

GENESIS

Lesson 18 - Chapters 18 and 19

Last week we started the story of the 3 men suddenly appearing to Abraham, that he brought them to his tent, and that they sat down and ate what was prepared for them. There is much disagreement on whether these were men, or angels, or some of each. No matter, something supernatural was happening here, although exactly what that was in difficult to discern.

Permit me the folly of offering my own opinion: I have said on a number of occasions that while on the one hand I fully subscribe to the general notion of the Trinity (that is that the Godhead consists of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), I do NOT subscribe to the notion that, therefore, every manifestation of God must embody ONE of these 3 persons of God in the strictest sense. Yet, could it be that the strange visitation of these 3 individuals was as a model of the 3-part Godhead?

Maybe. But, it really messes with the traditional Christian concept of what the Trinity amounts to if that is the intent. For instance, when have we ever heard of the Holy Spirit assuming ANY physical form? Christian tradition is that ALL physical forms of God are supposed to be Jesus. Did we have 3 Jesus' standing before Abraham?

What else could these 3 have represented? What was the burning bush? What was the Shekinah? What was that cloud that led Israel through the wilderness? What was that "Angel of the Lord" who identified Himself as God Almighty to Hagar? Who wrestled with Jacob? And, now, what are we to make of these 3 non-descript men who are somehow part of an appearance of Yahweh Himself? I think we do a great disservice to ourselves when we attempt to artificially limit the possible *manifestations* of God to 3, just so it satisfies and kind of makes Christian doctrine nice and tidy. And, I think it is utter foolishness to believe that we can honestly subject God to any limits whatsoever. He exists in a way that we cannot fathom. He exists in a dimension we cannot enter. We comprehend but the tiniest fraction of who God is; and sometimes we just need to get comfortable with that, and leave some mysteries as mysteries.

The prophets who had visions of things far into the future; or others, like John, who got a glimpse of Heaven, found these things so difficult to describe and communicate to others. They had no choice but to use descriptive words of things they were familiar with.... animals, precious stones and metals...fire.... stars and the moon; what else would they use? Yet, what they were seeing was either spiritual in nature and therefore human words would NEVER be able to capture it; or they were seeing so far into the future that words had not yet been invented to describe things that had not yet been invented.

I think we have a similar situation here. Clearly, there is some kind of God thing going on, but there are simply no words to describe it. So, the writer did the best he could. And, you can be

sure that some future writer probably tried to help the words a little bit, and has made it all the more difficult for us, now. And, I also doubt that Abraham could make heads or tails out of what was really going on, either. It happened. They said what they said. It came true. And, that is that.

Now, let's get back to something we can wrap our fleshly minds around a little better.

In verse 9 is an example of a kind of statement we see often in the Bible; and these words are put into God's mouth or the mouth of an angel. One of the 3 individuals says to Abraham "Where is your wife, Sarah?". This is a rhetorical question. This is simply a nice way to open a conversation about Sarah. It's not that these men don't know the answer. The fact is, spirit beings, and particularly God, and has to dumb things down pretty severely to communicate with humans. So, we get a lot of rhetorical and figurative statements subscribed to God and angels. Don't go off on some tangent ascribing human attributes, frailties, imperfections, and weaknesses to angels or to God because of these kinds of statements.

Now comes the purpose for this mysterious visit: in verse 10 one of the 3 informed Abraham that he was coming back in a year, and that Sarah will have given birth to a son by then. Yahweh's promise to Abraham of a son has been coming about, step-by-step. First, back in Genesis 12:2, God tells Abraham that he'll make Abraham into a great nation, which tells Abraham he will have many children. Second, in Gen. 15:4, Abraham is promised an heir, and that the heir will be natural-born son of Abraham. Third, in Gen. 17:16-21, Abraham was assured that his wife, Sarah, would give him a son. And, now, here in 18:10, it is time to fulfill all those promises.

Now watch this basic and elegantly simple God-principle in action; notice how each of God's promises build upon earlier promises. And, how each covenant is built upon earlier covenants. A new promise or new covenant doesn't replace or countermand an earlier one; it simply takes the sum of the earlier ones to the next level. When one builds a house, it starts with preparing the ground. Over that prepared ground a foundation is built. One can no longer see the ground under the foundation, but it's still there. Upon that foundation the first floor is built. One can no longer see the foundation, but it's still there. Upon the first floor, the 2nd floor is built, and so on. One thing built upon the former. Without the ground you can't have a foundation; without the foundation you can't have the 1st floor; without the 1st floor you can't have the 2nd.

