

Two Angels and the LORD

- ¹ And the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day.
- ² He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth
- ³ and said, "O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant.
- ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree,
- ⁵ while I bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on-- since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said."
- ⁶ And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quick! Three seahs of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes."
- ⁷ And Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, who prepared it quickly.
- ⁸ Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them. And he stood by them under the tree while they ate.
- ⁹ They said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "She is in the tent."
- ¹⁰ The LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him.
- ¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah.
- ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?"

- ¹³ The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?'"
- ¹⁴ Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son."
- ¹⁵ But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. He said, "No, but you did laugh."
- ¹⁶ Then the men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way.
- ¹⁷ The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do,
- ¹⁸ seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?"
- ¹⁹ For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him."
- ²⁰ Then the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave,
- ²¹ I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know."
- ²² So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD.
- ²³ Then Abraham drew near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?"
- ²⁴ Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it?"
- ²⁵ Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?"
- ²⁶ And the LORD said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake."
- ²⁷ Abraham answered and said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes.
- ²⁸ Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking. Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?" And he said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there."

- ²⁹ Again he spoke to him and said, "Suppose forty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it."
- ³⁰ Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there." He answered, "I will not do it, if I find thirty there."
- ³¹ He said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it."
- ³² Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it."
- ³³ And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place.
- ^{19:1} The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth
- ² and said, "My lords, please turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night and wash your feet. Then you may rise up early and go on your way." They said, "No; we will spend the night in the town square."
- ³ But he pressed them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house. And he made them a feast and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.
- ⁴ But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house.
- ⁵ And they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them."
- ⁶ Lot went out to the men at the entrance, shut the door after him,
- ⁷ and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly.
- ⁸ Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please. Only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof."
- ⁹ But they said, "Stand back!" And they said, "This fellow came to sojourn, and he has become the judge! Now we will deal worse with

- you than with them." Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door down.
- ¹⁰ But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them and shut the door.
- ¹¹ And they struck with blindness the men who were at the entrance of the house, both small and great, so that they wore themselves out groping for the door.
- ¹² Then the men said to Lot, "Have you anyone else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone you have in the city, bring them out of the place.
- ¹³ For we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it."
- ¹⁴ So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, "Up! Get out of this place, for the LORD is about to destroy the city." But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting.
- ¹⁵ As morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Up! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city."
- ¹⁶ But he lingered. So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city.
- ¹⁷ And as they brought them out, one said, "Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away."
- ¹⁸ And Lot said to them, "Oh, no, my lords.
- ¹⁹ Behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life. But I cannot escape to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me and I die.
- ²⁰ Behold, this city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one. Let me escape there-- is it not a little one?-- and my life will be saved!"
- ²¹ He said to him, "Behold, I grant you this favor also, that I will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken.
- ²² Escape there quickly, for I can do nothing till you arrive there." Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar.

²³ The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar.

²⁴ Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the LORD out of heaven.

²⁵ And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.

²⁶ But Lot's wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

²⁷ And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD.

²⁸ And he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the valley, and he looked and, behold, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace.

²⁹ So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had lived.

Genesis 18:1-19:29

Angels

Angels are **fascinating** creatures. Cultures have told stories about them since before the counting of time. Our own society goes through phases where angels are the most popular topic in our book stores and the most profitable trinkets in gift stores. The topic knows no religious boundary. Everyone from Muslims to Newagers to Hindus to Christians talk about angels. Kids draw them. Prophets have visions of them. Seminars try explain them. Capitalists make a lot of money off of them.

But what are angels? One thing I know is that they are **strange**. The Bible says some rather perplexing things about them. Hebrews says, “**Do not neglect hospitality, because through it some have entertained angels without knowing it**” (**Heb 13:2** NET). What does that mean? Here’s another one, “**A wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels**” (**1 Cor 11:10**). This is a very strange verse and few have any idea what it is talking about.

Perhaps this is so to some degree because angels are also **misunderstood**. Popular culture always depicts them as having wings like birds. Some have them looking like cute little children with big almond eyes. Many people teach that everyone has their own guardian angel, even though there is little biblical evidence for such an idea.¹ Almost everyone believes that Angels are completely spiritual and non-corporeal.²

The first explicit mention of angels by itself in the Bible (other than “the Angel of the LORD” - *malak Yahweh*) is found in Genesis chs. 18-19. The first use of the term *malak* (“angel”) in these chapters occurs in **Genesis 19:1**, “**The two**

¹ **Matthew 18:10** (“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven”) and **Acts 12:15** (“They said to her, “You are out of your mind.” But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, ‘It is his angel!’”) are the usual proof texts.

² **Thomas Aquinas** for example says, “**Angels have no bodies.**” (*Summa* 1.51.1).

angels came to Sodom in the evening.” The word “angel” occurs later in the same chapter, “As morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, ‘Up! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city’” (Gen 19:15). This happens to be the passage we are entering in our study of Genesis.

Before saying anything else, we need to understand that this is one long, uninterrupted narrative. Chapter 18 talks about three visitors that come to Abraham, where he prepares a meal for them. These visitors, including one in particular, have a long conversation with Abraham over the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah. Chapter 19 then tells us how two of those visitors go to Sodom. They meet with Lot, and over dinner tell him about how those wicked cities will be destroyed.

There have been some basic things that I dare say most people have missed here because they segregate the stories one from another. I grew up thinking that Abraham met three important men (18:1-8), that he then had a long conversation with disembodied voice from heaven about Isaac and Sodom (9-21). Then, I saw a couple of angels somehow go to Sodom to save Lot while they destroyed those cities because of homosexuality (19:1-29). Some of my thinking was right. Some was partially right. Some of it was wrong. But most of

all, because I thought of these stories in isolation from one another, I missed the entire thread of the angels that was right before my eyes. Because they are so fascinating, strange, popular, and misunderstood, and because they are central figures in our story, in this sermon, I want to help you get a grasp on what angels are and why it matters.

What is an Angel?

First, what is an angel? Let me ask you. What do you think they are? On the most basic level, most people think of angels as *kinds of beings*. We ask what kinds of beings did God create? We answer, he created insects, animals, humans, and angels. The most important thing I can tell you right from the start about what an angel is, is to tell you what an angel is not. An angel is *not any one particular kind of being*. Rather, the word can refer to many kinds of beings.

Definition

To understand this, let's first get a good *definition of word*. There are a few words to look at. The first is a Hebrew word: *malak*. This word is made up of two parts. The root are the letters L- -K (, read the letters backwards). This word means “*send*” with a focus on sending with a commission or message. The letter M () is a prefix (“from”), an adjective that identifies the vehicle or tool by which the action is

accomplished. In this case, the means by which a message is sent is a messenger.³ So, a *malak*, an angel, is literally a **sent messenger**. In other words, the **word describes a function**, not a kind of being. Angels relay messages.

