

**Lesson 8: October 21, 2018**  
**Abraham and Sarah Trust God's Promise**  
**Bible Background • GENESIS 18:9-15; 21:1-7**  
**Printed Text • GENESIS 18:9-15; 21:1-7 | Devotional Reading • LUKE 1:26:38**

Because of past promises that were not fulfilled, we find it hard to trust future promises. What can help us have faith and confidence to depend on important promises that shape our lives? Although Abraham and Sarah had to wait a long time for God's promise of a son to be born to them to shape all people of the earth, God showed them that this promise was trustworthy.

**Words You Should Know**

- A. Circumcision *mil* (Heb.)—Removal of the foreskin on a baby boy.
- B. Isaac *Yitschaq* (Heb.)—Laughter.

**Say It Correctly**

- Abraham. A-bra-ham.
- Issac. I-zek.
- Sarah. SAIR- a.

**Aim for Change**

By the end of the lesson, we will: REMEMBER to trust the promises of God; APPRECIATE the value of patience for God's promises; and CELEBRATE that God keeps promises in unexpected ways by grace.

**In Focus**

Cassandra had been waiting on God to send her the husband God wanted for her. She felt strongly that God had called her to be married, and despite some bad dating experiences and heartbreak, she still felt God intended her for marriage.

"It's like impossible for us to find good men these days," her friend Gina told her. "And it's even more unlikely that men want to commit to marriage. With so many people getting divorced, it's easy to get what you want when you want it. So many people are doing their own thing—it's just unrealistic, girl. You might as well find someone you like to chill with and leave it at that like the rest of us."

"Girl, I hear you, it's hard out here, but I believe in what God has for me," Cassandra responded. That was three years ago. As Cassandra stared at her fiancé John, she was glad she had trusted God. He wasn't what she thought she wanted, but he was everything she needed in a husband. God had been faithful to her and given her the desire of her heart.

"I'm glad God brought us together in His timing. I was out here acting crazy just before I met you," John said. "I am so grateful, I don't know what to say, honey."

All Cassandra could do was laugh. John had no idea how much of an answered prayer he was.

*How does it feel when you finally receive something you have been waiting on for a long time? Did it come at a time you expected, or did it surprise you?*

**Keep in Mind**

"And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken" (Genesis 21:1, KJV).

## Focal Verses

### KJV

Genesis 18:9 And they said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent.

10 And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him.

11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.

12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?

13 And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?

14 Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.

15 Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh.

21:1 And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken.

2 For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.

3 And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac.

4 And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him.

5 And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him.

6 And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me.

7 And she said, Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? for I have born him a son in his old age.

### NLT

Genesis 18:9 "Where is Sarah, your wife?" the visitors asked. "She's inside the tent," Abraham replied.

10 Then one of them said, "I will return to you about this time next year, and your wife, Sarah, will have a son!" Sarah was listening to this conversation from the tent.

11 Abraham and Sarah were both very old by this time, and Sarah was long past the age of having children.

12 So she laughed silently to herself and said, "How could a worn-out woman like me enjoy such pleasure, especially when my master— my husband—is also so old?"

13 Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh? Why did she say, 'Can an old woman like me have a baby?'"

14 Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return about this time next year, and Sarah will have a son."

15 Sarah was afraid, so she denied it, saying, "I didn't laugh." But the LORD said, "No, you did laugh."

21:1 The LORD kept his word and did for Sarah exactly what he had promised.

2 She became pregnant, and she gave birth to a son for Abraham in his old age. This happened at just the time God had said it would.

3 And Abraham named their son Isaac.

4 Eight days after Isaac was born, Abraham circumcised him as God had commanded.

5 Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born.

6 And Sarah declared, "God has brought me laughter. All who hear about this will laugh with me.

7 Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse a baby? Yet I have given Abraham a son in his old age!"