Yet, if one could somehow, magically, remove the prepared ground from under the foundation, the building would collapse. If you could remove the foundation from under the first floor, the building would fall. If you could slide the 1st floor out from underneath the 2nd floor, the building would instantly become rubble. Each portion of the structure of the house is dependent on the other; leave one out, or remove one, and the house is destroyed. This is how God's covenants work. The New Covenant, the Covenant of Jesus Christ, is not a covenant that replaces the earlier ones, nor does it stand-alone. The New Covenant is dependent on ALL the earlier ones, and it is the fulfillment of all the earlier ones...each covenant built upon the ones preceding it. The promises of God to Abraham in bringing about an heir sets up this pattern of bringing about His will in stages.

Well, Sarah... who was curious about these 3 guys, as anybody would have been...was listening through the tent walls (not very hard to do) and heard what was said. She about dropped over from trying to stifle the laughter that wanted to burst out of inside her. Believe me, this was not an "Oh boy I can hardly wait for the baby to come" kind of laughter. This was a "who are these yo'yo's and have they got one good brain between'em all?" kind of laughter. In other words, Sarah laughed in ridicule. Uh-oh. Yahweh says, why did Sarah laugh? Busted. God makes it clear that Sarah WILL have a son.....because He's decided it. And, it's going to happen within a year. Sarah then does the natural thing: she denied that she laughed. God, says, oh yes you did.

As odd as this encounter has been; even ending with Yahweh having a little argument with Sarah.....it continues in yet another vein.

From Abraham's tent, the 3 men set out for the wicked city of Sodom, and Abraham accompanies them for a short distance. In verses 17-19, we get a glimpse into something that we rarely do in Holy Scripture: we see into God's mind, so to speak, and we are given **the reasoning** behind a decision of God. I've told you on more than one occasion, not to seek WHY in the Scriptures, but rather to seek out patterns. Here, for one of the few times, we are told WHY. And, the WHY is about God's treatment of Sodom and Gomorrah, and whether or not Abraham should have foreknowledge of God's plans.

And, at least one thing we should take from this is that God does not keep His plans for mankind a secret. He does not keep the reasons for His judgments on people and nations secret. He does not keep the reasons for giving out blessing, secret. And, a second thing that we see is that God will do His revealing, and bring about His purposes, almost exclusively through His Hebrew people.....beginning right here with Abraham, the first Hebrew.

When Abraham finds out God's plan to devastate Sodom, well aware that his nephew is living there, he goes into a typical Middle Eastern bargaining session with God. But, what we are actually seeing is many things. First, we are seeing that Abraham cares about more than himself. Second, we are getting a glimpse into God's definition of justice and righteousness. Third, we are getting a glimpse into God's mercy when justice or retribution would seem to be called for.

Now a 4th thing we see is absolutely fascinating: repentance does **not** play a role in the story of Sodom, any more than it played a role in the Flood story of Noah. I have mentioned on a few occasions that, much to people's surprise, the notion of dying and going to heaven is nowhere to be found in the Old Testament. Well, in fact, the entire **concept** of repentance is nowhere to be found, yet, in Genesis....and it will be some time before we do see it develop. The only issue, thus far revealed, in God's justice system as regards mankind's behavior is: is that person righteous in God's eyes, or not. The wicked remain wicked, and the righteous remain righteous. We don't find Noah pleading with the wicked to repent; we don't find Abraham pleading with the wicked to repent. In Abraham's pleadings to Yahweh, it's not about whether the people who are doing wrong might REPENT and turn from their evil; it's ONLY about whether those who are NOT doing wrong will be judged right along with those who ARE doing wrong.

