

Luke 1:37

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For with God nothing shall be impossible.

Analysis

For with God nothing shall be impossible. This angelic declaration to Mary stands as one of Scripture's most comprehensive and sweeping statements of divine omnipotence in all of biblical revelation. The Greek phrase hoti ouk adunātēsei para tou theou pan rhēma (ὅτι οὐκ ἀδυνατήσει παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ πᾶν ὅμιλα) literally reads "because there shall not be impossible with God every word/matter," employing a characteristic Hebraic construction preserved in Luke's careful Greek composition. The verb adunātēsei (ἀδυνατήσει) is future indicative tense, declaring not merely God's present power and current capability but His eternal, unchanging, immutable capability across all time—what is possible with God today will remain equally possible tomorrow and forever. The double negative construction (ouk adunātēsei, "not impossible") creates emphatic, forceful affirmation in Greek rhetorical style, essentially meaning "certainly possible," "absolutely possible," or "never impossible."

The word rhēma (ὅμιλα) carries particular theological significance in biblical Greek, meaning both "word" (that which is spoken) and "thing" or "matter" (that which exists or occurs). This rich semantic range and dual meaning indicates that nothing God speaks will fail to come to pass, and simultaneously, no circumstance, situation, or condition exceeds His power to address, transform, or accomplish. Every divine promise, every prophetic declaration, every purpose of God, every word proceeding from His mouth will be accomplished and fulfilled because nothing whatsoever is impossible for Him. The term rhēma differs significantly from logos (λόγος, the general, broad term for word or reason) in emphasizing the specific, spoken, concrete, particular utterance—God's definite word in a specific situation to a particular person. When God speaks a rhēma, all of creation itself

must align with that word because divine speech carries inherent creative and transformative power within it, just as in Genesis 1 where God spoke and creation came into existence.

The prepositional phrase *para tou theou* (παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ, "with God" or "from God") uses the preposition *para* (παρά) with the genitive case, which in Greek grammar can indicate both source or origin ("from") and accompaniment or sphere ("with"). This grammatical flexibility and dual nuance suggests both God's capability (what is possible in His sphere of power and authority) and His initiative (what proceeds from His sovereign will and purpose)—whatever comes from God carries divine power inherently within it to accomplish its purpose and fulfill its design. The use of *theou* (Θεοῦ, God) without the definite article emphasizes the divine nature, character, and essence—this theological statement concerns not merely a god or any deity, but the one true God whose very essence, nature, and being is omnipotence itself.

The immediate context makes this universal declaration even more profound and startling. Mary had just received the angelic announcement that she would conceive and bear a son—not through normal marital relations but as a virgin, a biological and natural impossibility that contradicts and transcends all known natural law and physical processes. Gabriel strategically cites Elizabeth's miraculous pregnancy in her old age and barrenness as concrete, contemporary evidence of God's power over natural processes and biological limitations, then makes this sweeping, universal statement about divine omnipotence as the theological foundation undergirding both miracles. The verse directly and deliberately echoes Genesis 18:14 in the Septuagint translation, where God rhetorically asks Abraham, "Is anything impossible with God?" (μῆ adunatēsei para tō theō rhēma) regarding Sarah's promised son Isaac despite her barrenness and advanced age. This careful intertextual connection deliberately links Mary's miraculous virgin conception to the patriarchal promises and Abrahamic covenant, demonstrating God's consistent, unchanging pattern of accomplishing the humanly impossible to fulfill His redemptive purposes, advance His covenant plan, and bring salvation to His people.

Theologically, this verse establishes multiple foundational doctrines essential to Christian orthodoxy:

1. the doctrine of divine omnipotence—God's power has absolutely no limits, restrictions, boundaries, or impossibilities; He can accomplish anything consistent with His holy nature and sovereign purposes
2. the reliability and certainty of divine promises—what God speaks (*rhēma*) will certainly, inevitably occur, for His word cannot fail, return void, or prove false
3. the supernatural nature of salvation—redemption absolutely requires divine intervention in the impossible realm, miraculously transforming human hearts that cannot and will not transform themselves
4. the necessity of faith—when God speaks His word, belief and trust are the only appropriate responses, regardless of apparent natural impossibilities, human limitations, or rational objections
5. the doctrine of the Incarnation—only a God for whom literally nothing is impossible could accomplish the supreme mystery and miracle of deity taking on humanity, the infinite becoming finite, the eternal entering time, the immortal accepting mortality, and the Creator becoming creature while simultaneously remaining fully, completely God.

