

## Genesis 18A (2011)

- Abraham and Sarah are now within a year of receiving their first child together
  - This son, Isaac, will become the first of an uncountable number of descendants because of God's promise to Abraham
    - From Isaac, an entire nation will form
    - And out of that nation, God will bring His word, His tabernacle on Earth, and His Son
  - So obviously, it's very important to God how this nation develops over time...
    - What it's taught, how it is trained up
    - And what it understands about the God Who formed it
  - So today in Chapter 18 the Lord makes His sixth and most curious appearance to Abraham to prepare him better for his role as patriarch
    - And this appearance is but a few days after the previous one

**Gen. 18:1** Now the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day.

**Gen. 18:2** When he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth,

**Gen. 18:3** and said, "My Lord, if now I have found favor in Your sight, please do not pass Your servant by.

**Gen. 18:4** "Please let a little water be brought and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree;

**Gen. 18:5** and I will bring a piece of bread, that you may refresh yourselves; after that you may go on, since you have visited your servant." And they said, "So do, as you have said."

**Gen. 18:6** So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Quickly, prepare three measures of fine flour, knead it and make bread cakes."

**Gen. 18:7** Abraham also ran to the herd, and took a tender and choice calf and gave it to the servant, and he hurried to prepare it.

**Gen. 18:8** He took curds and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and placed it before them; and he was standing by them under the tree as they ate.

- Abraham is staying near the oaks of Mamre, which is in the wilderness south of Jerusalem

- The time is the heat of the day, which corresponds to early afternoon
  - This is also the traditional time for the main meal of the day
  - Abraham is resting in the tent doorway, out of the sun and probably waiting for the midday meal to be ready
- In v.1 Moses tells us that the Lord visited Abraham
  - Then immediately in the next verse we hear of three “men” visiting Abraham
    - The point of v.1 was to inform the reader of what was truly happening in this moment
      - The Lord was visiting Abraham
  - But in v.2 and later, Moses tells us the story from Abraham’s viewpoint
    - So we can understand the events from his perspective
- In v.2 three men approach Abraham
  - I like to imagine him looking up to see three standing figures walking toward him
    - Their appearances in shadow as they are silhouetted by the noon-day sun behind them
  - Abraham gets up and runs to greet them
    - This is a reflection of the importance of hospitality in that day
    - In this culture, it was a high honor to host a visitor – much less three visitors
  - And obviously, Abraham takes his responsibility seriously
    - So he makes haste to welcome them
- As Abraham runs to meet them, He immediately bows down to the ground
  - The word for bowed is the Hebrew word for worshipped
    - As Abraham approached the men and saw them closely, he recognized that these visitors were not men at all

- Abraham's greeting in v.3 is "My Lords" in Hebrew
  - It's the plural form of Adonai
  - Abraham recognized these visitors as spiritual beings, and he addresses them by the plural Adonai because he suspects one is the Lord
    - But perhaps he doesn't know which one
  - But in that same verse, Abraham switches to the singular form of "your" to address only the Lord Himself
    - It seems he quickly came to understand which personage was the leader
- Abraham asks to find favor in the Lord's sight and that they would not pass Abraham by
  - The word for favor is *chen*, the word for grace
    - This statement is similar to one in the opening of the story of Noah, where Noah was said to find favor with God
  - In fact, there are many parallels between this story and the story of the Flood, which we will examine along the way
  - And the reason for the parallels is that both stories are a picture or example of the coming destruction of the world and the return of our Lord
- Abraham offers to give the party water, to wash their feet, to rest under a tree out of the sun, and to provide bread
  - Abraham's invitation is in keeping with the customs of the day
    - But Abraham's actual efforts to care for the visitors goes well beyond even what he offered to do
  - The entire scene depicts Abraham moving quickly and with urgency, which is an indication of his desire to please his visitors
    - He tells Sarah to use three measures of flour to make the bread cakes, which is much more flour than would be needed to feed three men
    - He runs to the herd to select a calf to kill for the meat

- Rather than assign the task to a servant, Abraham picks out the calf himself, making sure it was a choice animal
- And then he instructs the servant to prepare it, but again with haste
- Finally, after he gives them fresh dairy and the calf meat and the bread, he stands by like a servant to attend to his guests
  - This is still the style of hosting in the East
  - My recent trip to India allowed me to see the same kind of hospitality
- Abraham's extreme hospitality is the natural result of knowing who he was serving
  - Abraham gave the Lord his best, which is only to be expected
    - God was visiting Abraham that day, as He had done in the past
    - And Abraham understood how special and honoring it was for the Lord to grant Abraham this audience, now for the sixth time
  - But in all likelihood, this is the first time the Lord had appeared in the form of a person
    - That is not to say that the Lord was actually flesh
    - He had not been born into human form yet, so this is a theophany
      - An appearance of God that takes physical form to our eyes, yet is not actually made of human flesh
    - Nevertheless, Abraham recognizes how special this moment is and that nothing but the best he has to offer would be acceptable
- Abraham actually models two Biblical principles we would do well to remember
  - First, he models the Christian call to show hospitality and love to strangers
    - The writer of Hebrews makes a passing reference to this moment at the opening of his thirteenth chapter

[Heb. 13:1](#) Let love of the brethren continue.

