

AN INTERRUPTED VISIT FROM THE LORD | GENESIS 18:1-16

In the previous chapter, Abram's name was changed to Abraham, and the Lord promised an expanded reach, that through he and Sarah nations (plural) would come forth. A change was made from Abram the "covenant man" to Abraham and Sarah, the "covenant couple." The significance of changing both Abram and Sarai's names seems significant to Genesis 18, which we consider today.

After Abraham's name change and circumcision, **the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre** (Gen. 18:1). As seen by the capital letters, this is YHWH, the very God of Israel who appears to Abraham.

But a most unusual interruption takes place. Three men appear, and Abraham's attention, and the focus of the story, completely divert to these three. Who are these men, what is happening, and why does the story take such a sudden turn? These are only the beginning of the questions.

The first question is whether the LORD is one of the three visitors. If this is the case (as most but not all believe), then the first phrase of verse 1, **the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre** (Gen. 18:1), serves as more of a *title* to the story than part of the story. Later in the chapter (v. 22), the passages says (ambiguously) that **the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the LORD**. Are these *two of the three men* or are they *all three men*? Because only two arrive in Sodom (19:1), the vast majority assume the LORD to be the third. If this is the case, then the LORD appears along with **two angels** (19:1). Note that since the days of Augustine many Christians have viewed the three as the manifestation of the Trinity, but this seems more "wishful thinking" than good exegesis.

But I am going to interpret the *three visitors* as *in addition to the LORD*, and thus I do not see the first words of 18:1 as an introductory title. Rather, I will view all three as angelic messengers, and this "entourage" convinces Abraham that He is in the presence of the LORD. In verse 2, the pronouns then would suggest the following: **And he** [Abraham] **lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him** [the LORD]: **and when he** [Abraham] **saw them, he ran to meet them** [the three men] **from the tent door** (Gen. 18:2). Then in verse 3, having received the angels, Abraham says, **My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away**. But in verse 4, Abraham speaks to the three (notice he uses singular pronouns in verse 3 (**thy, thee**) and plural pronouns in verse 4 (**you, your**)).

After the preparation of a meal (vv. 5-8), **they said unto him, Where is Sarah...**(v. 9). But then the LORD (presumably) said that He would return in nine months and that **Sarah thy wife shall have a son** (v. 10). Sarah laughed (v. 12), and **the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh** (v. 13). When Sarah knew she had been caught laughing, **she was afraid** (v. 15) and denied doing so. This scene is odd to us because

Abraham Himself laughed when he had heard the news (Gen. 17:17), and Abraham was not chastised at all. We want to say, "*what's up with that?*"

I suspect that *Abraham didn't tell his wife*, and thus when the LORD asked Abraham (rather than Sarah), **Wherefore did Sarah laugh** (v. 13), Abraham knew he had been caught: *he had never told Sarah*. Sarah was to be the "covenant wife" and yet Abraham was not telling her. This put Sarah in the awkward position of being unaware, while Abraham was aware.

THE CONTINUATION OF THE LORD'S VISIT | GENESIS 18:17-33

As the men depart, the LORD asks them, **Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do** (v. 17). It seems (as we would expect) that the LORD took Abraham's new name and new role seriously. If God was going to destroy some of the surrounding nations, Abraham would need to be included in the information (v. 18).

In a modern sense, this should teach us that any worldview that ignores an "Abrahamic connection" is not based on Scripture. It could be argued that when the modern world borders were devised after WWI, that the world leaders ignored this connection, and that world chaos has been the rule of the day since that time.

The LORD visits with Abraham about the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah, and Abraham "begs mercy," asking, **Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?** (v. 23). Then the familiar pleading with God to spare the city for 50 righteous...45, 40, 30, 20, and 10 begins. The LORD promises to spare the city for even 10 righteous, and the matter is left "hanging" in chapter 18, solved in chapter 19.

SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

- Almost every passage of Scripture has more difficulties in interpretation than the average preacher admits.
- Almost every passage of Scripture provides a wealth of "what if" scenarios, enough to keep the student of the Word busy for a lifetime!
- Both the LORD and the angels were in human form, and nothing is indicated that this is unusual. This seems to often be true in Scripture, beyond the Cherubim, which have a unique appearance. Perhaps we should abandon the idea that angels have wings, and adopt the idea that *God looks like us*.
- It is not uncommon that God's work with mankind involved *food and hospitality*. We should view *dining as more than eating* and as an opportunity for communion with God and others.
- As God includes man in worldly events, so man should include others in spiritual affairs. Abraham was scolded (it seems) for not including Sarah.
- God was willing to make great concessions for the sake of a few righteous. Perhaps this one reason God has spared the world judgment today. Will you be one of the few?