“Is Anything too Hard for the LORD?”

Genesis 18:1-15
7/12/98

Introduction:

- **Our God is an Awesome God; Nothing is impossible for Him!**

  (God can GO anywhere, KNOW everything, and DO anything He wants!)

I. An Incredible VISIT (v.1-8)
(The LORD visits Abraham’s Tent)

II. An Incredible PROMISE (v.9-15)
(The LORD promises Sarah a son)

Conclusion: Contemplate the Greatness of God!

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I. An Incredible VISIT (v.1-8)

(The LORD visits Abraham's Tent)

In chapter 17, the LORD made a covenant with Abraham; now in chapter 18, He fellowships with Abraham (as evidenced by the sharing in a common meal).

It is interesting to note that the Lord always fellowships with those who are in relationship with Him (Rev. 3:20). Those who are part of the New Covenant experience close fellowship with the Lord.

v. 1
"The LORD appeared" – Whenever the Bible describes the physical or visible appearance of the LORD, it refers to an appearance of the second person of the Trinity -- Jesus Christ. Since "no [mortal] man has seen God [implied, "the Father"] at any time" (Jn. 1:18), anyone who is said to see God was seeing Jesus Christ, as did Abraham, who rejoiced to see Him (Jn. 8:56 - Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.)

"The plains of Mamre" – near Hebron (Gen. 13:18, 14:13), which was northwest of Sodom.

v. 2
"Three men stood" – As Abraham looked up, he noticed the sudden appearance of three strange visitors. Perhaps at first he didn't realize it, but he was face to face with the LORD (*Yahweh*) and two angels (cp. 19:1). Maybe he did entertain such angels "unawares" (Heb. 13:2).

v. 2-5
Sensing that these visitors were very honorable guests, Abraham bows to the ground (v. 2) and requests that they stay awhile (v. 3) and get refreshed (v. 4). He then prepares them a quick meal (v. 5ff).

Abraham reflects the social hospitality customs of his day. He (unlike so many of us in our fast-paced society) had the time to show hospitality. We too need to be hospitable to strangers (Rom. 12:11; Heb. 13:2).

Hebrews 13:1-2 says: Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

One mark of a true child of God is His willingness to minister to those who belong to Christ (Mt. 25).

Heb. 6:10 and Gal. 6:10 both speak of our ministry to the saints:
Heb. 6:10 - *"For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister."*
Gal. 6:10 - *"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."*

Hospitality should <u>not</u> merely consist of having your best friends over; rather, as the word "hospitality" *philoxenias* suggests, hospitality is meeting the needs of *"strangers" (xenos)*.

Many missionaries, evangelists, youth groups on missions trips, and Christians pass through our city every year. Have you ever thought of opening your home to them?

In the future Tribulation, hospitality will be most needed (people like Corrie Ten Boom who housed and protected Jews during the Holocaust will be needed).

"Be not forgetful" - Do not go on being unmindful; don't unconsciously neglect hospitality.

Since there were very few inns (hotels or motels) in Bible days (and many of the ones which did exist were dens of wickedness), showing hospitality was an important part of the Jewish home.

For Christians such a hospitable spirit also provided the visitors an opportunity to see what a Christian family was like and to share the gospel. Your home is the greatest setting for evangelism to take place in.

Hospitality involves caring and sharing; giving of your food and material resources; sacrificing your time and energy; putting up with inconveniences; making adjustments of schedule, etc.

When was the last time you went out of your way to help someone in need?

Would you consider opening your home to disciple a new believer? (perhaps once a week for 8 weeks?)

We must use wisdom in hospitality. Ladies, never invite a man to stay in your home alone with you; men: vice-versa.

"Some have entertained angels unawares" - EX: Abraham (Gen. 18); Lot (Gen. 19)

The point is this: You never know who you may be showing a kindness to in being hospitable. Perhaps he might be the next D.L. Moody or Charles Hadden Spurgeon.

v. 6
Implicit in v. 6 is the example of a Godly, submissive wife, who would take such directives from her husband.

