

5. Abraham's Dinner Guests

Old Testament Heroes

Genesis 18

Warm-up Question: Who would you most like to have dinner with and why? It could be any person from the past or present.

¹The 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. ²Abraham 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. ³He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. ⁴Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. ⁵Let 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." ⁶So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread." ⁷Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. ⁸He 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. ⁹"Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him. "There, in the tent," he said. ¹⁰Then 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. ¹¹Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. ¹²So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?" ¹³Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' ¹⁴Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son." ¹⁵Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh." But he said, "Yes, you did laugh" (Genesis 18:1-15).

The Lord Comes to Dinner

Once a year I usually lead a group of people on tour to Israel. We go to most of the major Christian holy places, but we try to do one or two things different than the majority of tourists. One of the things we like to do is to visit a place east of Jerusalem, on the way to the Dead Sea, where it is likely the Patriarchs lived, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The place is called *Genesis Land*.¹ When we arrive by bus, we are greeted by Abraham's servant, Eliezar, who loans us clothes that will protect us from the 500 yard trip by camel down to visit with Abraham at his large tent. There we are served a meal in a traditional style of Abraham's day as we sit cross-legged around tables, eating the food of the land. The meal will include lamb, pita bread and hummus, a creamy paste made of chickpeas and tahini. We also had various salads, rice and vegetables, as we listen to our host, Abraham, and look over the Dead Sea Valley. Abraham is very courteous and describes what it

would have been like to live at that time. One can see the northern edge of the Dead Sea from here. It is down in the valley somewhere below us that Lot and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah would have been situated. It is a spectacular scene and helps us in the 21st century to think of what it would be like to live in the time of the Book of Genesis. Of course, we don't know exactly where the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were, but it helps to look down into the valley and picture the scene. You realize, when you look over this expanse of desert, just how important hospitality would be to a traveler. After all, there are long stretches of land with no water, there are no convenience stores, no roadside rest stops, just desert as far as the eye can see. In this type of environment, hospitality is a matter of necessity, not just a mere courtesy.

It was a normal day for Abraham. The sun was getting high in the sky and it was hot (Verse 1). Abraham was sitting in the shade of his tent under or near the great trees of Mamre, with the view below him just as we have described in the passage above. The goats, sheep and animals were nearby with the sound of the occasional dull gong of a sheep's bell. This was the day of Abraham and Sarah's annunciation that they were going to finally have the baby of their dreams. The good news would come from the Lord YHWH Himself. Of course, Abraham did not realize that it was the Lord until later on in the afternoon. As soon as he saw the three men, Abraham sprang into action and hurried from where he was sitting to meet them. He bowed low to these three strangers.

What do you see in your mind's eye when you think of angels? How do you think these visitors looked? Two of the men were angels who went down to Sodom to bring out Abraham's nephew Lot and his family. How did the two angels seem to the men of Sodom in Genesis 19:4-5?

¹The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. ²"My lords," he said, "please turn aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning." "No," they answered, "we will spend the night in the square." ³But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate. ⁴Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. ⁵They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them" (Genesis 19:1-5).

Abraham and Lot, as with many people in the Middle East today, valued hospitality highly. Visitors to one's home are a big deal. Abraham did not know why these men had come or who the men were that was visiting him. To Abraham these men were just strangers. The writer to the Hebrews in the New Testament, has something to say about the proper treatment of visitors:

²Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it (Hebrews 13:2).

Surely the writer to the Hebrews was thinking of the visit of the Lord and His angels in this passage that we are looking at. Abraham insists that they sit down and rest under the shade of the trees, and that he will bring water to wash their dusty sandaled feet and also food, and then they can carry on their way (Verse 5). He still doesn't realize that it was the Lord who had come to visit him before sending his two angels down to Sodom. The visitors are pleased to stay awhile. It is a wonderful thought to think that the Lord of heaven and earth would come and eat and be refreshed by His people. How we all long for Jesus to come and eat with us! Of course, these visitors did not need the provisions Abraham was to bring them, but they stopped and ate for Abraham's sake. It was Abraham who received what he needed that day.