## **People, Places, and Times and Background**

The Wilderness of Paran. Paran is a desert area located in the northeastern Sinai Peninsula, with the Arabah on the east and the wilderness of Shur on the west. The region experiences very little rainfall (less than 10 inches per year). The Wilderness of Paran or Desert of Paran is thought to be the place where the Israelites spent part of their forty years of wandering. The Wilderness of Paran is the spot that Ishmael settles near and where this conversation between the Lord, Abraham, and Sarah occurs. It was from Kadesh, in Paran, that the twelve scouts were sent into the Promised Land to gather information for the Israelites, a little more than two years after the Exodus from Egypt (Numbers 10:11; 13:1–3). King David spent some time in the Wilderness of Paran after Samuel died (1 Samuel 25:1). This region is part of modern-day Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

## **Background**

Our text for this lesson is a small snapshot of a much larger narrative surrounding God, Abraham, and Sarah. Amid concerns about having no son to whom to leave his vast estate upon his death, Abraham (then known as Abram) receives a promise from God in Genesis 15 that he would not have to leave his inheritance to a servant in his home, but to an heir of his own flesh and blood. Though Abram was well into his eighties when God promises him a son, God's track record with Abram stabilized his faith for God to do the seemingly unthinkable; the Bible reveals Abram believed the Lord for an heir to be born. As time continues, Sarah (or Sarai at the time) seeks to help God, assuming she is too old to produce the son of the promise that Abram anticipates. Sarai gives her servant Hagar to Abram to become his mate and the future mother of Abram's firstborn, Ishmael, at the ripe old age of eighty-six. It is not long before tension arises between the two women of the house. Sarai deals harshly with her servant Hagar and regrets allowing her to bear Abram's son. The narrative shifts in Genesis 17 when God reveals Himself once again to the now ninety-nine-year-old Abram. In this visitation, God changes Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai's name to Sarah, promising Abraham he would become "a father of many nations" (Genesis 17:5) and confirming Sarah's birthing of a son called Isaac in a year's time. Shortly after God renews His covenant with Abraham and clarifies Sarah's role in the process, the Bible says the Lord meets Abraham as he rests under a mamre tree at the beginning of Genesis 18. Abraham looks up and sees three travelers or visitors whom he goes out of his way to accommodate. As Sarah and the household servants make preparations for the guests within the tents, Abraham engages in a transformative conversation with the visitors outside—presumably unaware of Sarah quietly listening from inside of the tent.

## **At a Glance and In Depth**

### **At-A-Glance**

1. Dealing with Our Doubts (Genesis 18:9–15)
2. Faithfulness in the Face of the Fantastic (Genesis 21:1–7)

## **In Depth**

### **1. Dealing with Our Doubts (Genesis 18:9–15)**

As Sarah listens to Abraham and the visitors discuss the miracle that will occur through her womb, she is tickled by the prospect. It has been about thirteen years since the birth of Ishmael. Sarah has been barren her entire life and is now approaching ninety years old. How crazy must this visitor be to believe Sarah would give birth to a child a year from now? Afraid to blow her cover, Sarah laughs silently to herself, “How could a worn-out woman like me enjoy such pleasure, especially when my master—my husband—is also so old?” (v. 12, NLT). For Sarah, a feat like this is doubtful and her statement presents at least two sources of doubt. The first is her perceived internal barriers to the possibility. The text identifies Sarah as very old, far beyond child-bearing years, and she even sees herself as “a worn-out woman.” She has not had any success in bearing children in the past eighty-nine years, so what would change this now? Certainly, child-bearing was a young woman’s game, not the work of one well into her eighties. In short, if it could have happened through her, Sarah surmises it would have already occurred.

Moreover, Sarah also doubts the external resources she has to get the job done—namely her ninety-nine-year-old husband Abraham! In Sarah’s mind, this idea of childbirth is especially laughable “when my master—my husband— is also so old.” Yet, her statement gives us a clue that the idea—though unlikely—is a favorable one for her, as she would like to bear a child but just does not know if it is possible.