[Heb. 13:2](#) Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

- In v.1 the writer says the love of the church must continue (or in Greek: endure)
  - But in v.2 he adds that our hospitality cannot be limited to the church or just to people we know
    - The word for “entertain” in Greek is more nuanced than in English
    - It means to receive a surprise guest, to be caught off guard by an imposition and yet to respond with grace and gladness
- In such moment, the writer says we should remember how Abraham found himself in a similar situation
  - When Abraham arose and ran to greet these visitors, he didn’t know he was receiving angels
    - Yet he responded with grace and hospitality nonetheless, receiving them joyfully
  - Likewise, as God’s people, we are expected to reflect the love of Christ in the way we show grace to the person who calls upon us for hospitality
    - It’s not merely that we’re willing to serve someone a meal or engage in fellowship
    - It’s what we’re communicating by our willingness
- Look at all that Abraham communicated by his actions
  - He dropped everything, did everything he could to make them comfortable, made sacrifices and served his guests
  - He communicated love through sacrifice and service
  - In a sense, that’s the Gospel in action; the love of Christ working in us
- This a part of our calling as Christians

- Today, the practice of entertaining guests and opening our homes for others is a dying custom
- So as Christians, we have the opportunity to stand out in the world as salt and light by showing hospitality to our neighbors
  - Invite to dinner a neighbor you've only waved at a few times
  - Bake bread and bring it to a widow
- I knew a family who allowed a single mom and her son to move into their basement for over a year to help her get on her feet
- And through those interactions, you can witness to the gospel in both words and actions – a powerful combination
- The second Biblical principle Abraham demonstrates for us is how we are to serve the Lord
  - When the Lord came for this visit, Abraham had but a few things to offer, but he gave the Lord his best
    - All he could offer was refreshment, rest, shade, and his personal service
    - So he gave them generous portions: the ideal place to rest under the only tree, slaughtered the best of his herd and then he personally waited on them
      - Not even his servants were good enough
      - He insisted on becoming a slave of the Lord
    - In short, Abraham gave the Lord his best
  - Paul taught that in all we do, we should approach it with an attitude that we are serving the Lord directly

**[Eph. 6:5](#)** Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ;

**[Eph. 6:6](#)** not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.

**[Eph. 6:7](#)** With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men,

**[Eph. 6:8](#)** knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.

- Abraham had the benefit of seeing the Lord sitting before him
  - So as he went about his preparations, he acted with urgency, with personal investment and with a desire to give his best
    - Nothing was held back, nothing was too valuable to sacrifice
    - He engaged his entire household, including his family
    - Everyone became focused on the work of serving the Lord
  - And he did it joyfully and gladly
- What did Abraham expect to receive?
  - Nothing but the Lord's pleasure
  - Notice that Paul says, don't serve as men-pleasers giving eye service
    - Doing something kind merely to gain a reputation before me
    - But when those men aren't watching, we stop our work
      - It's a form of hypocrisy
  - Instead, do all our work knowing the Lord is watching us
    - We may not see the Lord visit us in person, as Abraham did, but the Lord is no less watching us
    - Work your best for Him and Paul says you will receive your reward from the Lord
- After Abraham served the Lord and the two angels, a conversation ensues

**Gen. 18:9** Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "There, in the tent."

**Gen. 18:10** He said, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him.

**Gen. 18:11** Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing.

[Gen. 18:12](#) Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?"

[Gen. 18:13](#) And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?'"

[Gen. 18:14](#) "Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son."

[Gen. 18:15](#) Sarah denied it however, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh."

- After the meal, the group inquires about Sarah
  - The pronoun is plural as reflected in the English translation, indicating they all asked this question
    - And they knew Sarah's name though there is no indication her name had yet been spoken by Abraham
    - So in knowing her name, the Lord makes clear to Abraham his supernatural identity
      - Jesus did a similar thing when he was collecting His disciples as recorded in John's Gospel

[John 1:45](#) Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

[John 1:46](#) Nathanael said to him, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

[John 1:47](#) Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"

[John 1:48](#) Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

[John 1:49](#) Nathanael answered Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel."