Since it is a function, different kinds of beings can be messengers/angels. In the OT, **humans are sometimes angels**. “When the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul, they reported the matter in the ears of the people, and all the people wept aloud” (1 Sam 11:4). “Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, ‘So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow’” (1 Kgs 19:2).

The LXX translates *malak* with the word *aggelos*. *Aggelos* is the word used for angels 175 times in the NT. Like the Hebrew word, the Greek word can refer to humans, “When John’s messengers had gone” (Luke 7:24). But other times, of course, in both Testaments and with both words, angels can refer to **non-human beings**. The context has to determine it.⁴

Angel Defines Different Words

³ S. A. Meier, “Angel I,” ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden; Boston; Köln; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999), 45.

⁴ A good case of how even the context can sometimes be difficult to determine is the seven “angels” of the churches of **Revelation 2-3**. Are these human messengers, delegates that were chosen to convey John and Jesus’ report to those churches, or are they non-human, preternatural creatures that God chose to oversee each of those churches? Most see them as supernatural beings, and thus translate the word as the English “angel.”

Aggelos translates different Hebrew words besides *malak*. For example, In **Psalm 97:7**, “Worship him all you gods (*elohim*)” becomes “worship him all you his angels.” Can you think of why someone might replace “gods” with “angels” this in their translation? I can. When you talk to people about gods, most smirk and roll their eyes, because everyone knows such beings do not exist. But when you say “angel,” that is a different matter entirely. The same kinds of reactions were true in the ancient world, even among the Greeks, for there were groups who believed in gods, and others who scoffed at the idea. So why not translate gods and angels to help ease people’s understanding?

There are other important words to look at as well. **Job 1:6** (also **2:1**; **38:7** and **Deut 32:8**) has “sons of God” (*beney ha-elohim*) in the Hebrew. They go into heaven with Satan. But in the Greek, this becomes “angels of God.” In **Daniel 4:13**, **Watchers** (*ir*) from heaven come down to convey a message that they, in the heavenly council, have decreed for king Nebuchadnezzar. In the Greek, they are not Watchers but angels. One of the most curious translations is in Isaiah’s great prophecy of **Messiah** where “wonderful (*Pele*) counselor” becomes “Angel of the Great Council” (**Isa 9:6**). Sometimes, when the **LORD** appears as an angel, it is said of him that his name is “wonderful” (**Jdg 13:18**; cf. **Gen 32:29**;

Ex 15:11). In intertestamental times “angel” began to be identified with **cherubim** (cf. **ApocEzra 2:13-15**) and **seraphim** (cf. **ApocMoses 33:3-4**) as well. Thus, what the OT refers to with many words: gods, sons of God, cherubim, seraphim, Messiah, etc., the Greek speakers were much more likely to simply lump together as “angels.”⁵ This shows how the Greek word “angel” became a catch-all used to describe any heavenly being. This is true in how we use the English as well.

Two Angels of Genesis 18-19

So what kind of beings are here in our passage? Before I answer, I want to complicate the question by adding one more word to think about. The word is “man.” In Hebrew, there are two main words for man. One word is *ish*. This is the word used as a synonym for the angels in our story. Notice how in **Genesis 19:1** the “angels” become “men” (*ish*): “**Where are the men who came to you tonight?**” (**Gen 19:5**). In other places, even in the NT, angels are sometimes called men. For example, at the empty tomb, “**Behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling apparel**” (**Luke 24:4**). But in John’s Gospel, “**She beheld two angels in white sitting**” (**John 20:12**).

⁵ This comment can itself be somewhat confusing, since many of these words also refer to functions rather than kinds of beings. Cherubim are “guardians.” “Sons of God” are “rulers.” Etc.

What kind of men are these? Well, *ish* is a word that is often used of human beings too. So biblically speaking, we share the *ish*-ness angels. However, there is a second Hebrew word that is used for men. This word is *adam*. This word is *only used to describe human* beings (male and female). It never refers to angels. It is difficult to know what the differences between *ish* and *adam*, metaphysically speaking. But I think we can be certain that they include whatever was unique about God's creating man in Gen 1.

Let's look at some things that are *not unique* between us. As we explore these things, we have to use the Bible rather than old wives tales or renaissance paintings or popular books we have read. Let's begin in our text. In the story, we find Abraham sitting at the door of his tent in the heat of the day by the oaks of Mamre. He has obviously just finished his early morning work and is ready to take his mid-morning nap out of the hot sun when suddenly, "*He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men (ish) were standing in front of him*" (Gen 18:2). This is a very clever way to introduce a story, because if we were just reading along in our Bible, not listening to a sermon on angels, there would be nothing at this point to even make us suspect that these are anything other than mere men. This point will continue as we move into the story.

When he sees them, Abraham “bows” himself to the earth (vs. 2). We do not know exactly what this means. It may be a sign of mere submission or respect or even worship. I’ll explain why the latter could be true later. For now, it is clear that Abraham recognizes them as men of high position, so much so that he asks them not to pass by him, but to show him grace/favor (3). This was obviously an unusual occurrence, but not so unusual that he is taken completely out of his element, unable to process what is happening to him. This is also an important point, because it helps to explain some things about life 4,000 years ago that is *perhaps* a bit different than it is today.⁶ You see, in these early days, the Bible (not to mention other ancient stories) has absolutely no problem talking like this. Of COURSE these angels appeared to Abraham. They appeared to all sorts of people.

At this point, things start to get very strange for us who know what these men are, yet it stays completely normal for the person just reading along in the story. He asks them if he might bring a little water out to wash their feet (4). They must be tired and dirty from their long walk, **where ever they came from**. They are just men after all, right?

⁶ Though, let us keep in mind verses like we began our sermon with such as the 1 Corinthians verse about head coverings or the Hebrews verse about entertaining strangers. These verses seem to apply to us today.

Then he asks them something even more stunning to us, yet still utterly obvious to the naive reader. He asks if he can bring a **morsel of bread** out so that they might refresh themselves (5). Clearly, they must be hungry. Men get hungry, especially after a long journey. It should be obvious that this is extremely physical language of beings with actual feet, legs, mouths, and anatomy capable of chewing, swallowing, and digesting food.

Suddenly, the three men break their silence. “**Abraham. No, we can’t eat. In fact, we are only apparitions. We are angels, not men. We don’t have bodies. We can’t eat. There is nothing here to wash. We are pure spirits.**” Is that what they say? No, they say—shocking us, yet still being quite normal for those who do not yet know what is going on (remember, all we know from the story is that they are ‘men’)—“**Do as you have said**” (5). Abraham knows what they mean, and so he runs to Sarah and says, “**Quick! Three seahs of fine flour! Knead it, and made cakes**” (6). This is a large amount that will yield much more bread than the three visitors will need, unless he is planning a huge party or the visitors are much larger than Abraham.