We also see that long before Moses and the Law of Mt. Sinai, God is applying some universal standard to all human behavior. The Hebrews refer to this standard as the 7 Noachide Laws. And, in this chapter, we see that Sodom has crossed over a line of wickedness, that violates that standard, and that God will no longer tolerate it. And, since that line has been crossed, the ONLY possible outcome is for God's wrath to be visited upon them. Now, the specifics of Sodom's sins can be, and regularly are, argued over; but, what is clear is that they are moral.....or better, immoral.....in nature. Later, as Lot enters the picture again, we'll get a couple of specific sins mentioned.....like sodomy and homosexuality.....but we never get a laundry list of Sodom's evil acts. Let me also quickly inject that Sodom was but the primary city, and government seat, of a 5-city district that was under common rule; Gomorrah was one of those 5 cities. So, when ONLY the name Sodom is mentioned, it is just that Sodom is representative of the whole district. When destruction was finally poured out, it was upon all 5 cities.

There have been all manner of allegorical sermons and teachings about the purpose of this verbal wrestling match. But, here's the thing I personally take from it: God does not destroy the righteous, along with the wicked. That is not to say that when God allows a conquering army to discipline His people that righteous people don't get killed, too. No, what I'm talking about is when God pours out His supernatural divine wrath, like the Flood for instance, and soon on Sodom and Gomorrah, He doesn't allow the righteous to die along with the wicked. There is a major difference between God pouring out His supernatural wrath, and His permitting bad things to happen, by which all are affected. For instance, let's say that "the big one" hits San Francisco; that 9.0 earthquake that is utterly devastating levels the city, and thousands are killed. Now, we all know that in our time, San Francisco is held up as a kind of Sodom and Gomorrah. So, are we to take this hypothetical 9.0 earthquake as an outpouring of God's wrath on that city? No. That the earthquake occurred, in a way, was indeed allowed by Yahweh, but it was not an ACT of Yahweh. The good WILL be killed along with the wicked as occurs with all these cataclysmic events that have happened over the centuries. But, the earthquake fault has existed for millions of years, and earthquakes of that size have occurred before along that fault-line. It's just that now, millions of people live there, whereas they didn't before.

The outpouring of God's wrath is when God SENDS a catastrophe. It is unique. Its scope is so far beyond what nature could normally do, and it occurs at a time that God ordains. The Flood is one example. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is another. At the end of the world, the earth's population will see phenomenon never before seen by man; and the Bible clearly states God is sending it as a judgment.

Further, an outpouring of God's wrath is preceded by ample warning. It's not sudden and unannounced. And, when it is God's destructive wrath, the good are divided away from the wicked. Again, the Flood and Sodom and Gomorrah are our examples. And, as we read Revelation, we see the same pattern; those who are in Christ, will be protected as the wicked are singled out for destruction.

This is a pattern of God's behavior that we can count on; yet, there was another pattern that baffled the prophets and the sages. Why, they often asked, does God allow the wicked to prosper? And, the answer, though mysterious in most ways, has something to do with their evil

actions either being part of a stage in God's plan being fulfilled by means of that wicked activity, or some benefit coming to His people by means of the Wicked's actions (though it is most certainly not the intention of the wicked for God's people to benefit). So, even though Yahweh allows bad things to happen to good people, we can also be certain that God is not going to pour out His wrath on the wicked, and let His people also die, in a supernatural destruction; because that is simply not what God does; it is not within His character. The purpose of the Rapture is to whisk His chosen away to safety.

Before we move on to chapter 19, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, let me point out a common misquote of the dialogue between God and Abraham: the final bargaining number was 10 innocent people, not 1. And, we'll find in later books of the Bible that 10 is a common minimum number for a useful congregation size. To this day, Jews generally will not conduct a service, nor even pray in a group of less than 10 individuals; in Hebrew this is called a *minyan*. So, Yahweh was saying that providing there was a minyan in the midst of the wicked population, He would stay His hand of judgment.

Now, the conversation is over, and it says in verse 33 that "the Lord" departed. Actually, the original Hebrew says, "Yahweh departed". That Yahweh departed is something to keep in mind as we begin the next chapter.

Read Genesis chapter 19:1 - 14

In Chapter 19 we get the answer to a question raised in Chapter 18: Who are these 3 men who came to Abraham? We already learned that one of the 3 was God Himself: Yahweh; for his personal name, Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh, YHWH, Yahveh, is the actual original Hebrew text in verse 3 of Chapter 18. In the first verse of Chapter 19, we are told that the other two are messengers. The Hebrew word used in this regard, malach, does not of itself mean angel. It means *messenger* and is MOST often used in the Bible as referring to a human messenger. It is from the context (that is, these messengers blinded the men of Sodom and performed other supernatural feats) that we understand they are actually Heavenly Messengers.....what we term *angels*.

