

I Will Surely Return This Time Next Year and Sarah Your Wife Will Have a Son

18: 9-15

DIG: What is the point of the LORD's visit with Abraham? How did ADONAI's silence impact Sarah? Why does Sarah laugh? Lie? Disbelieve? How does Sarah's laughter differ from Avraham's, or does it?

REFLECT: Describe a time in your life when you felt the Lord's silence in your life. How did you interpret His silence? What did you think about Him? About yourself? When we're living in ADONAI's silence, how do we get sidetracked from our true mission? Where in your life is God telling you, "Is anything too hard for Me?" Or, "I could change this trial you are going through, but it would be better if you grew through it so you can learn what I'm trying to teach you."

Sarah's day finally came. This time ADONAI appeared as a man with two other angels who also appeared as men. Following custom, Avraham hosted the three men as guests. If Abraham had been thinking of the Lord's promise of a son for Sarah and him, and somehow sensed that the three angels were associated with His promise, he was correct.

As a married woman, Sarah remained out of sight, secluded in the tent, but within earshot of their conversation. As soon as the men had finished eating, they immediately asked the whereabouts of Sarah, who was still inside the tent. It was not proper for the wife to come out and entertain, especially with three male guests. But now they asked about her: Where is your wife Sarah? Abraham answered: There in the tent (18:9). Although they all asked about her at first, the Lord Himself would do the talking.

Then the Lord, who knew Sarah was listening, spoke to her by talking to Abraham. He declared: I will surely return to you about this time next year when the promise is fulfilled. The promise was that Sarah your wife will have a son. Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind Him (18:10). Before the conversation was over, the Lord Himself was talking directly to Sarah.

The narrator merely states the biological facts. **Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years and Sarah was past the age of childbearing (18:11).** She had been barren since **she** was young and had already entered menopause. From a human perspective, it was impossible for **her** to bear a child. No mere angel could deliver on such a miraculous promise. Only **the Lord Himself** could bring about this miracle.

The purpose of the divine visit was to draw **Sarah** into full ownership of the covenant promises. In the previous chapter, **God** had been very specific; it was **Sarah** who would give birth to the **son** of promise (17:16, 19, 21). **Avraham's** response, like **Sarah's** here, had been **laughter** (17:17). And as a reminder of **their laughter**, the proud new **parents** would name the child **Isaac** (Hebrew: **Yitz'hak**), or *he laughs*.

We are not told if **Abraham** had informed **Sarah** that **God** intended to give **her** a **son** after all those years (17:19). If **He** had not, **her** reaction to this news was certainly understandable. But even if **Abraham** had prepared **her**, **she** could hardly bring **herself** to believe that after years of barrenness, and long past the age of childbearing at ninety, that **ADONAI** would now grant **her** the gift of a **son**.³⁰²

So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "This is utterly ridiculous: After I am worn out and my husband is old, will I now have this pleasure of having a son (18:12)?" Now what kind of **laughter** is this? Was this a mocking **laughter**? No, I think this is the **laughter**, which says: *This is just too good to be true*. I'm sure most of us have had experiences like this. **The LORD** has been so good to us on a certain occasion that we have just **laughed**. Something happened that was *just too good to be true*, and that was the way **Sarah laughed**.³⁰³

However, **the One** on the other side of **the tent** door knew **she laughed**, **He** knew **her** skepticism, but **He** also knew all about **her** sorrow and **her** unbelief. **Sarah** was so defeated by **her** circumstances that **she** had forgotten about the power of **El Shaddai**. **He** had brought **her** to the end of **her** hopes, to bring **her** to **Himself**. Strangely enough, the one thing that helped strengthen **her** faith was **the Lord's** question: **Why did Sarah laugh and say, "Will I really have a child, now that I am old" (18:13)?** This **man** could neither see **her** nor hear **her** because **she** had only **laughed** silently within **herself**. **She** must have quickly realized that this was **the Lord Himself**, in order for **Him** to know these things. That being the case, maybe **she** would be able to fulfill this miraculous promise after all.³⁰⁴ The B'rit Chadashah rightly honors **Sarah**. **By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised (Hebrews 11:11 NASB).**

The problem was that **Sarah** had put **her** life on hold, somewhere between **faith** and despair. That's where a lot of us spend our time. Stuck somewhere in the middle, longing to see **the LORD's** hand in our lives, trying to find our place in **His** purposes, struggling to put one foot in front of the other and keep moving. Daily confronted with our helplessness to change those things that trouble us the most, there's no escaping the fact that while nothing is **too hard for ADONAI**, **He's** not adverse to keep us waiting.