Then Abraham runs to his herd, takes a fine calf “**tender and good**” and gives it to his hired cook who prepares it quickly (7). The whole calf. That is a lot of food, and it would

have taken some time to prepare it all. Maybe he is just being extravagant, because of how important these men are? One thing we do know, in these two verses, Abraham is clearly **in a hurry** (“**quickly**,” “**Quick**,” “**ran**,” “**quickly**” are all words used). Why the hurry? Who are these men?

The last of the preparations sees Abraham take curds and milk and the calf and sets it before them (8). Mighty Abraham has become a waiter! Who *are* these men? It is at this point that they tell him, “**Sorry for making you go through all that trouble, Abraham. But we are angels, and we can’t eat.**” Is that what it says? No. It says that “**he stood by them under the three while they ate.**” They ate the food! Do you remember the passage in the Psalm that says the Israelites ate the manna, which is the “**bread of angels**” (Ps 78:25).

How can that be? They *only* way it can be is if they are physical beings. But maybe Abraham is just seeing some kind of a vision. Maybe it isn’t really happening? Or maybe he is the only one who sees them? The problem is, Sarah also hears them, the cook was not a phantom, and Abraham has told his entire clan about these visitors.

But maybe they are just men? Let’s skip ahead a few verses. **Gen 18:16** tells us that “**The men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way.**” They stop, and one of

them says that Sodom is about to be destroyed. Now skip to **vs. 22**, “So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom.” Which men? In **19:1**, “The two *angels* came to Sodom in the evening.” It is in 19:1 that what seems so normal suddenly becomes obviously unusual. It is not only the term “angel” that strikes the readers of that day, but the timing of the story.

The problem is, the men did not arrive to Abraham until mid-day. Then, Abraham spent some amount of time having all that food prepared. Then, they had to eat the food. Then, they had had a conversation about Sodom, and only after all of this did they depart for Sodom which is (approx.) 35 miles away as a crow flies,⁷ through rough mountainous and hot desert terrain. After all of this they managed to get to Sodom by evening? Good luck with that, unless you are an angel.

But not only this, later in ch. 19 we learn that these two men “**struck with blindness the men who were at the entrance of [Lot’s] house**” (**19:11**). What kind of men could do that? Then, two verses later, they tell Lot that they (“we”) are about to destroy this place, because “**the LORD has sent us to destroy it**” (**13**). Given that fire and sulfur came from the sky,

⁷ Tradition places the Oak of Mamre in Hebron, where a monastery still houses what is said to be the remnant of a 5,000 year old oak tree. From this point to the “Sodom cave” (which is probably not far from the location of Sodom and Gomorrah at the southwestern side of the Dead Sea) on Google Earth, it is 35.37 miles as the crow flies.

it is difficult to see how ordinary men could do that.⁸ It is for these reasons that English Bible correctly translates *malak* as “angel.” These are heavenly beings.

What have seen so far is not unique to angels (at least this particular kind/species of heavenly being) or men. We have seen that both can have **physical characteristics**: feet, mouths, stomachs. Both can eat food. These angels can be seen by more than one person, meaning that they do not purely belong to the realm of visions or trances or dreams (though they do come in those sometimes). If the men of Sodom, including Lot, were correct in their assumptions (and we will look more at this when we come to ch. 19 in particular), this physicality even included the ability to procreate (or to at least commit the act). Also, I didn't notice any wings on these men. (I'm fine with saying that there may be **other kinds of heavenly beings** that are not like those in our story. I have no problem with that. Are there some kinds of heavenly beings with wings? Yes. We see them throughout the Bible (cf. **Isa 6:2**). Are they angels? They can serve that function apparently. My guess is that there are probably all kinds of heavenly beings that I know nothing about. Could they serve

⁸ Some might think they had some incredible unknown technology like a bomb or a nuke. The text gives us no hint that it was a human weapon.

as angels? If God wanted them to, if he sent them to relay a message, because again “angel” refers to a function.).

This is a lot of similarity to us, though it is clear that their power is much greater than ours. The difficulty comes in wrapping our minds around how there are at least some kinds of heavenly beings that are very much like us, without actually being us. We simply must draw our theology of what an angel is from the Holy Scripture. The key here is to remember that they are **not human beings, nor were they ever human beings**. Biblically speaking, they are *ish-men*, but not *adam-men*. What does that mean? I really don't know. I've never seen one. I also don't know how we would ever find out. I've never known anyone who found one dead, or who has done an autopsy on one. None of them seem to be volunteering for us probing them to find out. So we really need to keep these kinds of speculations to a minimum. Say what we can know, try not to go much farther, but don't be afraid of what the Scripture says.

Let me point out a couple more differences though. Besides the vital point that they are not humans and never have been, and that their power is greater than ours, **death** and the **place they normally reside** seem to be a major differences between us and them. We have no hint that angels can die. We can die. We also know that they are called spirits

(**Heb 1:7**; **Ps 104:4** LXX). Their normal place of residence does not seem to be here in the way that we know it.⁹ Humans are not called “spirits” though we have spirits. When we die, we are called spirits (**Heb 12:23**), but we do not become some other kind of beings. We may go to be where they are, but we do not become them. We remain human beings.

These differences are actually vital to the gospel, for the whole mystery of our redemption is wrapped up in this, and it is something into which angels long to look into (**1 Pet 1:12**)? Why? Because they are not *Adams*. The Son of God became an Adam-man. Jesus did not die for angels (though his death does have an impact upon them). When he died, Christ retained his status as a human being, “**The Second Adam became a life-giving spirit**” (**1 Cor 15:45**). And who does he give life to? He gives life to his brothers, humans. These differences are so important and the temptation when you start to understand what angels really are, can be to confuse

⁹ To speculate, it could be somewhere else in the way that we know it. The whole E.T. idea of physical beings from other planets that have somehow managed to find earth could be wrapped up in this. Or it could be here in a way that we do not know it. This is the whole idea of trans-dimensional space, that they reside on a different plane of existence, but can somehow, sometimes “cross-over.” This does get very speculative, very quickly. But I bring it up in order to show that what many think of as “kooky” ideas may not be impossible or all that outlandish. In fact, we do know that angels live *somewhere* and exist *somehow*. But since we do not have concrete data, we should always be cautious about making dogmatic statements about such things either for or against. Of course, Christians and non-Christians have argued for both ideas. What is out of the question is for us to take non-Christian presuppositions such as ancient aliens that were are creators (the movie *Prometheus*, the *Gilgamesh Epic*, etc).

them with Adams. This is why the author of Hebrews spends basically the first two chapters explaining how Christ is greater than angels.