Now, let me warn you: we are going to get into some pretty difficult territory this week, and perhaps next. I'm going to challenge some doctrines that have been taken as truth for centuries; but, as so many doctrines of men are, they bear little relation to what is said in the Holy Scriptures.

So, what can we learn about Yahweh and/or about angels from this event? For one thing, angels have the ability to take on physical dimension. In fact, if we can point to one concrete thing we can know about angels from Scripture, it is that USUALLY they take on human form when they interact with humans. Generally speaking, the humans in the Bible story don't realize at first that these "men" they're seeing and talking to aren't really men at all, but rather are angels. Often we will see that once the humans realize that these "men" are angels, fear sets in, and the humans fall on their faces in worship or literally faint from fright..... which is apparently the main reason the angels take on human form in the first place. That is, so they

don't, quite literally, scare humans to the point of utter disorientation or even death.

Interestingly, while the Church has had the tendency to call all spiritual servants of God "angels", that is not really the case. Angels.....messengers, malach, are apparently somewhat lower spirit being who don't always have free will nor freedom. They are sent from Heaven to do specific tasks under specific orders from Yahweh. They have no latitude or option to exercise their personal wills in the matter. That is why they are, indeed, messengers. They don't create the message, they simply transport it. And, the message can be in the form of destruction, of which they apparently can have almost unlimited force at their disposal to accomplish.

So, angels are just certain specific spiritual beings, and they are at the lower end of the spectrum. At the upper end of the spectrum are the Cherubim. These are beings that are literally God's closest servants. They are the beings that protect God's Holiness; they are the ones that Ezekiel speaks of, with multiple faces and several wings. Cherubs are NOT angels. They are HIGHER than angels, and serve a different purpose than angels. And, there are other kinds of spirit beings that are listed in the Bible, but we won't get into that right now. I simply want you to understand that when we think of spirit beings, it is NOT that all spirit beings are simply one class or another of angels. Rather, angels are just one TYPE of spirit beings, of which there are several types of spirit beings.

But, what about this situation, in our story of Abraham and Sarah, whereby Yahweh has a similar human form as the angels? Let's stop and think about that for a minute. Since Yahweh took on physical, human form here.....why didn't He do the same thing with Yeshua? Or did He? In other words, the implication here is that this "man" form that God took on was done in the same manner that angels took on human form; that is, the human form was not a REAL man in the sense that he started life as an infant, grew and matured, and then eventually became "possessed" or "employed" by God's Spirit. This was not a man in its truest sense, some unsuspecting flesh and blood man who was simply going along in a normal life when God suddenly entered and took over the use of his body so that Yahweh could appear to Abraham. This was apparently an apparition of a man..... a man who otherwise had not existed. Not a ghost, and yet not a man who came from the womb.....but a flesh and blood apparition.

Yeshua on the other hand, WAS born of a woman, grew and matured as any normal child, was part of Jewish society and eventually became an adult Jewish male. He was a singular and unique human person, as any of us in this room are. Just as there is not another Becky Bradford, or Tom Gamble, or Patti Bryan that has ever been born or ever will be, so there is ONE Yeshua of Nazareth, Messiah, who has ever been born or ever will be. But, Yeshua was **not** apparition of a man, like what appeared to Abraham; nor was he a **regular** man, like you or I, whose physical form suddenly became a usable vessel for God Almighty. Rather, God's own pure essence substituted for what normally should have been a human male's seed, and that pure essence of Yahweh impregnated Miriam (Mary), and the result was this composite being that we call Jesus, but His real Hebrew name was Yeshua, or even more correctly, Yahshua. I say composite being, because His father was God and His mother was human. Yahshua was as unique as it gets.

Now, as regards Yahweh appearing to Abraham as a man, I don't want to draw conclusions where there is simply no evidence that can lead us to a firm conclusion. But, I also want to state that I do NOT believe this was Yeshua who appeared; for one thing, the Bible calls this man, Yahweh. Yet, it is also difficult to just leave this strange appearance of Yahweh and the 2 angels without considering the implications deeply.