Notice that Abraham's service to these strangers was all at a hurried pace (Verses 2 and 6). He cared about not wasting their time. But the Lord was pleased to wait for Abraham to be fulfilled in his service to the Lord. Think about the time it took Abraham to get this meal together. He hurried into the tent and got Sarah busy at kneading three seahs (about six gallons) of fine flour together. Then he ran (Verse 7) to the herd and got a choice, tender calf and a servant hurrying along to kill it, before preparing a fire and roasting it. How much time would it take to roast the calf and knead and bake the bread? At least two hours, I would think. Yet the Lord and His angels patiently wait while Abraham and Sarah serve Him wholeheartedly.

It is finally about three or four in the afternoon as Abraham stands under the shade of the tree (Verse 8) while his guests eat. (We know this because the scripture states that Abraham first noticed these men as he sat by the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day, which would be around noon.) Why is Abraham standing? Perhaps he is standing cooking the meat over the nearby fire; maybe he is standing while he is serving his guests. It is as the conversation goes on, that all of a sudden it becomes clear as to whom the leading person actually is. The first clue is that the leader of the three men asks where Sarah is. How did this stranger know that Sarai's name was changed to Sarah, meaning *Mother of Princes*, during a visit by the Lord some time previously? (Genesis 17:15). Moses, the person who wrote the Book of Genesis, spells it out plainly to us, the person leading the team of three is YHVH. Whenever the name LORD is capitalized, as it is in verse ten, thirteen and fourteen, the Hebrew word is YHVH. We have added vowels to the name to help us to pronounce the name more clearly, making it JeHoVaH, or YaHVeH. YaHVeH says that He will return to them about the same time next year and that when He does, Sarah will be a mother to a son.

The God Over All Impossibilities

Behind the Lord, inside the tent, Sarah, when she heard the LORD say that she would be a mother at ninety years old, laughs within herself (Verse 12). She thinks of the impossibility of it all, a woman of ninety that is worn out with age and long past childbearing ability, and Abraham being even ten years older than her, how could this be possible? Inside her mind she laughs at the thought. She utters not a sound, but the Lord knows her thought. He asks Abraham:

“Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really have a child, now that I am old?’ ¹⁴Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.” ¹⁵Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, “I did not laugh.” But he said, “Yes, you did laugh.”

Could it be possible that God knows every thought of every person on planet earth? Would you consider that to be a troubling thought, a comforting thought, or both? Explain.

God is omniscient, which is a word that means that He is all knowing. He knows all things in the universe and in all creatures at all time, whether it is something in the past, present or future. God knows them all perfectly. God’s knowledge is absolute and unacquired. He never has to learn anything. This is omniscience.

²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. ³⁰And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows (Matthew 10:29-31).

The writer, A.W. Tozer, has spoken of God’s omniscience in this way:

“God knows instantly and effortlessly all matter and all matters, all mind and every mind, all spirit and all spirits, all being and every being, all creature hood and all creatures, every plurality and all pluralities, all law and every law, all relations, all causes, all thoughts, all mysteries, all enigmas, all feelings, all desires, every unuttered secret, all thrones and dominions, all personalities, all things visible and invisible in heaven and in earth, motion, space, time, life, death, good, evil, heaven, and hell.”²

This is an appearance of YaHVeH in human form that is visiting with Abraham along with two of His angels. Most scholars believe that this divine being that is talking with Abraham is the Lord Jesus before His birth by Mary. The Lord Jesus is revealed as the divine YaHVeH (John 1:1-3), who hears every thought, and knows all things:

³⁰Now **we can see that you know all things** and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God” (John 16:30).

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “**Lord, you know all things;** you know that I love you” (John 21:17).

Do you think that Abraham had not told Sarah about the promise that she would have a son (Genesis 17:16, 19), or do you think she was unconvinced and unbelieving? Can you imagine her emotions when she laughed at this news?

There was a gentle rebuke about her laugh of unbelief. The Lord would not gently rebuke her if this were the first time she had heard about her personally having a child in her old age. This makes it highly unlikely that Abraham had not told her. Try and put yourself in Sarah's shoes, so to speak. She had never heard the Lord speak personally to her. Each time God had spoken it had only been to Abraham. Sarah hadn't even come out of the tent yet. The Lord had asked where she was (Verse 9), and Sarah had been listening to the conversation in the tent behind the Lord (Verse 10). How would you feel about hearing from a total stranger that you were going to have a baby next year, when you have been waiting for a baby all your married life? Oh yes, and to top it off, now it is physically impossible, and you hear that it is going to happen at the age of ninety! When Hagar, Sarah's handmaid had heard from the Lord and realized that God was watching her, it had been a wonderful thing for Sarah to hear and know, but now it is Sarah who realizes that God is speaking about her personal future and the dream that she has waited for all this time! To realize that God knows her every thought is to also know that this same God can do anything. She is told by the messenger, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Verse 14). Whatever you are dealing with, know this; God understands your frustration, unbelief, and your struggles, and is aware of your thoughts. It does not stop Him from being able to provide the answer.

