

The Lord appeared again to Abraham near the oak grove belonging to Mamre. One day Abraham was sitting at the entrance to his tent during the hottest part of the day. **2** He looked up and noticed three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he ran to meet them and welcomed them, bowing low to the ground.

**3** “My lord,” he said, “if it pleases you, stop here for a while. **4** Rest in the shade of this tree while water is brought to wash your feet. **5** And since you’ve honored your servant with this visit, let me prepare some food to refresh you before you continue on your journey.”

“All right,” they said. “Do as you have said.”

**6** So Abraham ran back to the tent and said to Sarah, “Hurry! Get three large measures of your best flour, knead it into dough, and bake some bread.” **7** Then Abraham ran out to the herd and chose a tender calf and gave it to his servant, who quickly prepared it. **8** When the food was ready, Abraham took some yogurt and milk and the roasted meat, and he served it to the men. As they ate, Abraham waited on them in the shade of the trees.

**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.”

Leader: The Word of God for the People of God.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

No Laughing Matter

Opening story

Story of Abram and Sarai

You see, it all began back in Chapter 12 of Genesis.

About 100 years after the great Flood, the people of the world had returned to their wicked, sinful ways.

Like in the days of Noah, God was looking for a righteous person. A faithful follower. Someone who loved God. And so, God called a man named Abram. (“The Bible Story,” Arthur Maxwell, © 1975, Review and Herald Publishing Association; volume 1, Part IV; story 1 “God Finds a Boy.” pp. 133-137)

*“Leave your country, your relatives, your father’s house... and go to a land I will show you.” “I will cause you to become the father of a great nation.”*

Now “Abram was 75 years old when he left (home)” (Gen 12. 1,2,4)

I don’t know about you, but I can’t imagine getting a call from the Bishop about moving when I am 75! But you just never know what God may have in mind!

*IWW is God making us laugh?*

And so it was. Abram and his wife, Sarai and nephew Lot, and other relatives and servants and all their flocks loaded up the Caravan and headed to a place that he knew little about. Except that it was the Land of Promise. (“The Bible Story,” Arthur Maxwell, © 1975, Review and Herald Publishing Association; volume 1, Part IV; story 2 “All Aboard for Canaan.” pp. 138-141)

Along the way, Abram built altars to the Lord. Leaving a “silent witness to his faith.” (“The Bible Story,” Arthur Maxwell, © 1975, Review and Herald Publishing Association; volume 1, Part IV; story 3 “A Good Man’s Footsteps.” pp. 142-147)

Many years had passed, and it seemed that God’s voice was silent for much of that time. He had reached Canaan, but still there was no child.

He began to wonder what God’s plan was. But God appeared to him in a dream, reassuring him of God’s plan and promise.

“But I don’t have any heirs.”

And then, God took him into the darkness and asked him to look up to the heavens.

*“Count the stars.... Your descendants will be too many to count.”* (Genesis 15.1-2,5)

“Children like the stars! How could that be? It seemed impossible.”

But somehow, he believed. (“The Bible Story,” Arthur Maxwell, © 1975, Review and Herald Publishing Association; volume 1, Part IV; story 6 “Children Like the Stars.” pp. 155-158)

Meanwhile, years go by. And still no child.

So, Abram and Sarai decide to take matters in their own hands. Abram takes Sarai’s servant girl Hagar as another wife, and she bears a son, Ishmael. (More on that at another time.)

About 13 years later, when Abram was 99 years old, the Lord spoke to Abram again.

*“I am El-Shaddai—‘God Almighty.’ Serve me faithfully and live a blameless life. I will make a covenant with you, (and) I will ... give you countless descendants.”*

*“I will make you the father of a multitude of nations.”* (Genesis 17.1,2,4) At this point, there is a significant change.

God gives Abram a new name.

No longer will he be called Abram (Exalted Father), now he would be called Abraham (father of many nations.)

In addition, his wife received a new name.

*“...her name will no longer be Sarai. From now on her name will be Sarah. And I will bless her and give you a son from her! Yes, I will bless her richly, and she will become the mother of many nations. Kings of nations will be among her descendants.”*

Then Abraham bowed down to the ground, but he laughed to himself in disbelief. *“How could I become a father at the age of 100?”* he thought. *“And how can Sarah have a baby when she is ninety years old?”* (Genesis 17.15-17) (“The Bible Story,” Arthur Maxwell, © 1975, Review and Herald Publishing Association; volume 1, Part IV; story 7 “Sarah Laughs Too Soon.” pp. 159-161)

Abraham laughed.

Maybe it was just too much to take in.

It had been so many years. Was this promise really going to be reality?

“God, are You serious?”

*IWW is God making us laugh?*

“Is anything too hard for the Lord?”

*How long are we willing to trust in God’s promises?*

One day, when Abraham is trying to stay cool, he discovers some guests. He bends over backward to provide for them. He doesn’t know who is visiting, but he extends radical hospitality.

While they are enjoying a nice meal, they inquire about his wife.

“She’s in the tent.”

“... *this time next year, she will have a son!*”

Now Sarah heard this conversation from the tent. And knowing how old she and Abraham were, she simply laughed.

*“It’s much too late. We’re both too old to start now! I want to enjoy retirement; i don’t want to start a family NOW!”*

*IWW is God making us laugh?*

“Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Genesis 18.9-15)

How could this be? By now, she and her husband, Abraham, were way too old.

It was impossible! Or was it?

Certainly, it was too difficult to believe. By this stage, both of them had pretty much given up on the child of promise.

*How do you respond to such unbelievable news?*

*IWW is God making us laugh?*

“Is anything too hard for the Lord?”

A year later...God’s promise becomes reality.

‘Sarah became pregnant, and gave birth to a son... And Abraham named their son Isaac (he laughs).

Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born.

Sarah (put it this way), *“God has brought me laughter. All who hear about this will laugh with me.”* (Genesis 21:2-6 NLT)

*How do you respond to such unbelievable news?*

*IWW is God making us laugh?*

“Is anything too hard for the Lord?”

‘The daughter of the synagogue leader died. So he knelt before Jesus. *“Master, my daughter has died, but I believe You can bring her back to life again.”*

‘When Jesus arrived at the home, he saw the mourning crowd and heard the funeral music. *“Everybody, get out! She’s not dead; she’s only asleep.”* But the crowd laughed at him.

‘Maybe theirs was the kind of “Laughter (that) can conceal a heavy heart;” as the wisdom writer puts it; “when the laughter ends, the grief remains.” (Proverbs 14.13)

'After ...Jesus ... took the girl by the hand, ... she stood up!' (Matthew 9.18, 23-25)

*How do you respond to such unbelievable news?*

*IWW is God making us laugh?*

“Is anything too hard for the Lord?”

God is With Us

Dawn Chesser reminds us that...

“God is with us in our moments of greatest joy, and God is with us through the inevitable chaos and sorrow that life brings. God is with us in our friends and family, and God is with us in strangers who suddenly show up and bring us a word of hope and clarity in the midst of the jumbled, chaotic messes of life. God is with us in the familiar and God is with us in the unexpected.”

“The good news is, no matter what we must face, we don't face it alone. We face life together, in community with Christ, and in community with one another, until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet.”

“God is with us.” Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries

*“To What (to whom) is God calling us?”*

“Is anything too hard for the Lord?”

Story of Jesus House 1209 (Rethink Church, UMCOM)

To what or whom is God calling you?

Is anything too hard for the Lord?

What we may consider IMPOSSIBLE, God calls POSSIBLE.

With God, all things are possible.