

Is Anything Too Hard for the Lord? Genesis 18:1-15



As a nation, we are addicted to fast food. We are addicted to the taste, the smell, the cheap price and convenience of fast food. But did you know when fast food was first invented? It was actually invented by Noah and his three sons. When they stepped off of the ark, God allowed them to eat animals instead of only plants. At first they probably ate slow food like turtle soup and clam chowder, but as soon as they invented a spear they started eating fast food like deer and rabbits. Get it? Fast food—food that moves fast! The frog in this video clip was after some fast food. (Frog jumps into the air and barely misses catching a dragonfly.)

When I read Genesis eighteen, I can't help but notice what fast food looked like in Abraham's day. This is hardly the most important point in this passage, but see if you can't find the fast food as I read and offer comments.

The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day.² Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

³ He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. ⁵ Let me get you something to eat

The ESV translates "something to eat" as "a morsel of bread." Abraham made it sound as if he was going to fetch them an afternoon snack.

so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant." "Very well," they answered, "do as you say."

⁶ So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of fine flour and knead it and bake some bread."

There—did you see it? I love this verse. He tells Sarah to get three seahs of flour—enough for about 30 loaves of bread—and bake some bread. Again the ESV picks up on the tome of the original Hebrew: And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quick! Three seahs of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes." Abraham is in such a hurry that he doesn't even use all of his verbs. Notice also that Abraham selected "fine flour" a "tender and good" calf. Even though he didn't yet know the identity of his guest, he was choosing the very best of what he possessed to the Lord. Nothing but the best for the Lord, though he does not yet know it!

⁷ *Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it.*

Abraham ran to the herd and then the servant hurried to prepare the calf. How long do you think it would take to slaughter, slice and roast this meat? Two hours—if you like your meat rare. And how long would it take to mix, knead and bake bread? The next verse would make it appear that the meat was done first. All of this describes how they ate “fast food” four thousand years ago.

⁸ *He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.*

Up until this point, Abraham had no idea who his guest was. As readers, you and I knew what was happening, but Abraham was merely practicing Bedouin hospitality. In a day without Super 8’s and other motels, even if a stranger arrived at your home, you were obligated to meet their needs and offer them food and shelter for the night. If he didn’t know that the Lord was visiting him, he at least knew that he was a very special guest. This is why he was rushing around preparing the food.

⁹ *“Where is your wife Sarah?” they asked him.*

“There, in the tent,” he said.

¹⁰ *Then the LORD said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.”*

This makes the fourth time that the Lord promised to build a nation through Abraham and the third time he specifically promised a son. In chapter 15 Abraham was told that a son would come from his own body and in chapter 17 the Lord changed Sarai’s name to Sarah and promised that he would “bless her and surely give her a son by her.” Finally, after 24 years of waiting, the promise became very specific—“this time next year.” But from their perspective, it would have been much easier 25 years earlier. If you recall, when Sarai was 65 years old, she was still very beautiful—so beautiful in fact that to save his own skin, Abram lied to Pharaoh and said that she was his sister. Back then it may have still been possible for Sarai to conceive and bear a child, but now it was obviously too late.

^{10-b} *Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. ¹¹ Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. The ESV translates as: “The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah.” Even though the NIV obscures the passage, Sarah even made it into the “Hall of Faith” in Hebrews 11. *By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.* (ESV).¹*

Do you see why Sarah was able to trust the LORD to give her a son? Because she understood that the Lord was faithful. Faithfulness was an attribute that was part of God’s character. Faithfulness was inherent in his nature. His very being and essence was faithfulness. Do you see, faith did not arise from within Sarah but was a response to the faithfulness within the LORD. Faith is not something we manufacture within ourselves, but is based on a quality inherent in something else, or in this case, Someone else.

For example, does it take faith for me to walk along the platform up front? (Well, I guess it depends on who constructed it, right? I think Tony built most of this, so I will trust it!) The thing

that allows me to walk across this platform is inherent in the characteristic of the platform itself. Does anyone think that I am a man of great faith simply because I walk across this platform? Why not? Because any knucklehead can see that it is perfectly safe. Now what if this was a half inch of ice on top of the Mississippi River—would you say that walking on top of that required faith? You might be inclined to think that faith had nothing to do with it—it was probably an absence of common sense more than anything else. And you would be right, because the key to walking across thin ice on a moving river is the inherent characteristic of the ice itself. If it was twelve inches thick then it would be worthy of my trust but if it is only ½ inch thick, it is not worthy of my trust. To use the language of Hebrews 11:11, ½ inch thick ice is not “faithful.” The very attribute of the ice is weak and thin and is not itself faithful. Therefore, if I walked across this thin ice, I would not be demonstrating faith at all. I would be showing my complete ignorance of the quality of the ice. As I fell through the ice and was sucked five miles down river, I would be showing the world that I didn’t understand the basic properties of ice. The problem was not my faith or lack of faith, but my lack of understanding of the poor quality inherent in the ice.