- By revealing His knowledge of secret things, Jesus demonstrated His divinity and Nathanael accepted it as evidence Jesus was Messiah
  - Likewise here, Abraham and Sarah have received evidence to confirm their suspicions concerning their visitor: He is the Lord
- Abraham answers that Sarah is in the tent, but of course if they knew her name, then they also knew where she was already



- So the point of the question was to confirm the Lord's identity while drawing attention to Sarah and the promise
  - The Lord repeats the news that Sarah would give birth in a year
    - In the previous encounter with God Abraham had been told that the child would arrive in the same season in the next year
    - That means it was likely a little longer than a year, but now it is exactly a year away
- During this time, Sarah was listening at the tent door
  - It's hard to know how much Sarah has heard from Abraham's previous conversations, but it's likely she has heard nothing from the Lord
    - She probably knows only what Abraham has chosen to share with her
      - She knows her name has been changed and the men were circumcised
      - But does she know the full extent of the promise?
      - I wonder if Abraham might have hidden this detail from her not wanting to get her hopes up or cause her concern
    - But now the Lord Himself is determined to bring this knowledge to Sarah
  - And as she hears it through the tent, she laughs
    - The reason for her laughter is given in v.11
    - The text says they were both old and she was past childbearing
      - In Hebrew, the text literally reads "Sarah had ceased in the way of a woman"
      - This is a euphemism for a woman reaching menopause
    - So from a human perspective, it was literally impossible for her to bear a child
- Sarah's laughter was a silent laughter to herself
  - She reacted in a way similar to Abraham but different

- In v.12 she asks, now that I'm old, shall I have delight or pleasure; that is shall I have the child I've always wanted
- Sarah's thoughts go something like this:
  - I've always wanted a child and we've been hoping for one all our marriage
  - If God wanted to give me a child, He certainly would have done so by now
  - If God didn't see fit to give me a child when the timing would have been best, it's laughable to think He would do it now that I'm past the age of childbearing
- In other words, her laughter is an indication that she doesn't yet believe God's promises
  - We have confirmation that she hasn't believed because of how the Lord responded to her
  - He corrects her and accuses her of laughing rather than accepting His word
- How can it be that Sarah hasn't believed the promises of God up to this point?
  - She followed Abraham from Ur
  - She has agreed to live as a nomad in the desert though it was not what she was accustomed to
  - She has gone into Egypt
  - She has heard secondhand about the promises and the covenant and seen her husband obey God's commands
    - Yet she still doesn't believe?
- The faith of Abraham doesn't substitute for the faith of Sarah
  - She was being blessed by God in the covenant He made with Abraham because of her association with Abraham
    - And this was part of the covenant God made
    - Those who bless Abraham would themselves be blessed
    - How did Sarah bless Abraham?

- By being an obedient, supportive wife
- Even when she was not herself believing in the promises of God, nevertheless she followed Abraham obediently
- Notice in v12 she addresses Abraham as “lord”
  - This is a term of respect but it also implies obedience to authority
  - Sarah respected her husband so much that she followed his authority even though she herself lacked the faith to follow God in her own heart
- This gives us the full understanding of Peter’s statement in his first letter concerning the purpose of submission

[1Pet. 3:5](#) For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands;

[1Pet. 3:6](#) just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.

- Sarah’s willingness to call her husband lord led her into a relationship with the Lord
  - For had she not been obedient and trusting in following Abraham even as Abraham himself was following the Lord, then Sarah would never have been in this situation
  - She would never have had the opportunity to encounter the living God by way of her husband’s relationship
- As the Lord revealed her thoughts back to her in v.12, He asks her if anything is too difficult for the Lord?
  - This is similar to the Lord’s comments in Matthew

[Matt. 19:26](#) And looking at them Jesus said to them, “With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

- The point of the Lord’s comment is that Sarah has been focused on the natural rather than trusting in God’s word
  - By the power of men and in the realm of the physical, Sarah could never have children

- But by the power of God's promise and through His faithfulness, He could make anything happen
- He is calling her to believe
  - And the Lord delivers His promise to her personally, saying He will "visit" her this time next year
  - This statement has double meaning
    - Not only will the Lord visit Sarah in the sense of bringing His promise into reality
    - But since we know Isaac is a picture of Christ, the Lord is saying that He will come as a child to her
    - Not literally, but as a picture
- Sarah, for her part, feels the fear of the Lord and shock of realizing He knew her thoughts
  - She initially denies her mistake
    - But the Lord persists and says, no you did laugh
    - He makes clear she must repent and accept the conviction of her unbelief
    - And then by that repentance, she might come to believe in the promise
  - Did Sarah ever come to accept and believe? Scripture says she did

**[Heb. 11:11](#) By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised.**