Sarah was a homemaker housewife who was a fabulous "helpmeet" for Abraham. Peter calls on all Christian wives to follow her example of a sweet-hearted, submissive spirit (I Pet. 3:4-6a - But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord)

v. 8
"And they did eat" – Can supernatural beings (who take on the form of man) eat? They did on this occasion. Perhaps this is an indication that there will be eating in Heaven even after we are glorified. For example: Jesus ate after His resurrection (Luke 24:42-43), and the New Jerusalem will have trees which will produce twelve different kinds of fruit (Rev. 22:2). Also, there is a Marriage Supper of the Lamb coming (Rev. 19:9).

II. An Incredible <u>PROMISE</u> (v.9-15)
(The LORD promises Sarah a son)

v. 9
They knew where Sarah was (they even knew her by name), but asked the question to get to the point of their visit and to get Sarah's attention so that she would hear the announcement that was to be made.

v. 10

"According to the time of life" = this same time next year (Gen. 21:2 - For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him).

The Lord did visit and speak to Abraham that same year and gave him revelation concerning Ishmael and Isaac (Gen. 21:12-13).

[NOTE: It is interesting to find a parallel between this prophecy about the birth of a child, and the birth of the Shunammite's son in II Kings 4:8-17.]

v. 11
"It ceased with Sarah after the manner of women" – Sarah had reached menopause; she no longer had a monthly cycle ("a period"). To have a child was a natural impossibility.

By the time Isaac was born, Abraham would be 100 and Sarah 90 years old (cp. 17:17).

v. 12
Either Sarah was ignorant of the promise God confirmed with Abraham (in Gen. 17) or she doubted that God could keep such a promise.

Sarah did <u>not</u> outwardly offer a laugh of mockery, but in her heart, she (like Abraham – Gen. 17:17) laughed in amazement that such a miracle could occur.

Sarah had for almost nine decades desired to have a child; now, pushing 90, she thought it an impossibility that she would enjoy the pleasure of having, nursing, and caring for her own newborn.

v. 13
"The LORD said" – Now, it is evident that one of the three visitors is Yahweh. Since He is LORD, He can read even the thoughts of someone like Sarah, who was hidden from view inside the tent.

--The fact that the LORD visited the earth (v. 1-12) hints at His <u>omnipresence</u> (he can be anywhere, and is in fact, everywhere).

--The fact that He knew Sarah's thoughts (v. 13) shows His <u>omniscience</u> (He knows everything).

--Now, in verse 14, the <u>omnipotence</u> of the LORD is implied (he is all powerful).

"Why did Sarah laugh?" – Because at this time she doubted God's promise; she did not completely believe God's Word.

She laughed for the same reason so many, if not openly, at least in their hearts laugh at some of the dogmas of Scripture.

--The evolutionist laughs at the creation account

--The feminist laughs at the role of the wife
--The atheist laughs at the evidence of God
--the fornicator laughs at God's plan for purity (doubting that God will recompense violations of His ways)

v. 14
****"Is anything too hard for the LORD?"** –

Is anything too hard for the One who . . .

Spoke this universe into existence?
Dried up the Red Sea?
Fed 2 million Jews with manna?
Became incarnate, walked on water, and rose from the dead?

"I <u>will</u> return . . . Sarah <u>shall</u> have a son" – what a firm promise! A promise Sarah would, from this time on, believe.

Although Sarah initially laughed at the thought that she, an elderly woman, would give birth to a son, she afterward believed, and because of that faith in the God of the impossible, she received the power to conceive.

Hebrews 11:11 says, "Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised."

Faith is simply trusting a God who is faithful. Such a faithful God is worthy of our full faith.

"Great is Thy Faithfulness!"

GOD IS FAITHFUL TO HIS <u>PROMISES</u>
(He keeps His covenants)

God is bound by His Oaths (Abraham - Rom. 4:19-<u>21</u>; Sarah - Heb. 11:11)

Examples of God's faithfulness to His promises:
1) God's promise as evidenced by the <u>rainbow</u> (Gen.9:16)
2) God's promise of deliverance from <u>Egypt</u> (Ex.6:4-8)
3) God's promise to keep His <u>Word</u> (I Kings 8:56; Matt.5:18)
4) God's promise to give the believer <u>eternal life</u>
(Titus 1:2; cp.II Cor.1:20)

The billions of Jews who lived throughout history and the millions on the earth today all stem from the one old man and old woman who lived some four millenia ago. Two people who would come to personally experience God's great faithfulness to His Word.