Personal Testimony of Overcoming Impossibilities

I had a situation in the year 2000 that seemed utterly impossible. Immediately after I married my wife Sandy, a US citizen, in 1980, I applied as a Brit for Residency to live in the USA. It took about a year but I found out that because of two minor marijuana convictions that I was honest about with the US Immigration, (committed in England when I was seventeen and twenty-one), I was not eligible for a Resident Visa. These convictions occurred before I had given my life to Christ. If it would have been only one conviction against me, it would have barred me, but I had two against me. This inadmissibility hung over my head for twenty years and was a source of great pain for us as a family. It was hard to understand how something which I did so long ago when I was very young, could keep my wife and two kids from their family in the United States. It was very hard for us to bear. I always felt inside my spirit that God would do something for me to be able to sometime take them home, but whenever I tried to overcome the visa problem; I was always met with the impossibility of what we were asking. We got some hope when I found out in 1999 that it might be possible for us to have time in the USA by getting a five-year work visa. All I needed was a job in America with a church that was similar to the one I was working with in England.

We spent all of our savings on a flight and visited the USA to attend a conference in Cincinnati, Ohio. God provided me with a Groups Pastor job at the Cincinnati Vineyard. With letter and job proposals in hand I went back to England and up to the London Embassy of the USA and asked for my work visa. They turned me down with no reason. We were brokenhearted. For twenty years I had longed to take my family home. I thought that I needed to speak to someone higher at the Embassy and was able to get the appointment. Again I was turned down flat. Try to imagine how hard it was on our

emotions. We were given hope, and then they were dashed, time and time again. After being turned down for this visa multiple times over the years, my wife Sandy wrote a letter to the State Department in Washington DC complaining about the situation. When I read the letter it was full of anger, pain and disappointment. Our dream of returning home seemed further away than ever. Nine months went by and one morning Sandy and I got into an emotional time where I was trying to build her faith and continue to believe that God would do something. She left for work that morning crying and telling me that she had to give up ever hoping to go home and that she just had to forget about this because it was causing too much pain to fight it and keep hoping for something that was not going to happen. She asked me not to talk about it again. I had been broken many times on this issue, but that particular morning the impossibility of the situation came over me. I fell to my knees in brokenness. I cried out to the Lord in prayer, telling Him that I could no longer go on believing and hoping and trying different things to overcome the situation. I had come to the bottom and was sobbing at my inability to do anything to alleviate and overcome our problem. I was still on my knees with tears streaming down my face when the phone right beside me rang. I picked up the phone and heard an American accent on the other end. It was the American Embassy telling me that they were awarding me a five-year work visa and that all I had to do was come and pick it up! I was not expecting a call, and we thought that the final decision had been made.

When everything was impossible to me, God stepped in showing me that with God all things are possible! Is anything too hard for the Lord? That was exactly what the Lord was showing Sarah and Abraham. Now that it was impossible for Abraham and Sarah to accomplish their dream, God could step in and show them that nothing was too hard for Him!

What things have you given up on that have seemed impossible? Perhaps it is the promise of a child, or you may have a child that is wandering in his or her own desert place. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Share and pray together.

Prayer: Father, I ask you for all those who have come to a place where their situation seems impossible. Would you step in for them? Would you visit them? Would you speak tenderly to them and lift their hearts to hold on to you in whatever they are going through. Amen!

Both Abraham and Sarah had both laughed at the thought that they would have a son in their old age, no wonder the Lord had given the baby the name of Isaac, which means laughter. Their laughter, which at first was a laugh of unbelief by Sarah, becomes a laugh of joy for both of them. Believe God for the impossible things! Is anything too hard for the Lord?

Keith Thomas

Email: keiththomas7@gmail.com

Website: www.groupbiblestudy.com