The Third Angel

We could obviously spend more time on this question of what is an angel, but since we can't do everything we might want as it concerns angels this morning, I want to use Christ as a transition into thinking a little more about our story of Genesis 18-19. Doing this will help you see why I view what we are doing this morning as quite important. You may have noticed that I [skipped large portions of chapter 18 earlier](#). The reason will soon be made clear.

Let us begin by going back to [Genesis 18:1](#). It uses familiar language of “[The LORD appeared](#)” to Abraham. We saw it in [12:7](#). We saw it in [17:1](#). We essentially saw it in [15:1](#). At least some of these appearances were physical and public. But if we didn't catch that before, what happens in Genesis 18-19 forces this reality upon us, shocking us so profoundly that it seems to go right over many people's heads even as they read it.

So the opening verse, acting like an introduction, says the LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre ([Gen 18:1](#)). Suddenly, [three men](#) were standing in front of him ([2](#)). We have seen that two of those men went on to Sodom to get

Lot out of town. But what about the third man? Abraham addresses this man in vs. 3, “O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant.” He calls this third man “Lord” (*Adonai*). Curiously, this is what Abram called Jehovah in Gen 15:2, 8, the only two uses of the word in Genesis up until now. It is true that the two angels are also called Adonai later in 19:2, so this may or may not be a big deal. But its use does cause us to wonder, does Abraham know him?

Let me use my imagination, as it is built on things I’ve read about the Watchers or sons of God in literature of the ancient world, to tell you how I see the events that now come. The kind of beings that I believe are standing before Abraham right now are instantly recognizable, especially in a world steeped in divine council theology. Everyone knew who these men were, not the least reason being that they looked different -- taller, more regal, different kind of hair, eyes, skin, etc. As soon as the mighty Abraham sees them, he gets worried and thinks, “Why is the LORD here with two men? He has not done this before. What did I do?” He runs to Sarah and says, “T-H-E-Y are here. Quick, get the food ready. I’ll see if I can appease them.” I believe this is the reason for his rush. He is concerned, probably for his own life.

Now, notice in the course of the story, while they are eating, they ask where Sarah is. “They said to him, ‘Where is Sarah your wife?’” (Gen 18:9). Then the next verse says, “The LORD said...” (10). Again, all we know so far from the text is that there are three men. Suddenly, *Yahweh* speaks. Let that sink in. It does not use “Angel of the LORD” language, like it did in chapter 16. It does not use “Word of the LORD” language, like it did in chapter 15. It does not use Melchizedek language like it did in ch. 14. It just says Yahweh. This is not a disembodied voice coming into Abraham’s mind. This is one of the three *men*. One of them—*is*—Yahweh. This is absolutely stunning, but it finally confirms exactly what we have been seeing for several chapters now. This man—Yahweh—has come to Abraham several times. He is (now) Abraham’s God. But he is no human being.

This is confirmed not only in the name, but also in what he says. “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son” (10). This is exactly what the LORD said in the previous chapter. Our minds are deliberately brought back to Gen 17:21, when the LORD made a covenant with Abraham and said these very words. This man is the same person who was in the previous story.

Genesis 17:17-21	Genesis 18:10-14
²¹ But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year."	The LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son."
¹⁷ Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"	¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?"
¹⁹ God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.	¹⁴ Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son."

At that point in time, he said it to Abraham, who laughed to himself. This is parallel. Sarah is listening at the tent door (10). Obviously, she hears these men talking. She has seen them. They are real, right there in her camp. Just like the previous chapter, this one tells us that Sarah is very old, "The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah" (11). She can't have children. So she, like her husband, laughs (12). The whole scene is a repeat of Abraham's reaction, from his laughter, to their age, to the LORD's response and promise.

Next the man says, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (14). He is talking about himself. This is a claim of omnipotence. This man can do anything he wants, including open the womb of a 90 year old woman. Sarah then responds to the LORD and denies that she laughed (15). "I did not

laugh.” “No, but you did laugh” (15). But she laughed to herself (12), not out loud. He couldn’t have possibly heard it. Thus, Yahweh is omniscient. He knows her inner laughing. This is truly incredible language. This man in front of her is both omnipotent and omniscient.

There is more. After leaving the Oak of Mamre, the three men set out towards Sodom. Abraham goes with them for a while (16). Suddenly, they arrive to an overlook, of which there are many between Hebron and the Dead Sea. As the four men look over the great low basin beneath them, the lowest point on planet earth above water, Yahweh says, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do” (17-18)? What *he* is about to do? I thought *God* was going to destroy Sodom?¹⁰ Several more attributes of Yahweh now rise to the surface in this man. First, he says that he has chosen Abraham (19). This man is the God that predestines, elects, and chooses. Second, he is the God that has promised Abraham many blessings (19). So he is the covenant God of Abraham.

After a short conversation, the LORD sounds like he is going to go with the other two men down to Sodom (22).

¹⁰ In Gen 19:13, the two angels say that they are also about to destroy Sodom. There is a complicated chain of causation in the destruction of the evil cities in these chapters, and as the angels are involved in the destruction, it shows that they are more than messengers. What we see is that three different agents are all involved at different levels. The two created angels work at one level (19:13), the angel of the LORD talking to Abraham works at a second level (18:17), and the LORD in heaven works at yet a third level (19:24).

But Abraham stood before the LORD, because he was disturbed about what was going on in their minds. The two angels leave, and the one stays behind. “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked” (23), Abraham asks him. Moses says, “The LORD is a man of war” (Ex 15:3).¹¹ At this moment, a great and incredible bartering begins. In the middle of this dickering, Abraham says, “Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall now the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” (25). Now this man’s justice comes into view. As does his righteousness. As does his sovereignty, for he is LORD of all the world.¹² He is the great Judge.

Omnipotence, omniscience, predestinating, covenanting, promising the future, holiness, righteousness, and sovereignty makes for quite an impressive list of attributes for a “man” or even an angel. The only things we know about this person *from the text* are that he is called a “man” and “The LORD.” This is the point that I just don’t think people stop to think about, but it is crystal clear in a passage that is brilliantly

¹¹ “Man” is not literally in the text, but the idea of a physical warrior certain is, hence the ESV’s translation.

¹² It is possible, especially in a divine council sense, to read this as the LORD being the Judge of all the “land” as in the land of Canaan, of which Sodom and Gomorrah were certainly part. This would be a lesser claim by Abraham, but still an acknowledgement that this man is also the God of this region, who has the rights to do with it and the power to do with it whatever he wants.

written so that it will catch you completely off guard in just this way. This is clearly no ordinary man or angel.

Two Yahwehs

To drive this home and to now move from simply telling you about the story, to hopefully helping you worship God through the story, let us turn to events that take place near the end of the Sodom episode. This point is one of the most central I can give you to strengthening and upholding your Christian faith. Here is what I mean.