Do you trust God to do what you cannot do?

What may seem humanly impossible is possible for God.

His ways are not our ways; He will often allow our faith to be tested and tried, and will often delay a promise. But in the end, He will always keep His Word.

v. 15
We can't pull anything over on God. He is not oblivious to us. Our lives are an open book before Him (Heb. 4:13 - Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do).

Sarah now, knowing that she is known, still (out of fear) attempts to lie to the LORD.

Rather than denying the truth before the One who knows all, we should just admit the truth – rather than add sin on top of sin.

"Thou didst laugh" – This paragraph ends with the LORD not allowing Sarah to deny her laughter at God's Word.

God, however, would get the last laugh, as He would give her a son and then she would give him a name to remind everyone of the futility of laughing at God's Word. The boy would be named "Isaac" (*Yishaq* – he laughs).

Conclusion: Contemplate the Greatness of God!

"Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (v. 14)

God is omnipotent!

"The Lord God omnipotent reigneth" (Rev. 19:6)
God is more than mighty. He is "the Lord God Almighty" (Rev. 21:22).
As He said to Abraham, who was 99 years old, "I am the Almighty (all-sufficient) God" (Gen. 17:1).

What is God's Power?

God's power can be basically defined as both:
"Ability" (Greek - "Dunamis") - The might to act
(Mt. 26:64; Mk. 14:62; I Cor. 1:24)
"Authority" (Greek - "Exousia") - The right to act
(Lk. 12:5; Mt. 28:19; Acts 1:7)

Why is God's right hand the hand of power? (Ex. 15:6, 23; Ps. 89:13, 118:16; Is. 48:13)
Because that is where Jesus is seated (Ps. 110:1; Mk. 16:19; Lk. 22:69; Acts 7:55; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3, 8:1, 10:12, 12:2; *I Pet. 3:22).
Jesus is "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (I Cor. 1:24).

1. God's power is exclusive (Ps. 62:11)
(It belongs to Him alone)
"God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God" (Ps. 62:11).
God (in contrast to man) only needs to speak once and His wish is heard and fulfilled.

"Power belongeth unto God" - and to Him alone.

God is independently powerful.
"Not a creature in the entire universe has an atom of power save what God delegates. But God's power is not acquired" (Pink, p. 47).

2. God's power is eternal
Is. 26:4 - "Trust ye in the LORD forever; for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength."
God's power never changes, never diminishes, never grows or increases; but is always the same.
God's ability to perform miracles never changes, but His desire to may change. He does only as He pleases! (Ps. 115:3, 135:6; Is. 14:24, 27).
"Jesus Christ [is] the same yesterday, today, and forever."
This describes His character and will. He never changes, but His methods of dealing with men may.
(Just because He spoke to the apostles with an audible voice, does not mean that this is His mode for today.)

3. God's power is inexhaustible

God's power never diminishes (He never loses strength).
Is. 40:28 - "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding."

"Since He has at His command all the power in the universe, the Lord God omnipotent can do anything as easily as anything else. All His acts are done without effort. He expends no energy that must be replenished. His self-sufficiency makes it unnecessary for Him to look outside of Himself for a renewal of strength. All the power required to do all that He wills to do lies in undiminished fullness in His own infinite being" (Tozer, p. 73).

In other words, God did not have to rest on the seventh day of creation because He had worked up a sweat during the six days previous.

4. God's power is incomparable

Deut. 3:24 - "O Lord God, thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand: for what God is there in heaven or in earth, that can do according to thy works, and according to thy might?"

Job said: "The pillars of heaven tremble and are astonished at His reproof. . . The thunder of His power who can understand?" (Job 26:11, 14).

God is more powerful than the Laws of nature (Mt.14:25); nature itself (Ps. 147:5); Leviathan (Job 41:10); all the inhabitants of the earth (Is. 40:22); none can compare with Him (Jer. 10:6).

God's power is unleashed when He speaks (Gen. 1:1ff; Ps. 29:3-5; 46:6; 33:9 - "For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.").

"Before man can work, he must have both tools and materials, but God began with nothing, and by His word alone out of nothing made all things" (Pink, p. 48).

ILLUS: The power of Christ's words.

