraham was about 100, and Sarah was about 90. They were not living in the era when people lived to 800-1000 years old. They would end up living 127 years (Sarah) and 175 (Abraham). But apparently even for them the time for child-rearing was during younger years, as it is for us today. Sarah was probably not having a monthly cycle, so it was impossible to have children.
- C. Sometime earlier that year, when Abraham was 99 years old (17:24), God had given him the sign of circumcision, and told him that he would have a son who would inherit the promise—and it would not be Ishmael. At that time, Abraham had laughed. His conclusion was that it was impossible. He was initially short on faith. But he came around quickly.
- D. Now it was Sarah's turn to laugh at the promise of God. Sarah could not believe it, so she laughed, but only internally so as not to offend her guests, and behind their backs at that. We can imagine the internal "snicker" accompanying her disbelief. But God had made this promise now several times—15:4, 17:19, and now again.

E. The LORD perceived that Sarah had laughed but reiterated the promise again and asked the rhetorical question, “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” Nothing is too hard for God (v. 14, see also Matt. 19:26 about salvation). God had repeatedly given the promise and even in their moments of unbelief He did not abandon His plan. He is persistent, longsuffering, and patient with people slow of faith or of little faith.

This is our problem—we do not believe God when He says things. When He promises, we doubt. When He tells what is coming, we ignore. When He commands us to do something, we delay or thumb our noses at it. May I emphasize that we are talking about GOD here? We are not talking about a politician, a crook, or a liar. We are talking about the Creator of all things, Who knows all things, Who has all power, Who loves His people. You might object: “But what He said was impossible!” I beg to differ, because as we will read 21, Isaac was born, as named the year before (17:19, 21). The salvation of your loved ones and neighbors is also impossible, but sometimes God works that very thing in their lives, doesn’t He? The wisdom or grace that you need to face some situation may seem impossible, but with God it is not.

F. Sarah denied lying—oops, caught! She was moved by fear to make the denial. Was it fear of God? Did she fear insulting her guests? Did she fear being found out as unbelieving? She probably had a little bit of all those, but the fact that the guest knew her thoughts made her realize that something more was happening here than just someone making an educated guess. Plus, she knew God had spoken to her husband several times before about this matter.

G. Such a lie, though it might work with people, totally failed with the all-knowing God (v. 15). You can try to deceive others, and sometimes it works. You can deceive yourself, and that works frighteningly often. But you can never deceive God.

#### **IV. Identity of the Visitors**

A. In summary: there were three men, but they are really two angels and God who had taken on the appearance of men.

- B. We learn as we read—just like Abraham did by digesting what he was experiencing—that he was interacting with some men who were not mere men.
- C. Initially, Abraham addressed the group leader as “Lord” in verse 3, but that seems to be a courtesy title instead of a reference to this one as God. Later it becomes apparent that this is a theophany because the one making the promise alludes to the LORD. By 18:22, Abraham understands that he is once again speaking with God, now appearing in a human form. This is a theophany. It is an appearance of God often in human form, usually in the Old Testament. *Theophany* derives from “θεός” (God) and “φανερώω” (to appear). Some such appearances are quite elaborate (Ezek. 1:4ff). Others are more “normal” and, like the incarnation of Jesus Christ, at least initially God seems to be a regular human.  
  
By 19:1, Moses writes explicitly that “the two angels came to Sodom.” Now we know who Abraham was hosting!
- D. Heb. 13:2 alludes to this passage when it says that we must not neglect hospitality because it is possible you could be entertaining angels and not know it. Even if that is not the case (and it is most usually *not*), there is still the general instruction to be hospitable (Romans 12:13, 1 Tim. 3:2, 1 Tim. 5:10, Titus 1:8, 1 Peter 4:9).

## Conclusion/Lessons

- A. Trust God regarding His promises.
- B. Do not be merely pragmatic, thinking, “It is impossible!”
- C. Remember the as-yet unfulfilled promises to Abraham—because they will be fulfilled even if it seems impossible.
- D. Be hospitable.
- E. Know God is omniscient and omnipotent.
- F. Don’t lie!
- G. Thank God for His patience with His “people of little faith.”

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