

The LORD And The Three Men

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In Genesis 18 **“the LORD”** appeared to Abraham before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Who is the LORD? God used Moses to record the first five books of the Bible and he clearly knew who the LORD was. God had appeared to him and affirmed that He was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 3:6). God then declared further **“I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name, LORD, I was not known to them”** (6:2-3). The LORD who appeared to Moses was the God Almighty who had appeared to Abraham. Acts 3:13 clearly states **“The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus”**. Also, in Revelation 21:22 the Lord God Almighty is the Father. **“The LORD”** is the Father as well.

This identity is also evident in the account of Hezekiah crying out to God for protection from Sennacherib. **“Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD. Then Hezekiah prayed to the LORD, saying: O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear all the words of Sennacherib, who has sent to reproach the Living God...therefore, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the LORD, You alone”** (Isaiah 37:14-17,20).

The terms **“house of the LORD”**, **“the LORD”**, **“LORD of hosts”**, **“God of Israel”**, **“God”**, **“the living God”**, and **“O LORD our God”** used in Isaiah 37 are all references to the Father. Jesus Christ is not the living God. He is **“the Son of the living God”** (Matthew 16:16) and He referred to the temple as His Father’s house (Matthew 21:12-13; Luke 2:46-49; John 2:16). The Father is the One portrayed as dwelling in the house of the LORD and the One who was worshipped there (Exodus 25:21-22; 1 Samuel 1:3; 2 Samuel 6:2; Isaiah 37:16; Haggai 1:7-9; Zechariah 1:16; 8:1-9,20-22; 14:16-21; Matthew 27:50-51). There is no other way to properly explain these terms.

Another reference to God in Genesis 18 that is a key to understanding the true meaning of the passage is in verse 25. There Abraham asks **“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”** Who is the Judge of all the earth? The Father is the Judge of all there is. Notice what is stated in Hebrews 12 **“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel”** (verses 22-24). The fact that God directs Jesus Christ to carry out His will in judgment (John 5:22; Acts 10:42) amplifies rather than lessens His own role as Judge. The Judge of all the earth is the Father.

The account in Genesis 18 begins **“Then the LORD appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, and said, My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant”** (verses 1-3). Appeared, is a broad term and can mean perceived or visual. The appearance of the LORD and the appearance of the three men is not the same. John stated that **“No one has seen God at any time”** (1 John 4:12). No one had ever seen the Father, either fully in appearance as a man or in His glory. Still, Moses saw the form of the LORD and God the Father had been directly present with him (Numbers 12:6-8). In those cases God spoke from a cloud (Exodus 33:7-11; Numbers 7:89; 14:13-14) rather than just openly in person. Moses didn’t see God in the same way that he saw Aaron when he was with him.

The three men in Genesis 18 sat and ate a meal that Abraham ordered to be prepared. **“Then the men arose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way. And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him”** (verses 16-18). The LORD is speaking to one or more of the men but He is not one of them. His reference to the nations of the earth being blessed is to the promise of forgiveness and salvation through Jesus Christ. This is addressed in Galatians as **“Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, And to seeds, as to many, but as of one, And to your Seed, who is Christ. And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the promise is to the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise”** (3:16-18). It was the Father who made the promise to Abraham of the blessing that would come by Jesus Christ.

The passage in Genesis continues and again makes a distinction between the LORD and the men for whom Abraham had prepared the meal. **“Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD”** (18:22). It is at this point that Abraham begins to reason with God about His intent to destroy Sodom and he states **“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”** (verse 25). Again, the Judge of all the earth is God the Father. The chapter finishes with **“So the LORD went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place”** (verse 33).

The story continues by showing two angels coming to Sodom in the evening (Genesis 19:1). This is a reduction from the three men at the beginning of the account and the third man could certainly have been Jesus Christ. Still, the third man was not the LORD. There is only one LORD (Deuteronomy 4:39; Nehemiah 9:6; Isaiah 42:8; 45:14,18,21-22; Joel 2:27). The two angels have the responsibility to save Lot and his family and additional passages state **“Then the LORD rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the LORD out of the heavens”** (verse 24) **“And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot had dwelt”** (verse 29).

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is also addressed in 2 Peter. There it states **“God...turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed with the filthy conduct of the wicked”** (2:4-7). Again, the reference is to what God did. God here is the LORD.

The question of the role of Jesus Christ in Genesis 18 and 19 is a valid one as His role is not fully clear. But to place Him as the LORD or even one of two LORDS violates numerous other scriptures. There are accounts in the Bible that do place both the LORD and the Angel (or Messenger) of the LORD together (Exodus 3:1-6; 14:19-24) but the One who is sent (the Messenger) is not also the sender. Christ, as the Messenger, didn't send Himself.

The only LORD God of the Old Testament is the one God of the New Testament (John 17:3; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; 1 Timothy 2:5) and recognizing that is the only way to harmonize all the record of scripture.

The LORD in Genesis 18 is God the Father and not one of the three men.