

One of Abraham's greatest blessings came while he was being hospitable in the midst of ordinary life

• He was serving angels without knowing it

• A son for Sarah

• A miracle of conception – the Holy Spirit makes conception possible

Some strangers arrive at Abraham's rural home at a time when it is very hot ^{☞1}. He greets them with extreme respect, running to meet them and showing great courtesy ^{☞2}. He pleads with them to stay awhile ^{☞3} and sends for a bowl of water to wash their feet, urging them to rest under a tree ^{☞4}. They accept his offer, and while they are resting Abraham arranges for food to be cooked for them. Behind the scenes the women get on with the cooking for the new arrivals ^{☞5}. One of the young animals from the herd is killed to obtain meat ^{☞6} and a few hours later the guests are served. Abraham does not eat with them. He stands by them, more like a servant than a sharer in the meal ^{☞7}.

It is a classic description of hospitality. Abraham did not at first realise who they were. He was serving angels 'without knowing it' ^{☞1}. With a few changes (the water might be for the hands rather than the feet, and the animal might be a goat rather than a calf) it is typical of rural Africa and of many parts of the third world today, but it is not at all like Europe or America! What is interesting is that the writer of Hebrews 13:2 had this passage in mind when he wrote '*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some have entertained angels without knowing it*'. **One of Abraham's greatest blessings came while he was being hospitable in the midst of ordinary life.** He entertained angels without knowing it because he took it for granted that hospitality was important.

While the strangers were relaxing there came a casual question. '*Where is Sarah?*' ^{☞1}. It was startling. They knew her new name! Then their identity became more obvious because one of them began to speak as if he were God! '*I will surely return to you according to the time of life and behold there will be a son for Sarah your wife*' ^{☞2}. The phrase 'according to the time of life' does not mean 'in due season' or 'about this time next year', but refers to the period of gestation. Sarah is to become pregnant in the next few days and 'according to time it takes for life to come to full birth' the child will be born. This understanding of the text is confirmed by 2 Kings 4:16–17 where a woman is told that in about a year's time she will embrace a son 'according to the time of life'. It will take nine months and more before the child will be in her arms. The phrase 'according to the time of life' again refers to a period of gestation and the next verse puts it clearly. The woman became pregnant, and bore a son at the same season of the year '*according to the time it takes for life to come to full birth*' ^{☞3}.

What this means is that the miracle of conception will take place within a few days. The child will be a miracle-child; however it will **not** be a virgin birth like the birth of Jesus! The child will be conceived in the normal way except that God will be making the conception possible. In one sense Isaac will be born of the flesh; sexual union will be involved. But in another sense Isaac will be produced by the Holy Spirit because God will be working a miracle. Yet the miracle-child will take nine months to be born like any other child. This is why Paul can use Isaac as a case of a child '*born according to the Spirit*' ^{☞1}. It also relates to Paul's teaching concerning predestination. The teaching is that God **produces** His elect. God is choosing to use Isaac to be the one who carries forward His covenant. Isaac is being 'born through the promise' ^{☞2}. **The promise produces its own children!** '*It is through Isaac that your seed shall be called into being*' ^{☞3.1}

☞1 18:1
☞2 18:2
☞3 18:3

☞4 18:4

☞5 18:5-6
☞6 18:7
☞7 18:8

☞1
Hebrews 13:2

☞1 18:9

☞2 18:10

☞3 2 Kings 4:17

☞1
Galatians 4:29
☞2
Galatians 4:23

☞1 Romans 9:7

Sarah is blessed by God despite the weakness of her faith

• *Sceptical wonderment of a ninety year-old*

• *Sarah's faith rose above her doubts*

• *Real faith – God's purpose for her life achieved*

Sarah is blessed by God despite the weakness of her faith. She was listening behind the tent door ^{☞1}. The couple are advanced in age ^{☞2} and Sarah giggles in sceptical wonderment ^{☞3} but is rebuked by the all-knowing angel ^{☞4}. Yet Sarah is blessed by God despite the weakness of her faith. Abraham's laughter seems to have been the laughter of joy. Sarah's laughter was sceptical. She had many, many times before been hoping that God's promise would come about. Was it really about to happen now? She is a bit cynical. Yet she is rebuked by God ('*Is anything too hard...?*') and she becomes afraid of having disbelieved an angel. In her fear she denies that she even said what she did ^{☞5}. But her heart is right and we must sympathize with her. She is in her nineties and has had a life with many sufferings in it.

In the event Sarah came to trust the promise. Her faith rose above her doubts, and the Bible is emphatic that by faith she bore the child ^{☞1}. She believed God's word. Blessing came to Sarah is the course of her being hospitable and living a life of practical godliness. It came despite great delay. It came despite weakness of faith.

God was not blessing **great** faith in Sarah, but he was blessing **real** faith. It comes to us as an encouragement to go on believing God. She experienced severe sufferings, long delay, unstable faith, and the weakness of old age – but God brought her through everything and she achieved God's purpose for her life.

Footnote

1 See D.M. Lloyd-Jones' magnificent book, Romans: God's Sovereign Purpose (Banner of Truth, 1991), pp. 108–115, and M.A. Eaton, Predestination and Israel (Paternoster, 1999), ch. 7.

☞1 10:10b
 ☞2 18:11
 ☞3 18:12
 ☞4 18:13
 ☞5 18:14–15
 ☞1 see 21:1–2

	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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