

Beacons of the Bible

Sarah's Unbelief

By [Henry Law](#)

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Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh?" Genesis 18:13

The scene is in the plains of Mamre. The time is when the midday heat is vehement. The patriarch, now fast descending in the valley of years, is seated in the tent-door. Doubtless his thoughts now intermix with heaven. How blessed are such seasons! The happiest hours are spent in converse with the unseen world! How bright would earth be, if the mind soared more frequently to things above! A gracious eye is watching him. A heavenly friend ponders his heart's meditations. He, who was near to Nathanael beneath the fig-tree's shade, now reads Abraham's musings. There is no solitude which God surveys not. There is no wayside prayer unheard. The songs in Philippi's jail fly upwards. The rapture in Patmos is marked. No lonely aspiration is unheeded.

Abraham lifts up his eyes. Three strangers approach. The mystic number is not without meaning. Its frequent occurrence in the sacred page has sure design. God's every arrangement is offspring of Divine intent. There is no random word, where all is spoken by celestial lips. Faith knows this well, and ever ponders--ever learns.

Hence in this selected number we see the emblem of our Triune God. Grand thought! The holy--blessed--glorious Trinity, three persons in One God, is the God of our salvation. Let us devoutly heed each symbol. Let us rejoice and reverently adore.

In this mystic band one form claims notice. The Eternal Word in human guise visits His servant. Before the time of incarnation, His delights are with the sons of men. He appears to Moses in the burning bush. He cheers Joshua as the captain of the Lord's hosts. He struggles with the wrestling Jacob. He brings tidings to Manoah and his wife. He walks with Israel's captives in the midst of the burning furnace. Nebuchadnezzar is awe-struck. He exclaims--Lo! I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt--and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." Dan. 3:25. Abraham knows his visitors, and reverently bows.

Let us not advance without the true thought, that Christ abounds throughout our Bible. The Book is emphatically "the Word of Christ." His image would be more discerned, if cold unbelief weaved not so many veils. Many doubt too much. How few believe enough! Abraham with reverential joy urges the guests to tarry. As they condescend to tread this earth, so he requests that they will take food, as earthly pilgrims. Who ever prayed in vain for the Lord's presence? He stood still, when Bartimeus called. He stops now, when the patriarch invites. Reader! your heart, also, might be His perpetual seat.

With eager haste all hospitality is prepared. The welcome is not unrewarded. The former promise is renewed. The tidings--so early given, but in performance so long delayed--again delight his ears. "I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and lo! Sarah your wife shall have a son." Genesis 18:10. The gracious word could not be recalled. In heaven's courts there is "no variableness, nor shadow of turning." Lapse of years may seemingly raise difficulties, but the event shall be. "Sarah your wife shall have a son."

The words reach Sarah's ears. She stood behind in the tent-door. How glad their message! "She shall have a son." How grand the far-extending blessing! "She shall be a mother of nations, kings shall come from her." Genesis 17:16. One from the courts of heaven now seals the pledge. Surely her heart will break with joy! Her happiness will surpass bounds. Her mouth will be quick to sing, "My soul does magnify the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior." Luke 1:46, 47.

Alas! how different is the fact! She laughed within herself. This laugh is not the exuberant delight of Abraham, when he first heard this truth. It is the scornful sneer of unbelief. Its language says, it cannot be. It is impossible. The course of nature forbids. I am old. My husband is old. The very thought is folly.

Thus Sarah laughed. Who will not blame her, for the sin is deep? Who will not check surprise, for the sin is common?

Reader! analyze the sin, and mark its dark ingredients. All skeptic doubts are full of vain conceit. Vain man assumes more than Divine prerogative. In pride he sits as judge of what God can perform. He is bold to call God's attributes to his puny bar. He sets boundaries to superhuman power. He confines God's wisdom to the limits of his own notions. What is so silly as man's so-called reason! It is a created quality, and still it vaunts itself as higher far than the Creator. It owes its being to sovereign will, and yet it plumes itself as mightier than its originating cause. Its every power is a gift, and still it claims to be far wiser than the giver. Its faculties arise--expand--increase--decay--just as God wills; and still it struts haughtily, as if independence were its attribute.

It mainly assails the truth and power of God. Thus it showed hideous features in Moses. Though so long experienced in the school of miracles, he says, "You

have said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. Shall the flocks and herds be slain for them to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them to suffice them?" Here is the sneer of unbelief! Here is a skeptic taunt! The Lord's reply shatters such silliness. "Is there any limit to my power? Now you will see whether or not my word comes true!" Numbers 11:23. Oh! that the sons of men would deeply ponder the wise sayings of the Spirit, "Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being His counselor, has taught Him?" Is. 40:13. "Have you not known, have you not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faints not, neither is weary? There is no searching of His understanding." Is. 40:28.