*What are some of your doubts as it relates to what you hear God speaking to you in this season of life?*

### **2. Faithfulness in the Face of the Fantastic (Genesis 21:1–7)**

When we pick up on the story again in Genesis 21:1–7, we find a temporary, yet appropriate bookend for the narrative around Abraham, Sarah, and the birth of their son Isaac. God is faithful to the promise He makes to Abraham (Genesis 15 and 17), and Sarah “gave birth to a son for Abraham in his old age. This happened at just the time God had said it would” (Genesis 21:2). This is a fantastic feat, one that leaves both Abraham and Sarah grateful and relieved. Appropriately, in the face of God’s faithfulness, Abraham is moved to obedience and has Isaac circumcised on the eighth day, “as God had commanded” (v. 4). Abraham is grateful for the faithfulness of God, one who keeps even the most fantastic of promises. As a result, Abraham is committed to being faithful and obedient to God in return, handling the blessing and promise in the way God had instructed him.

*How do you show appreciation to God in the face of answered prayer?*

## **Search the Scriptures and Discuss the Meaning**

### **Search the Scriptures**

1. Sarah is not the only biblical figure to laugh at the prospect of one of God’s promises. Can you identify any other biblical figures who laughed at God’s vision for them? What were their reasons?
2. The visitors who meet Abraham and Sarah at their tents seemingly repeat to Abraham what God has spoken to him in the previous chapter. Why do you think God would send these visitors shortly after speaking to Abraham? What might this say about Abraham? What might this teach us about God?

### **Discuss the Meaning**

1. Why is it important to wait on the promises of God instead of trying to get to the promises in our own strength?
2. How does God’s display of faithfulness affect your desire to be faithful to God and others?

## Lesson in Our Society and Make it Happen

### Liberating Lesson

When God proposes doing the fantastic in our lives, it is natural to have doubts. Sometimes we are doubtful because of perceived deficits in us and other times we are doubtful because we do not believe we have adequate resources to complete the task. It can also be frustrating to trust God when we feel we have missed the window to do some of the things He has told us to do, such as returning to school, engaging in a new romantic relationship, or starting a business. While some of what God speaks to us may seem laughable, it is not impossible. This text reminds us of God's nature to keep His promises. Be mindful and watchful for God to confirm what He has spoken to you. When God makes good on His promises to us, it is important to show our appreciation by handling the blessing in the way God has instructed us. In many ways, obedience is the best "thank you" we can provide to God when He does the fantastic in our lives.

### Application for Activation

Consider what could have happened to Abram's legacy if he chose comfort and security over faith. Would there have been the miracle of Isaac's birth? The twelve tribes of Israel? David? Would his name have been in the line that would include Jesus? Abram had no idea that his departure would have such an impact. He obeyed a God that he did not know. Yet, we struggle, even in having the benefit of hindsight. Is there something that you feel called to do that you have not done? Are you walking in disobedience in a particular area? Why? Fear? Comfort? Desire for stability? Laziness? Distraction? Consider the potential consequences of such disobedience. This week, ask God to bring to your remembrance God-given calls and dreams that have fallen by the wayside. Ask that He will grant you Abram-like faith to obey Him.

### Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

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### Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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### More Light On The Text

#### Genesis 18:9–15; 21:1–7

9 And they said unto him, where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent.

In 18:1–8, Abraham receives visitors whose identity is unknown to him. He, however, welcomes them with a good meal before the conversation could start. This is an example of how important expressing hospitality was in Abraham’s culture. In Africa, hospitality is also a key issue today in rural areas; unless a visitor is properly welcomed, the formal greetings cannot take place. The book of Hebrews—perhaps referring to this event—urges believers to exercise hospitality because in doing so some accommodate angels unknowingly (13:2). Though Abraham does not know the visitors, the narrator of Genesis states their identity: the Lord (18:1). The visitors throughout chapters 18 and 19 are sometimes called men (18:2; 19:10, 12), or three men (18:2), and in other instances two angels (19:1). Some suggest therefore that this is the angel of the Lord in the company of two other angels. These are the visitors who inquire about Sarah. The event happens at Mamre where there were oak trees, a place believed to be Hebron (23:19; 35:27).

The visitors’ question is rhetorical. They know Sarah’s whereabouts. The same type of question was addressed to Adam after the Fall and to Cain after the murder of Abel. These visitors also know Abraham’s marital status and even his wife’s name. The Lord is omniscient and knows everything. The question is to direct Abraham’s thoughts toward who is behind the scenes, namely Sarah. Abraham had already received what the Lord is about to say (Genesis 17:15–16, 19).