This verse thus becomes the essential theological foundation for Christianity's central miracle and mystery—God with us, Emmanuel incarnate.

Historical Context

Luke 1:37 occurs within the Annunciation narrative, set in Nazareth of Galilee during Herod the Great's reign (circa 6-4 BC). Nazareth was an insignificant agricultural village, unmentioned in the Old Testament, the Talmud, or Josephus's writings, with perhaps 200-400 inhabitants. That God chose such an obscure place for the Incarnation's announcement underscores the biblical theme of divine power working through weakness and insignificance. Mary was a young Jewish virgin (*parthenos*, παρθένος), likely 12-14 years old according to first-century Palestinian marriage customs, betrothed to Joseph, a craftsman of David's house. The betrothal period was legally binding, requiring formal divorce to dissolve, though the couple did not yet cohabit. This period typically lasted one year while the groom prepared a home.

A pregnancy during betrothal constituted legal grounds for divorce and potentially capital punishment for adultery (Deuteronomy 22:23-24), though Roman occupation had restricted Jewish courts' ability to execute capital sentences. Nevertheless, the social stigma would have been devastating—Mary would have been branded an adulteress, ostracized from religious community, and faced lifelong shame and poverty. Joseph's plan to divorce her quietly (Matthew 1:19) represented extraordinary mercy in the cultural context. The angel's announcement placed Mary in an impossible situation—obedience to God meant accepting social death, yet the angel's word about divine possibility provided the theological framework for her faith response: "Be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38).

The context of messianic expectation pervaded first-century Judaism. Following the Maccabean period and under Roman occupation since 63 BC, Jewish hope for the Messiah had intensified. Expectations varied widely—some anticipated a political liberator from Rome, others a priestly figure, still others an apocalyptic judge. Gabriel's announcement that Mary's son would inherit David's throne and reign forever (Luke 1:32-33) clearly identified this child as the Messiah, making supernatural conception theologically necessary—the Messiah must be both fully human (son of Mary, son of David) and fully divine (conceived by the Holy Spirit, Son of God).

The phrase about God's power was deeply rooted in Jewish Scripture. First-century Jews knew the stories of miraculous conceptions: Sarah conceiving Isaac in old age (Genesis 18:14), Rebekah's barrenness before Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:21), Rachel's barrenness before Joseph (Genesis 30:22), Hannah conceiving Samuel (1 Samuel 1:19-20), and now Elizabeth conceiving in old age (Luke 1:24-25). These miracles demonstrated God's sovereign power over nature and faithfulness to covenant promises. However, Mary's situation surpassed all precedents—not conception despite barrenness, but conception without any human father whatsoever. The angel's statement was not merely reassurance but theological declaration: the Incarnation itself, God becoming man, represented the ultimate impossibility made possible, the hinge point of history when deity took on humanity to accomplish the impossible task of human redemption.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does the truth that nothing is impossible with God affect your prayer life, especially regarding situations that seem hopeless by human standards?
2. What does Mary's response of faith ("be it unto me according to thy word") teach us about responding to God's impossible promises in our own lives?
3. How does the miracle of the virgin birth demonstrate both God's power to do the impossible and His faithfulness to keep His ancient promises?
4. In what ways does this verse challenge naturalistic worldviews that deny the possibility of divine intervention in the natural order?
5. How should the truth that God's every word (rhēma) carries power to accomplish the impossible shape our approach to Scripture and God's promises?

Interlinear Text

ὅτι	οὐκ	ἀδυνατήσει	παρὰ	τῷ	θεῷ	πᾶν	ρῆμα
For	nothing	shall be impossible	with	G3588	God	G3956	G4487
G3754	G3756	G101	G3844		G2316		

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 19:26 (References God): But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

Jeremiah 32:27 (References God): Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?

Mark 10:27 (References God): And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.

Jeremiah 32:17 (References God): Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee:

Luke 18:27 (References God): And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.

Genesis 18:14 (Parallel theme): Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.

Numbers 11:23 (Parallel theme): And the LORD said unto Moses, Is the LORD'S hand waxed short? thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not.

Philippians 3:21 (Parallel theme): Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

Zechariah 8:6 (Parallel theme): Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the LORD of hosts.

Job 13:2 (Parallel theme): What ye know, the same do I know also: I am not inferior unto you.