Reader! settle in your mind the truth, that God is all-wise--all-true--almighty. The heart thus stored cannot nurse unbelief. The ground is then preoccupied. There is no place where doubt can rest. Their the only question is, "Has God spoken?" If so, the end must be according to the word. Be persuaded, that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, then perplexities are gone. We may not see the time or manner of performance. Attending circumstances may be hidden, but we well know, As it is written, so it shall be.

Now, the admonition of the Lord exposes the weak ground of unbelief, "Why did Sarah laugh?" What cause can justify the jeer? When was it known that trifling sayings were uttered by me? Was any word not thoroughly fulfilled? Did any promise ever fail? Cannot every child of God testify with the dying Joshua, "Behold this day I am going the way of all the earth; and you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you--all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing has failed thereof." Josh. 23:14. Let the believer bring forth the catalogue of promises. It is a sparkling chain, in which each jewel is from the treasury of heaven. It is exceeding long--what mind can count the precious links! They belong to many circumstances and many days. They pledge countless victories over many trials and many foes. But when the end arrives, the testimony is firm; not one ever failed. All were firm as the everlasting hills. All were true as the Speaker, who is Truth.

Why then do scoffers laugh? Where is excuse for such irrational distrust? If one vessel had suffered shipwreck in this wide sea of predictions--if one voyager had failed to reach the promised haven--if one instance could be adduced, in which God spoke and accomplishment came not--if there had been one eclipse of the glorious luminary of Divine announcements--then incredulity would have a resting-place, and the laughter might reply, "For this cause do I laugh."

But no such plea was ever found. God's Word has had long trial. It has been roughly dragged before many a prejudiced tribunal. Judges have sat pre-determined to condemn. Advocates have used prodigious talent to beguile. The jury have been ready to put darkness for light. But all in vain. God's every word has raised a triumphant head above submerging seas. It has stood as a rock

lashed by the mighty waves of many thousand years. But the tempest's fury only consolidated. And so it ever must be. He who utters is eternal truth. Therefore fallibility can have no place. The Speaker wields the Scepter of Omnipotence. Therefore to *accomplish* is as easy as to *say*.

Why then do scoffers laugh? O my soul, stand far apart from such profanity. Clasp to your heart of hearts the comforting assurance, that nothing in all the treasury of the Word can fail. Delight in the countless promises. They are the rich inheritance of faith. Ponder them well. They are adapted for all circumstances of prosperity or woe. They are a pillow for the aching head--a staff for the pilgrim's march--a shield against the tempter's every dart--a light in every hour of gloom. Drink deep their cordial cup, and be persuaded, God will do what God has said.

Sarah laughed. But was this sin unseen--unnoticed? It is true no human eye was resting on her. She stood in the tent-door. She faced not the heavenly visitant. His back was towards her. But from His gaze no tent could hide--no darkness screen. Every movement of her mind--every rising doubt--every ridiculing sneer was read, as are the pages of an open book.

When will the perversity of man justly weigh Omniscience? "Our secret sins are ever in the light of His countenance." Ps. 90:8. Man may dig deep, but he cannot hide. He may plan secrecy. He may weave dark veils. But there is no cover from the all-pervading eye. Darkness is light to Him, with whom we have to do. The secret chamber and the public mart are both alike.

The solemn remonstrance speaks, "Why did Sarah laugh?" and then the grand inquiry follows, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Impossibility has reference to restricted power. It touches not Omnipotence. Space is unknown to infinity. Time bounds not eternity. No strength retains almightiness.

Fear seizes Sarah, when detection came. Bold in concealment, she trembles when unveiled. Proud scoffers imagine that they are unknown. It is a fond dream. The day is near, which will reveal their every sneer. The great white throne will drag all secrets from their flimsy refuge. And then terrors will grasp them with iron grasp. They must meet Him in fear, whom they feared not to scorn.

Sarah quails and denies. Thus sin is seldom single. It is a root producing many stalks. It is a river parting into many streams. Scoffs lead to lies. But no lie can undo the deed. Truth instantly confronts her, "No, but you did laugh."

Sinner, shun each sin. Avoid its adhering stain. It is a bloodhound, which will hunt you down. Conscious that your sins are many, heinous, and of crimson dye, take each--take all in penitence and faith to the one cleansing fountain. And when you hear, "No, but you did," be ready to confess--"I did; but Jesus died." This is the only hope. At the cross is the only smile of pardon. Faith meekly pleading there obtains remission of all guilt--even the vile guilt of 'unbelieving scoffs'.

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