I want to try something a little different. In a moment I will put this blindfold over my eyes and walk slowly toward the end of the platform. As I raise my foot to take the next step, I need you, as a congregation, to indicate whether I should take the next step. Please answer either “yes” or “no”. Please be clear so I know what I should do. (Illustrate) Would you say that I had great faith in trusting you in this way? It had nothing to do with my faith but rather it was a test of your faithfulness. Each step I took tested your faithfulness, whether or not you would you be reliable and trustworthy or not.

Sarah was able to understand the quality inherent with the LORD. He was faithful. He possessed in full measure the inherent quality of faithfulness. Therefore, with this kind of understanding, having “faith” in the Lord is as simple as walking across this platform or walking across twelve inches of ice. But this is not how we think as Christians. If the Lord asks us to do something that we think it difficult or seemingly impossible, what do we usually say? We say things like, “I don’t know if I can do that. I don’t have enough faith.” Do you see how wrong-headed this is? Our faith or lack of faith has absolutely nothing to do with our lack of response to what God wants us to do. We don’t lack faith—we lack understanding of God’s inherent attribute of faithfulness.

This completely changes the way we live as believers. If I think that my problem is a lack of faith, then how might I solve my problem? That’s an interesting question, is it not? How does a person get “more faith?” Do you simply scrunch up your face, grit your teeth and try harder? “Oh, if I only had more faith. I just have to believe.” Faith feels like something that we have to manufacture, but this is so wrong. I don’t need more faith, I need more understanding of God’s faithfulness. I need to know Him who is faithful. But it’s not just head knowledge, is it? If head knowledge is that was needed, then the scholars of our day and Pharisees of Jesus’ day would have had the most faith. Knowledge by itself can be a dangerous thing. What we need to do is put our knowledge to the test. If I believe that this platform is strong enough to hold me, how do I test this belief? I walk across it and jump up and down on it. If I believe that ice that is a foot thick is strong enough to hold me, how do I test this belief? I walk across the ice and jump up

and down on it. I drive my car onto the ice—not because I have great faith, but because I am testing the inherent faithfulness of the ice.

You may recall what happened to the Israelites when Pharaoh finally let them leave Egypt. Pharaoh's army pursued the millions of Israelites. The people found themselves trapped by the Red Sea on one side and Pharaoh's army on the other. They had no place to go. Picking up the story in Exodus 14 we read: *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. ¹⁶Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground.* (Ex. 14:15-16) When the Lord gave this command to Moses, did he sit back and ponder the intellectual ramifications of God's power and faithfulness? Did he think to himself, "Now let's see. I know that God possesses the characteristic of faithfulness. I know that he is all-powerful. In theory he has the ability to part this sea. What should I do? Let me ponder this for a while." That is what someone with a mere intellectual understanding about God would have done. He or she would sit and ponder the various theories and notions about God. It's a bit like sitting through ordination councils listening to candidates describe the attributes of God. They do their best to list God's attributes. He is loving, merciful, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent and just. Then someone points out, "I think you left out eternity and aseity." So the candidate responds, "Oh, yes, thank you. I guess I missed those two." When God spoke from within the cloud of glory and commanded Moses to raise his staff and divide the Red Sea, there was no cerebral posturing going on. This was not a question on an exam or an academic challenge. Moses raised his staff and the Lord parted the Red Sea. Moses considered him faithful who had made the command. At that moment he wasn't worried about his own faith or lack of faith. He knew that God was faithful and he put God's faithfulness to the test by obeying him.

Do you see—faithfulness is not a characteristic to be studied with rational indifference. Faithfulness is meant to be tested. Now remember, I am not talking about our faithfulness, I am referring to God's faithfulness. How do I know if God is faithful? Confessing that he is faithful is nothing. I need to test his faithfulness. I need to walk forward knowing the platform will hold me up. I need to walk forward knowing the ice will support my weight. In the same way, I need to walk forward knowing that God is faithful. If I say that he is faithful and worthy of my trust and then I don't trust him, I have made myself a liar. A trustworthy person—in this case, the Lord—is to be trusted. But some of us sit around and wait for God to ask us to believe some huge miracle. We think that if God asked us to believe a miracle like he asked Sarah to believe she would bear a son, we would believe it. If God asks us to do big and hard things for him, we would certainly do it. No we wouldn't. Who are we kidding?! If we can't trust God in the small things in life why would he ask us to trust him with a miracle?

For example, if God asks us to give our money to his work—and he does—if we withhold our money are we not demonstrating by our actions that God is not to be trusted? If God asks us to serve him in some small way—and he does—if we hold back our service are we not telling the world that God is not faithful? Can we all just stop using this term—"I don't have enough faith"? What we should say in such cases is that God is not faithful, because that is ultimately what we mean.

In contrast to our disobedience, every step of obedience to his revealed word is a step out onto the ice. Every time we listen and obey we are testing the faithfulness of God. Each time we show love to our wives when we are not certain we will get anything in return, it is like singing from the top of our lungs—Great is thy faithfulness! Each time we show respect to our husbands we declare that God is faithful. These steps of obedience are tests of God’s faithfulness.