In **18:33** it tells us that after the bartering for Lot's life is over, "The LORD went his way ... and Abraham returned to his place." Where does Yahweh go? I believe we can reconstruct what happens. "Yahweh" as a word does not appear in the story again until **Gen 19:13**. In this verse, he is only being spoken *about*. Here we read the two angels telling Lot that they have come to destroy the place because the outcry against its people have become great before Yahweh, and **Yahweh has sent them to destroy it**. This makes perfect sense, because these two angels were with the LORD and Abraham when they were looking over the valley. These two angels left the other two to their business while they went down to Sodom to destroy it.

Again, the conversation about saving the righteous takes place between only Abraham and the LORD. The two angels

are gone. They don't know about it, do they? They arrive and meet Lot and spend the night in his home. It is now twilight. With this in mind, notice **Gen 19:16**, “But he lingered. So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city.” How come they saved Lot? Who told them that Abraham had bargained for his life? Unless, it was God's plan all along (which it was), and this now proves that the LORD never was going to destroy Lot, a righteous man, with the wicked.

At any rate, our little fellowship has now moved outside of the city. How did they bring him out and set him outside of the city? They blinded the citizens of the city. After a short exchange about being allowed to flee to a little city, more strange language occurs in **19:21-22**, “And he said to him [Lot], “Behold, I grant you this favor also, that I will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken. Escape there quickly, for I can do nothing till you arrive there.” Who is talking now? One of the two angels? That is possible, but I do not believe so. The third man, who is also an angel, and who is called Yahweh, has now joined them outside of the city walls. Otherwise, it should say “we” grant, “we will not overthrow,” and “there is nothing we can do.” The two created angels have been speaking in the plural, but this is

singular, not plural: *I* not *we*. So now Yahweh is talking to Lot.

Then, as Lot was fleeing for his life to Zoar, one of the strangest and, in my opinion, most important verses in the whole OT appears, “Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the LORD out of heaven” (Gen 19:24). Let us stop and pause to think about this. I’ll take out all but the essential words to make my point. “The LORD rained ... fire from the LORD out of heaven.” Do you see it? There are two Yahweh’s here. One is on earth. He has been talking to Abraham and now Lot in our story. There is another Yahweh *in heaven*.

How can this possibly be? I thought there was only one God? There is. The NT has some commentary on just this point. 2 Peter 2:3ff. is a warning about false teachers and evil people. It says, “God did not spare angels when they sinned” (4). God did not spare the ancient world in the Flood (5). God condemned Sodom and Gomorrah to extinction (6). “He” rescued righteous Lot (7). This isn’t talking metaphorically or in some general providential way. It is speaking quite literally. When we come to Genesis 19, I’ll have more to say about the Bible’s own reflections on this as it regards Christ.¹³

¹³ **GOING DEEPER** [***Do not read this if you want to be surprised in the upcoming sermon on Sodom***]:

For today, I would like to finish with a few thoughts from the early church. For this passage was used regularly by many of the “Big-Guns” in their defense of the Faith against heretics, as well as in their more pastoral comments in

The biblical reflections on who destroyed Sodom is worthy of a whole paper. There are several relevant Sodom and Gomorrah passages in Scripture on this. [Jeremiah 50:40](#) says that “[Elohim](#)” (singular) overthrew Sodom, and yet does this in the context of, “[declares Yahweh](#).” This seems to make an interesting distinction between Yahweh (the Father?) and Elohim (the Son?). [Amos 4:11](#) is almost identical, “[I overthrew some of you, as when Elohim overthrew Sodom ...’ declares Yahweh](#).” [Zeph 2:9](#) is a little different, “[Therefore, as I live,’ declares Yahweh Sabaoth, the Elohim of Israel, ‘Moab shall become like Sodom...’](#)” In this one, Yahweh Sabaoth IS Elohim, because this Yahweh is the Angel of the LORD. [Isaiah 13:19](#) comes in the context of the Day of Yahweh and, like the others, says that “God” (*elohim*) destroyed Sodom. Elohim, the consistent word of the prophets is, curiously, a word *not found* in the Genesis story (as we have seen, Genesis uses “men” (*ish*), “angels” (*malak*), and Yahweh, but not *elohim*. Elohim destroying Sodom appears in [Gen 19:29](#), “[So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had lived](#).”

Why are they doing this? Perhaps the NT sheds light, especially in light of the overall context of [Isaiah 13](#). Jesus says that the towns he grew up in will have worse judgment than Sodom and Gomorrah, because the Son of man ([Matt 19:11](#)) has now come in the flesh. We usually focus on the judgment parallels in this passage (i.e. God judged Sodom, God will judge Capernaum worse), but it seems quite reasonable given all that we have seen in this note and in the sermon, that there is another parallel: the SON of God destroyed Sodom as the Elohim of Israel, the SON of God come in the flesh will judge these cities even more. It is interesting to note that immediately after Matthew 11:23-24 (Capernaum ... Sodom), that it says, “[At that time Jesus declared, ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth’ \(25\) and ‘All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him’ \(27\)](#).” The point being, Jesus intentionally—at this very moment—makes a distinction between himself and the Father. He then says “come to me [like children] ... and I will give you rest” (vv. 28-30; cf. 25). I believe the whole point of the passage is that Jesus is reflecting upon [Genesis 19:24](#), with two Yahwehs, and he is saying that seeing and coming to him (he is in all Scripture) is where we find our rest. But this has been hidden from even very wise men. We can’t come through our wisdom, but we must come to Christ like little children (25).

Luke gives a warning about Sodom as well. Following the classic Jewish list of warning passages (Sirach 17:7-10; CD [Dead Sea Scroll] 2:17-3:12; 3 Macc 2:4-7; m. Sanh [Mishnah] 10:3; Jub 20:5; T.Naph 3:4-5; [2 Peter 2:4-7](#); [Jude 5-7](#)) and paralleling 2 Peter’s Flood and Sodom examples, Jesus—in the context of the Day of the “Son of Man” says, “[but on the day when Lot when out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all—so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. On that day...](#)” ([Luke 17:29-31](#)). This is “day of Yahweh” language, except now the “Son” replaces “Yahweh” from Isaiah. The point is, all of the passages that speak about the judgment of Sodom, in one way (elohim vs. Yahweh) or another (Son of man; Jesus’ relationship to the Father) reflect the binitarianism of [Genesis 19:24](#).

sermons.¹⁴ In the second century, there was one **Rabbi b. Yosi** who said that there were two Yahweh's in this passage. But **Rabbi Nahman** said that **the text was wrong**, and that it should not have said “from the LORD” but “from *him*” meaning that there was only one Yahweh in the verse.¹⁵