### **Genesis 18:10**

10 And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him.

One of the three men will now lead the conversation. Sarah, though the key target in this conversation, is indoors separate from the action. It is possible that it was not customarily good for her to actively take part in the conversation. However, from where she was, she could hear the conversation. Abraham from that moment may have known the real identity of the one speaking to him because earlier he had been privileged to get the same information.

Now, though, there is more precision about the date of birth of the awaited child. When the Lord mentioned that He would “return” (Heb. *shub*, SHOOVE), the idea is to show favor. The verb used is found elsewhere portraying God’s gracious intervention (Zechariah 1:3; Psalm 80:14). The period of the return is mentioned as “the time of life” (KJV) or “about this time next year” (NLT). The same Hebrew phrase is also found in 2 Kings 4:16, when Elisha promises a woman that she will have a child the following year. The Lord’s patience in building one’s faith can be perceived here. After many years of waiting for a child, the barren Sarah had given up and suggested God intended the promised child to come from another woman (Genesis 16:1–3). Prior to this Abraham had been reassured that he will have a biological son as his heir (Genesis 15:1–4) and not an adopted one. After lifting Abraham’s faith in Genesis 17 in revealing the name of the son, now it was Sarah’s turn to be strengthened in her faith.

### **Genesis 18:11-12**

11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. 12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, after I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?

Though Abraham was old (around ninety- nine) at the time of this encounter, his age was not such a great obstacle compared to the Sarah’s situation. Later on, Abraham will have children from Keturah at an even older age (Genesis 25:1–2). But for Sarah, not only was she barren when she was still young (11:30), now she is too old. The phrase “the manner of women” (KJV) is a reference to menses. She was beyond menopause. The might of the Lord is displayed here. Nothing stops the manifestation of divine will, not even barrenness or menopause.

The prospect of conceiving a child in such conditions is unbelievable for Sarah. She laughs at the possibility of bearing a child. This was not an open laughter but a soft inner laughter that will go unnoticed before humans but not in front of the Lord. Her laughter comes after her husband's laughter earlier concerning the same prediction. The occasion surrounding the child birth issue is full of laughter. Abraham laughs in joy and disbelief at the assurance of a son (Genesis 17:17), and Sarah laughs in unbelief at the prospect of a son (18:12). The name Isaac (Heb. Yitschaq, yits-KHAWK, laughter) was already given when Abraham first laughed at God's promise (Genesis 17:19). However, other scholars suggest that Sarah's laughter of unbelief is a result of hopelessness and not pride, which explains a self-restraint in expressing too openly her doubt.

#### **Genesis 18:13-14**

13 And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? 14 Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.

The Lord's omniscience is displayed here again. Sarah's inner laughter and thought does not go unnoticed. The Lord's inquiry about the reasons for her laughter is a rebuke of her unbelief. Abraham had laughed when he first heard the news but he was not rebuked (Genesis 17), although he had bowed before laughing signifying his willingness to follow God. If Sarah had been briefed previously about Abraham's earlier encounter with the Lord, she would have been less surprised by the announcement. With all these human conditions making the fulfillment of the promise humanly impossible, the Lord asks a question to shift Abraham and Sarah's thinking from their own limitations to God's limitless power. As the angel assured Mary, nothing is impossible for the Lord (Luke 1:37). This passage not only displays God's omniscience, but also His omnipotence. The fact that He could read Sarah's inner thought should assure her and Abraham of God's ability to fulfill what He has promised. The Lord then reiterates what He said earlier in verse 10. Therefore the phrase "at the time appointed" is added to the "time of life" earlier used in verse 10. Sarah's unbelief will not affect the fulfillment of the promise at the appropriate time. The repetition of the promise of the visit reinforces its certainty. Here we see further evidence of God's omnipotence even over time. He will fulfill His promise in His time, and we know that He makes everything beautiful in His time (Ecclesiastes 3:11). The Lord controls time and circumstances in life.