Let’s get back to our text, picking up in verse twelve.

¹² So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, “After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?” ¹³ Then the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really have a child, now that I am old?’ ¹⁴ Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son.”

Verse fourteen is one of two loud crescendos in this chapter—*Is anything too hard for the LORD?* What is the answer to this question? No! Nothing is too hard for the Lord. Notice who is asking this question. Verse thirteen tells us that the Lord is speaking to Abraham, so the Lord is the one who asked the question. It is as if the Lord says, “Is anything too hard for me?” just think about the ramifications of that question. In order for it to be true, God must have absolute sovereign power over everything and everyone. In chapter sixteen God predicted that the descendants of Abraham would be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years and then they would be released and leave that country with great possessions. Do you see what is involved in making such a prediction? God doesn’t merely look into the future like a fortune teller peers into a crystal ball and foretells the future. God doesn’t look into the future, he determines the future. In order for any prophesy to ever come true, God has to bring all of the pieces together in order for the prophecy to come to fulfillment.

In the case of the Israelites being enslaved in Egypt, God had to open the womb of Sarah so that Isaac could be born. God had to open the womb of Rebekah so that Jacob could be born. God had to open the womb of Rachel so that Joseph could be born. God had to give a dream to Joseph about ruling over his brothers to provoke them to jealousy so that they would grab him and throw him into a pit. God had to bring along the caravan of Midianites at just the right time so that Joseph’s brothers could sell him into slavery. God had to lead the Midianite slave traders directly to Potiphar so that he could buy the young Jewish slave. God had to create Joseph as a very handsome man so that the lust-filled wife of Potiphar would try to seduce him. I could go on for hours listing all of the fine details of how God sovereignly ordained the fulfillment of this prophecy.

But this is not how you and I plan for the future. Let’s say I am going to start a carpentry business. I may need to purchase a few tools, possibly a truck or a trailer. Then I’ll need to do some advertising and develop a customer base. But as I work in building my business, I am constantly responding to my circumstances and changing accordingly. I can’t predict my future because it is always changing. But God does not merely predict the future—God determines the future. Therefore, when God ask the question—*is anything too hard for me?*—it is a statement of absolute sovereign power. In order for God to be faithful in fulfilling his promise to bear a son through Sarah and Abraham, God must also possess the power to make it happen just as he said it would. And what do we call the characteristic of God in which he possess all power? It is usually called omnipotence. Do you see—God’s faithfulness is dependent upon his omnipotence.

If he does not have the power to fulfill a promise then he is not capable of fulfilling a promise and he ceases to be faithful. Is anything too hard for the Lord? This question is asked in various ways and at various times throughout Scripture. In the example of Moses standing between the red sea and the approaching Egyptian army, God thundered from within the cloud of glory and commanded—*Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water.* In other words, God was asking, “is anything too hard for me?” When the Lord spoke to Joshua on the eve of a battle with Jericho, he appeared to him as the commander of the Lord. He gave clear instructions, telling them to march around the city seven times and at the end of the seventh time around, Joshua was to sound the trumpet and all the people were to shout and the walls would crumble to the ground. That was another way of saying, “is anything too hard for me?”

God often spoke from a burning bush or thundering mountaintop or blowing whirlwind and each time essentially asked the same question—“is anything too hard for me?” But this time, the Lord appeared as a man and sat down for several hours under the shade of trees outside the tent of Abraham and ate the food prepared by his servants then he began a conversation like you and I might have over a meal on Sunday afternoon and gently asked, “is anything too hard for me?” But no matter if he asks it in the shade after an afternoon meal or from the middle of a whirlwind, the result is the same—it is a statement that declares his absolute power, his omnipotence over everyone and everything. His raw, perfect, absolute power is necessary for him to be faithful.

Let me show you how this points to Christ. Please turn to Acts 4:23.

²³ *On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.* ²⁴ *When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.* ²⁵ *You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:*

Here they are quoting directly from Psalm 2.

*“Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?*

²⁶ *The kings of the earth take their stand
and the rulers gather together
against the Lord
and against his Anointed One.”^b*

They are saying several things in this prayer. First they are confessing that the anointed one from Psalm 2 is none other than Jesus Christ. Second, they are equating the conspirators and raging nations of Psalm 2 with Herod, Pilate and the rest. Were Herod and Pilate guilty of this sin? Did they act freely and of their own volition? Yes, they did, but at the same time God determined in advance that they would play this role.

²⁷ *Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.* ²⁸ *They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.*

The crucifixion of Jesus and all that went with it was planned by the sovereign power and will of the Lord. So as we approach resurrection Sunday we ask again, is anything too hard for the Lord? The Lord knows all of your unique struggles and joys right now. He knows your areas of

obedience and your struggles. This morning he is speaking into each of those areas and says to you personally, “Is anything too hard for me?”

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¹ Compare to the NIV: “By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.”

^b Psalm 2:1,2