

Nothing is Impossible for God

Genesis 18:1-15

Pippa Page

I would like us to think for a few minutes about 3 things:

1. The Visitors that came to Abraham and Sarah
2. Sarah's actions and reactions
3. And why this is relevant to us

So, Abraham was visited by 3 men, and he recognised that one of them (at least) was the Lord.

There is some speculation in the different commentaries about whether It was God in three persons, or 3 angels or God and 2 angels. Nobody is offering a direct answer. The problem for them is that God says, in Exodus and in Deuteronomy, that His face may not be seen.

But, to be honest, if nothing is impossible for God, I can't see why he couldn't appear as a man, or men, and not show His own face or form at all. He certainly didn't come in all His glory, in the way that Isaiah and Ezekiel saw Him, and Moses encountered Him in a different way too, which made his face glow so much that he had to wear a veil!

"The Lord" and "the angel of the Lord" often seem to be confused, and almost sound like one and the same in some of the Biblical accounts we have though, so I think that people were not always sure who it was.

Gideon is one example of this. Gideon's story, by the way, is a really good read when you've got a moment. It's in Judges 6.

Abraham's visitors definitely weren't a vision though. It would have taken quite a while to bake bread and cook meat, so they were not in a hurry, and then they ate the food (which angels don't usually do, but like I said, God can do anything He likes!)

Personally, I think of this as God, appearing as a man, and 2 angels with Him, also appearing as men, because in next week's exciting episode, what appears to be the same two men are referred to as angels.

God had appeared to Abraham in chapter 17, and actually introduced Himself as God Almighty, which is very helpful! And it was not very long ago, because at the time He said that Sarah would have a baby within a year, and now He is saying that this time next year she will have had Isaac. So, it is quite possible that Abraham actually recognised Him as God!

I don't think that we need to be unduly concerned about this though. God is God, and He can do what He likes! As long as His message gets through, that's what matters. What a privilege for Abraham though, to be visited by God in a physical form!

Abraham is very keen to welcome his visitors. It was customary to offer hospitality to weary travellers, but he went to quite elaborate lengths to provide for them, and then served them himself, even though he had plenty of servants.

And then, in verse 10, one of them said:

Genesis 18:10

¹⁰ 'I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.'

And Sarah laughed ruefully to herself. As if to say, "it's a bit late now!"

Sarah was still beautiful though. We are told later on in Chapter 20 that Abraham decided to move down to the Negev, and, **astonishingly**, he said that Sarah **was his sister** again, just like he had done in Egypt.

Sarah was then taken by Abimelech, the King of Gerar to be his wife!...It's as if they haven't learned anything from past mistakes!!

God intervened and gave Abimelech a fright in a dream in the night, and he sent her back to Abraham and asked them to leave!

Medically, though, it **was not possible** for Sarah to have a baby at the age of 90. Her child-bearing years were over, and her body no longer had the capability to get pregnant and carry a child. But nothing is too difficult for God!

I'm sure that Sarah would have loved to have had a child, earlier in life, to relieve her disgrace at being childless and to enable Abraham to live up to His name, which actually means "Father of many nations". It would have been so much easier to look after a child when she was younger too!

Why did God make her wait so long?

The obvious answer is that we don't know. **God does things in His own way and in His own time.** It's amazing how many people in the Bible had to wait an awfully long time for God to answer their prayers! Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, and Hannah, the mother of Samuel, spring immediately to mind, and also King David, who was anointed as a young lad, but had to go through years and years of trauma before he actually became king.

I have a distinct feeling though that Sarah and Abraham's decision to try to force God's arm by using Hagar as a surrogate mother might have delayed Isaac's birth, because as soon as Isaac was weaned (**possibly** having been nursed by **Hagar**), Sarah insisted on Abraham sending Hagar and Ishmael away. So, the morning after Isaac's weaning celebration, Ishmael and Hagar were sent away by Abraham.

Sarah's reasoning for this was that in Genesis 21:19, it says in the NIV that Sarah saw Ishmael "mocking," but an alternative translation of the Hebrew word is that he was "at play". In other words, Ishmael was playing with his little brother! But Sarah saw him as a threat to Isaac's inheritance and didn't want them getting too close.

