

Exegetical Notes – Genesis 18:1-15
“You Did Laugh”

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Verses 1-8

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.

³ He said, “If I have found favor 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.”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 was camped near the great trees of Mamre. In the early afternoon, he was sitting at the door of his tent resting. He looked up and saw “three MEN” standing nearby. He left the door of his tent to greet these men formally according to the common practice of the time.
- The identity of these “men” is not known to Abraham. He assumes that they are human beings who are passing his encampment and nothing more. In verse 3, he uses the word “lord.” This is the Hebrew word “Adonai” and is the equivalent of the English word “sir.” Abraham offers these strangers common hospitality which they accept. Abraham acts as a proper host.

Verses 9-10a

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.”***

- As the “men” eat, it becomes obvious that they know more than strangers would or should know. They asked him where his wife was and call her by the name YHWH had given her, Sarah (see Genesis 17:15). Abraham confirms that Sarah is nearby in the tent.
- Then “one of them” speaks to Abraham confirming the promise that Sarah will bear Abraham a son. The new information given is that the event will happen within the present year.
- The change in the nature of the conversation causes scholars to speculate about who these “men” actually are. Some scholars conclude that they are YHWH and two angels. They could be the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. What is clear is that, though they appear in human form, they are divine visitors and that at least one of them is YHWH.
- YHWH is the one who has confirmed the promise. Sarah will give birth to a son within the year.

Verses 10b-12

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?”

- Sarah was listening to the conversation between Abraham and these men from within the tent. When she heard the promise that she would bear Abraham a son, she laughed because she did not believe that it was possible for her to conceive and bear a son because both she and Abraham were too old. Her laughter was a sign of disbelief.

Verses 13-15

¹³ ***Then the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really have a child, now that I am old?’ ¹⁴ Is anything too hard for the LORD? 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.”***

- Now, the identity of one of the men is made perfectly clear. YHWH speaks. The word used in this verse is the divine name. YHWH asks Abraham why Sarah laughed at the promise. YHWH knows everything. Sarah's unbelief is not hidden from Him.
- Nothing is impossible or "too hard" for God. He affirms that despite Sarah's unbelief, it will happen as He has said it will.
- Sarah, now exposed before God is afraid. She lies, telling Him that she did not laugh. But YHWH knows she does not believe. He confronts her disbelief. He knows. Nothing is hidden from God.

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