I think the problem dealing with the matter of Abraham, Yahweh, and the 2 angels, we have created for ourselves due to our modern construct of the Holy Trinity.....one which is entirely absent from the earliest days of the church. In an effort to explain God, the modern Church says that He is composed of 3 persons. This "**3 persons concept**" has tended to create in our minds a vision of a God who has all the characteristics of a Science Fiction movie like Independence Day whereby we have a Mother Ship...or in our case a Father Ship... which remains stationed at a distance from earth.....and a couple of very powerful, but smaller, vessels who are kind of an organic part of that Mother ship; but they can, when needed, be detached and go and do the bidding of the intellect that controls the whole entity. The smaller vessels are subservient to the Mother ship, even though they are part of it; and so they bring the presence and power and authority of the alien Mother Ship into contact with various life forms.....mainly humans. Of course, there are also times that the Mother Ship.....all the parts of it.....chooses to come as a whole to deal with men.

I don't think this kind of understanding of who God is, is very helpful.

Our basic problem is that we are restricted to thinking in 3 (4, really) dimensions, so we think of God in pieces.....various pieces that together form the whole...the sum of the parts. We cannot envisionwell, I sure can't.....how something can be one, but more than one. Yet, that is exactly what the Torah says God is. How can Yeshua be a man and be God at the same time? How can Yeshua be God on earth and God in Heaven at the same time? How can Jesus be subservient to Yahweh, yet be able to say that if you've seen ME, you've seen the Father? I mean, think about the enormity of that statement: Yeshua is basically saying if you've seen the part, you've seen the whole.

He also said that He and the Father are one. One, in what way?

Now, let me state right here, that I'm **not** challenging the idea of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. What I'm challenging is the way this idea has been generally presented to us and the way it has been structured. And, in order to preserve that particular way, or doctrine, some things have been done to the translations of the Bible from Hebrew to all the other languages, which perpetuate some notions that simply do not jibe with Scripture. And, perhaps the greatest lapse concerns the use of God's name.

Some of you who have been with me for a while have heard me say that in the Old Testament, God's name is used more than 6000 times. Now, the Hebrew Scriptures tell us that God's name is Yahweh. Long ago, gentiles started using the word "Jehovah" instead of Yahweh. Whether or not Jehovah is a fair and correct substitution for Yahweh is not the point of this dissertation; the point is, if you open your Bibles and start counting the times the word Yahweh or Jehovah is used, it is but a handful. Some Bible versions use God's name less than 10

times. Others may approach 100. But, that's about it. So, what happened to the other 5900 times God's name was used in the original Hebrew Scriptures?

God's name was substituted with the words Lord or God. Why this was done is also not the point, but just realize that this is true. And, I'm not telling you something new or radical; this is not disputed by Bible scholars, nor is it a secret. You can pick up ANY competent Hebrew Old Testament, and look for the Hebrew word Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh.....which spells Yahveh (Jehovah).....God's name, and count it up for yourself.

But, one question this leads to.....and probably won't be answered to anyone's satisfaction, today, including mine.....is this: who or what is Yahweh? Is Yahweh God the Father, in the sense that the Godhead consists of the 3 elements we call the Holy Spirit, Yeshua as the Messiah, and Yahweh as the Father? Or is Yahweh the name for the total Godhead? The name for the sum of the parts? Plus, we find MANY names for God in addition to Yahweh.....El Shaddai being the earliest.

This problem doesn't really appear to be much of a problem when God's name is replaced in our Bibles by the less specific words Lord and God. That is, because Yahweh is called Lord, and Jesus, Yeshua, is also called Lord, just who is being referred to when the word Lord is used? Is it Jesus, or is it Yahweh? Therefore, by using the word Lord, the distinctions between God and the Messiah kind of disappears. Therefore, when our New Testaments refer to Jesus as Lord, and then we go back and look at an Old Testament prophecy that seems to be about the Messiah and it, too, uses the word Lord, it's rather easy to assume that we can simply stuff Jesus' name in it's place, and all the pieces fall together rather well. And, in fact, that's exactly what has been done for century after century.