The Rabbis were increasingly concerned about anyone who thought that there could be two Gods here, even if they also affirmed one God, and Christianity was directly in their line of fire?¹⁶ Why? Because Christians everywhere were saying that this passage was talking about God the Father and God the Son—One God, two persons. **Justin Martyr** said, “Neither Abraham, nor Isaac, nor Jacob, nor any other man, saw the Father ... but [saw] Him who was according to His will His Son, being God, and the Angel because He ministered to His will ... [and] unless we thus comprehend the Scriptures, it must follow that the Father and Lord of all had not been in heaven when what Moses wrote took place: ‘And the Lord rained upon Sodom fire and brimstone from the Lord out of heaven.’” (*Dialogue* 127). **Irenaeus** said, “Since,

¹⁴ For the “Who’s Who” see Justin (c. 100/110–165), Pseudo-Ignatius (post 117 AD); Irenaeus (c. 135–c. 202), Tertullian (c. 155/160–225/250), Cyprian (200–258), Novatian (also 200–258); Eusebius (c. 260/263–340); Athanasius (c. 295–373); Hilary of Poitiers (c. 315–367), Gregory Nazianzen (b. 329/330), Basil (b. c. 330; fl. 357–379), Ambrose of Milan (c. 333–397), Chrysostom (344/354–407), Augustine (354–430), Cyril of Alexandria (375–444), Socrates Scholasticus (c. 380–450), Constitutions of the Holy Apostles (c. 381–394). These quotes can be found at the end of the sermon in an Appendix.

¹⁵ See the Appendix.

¹⁶ See Philo, *On Dreams* 1.229 for the language of “two Gods” while also affirming “One God.”

therefore, the Father is truly Lord, and the Son truly Lord, the Holy Spirit has fitly designated them by the title of Lord. And again, referring to the destruction of the Sodomites, the Scripture says, ‘Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah fire and brimstone from the Lord out of heaven.’ For it here points out that the Son, who had also been talking with Abraham, had received power to judge the Sodomites” (*Against Heresies* 3.6.1). Indeed, almost all of the Father’s used this very verse to point to Christ. One serves as a great conclusion to their battles against Unitarians of all stripes, “If anyone says that it was not the Son that was seen by Abraham, but the unbegotten God ... or understands the words, ‘The Lord rained from the Lord’ not in relation to the Father and the Son, but shall say that he rained from himself, let him be anathema” (**Socrates Scholasticus**, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.30).

Beloved, this is just it. Our Savior and covenant God, the one who called Abram, changed his name, protected him, rescued Lot, did so at the sending of the Father, for he was His Angel-Messenger. But he was also God, bearing the very name Yahweh/Jehovah throughout the OT, bearing witness to his eternal, divine, omnipotent, omniscient, loving, holy, righteous, foreknowing, predestining nature since the Garden of Eden. He is God, and Abraham bowed down to him as

soon as he saw him approaching. Our father did not give worship to angels (though that was always a temptation, for the very things we are talking about today). But he worshiped the Son, because he knew the Son, and he had come to him again that fateful day.

The Son promised father Abraham and mother Sarah that they would have their own son, and through this son, Isaac, would come one like the Son of man. The holy Scriptures call him the “son of man” (*adam*; Num 23:19 etc). This common phrase in the OT is always *Ben-Adam*.

The Scripture says of him,

¹⁹ The Son of Man ...

²⁰ ... began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent...

²³ you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

²⁴ But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.”

²⁵ At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children;

²⁶ yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

(Matthew 11:19-30)

Why does our Lord, immediately after talking about Sodom and Gomorrah, make this distinction between the Father and himself? Why does he say that wise and understanding men cannot see such things, but only little children? Why does he say that all things have been handed over to him by his Father? Children, it is because our Savior is reflecting upon the events that he himself partook of in Abraham's day. He is making the same distinction that between two LORDs that **Genesis 19:24** does. He is God, but he is distinct from the Father.

Once upon a time, this theology turned the world upside down, but the wise and understanding hid it from their own people, declaring Second Yahweh a heresy in the OT and putting an anathema upon Christianity. We in our day have not seen Christ as we should. We are very much **not** like our

Father's in his regard. We effectively throw out the OT, finding it irrelevant and boring, or seeing it as anything but the revelation of Jesus Christ to the world. Is this not why we preach good sermons on the covenant promise of Isaac, Lot's walking/standing/sitting in Sodom, homosexual sin, etc. from these stories, while missing Christ right in front of our eyes? Have we too tried to be wiser than God, and effectively taken our Lord out of the Scripture without even realizing it? It is time for the wise to become like children again, to see and seek the Savior, the only hope of humanity, the only hope of Adam's children, not only in the NT, but in all of Scripture.

He ate with Abraham. He feasted with his disciples. He gives us a feast whereby we can remember him and he can feed us, with the very manna from heaven. Is he not that manna, the bread come down from heaven? When he revealed himself on the road through the Scripture, did not their hearts burn within them?

The older I get, the more I realize, any other focus may not only cause you to be diverted from the narrow road, it may actually turn you against God himself, and can often do so all while you think you are actually doing the very will of God like Saul thought as he went to murder Christians. There is a reason why Jesus finishes his discussion about Sodom and

the people of his day with “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” He is the God who rescued Lot, and gave him rest. He end of the law. He is the end of theology—of angelology, of eschatology, of all our studies of God. He is the end of preaching, the reason and goal of this message. He is the mediator between God and man. He is the judge of all the earth. He is the savior of righteous souls who are in anguish over the sensual conduct of the wicked. Will he not do what is right? Take his yoke upon yourself, and learn from him, for he is gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

APPENDIX: The Church Fathers on Genesis 19:24

(I have kept a few of the notes from the Schaff edition, and moved the reference notes to parenthesis).

CHRISTIAN

JUSTIN, *Dialogue* 127

Therefore neither Abraham, nor Isaac, nor Jacob, nor any other man, saw the Father and ineffable Lord of all, and also of Christ, but [saw] Him who was according to His will His Son, being God, and the Angel because He ministered to His will; whom also it pleased Him to be born man by the Virgin; who also was fire when He conversed with Moses from the bush. Since, unless we thus comprehend the Scriptures, it must follow that the Father and Lord of all had not been in heaven when what Moses wrote took place: ‘And the Lord rained upon Sodom fire and brimstone from the Lord out of heaven’ (Gen 19:24); and again, when it is thus said by David: ‘Lift up your gates, ye rulers; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting gates; and the King of glory shall enter’ (Ps 24:7); and again, when He says: ‘The Lord says to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool’ (Ps 110:1).¹

¹ Justin Martyr, “Dialogue of Justin with Trypho, a Jew,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 263.

