

THE SPY AT JACOB'S LADDER

AND OTHER BIBLE STORIES
FROM THE INSIDE OUT

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SARAH'S WILD LAUGHTER

As Told by the Oak of Mamre

Some say that I am dead. As dead as the papery shell a butterfly leaves behind when it flies free. As dead as an autumn-burnished leaf, slipped loose from its mother tree. But I will tell you a secret: Once somebody or something is alive in God's creation, even if our bodies slip away, we are still alive, held tight by God's love. God loves everything that has been made and never lets any of us go.

To this day, my body stands on the very spot where I heard an astounding conversation thousands of years ago. I am an oak tree, called the Oak of Mamre (pronounced Mom-Ray). A small group of us trees stood strong back then, when an old man named Abraham and

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his wife Sarah lived near us, camping out in the desert with their family, servants, and sheep. I am the only one left now.

The desert was a lonely place. And Sarah was one sad woman. One night when she and Abraham were out for a walk under the stars, I could see her lean against him, wiping her tears away.

I knew why she was crying. She was almost ninety years old and didn't have any children. In those days, having children meant everything.

Oh, how I wanted to comfort her. I rustled my leaves and held my branches out wide, hoping she might think the grassy spot under me would be a good place to rest.

She didn't look my way. But I could feel my trunk stand straighter as Abraham glanced in my direction.

"Come with me, dear," he said to Sarah. "Come sit with me under this beautiful tree."

And they did, nestling against me. Sarah tried to stop the tears running down her cheeks, but, after a while, she gave in to them.

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“God promised us that we would have children,” cried Sarah. “I don’t understand how he could go back on his word.”

“My love, we must have faith,” Abraham said. Leaning into me and wrapping his arms around Sarah, he reminded her of the promises God made some twenty-five years before: that they would have land of their own—God called it a land flowing with milk and honey—and that they would have as many descendants as there were stars in the sky. They had been trekking through deserts and wilderness ever since.

I wish I could tell you Sarah felt joyful after hearing Abraham’s words, or even confident. But she just grew quiet.

When they stood to leave, Sarah steadied herself on my trunk. I stood even taller then, standing as strong as I could for her. Hand in hand, Abraham and Sarah walked back to their tent.

The next afternoon brought the event that I will never forget—the one that changed history.

Abraham was staying cool, sitting at the door of his tent, as he often did during the heat of the day. Sarah was

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taking a nap. Suddenly, three men seemed to grow out of the desert sand. They hadn't been there a minute ago, when I had glanced off to the west. But they were there now and heading straight for the old man.

Desert hospitality demands that you share the best food and drink that you have with guests, even on the spur of the moment. And Abraham did just that, asking Sarah to make stew for dinner.

Not knowing who the men were, she placed her ear against the tent wall to hear their conversation while she made dinner. She knew, as did I, that people don't just pop up out of sand and thin air. I could almost hear her questions: *Who are these people? Why are they there? Where did they come from?*

I was just as curious. Hunching down, I held my limbs still so there would be no rustling to drown out their voices.

"When we come back in a year, Sarah will have given birth to a son," said one of the three visitors.

Abraham's mouth fell open. And on the other side of the tent, Sarah started to laugh to herself.



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The same person who had shared the stunning news looked at Abraham. “Why is your wife laughing?”

Abraham came around the tent wall to find her, asking, “Why did you laugh?”

Oops! Sarah knew it was impolite to eavesdrop—and even worse to be caught laughing at visitors!

“I did not laugh,” Sarah fibbed.

“Yes, you did!”

Well, I knew why Sarah had laughed. You probably do too. Sarah was ninety years old, and ninety-year-old women don't have babies! Especially after following very old husbands around in the wilderness for years and years.

As the strange visitors walked away, the one who told Abraham about Sarah's baby brushed his hand against my trunk. “You are a beautiful tree,” he whispered. “I have loved you since the day I made you.”

What? And then I knew. The three visitors weren't people. Two of them were angels, and one—the One who had spoken to Abraham and to me—was actually God!

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Imagine that: God, the maker of all things, right there in front of me!



A year later, Sarah did in fact give birth to a son. And she was so happy that she named him Isaac, which means *he will laugh*. In the years following Isaac's birth, I heard plenty of joy and laughter come from their tent.

After this special family moved on, the night winds told me that Abraham and Sarah had many grandchildren and great-grandchildren, just like God promised. Their descendants came to be known as the children of Israel, and they loved God very much.



Note:

The Oak of Mamre, also called the Oak of Abraham, is said to mark the spot where the angels visited Sarah and Abraham. Located 1.2 miles southwest of Mamre, near Hebron, it has been declared officially dead, but parts of its ancient trunk are said to still remain.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

YOUNGER READERS

What do you think it would feel like to wander in the desert for years and years, not exactly sure where you were going?

Abraham and Sarah listened carefully for God's voice. When have you listened for God's voice? What did you hear?

Sarah wanted a baby more than anything. Have you ever wanted something so badly? Did you talk with God about it? What did you learn from the conversation?

Look at the sky tonight. What did it mean when God told Abraham that he and Sarah would have as many descendants as there were stars in the sky?

OLDER READERS

Following God's voice was the cornerstone of faith for Abraham and Sarah. They were told that they would have as many descendants as there are stars in the sky (Genesis 26:4). Yet Sarah, approaching ninety, was still childless. What messages might the Holy Spirit be communicating through this story?

Sarah and Abraham must have significantly downsized in order to begin their great adventure at ages 65 and 80. Is there anything you would need to downsize to respond better to God's call?

THE BIBLE STORY

Genesis 18:1-15. The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent." Then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season,

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and your wife Sarah shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?” The LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ Is anything too wonderful for the LORD? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.” But Sarah denied, saying, “I did not laugh”; for she was afraid. He said, “Oh yes, you did laugh.”