#### **Genesis 18:15**

15 Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh.

Fear motivated Sarah's denial of her laughter. Fear leads people to do irrational things. It leads Sarah to commit a second sin of lying after the first of unbelief. It was the factor underlying Abraham's deception of the Egyptians about his wife (Genesis 12:11-13). In Jesus' parables of the talents, the servant with only one talent hid it because he was afraid of investment (Matthew 25:24-25). The Lord maintained His rebuke. He knows everything and we cannot deceive Him about what we do. The best thing to do when confronted by the Lord is to accept and repent, so that in His gracious love He will forgive us.

#### **Genesis 21:1-2**

21:1 And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken. 2 For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.

As should be expected, the Lord fulfills the promise and visits Sarah. The word used for "visit" (Heb. paqad, paw-KAHD) is used in many ways throughout the Bible. When God is the subject of this verb, it indicates His special interest in an individual, whether for judgment or blessing. The closest parallel to its use here is in the story of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:21). In both places, God shows His special interest in these women by bestowing His merciful blessing to alleviate the hardship and stigma of barrenness. The fulfillment of the promise is affirmed in verse 1.

At last, Sarah was able to conceive and give birth through the might of the Lord. The human limitation of their “old age” is again mentioned to demonstrate the power of God to overcome any human hindrance. This happened “at the set time” as forecast in Genesis 17:21 and 18:14. The Lord is always faithful to His promises. As nothing prevents Him from doing His will, believers should live with the firm assurance that He will do what He promises to do. Not even human doubt can prevent Him from fulfilling a promise. At last, the promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 12 and reiterated many times is fulfilled in Isaac’s birth. Isaac is the promised son, not Ishmael, who is the result of Sarah’s doubt.

#### **Genesis 21:3-4**

3 And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac. 4 And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him.

The son is named Isaac, a name already given by God to Abraham (Genesis 17:19). God promises the birth of several children in the Bible and gives their names even before conception; John the Baptist and Jesus are two examples in the New Testament. This is a warning for our generation when people play with the lives of the unborn. Even though many promote abortion on the basis that what is in the womb is not yet a baby (so not a human being), and therefore can be disposed of without any problem, God has human beings in His mind even before conception. God is the only sovereign over human life in each stage of its development, and even the youngest life is sacred. The rite of circumcision on the eighth day was given to Abraham and his descendants to set them apart from other nations. Abraham and every male in his household went through circumcision as a sign of the covenant between the Lord and Abraham, and his descendants (Genesis 17:11). Those who were circumcised at this occasion were older. Isaac was the first to be circumcised as required at eight days old. During the years in the wilderness, the rite was not observed, so when the people reached Gilgal at the entrance of the Promised Land, circumcision was performed (Joshua 5:5–7). As a Jewish child Jesus was circumcised (Luke 2:21), which is evidence of His humanity and entitled Him to all the duties and prerogatives of a Jew.

#### **Genesis 21:5-6**

5 And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him. 6 And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me.

Abraham’s age at the birth of Isaac is significant because of the time spent between his departure from his homeland—after the Lord’s promise to bless his descendants—and the actual birth of a son. The significance of his ability to father a child is beside the point here because in later years, he will have other children with no apparent divine intervention (Genesis 25:1–2). From his departure from Haran, twenty-five years have passed since the first encounter with God. But finally the promised son has come. Isaac is called as such because Ishmael does not share in the promise.

Sarah’s previous laughter in unbelief is the source of more laughter in unison with those who will hear the news of the birth. Some scholars think the term can be understood to mean “to laugh at” rather than “to laugh with.” But even in the case of some teasing her, when the news goes public, everyone rejoices with her in amazement for what the Lord has done.

#### **Genesis 21:7**

7 And she said, who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? For I have born him a son in his old age.

Indeed no one would have believed Sarah could have a child at her age. First, she was a barren woman; second, she was very aged and beyond the possibility of childbearing because she was post-menopause. To her question resounds the other question in Genesis 18:14, “Is any thing too hard for the Lord?” What was



beyond human capability and imagination had been accomplished by the mighty power of the Lord and Creator of the universe.