PSEUDO-IGNATIUS, *Antiochians 2*

For Moses, the faithful servant of God, when he said, “The Lord thy God is one Lord” (Deut 6:4; Mark 12:29), and thus proclaimed that there was only one God, did yet forthwith confess also our Lord when he said, “The Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah fire and brimstone from the Lord” (Gen 19:24).²

IRENÆUS, *Against Heresies 3.6.1*

Since, therefore, the Father is truly Lord, and the Son truly Lord, the Holy Spirit has fitly designated them by the title of Lord. And again, referring to the destruction of the Sodomites, the Scripture says, “**Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah fire and brimstone from the Lord out of heaven.**” For it here points out that the Son, who had also been talking with Abraham, had received power to judge the Sodomites for their wickedness.

TERTULLIAN, *Against Praxeas 13*

I find in Scripture the name Lord also applied to them Both: “The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on my right hand” (Ps 110:1). And Isaiah says this: “Lord, who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” (Isa 53:1). Now he would most certainly have said *Thine Arm*, if he had not wished us to understand that the Father is

² Pseudo-Ignatius of Antioch, “The Epistle of Ignatius to the Antiochians,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 110.

Lord, and the Son also is Lord. A much more ancient testimony we have also in Genesis: “Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven” (Gen 19:24). Now, either deny that this is Scripture; or else (let me ask) what sort of man you are, that you do not think words ought to be taken and understood in the sense in which they are written, especially when they are not expressed in allegories and parables, but in determinate and simple declarations?³

CYPRIAN, *Against the Jews* 3.33

That the Father judgeth nothing, but the Son;

and that the Father is not glorified by him by whom the Son is not glorified.

In the Gospel according to John: “The Father judgeth nothing, but hath given all judgment unto the Son, that all may honour the Son as they honour the Father. He who honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father who hath sent Him” (John 5:22, 23). Also in the seventy-first Psalm: “O God, give the king Thy judgment, and Thy righteousness to the king’s son, to judge Thy people in righteousness” (Ps 72:1,2). Also in Genesis: “And the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah sulphur, and fire from heaven from the Lord.”⁴

³ Tertullian, “Against Praxeas,” in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Peter Holmes, vol. 3, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 607–608.

⁴ Cyprian of Carthage, “Three Books of Testimonies Against the Jews,” in *Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Novatian, Appendix*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Robert Ernest Wallis, vol. 5, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 544.

NOVATIAN, *On the Trinity* 18.15–17

And that there might not remain any doubt that he [God the Son] had been the guest of Abraham, it is written regarding the destruction of the Sodomites that “the Lord poured down on Sodom and Gomorrah fire and sulfur from the Lord out of heaven” (Gen 19:24). In fact, the prophet also says in the person of God, “I destroyed you as the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.” The Lord, therefore, destroyed Sodom; that is, God destroyed Sodom. In the destruction of the Sodomites, however, it was the Lord who rained fire from the Lord. This Lord was the God seen by Abraham (Gen 12:7; 18:1). This God is Abraham’s guest (Gen 18:3-8). and was undoubtedly seen because he was touched. Now, since the Father, inasmuch as he is invisible, was assuredly not seen at that time, he who was seen and who was hospitably received and taken in was he who was willing to be seen and touched. This one then is the Son of God, “the Lord, who rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah fire and sulfur from the Lord” (Gen 19:24). But he is the Word of God, and the “Word” of God “was made flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14). This one then is Christ. Therefore it was not the Father who was the guest of Abraham but Christ. Nor was it the Father who was seen but the Son; therefore it was Christ who was seen. Consequently Christ is both Lord and God, who could be seen by Abraham only because he was God, the Word, begotten of God the Father before Abraham even existed (Jn 8:58).⁵

⁵ Alberto Ferreiro, “Introduction to the Twelve Prophets,” in *The Twelve Prophets*, ed. Alberto Ferreiro, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 96.

EUSEBIUS, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.2.9

Of him Moses speaks very clearly, calling him a second Lord after the Father, when he says, “The Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord” (Gen 19:34).⁶

ATHANASIUS, *Discourses Against the Arians* 2.15.13

If then they¹⁴ suppose that the Savior was not Lord and King, even before he became man and endured the cross, but then began to be Lord, let them know that they are openly reviving the statements of the Samosatene.¹⁵ But if, as we have quoted and declared above, he is the everlasting Lord and King, seeing that Abraham worships him as Lord and Moses says, “Then the Lord rained on Sodom and on Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven” (Gen 19:24). and David in the Psalms, “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit on my right hand’ ”; and “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of your kingdom” (Ps 45:6); and “Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom” (Ps 145:13); it is plain that even before he became man, he was King and Lord everlasting, being Image and Word of the Father. And since the Word is everlasting Lord and King, it is very clear again that Peter did not say that the essence of the Son was made but

⁶ Quentin F. Wesselschmidt, *Psalms 51–150*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture OT 8 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 254.

¹⁴ The Arians, who taught that the Son was subordinate to the Father and not co-eternal with him.

¹⁵ Paul of Samosata, a bishop of Antioch, who was condemned in the late 260s as a supporter of dynamic monarchianism, which supported an adoptionistic view of the incarnate Christ.

spoke of his lordship over us, which “became” when he became man, and redeeming all by the cross, became Lord of all and King.⁷

HILARY OF POITIERS, *On the Trinity* 5.16

I ask further, Who is this God Who overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah? For *the Lord rained from the Lord* (Gen 19:24); was it not the true Lord from the true Lord? Have you any alternative to this Lord, and Lord? Or any other meaning for the terms, except that in Lord, and Lord, their Persons are distinguished? Bear in mind that Him Whom you have confessed as *Alone true*, you have also confessed as *Alone the righteous Judge*. Now mark that the Lord who rains from the Lord, and slays not the just with the unjust, and judges the whole earth, is both Lord and also righteous Judge, and also rains from the Lord. In the face of all this, I ask you Which it is that you describe as alone the righteous Judge. The Lord rains from the Lord; you will not deny that He Who rains from the Lord is the righteous Judge, for Abraham, the Father of the Gentiles—but not of the unbelieving Gentiles—speaks thus: *In no wise shalt Thou do this thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, for then shall the righteous be as the wicked. In no wise shalt Thou, Who judgest the earth, execute this judgment* (Gen 18:25). This God, then, the righteous Judge, is clearly also the true God. Blasphemer! Your own falsehood confutes you. Not yet do I bring forward the witness of the Gospels concerning God the Judge; the Law has told me that He is the Judge. You must deprive the Son of His judgeship before you can deprive Him of His true Divinity. You have

⁷ Quentin F. Wesselschmidt, *Psalms 51–150*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture OT 8 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 262–263.