Carolyn James, in her book *Lost Women of the Bible* offers these insights. What are we to make of this? How do we go on when some major piece of our lives is missing or broken? Are we to put our lives on hold and wait for **Him** finally to come through for us? Is that how we're supposed to live? How much of our lives do we let slip away while we drum our fingers restlessly waiting to graduate, get married, have a baby, buy a house or get that job that we've always wanted? What do we do in those long stretches when life comes to a standstill because of **the LORD's** silence, when day after day we're looking at the same problems, and same unchanged heart, the same unhealed body?

Sarah made a lot of mistakes. **She** put her life on hold. **She** watched a lot of precious years slip away believing **she** had failed as **a woman**. After all, in **her** culture **a real woman** gave **her** husband sons. A slave girl even usurped **her** identity as **a wife**. **ADONAI** didn't seem to want **her** life. **She** didn't see a place for **herself** in the big things **the LORD** was doing for **Abraham**. Until then.

Then **Sarah's** laughter brought forth one of the great statements of Scripture. **Is anything too hard for the Lord (18:14a)?** The Hebrew word for **too hard** is *pele* and means *wonderful or extraordinary*. It is one of those Hebrew words that is only used of **ADONAI**, never used of mankind (**Judges 13:18; Psalm 139:6; Isaiah 9:6, 28:29**). So literally **the Lord** is asking: *Is there anything too wonderful for Me to do?* **Jesus** would say it this way: **With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26)**. **This is a difficult passage for the Jews because they do not believe that one of the three angels was the Lord. Therefore, the rabbis teach that one of the angels did not simply give his blessing to Abraham, but also brought his greetings to Sarah.**

God wasn't laughing. But rather than rebuking **Sarah** for **her** unbelief, **the Lord** gently reminded her that **the One** who knew **her** name and heard **her** innermost thoughts was able to bring it to pass. **Her** long years of disappointment and sorrow were about to end, because nothing is **too hard for the Lord**. It was time for **her** to claim **her** role in the covenant promises, and to prepare **herself** to become **the mother of nations (17:16)**.³⁰⁵ Then **ADONAI** reaffirms **His** promise: **I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son (18:14b)**.

Sarah was afraid, knowing that **the Lord** had correctly discerned **her** silent **laugh** and thoughts of unbelief. But **she** added to **her** problem when **she** said, "I did not laugh." But **the Lord**, standing in front of **her**, said, "Yes, you did laugh" (18:15). The conversation ends quickly. **Abraham** listens, but does not get involved. Did **the Lord** name **their** son *he laughs* as a penalty because **they** laughed? Not at all! It would be a constant reminder that nothing was **too hard for the Lord**. What a joy little **Laughter** would be to **them**.

Is anything too hard for the Lord? This rhetorical question does not present us with a promise to claim, but an attribute to embrace, a **faith** to aspire to, and a hope to sustain us. When we face difficult circumstances, we cannot claim this verse as a promise that **Christ** will change our circumstances. **He** is capable of doing that, but perhaps the **hard** thing to do is to help us to *accept our circumstances and grow through them*.

In 1967, teenager Joni Eareckson took a dive that changed her life forever. Her story has been told many times, but there is an important point that is not often made: one that gives us a vital insight into how **Jesus** works in our circumstances. Her broken body at first brought denial and bitterness. When Joni began to confront her paralysis, she was encouraged by some friends to have the **faith** that **Messiah** could miraculously heal her. After all, nothing is **too hard for the Lord**. As she explored this **faith**, she struggled with the difference between **faith** that **He** *could* heal her and faith that **He** *would* heal her. Would it take just as much **faith** to believe that **the Lord** would heal her *spirit* without healing her *body* and use her in **His** service regardless of her limitations? Doesn't **Yeshua** do a **hard** thing when **He** uses any of us despite our limitations?

If you told Joni then that thirty years in the future she would be an internationally known mouth artist, author of more than twenty-five books (translated into thirty-three languages), and an inspirational speaker whose radio broadcasts are presently aired by some eight hundred stations daily, she may have considered that doing that would be a much more difficult accomplishment for **the Lord** than healing her paralysis. If you had told her that, in addition, she would have produced a number of albums and videotapes and founded a ministry to and for the disabled that put her in the national and international spotlight as their spokesperson, she may have thought that healing was the easy way out for **the Lord**. As it turns out, Joni's **faith** that she could be *transformed* was of far more use to **Yeshua** than her **faith** that she could be *healed*.

We must be cautious that as we accept by faith that nothing is too **hard** for **the Lord**, we do not begin to dictate to **Him** which **hard** thing **He** must do. **He** tends to have things in mind that go far beyond what we are able to ask for or even think of.³⁰⁶