Ishmael would have been 16 or 17 by then, because he was 13 when he was circumcised, so would have been 14 when Isaac was born and children were normally *weaned at 2 or 3 years old* in that culture, so Ishmael would be late teens by then. If they had been sent away any earlier, Ishmael would have been too young to be able to support them both in the wilderness by hunting with a bow and arrow, which we are told in Genesis 21:20 that he did.

So, this story doesn't show everybody in their best light, but it does contain a **major miracle** in the birth of Isaac.

It's an interesting story from history – at least, I hope you think it's interesting! But the important thing is, what does it mean for us? Why are we studying it and what difference should it make for us?

This talk is entitled "Nothing is impossible for God" and I really believe that statement to be true. Do you?

If you want to hear about some of the amazing things God has done, read the Bible! Especially the Old Testament.

We can start with creation – with or without a big bang, God created the earth from nothing!

And it was very good!

We can hear stories like Noah's, who built a massive boat in the middle of dry land, (which must have caused some amusement to his neighbours!), because God had told him to, and how God rescued Noah's family and all the animals he took with him from the massive flood God sent to wipe out the population. That's in Genesis chapters 6-8

The story of God dividing the waters of the Red Sea for the Israelites to cross over, and then bringing them back to drown the chariots of the pursuing Egyptians (Ex. 14)

The amazing stories of Elijah and Elisha in 1 Kings 16 onwards and 2 Kings 1-8:

God sent ravens to feed Elijah every day for a period of time, (this is not normal behaviour for ravens!); he miraculously provided vast quantities of olive oil; he raised children from the dead, sent fire to consume the sacrifice, and the altar and the surrounding pool of water in a public challenge on mount Carmel; he purified water so people could drink it, made an axe head float, healed people of leprosy among lots of other exciting events!

He made the sun stand still for Joshua to win a battle (in Josh 10,) and He made the sun go backwards for Hezekiah and Isaiah (in 2 Kings 20).

Then there's Daniel and his friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who God rescued from an execution furnace without any burns, and not even a smell of smoke! (Daniel 3).

And Daniel himself who God gave the ability to interpret dreams, was kept safe all night, by God, when he had been thrown into a den of lions. (Daniel 6).

I could go on and on..., Psalm 105:5 says:

Psalm 105:5

⁵ Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced,

And the Israelites were forever being reminded not to forget what God had done, and to tell their children and their grandchildren all about it.

And then there's the New Testament, where **Jesus** did all His miraculous signs, and **God** raised **Him** from the dead, that's all written in the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John).

And then the book of Acts tells us about all the remarkable things that God did through the Apostles and other members of the early church.

John says in his gospel in John 20:31-

John 20:31

³¹ “These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”

In other words, **we** can be **put right** with God by **believing** and **trusting** in Jesus. That's what faith is.

Paul says in Ephesians 2:8 - “**By grace you are saved through faith**”

Ephesians 2:8

⁸ “**By grace you are saved through faith.**”

God's free gift is to put right with Himself all those who believe and trust in Jesus Christ.

Do you believe this? I do

I believe in the Bible and what it says. Some people might think I'm naïve, but I don't care, because Jesus said in Matthew 18:3 –

Matthew 18:3

³ “**unless you become like a child you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven.**”

He was talking about humility and trust.

I haven't had the easiest couple of years, as some of you will know, but I can honestly say, with the words of Psalm 18:2 –

Psalm 18:2

³ “The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

Every day I have put my hand into the hand of God and tried to walk with Him, and He has not let me down.

He is trustworthy, and he can do anything, although not always as quickly as we might like!!

If anybody here hasn't yet put their faith and trust in Jesus and been put right with God, this morning is a very good time to do it!

All we have to do is confess that we can't put ourselves right with God, because none of us will ever be good enough. Then turn to Jesus and say I believe and trust in you. God is trustworthy, He will do what He says.

Closing Prayer:

Father God, you are totally awesome! You are the Almighty, everlasting, all powerful God. And we want to say that we love you, and we trust you and we believe your promises; that you love each one of us and that if we turn to you, confess our failings and say that we believe and trust in Jesus Christ, we can spend eternity with you! Thank you that you can do anything! Please fill us with your Holy Spirit and enable us to keep trusting you and serving you and growing into the people you want us to be. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen



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