5. God's power is boundless

(It knows no limits outside of God)
Job 42:2 - "I know that Thou canst do everything."
(Gen. 18:14; Luke 1:37 - Miraculous birth)

Nothing can hinder God's power.

Isaiah 43:13 - "Yea, before the day was, I am He; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?"

Cp. Nebuchadnezzar's testimony - Dan. 4:35

His hand is not short (Is. 50:2; 59:1)

Nothing is too hard for God to do (Jer. 32:17, 27 - "Ah Lord God! Behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee;" . . . "Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?").

God's might is unleashed according to His wisdom ("Wisdom and might are His" (Daniel 2:20).
God's power is <u>not</u> unrestrained, out of control, irrational, uncontrollable force. He controls the exercise of His might. When He chooses to demonstrate it, He does!

God is able to do all that is consistent with His <u>character</u> and <u>will</u>.

<u>All</u> limitations upon God are <u>self-limitations</u>.

God cannot do that which is contrary to His <u>character</u> (holy nature) -
1) God cannot <u>lie</u> (Titus 1:2).
2) God cannot <u>tempt</u> men to do evil (James 1:13).
3) God cannot <u>deny</u> Himself (II Tim. 2:13).

God cannot do that which is contrary to His <u>will</u> (purpose, plan, or desire) -

"God <u>can</u> do all He <u>wills</u> to do;
He <u>will</u> not do all He <u>can</u>."

<u>How</u> does God use His power?
Demonstrations of God's power:
1. Creation (Rom. 1:20);
2. Flood;
3. Exodus;
4. Conquest of Canaan;
5. Miracles (O.T. & N.T.);
6. The virgin birth (Lk. 1:37);
7. The resurrection of Christ (Eph. 1:20; Rom. 1:4; Acts 26:8);
8. Future "Day of the Lord" (Joel 2:11; Rev. 11:17)

a. God uses His power to <u>rule</u> (Ps. 66:7- He ruleth by his power for ever; his eyes behold the nations: let not the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah.)

b. God uses His power to <u>preserve life</u> (Ps. 79:11- Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee; according to the greatness of thy power preserve thou those that are appointed to die)

c. God uses His power to <u>save</u> (Mt. 19:26 - When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.)

d. God uses His power to judge (Mt. 10:28 - And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.)

Why does God display His power?

Answer: For His own glory -- "His name's sake"

Ps. 106:8 - "Nevertheless he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known."

SEE Ps. 106:7-12)

God does not merely pour out His power for the benefit of those that are recipients of His working; but to glorify Himself.

To reveal His might, God will often use:

1) "Foolish things" (I Cor. 2)
2) "Weak things"
3) "Few men"
   I Sam. 14:6 - Jonathan said, "There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few."
   EX: Gideon's 300-man army.

What should the Christian's Response be to God's Power?

a. Respect His power (Heb. 12:18-29)

b. Glorify His power (Rev. 19:1, 6)
   (Praise Him for His power)
   In the "Lord's Prayer": "Thine is the kingdom, and the power . . ." (Mt. 6:13).

c. Trust His power
   Confidently rely on God's power for:
   1) Deliverance from trouble (Dan. 3:17 - our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.)
   2) Fulfillment of His promises (Rom. 4:21- And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.)
   3) Your eternal security (I Peter 1:5 - Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.)
   4) Your future resurrection (I Cor. 6:14 - And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power.)

   God can back up what He says, because He has all power.
   "Without power, His mercy would be but feeble pity, His promises an empty sound, His threatenings a mere scarecrow" (Charnock).

d. Use His power
   1. Understand His power in you (Eph. 1:16-20).
   2. Don't limit His power to work through you
      (Eph. 3:20; Phil. 4:13)
   3. Overcome pain and weakness with His power
      (II Cor. 12:9; cp. Phil. 4:13)
      God gives strength (I Chron. 29:11, 12).
      God shows Himself strong to those whose hearts are right with Him (II Chron. 16:9; Ezra 8:22).
   4. Serve with His power (I Pet. 4:11).

CONCLUSION:
There is: "No prayer too hard for Him to answer, no need too great for Him to supply, no passion to strong for Him to subdue; no temptation too powerful for Him to deliver from; no misery to deep for Him to relieve" (Pink, p. 51).
"The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27:1).