solemnly confessed that He Who is the only righteous Judge is also the only true God; your own statements bind you to the admission that He Who is the righteous Judge is also true God. This Judge is the Lord, to Whom all things are possible, the Promiser of eternal blessings, Judge of righteous and of wicked. He is the God of Abraham, worshipped by him. Fool and blasphemer that you are, your shameless readiness of tongue must invent some new fallacy, if you are to prove that He is not true God.⁸

GREGORY NAZIANZEN, *Oration 29:17*

For we have learnt to believe in and to teach the Deity of the Son from their great and lofty utterances. And what utterances are these? These: God—The Word—He That Was In The Beginning and With The Beginning, and The Beginning. “In the Beginning was The Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn 1:1), and “With Thee is the Beginning” (Ps 110:3), and “He who calleth her The Beginning from generations” (Isa 41:1). Then the Son is Only-begotten: The only “begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, it says, He hath declared Him” (John 1:18). The Way, the Truth, the Life, the Light. “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life;” and “I am the Light of the World” (John 7:12; 9:5; 14:6). Wisdom and Power, “Christ, the Wisdom of God, and the Power of God” (1 Cor 1:24). The Effulgence, the Impress, the Image, the Seal; “Who being the Effulgence of His

⁸ Hilary of Poitiers, “On the Trinity,” in *St. Hilary of Poitiers, John of Damascus*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. E. W. Watson et al., vol. 9a, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1899), 89.

glory and the Impress of His Essence” (Heb 1:3). and “the Image of His Goodness” (Wis 7:26). and “Him hath God the Father sealed” (Jn 7:27). Lord, King, He That Is, The Almighty. “The Lord rained down fire from the Lord” (Gen 19:24). and “A sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Thy Kingdom” (Ps 45:6), and “Which is and was and is to come, the Almighty” (Rev 1:8)—all which are clearly spoken of the Son, with all the other passages of the same force, none of which is an afterthought, or added later to the Son or the Spirit, any more than to the Father Himself. ⁹

BASIL, *On Prov. 7:22*

The Lord Created Me (LXX.). According to them [the heretics he has in mind] the Saviour is not God nor the Father Lord, and it is written in vain, ‘the Lord said unto my Lord.’ False is the statement, ‘Therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee.’ False too, ‘The Lord rained from the Lord.’ False, ‘God created in the image of God,’ and ‘Who is God save the Lord?’ and ‘Who is a God save our God.’ False the statement of John that ‘the Word was God and the Word was with God;’ and the words of Thomas of the Son, ‘my Lord and my God.’¹⁰

AMBROSE, *Exposition of the Christian Faith* 1.3.22-23

⁹ Gregory Nazianzen, “Select Orations of Saint Gregory Nazianzen,” in *S. Cyril of Jerusalem, S. Gregory Nazianzen*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow, vol. 7, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1894), 307.

¹⁰ Blomfield Jackson, “Prolegomena: Sketch of the Life and Works of Saint Basil,” in *St. Basil: Letters and Select Works*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. 8, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1895), xlii.

“In Thee,” saith he, “is God”—forasmuch as the Father is in the Son. For it is written, “The Father, Who abideth in Me, Himself speaketh,” and “The works that I do, He Himself also doeth” (Jn 14:10). And yet again we read that the Son is in the Father, saying, “I am in the Father, and the Father in Me” (Jn 14:10). Let the Arians, if they can, make away with this kinship in nature and unity in work.

23. There is, therefore, God in God, but not two Gods; for it is written that there is one God (Isa 45:18; 1 Cor 8:4, 6), and there is Lord in Lord, but not two Lords, forasmuch as it is likewise written: “Serve not two lords” (Matt 6:4). And the Law saith: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord thy God is one God” (Deut 6:4); moreover, in the same Testament it is written: “The Lord rained from the Lord” (Gen 19:24). The Lord, it is said, sent rain “from the Lord.” So also you may read in Genesis: “And God said,—and God made” (Gen 1:6, 7), and, lower down, “And God made man in the image of God” (Gen 1:26-27); yet it was not two gods, but one God, that made [man]. In the one place, then, as in the other, the unity of operation and of name is maintained. For surely, when we read “God of God” (Nicene Creed) we do not speak of two Gods.¹¹

CHRYSOSTOM, *Homily 3: 2 Tim 1:13-18*

Here those who are infected with the heresy of Marcion assail this expression; but let them learn that this mode of speech is not uncommon in Scripture; as when it is said, “The Lord said unto my Lord” (Ps.

¹¹ Ambrose of Milan, “Exposition of the Christian Faith,” in *St. Ambrose: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. H. de Romestin, E. de Romestin, and H. T. F. Duckworth, vol. 10, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1896), 204.

110:1); and again, “I said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord” (Ps. 16:2); and, “The Lord rained fire from the Lord.” (Gen. 19:24.) This indicates that the Persons are of the same substance, not that there is a distinction of nature. For we are not to understand that there are two substances differing from each other, but two Persons, each being of the same substance.¹²

AUGUSTINE, *Tractates on John* 51.3

But when it is said, “Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord, [as] the King of Israel,” by “in the name of the Lord” we are rather to understand “in the name of God the Father,” although it might also be understood as *in His own name*, inasmuch as He is also Himself the Lord. As we find Scripture also saying in another place, “The Lord rained [upon Sodom fire] from the Lord.”

CYRIL, *Comments on 1 John* 1:2

The Divine Scripture says that the cities of the Sodomites were burned by the Anger of God, and explaining how the Divine wrath was brought upon them, and clearly describing the mode of the destruction (Gen 19:24), *The Lord, it says, rained upon Sodom brimstone and fire from the Lord, since this too is the portion of the cup most befitting those who are wont to*

¹² John Chrysostom, “Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Second Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to Timothy,” in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. James Tweed and Philip Schaff, vol. 13, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 485.

commit such sins (Ps 11:6). What Lord then from what Lord sent the fire on and consumed the cities of the Sodomites? It is clear that it was the Father Who worketh all things through the Son, since He is too His Might and His Arm, Who caused Him to rain the fire upon the Sodomites. Since therefore the Lord sends the fire from the Lord upon them, how is not the Father Other, in respect to His own Being, than the Son, and the Son again than the Father? For the One is here signified as being from One.¹³

SOCRATES SCHOLASTICUS, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.30

If any one says that it was not the Son that was seen by Abraham, but the unbegotten God, or a part of him, let him be anathema. If any one says that it was not the Son that as man wrestled with Jacob, but the unbegotten God, or a part of him, let him be anathema. If any one shall understand the words, “The Lord rained from the Lord” (Gen 19:24) not in relation to the Father and the Son, but shall say that he rained from himself, let him be anathema: for the Lord the Son rained from the Lord the Father.¹⁴

CONSTITUTIONS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES 5.20

¹³ Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel According to S. John*, vol. 1 (Oxford; London: James Parker & Co.; Rivingtons, 1874), 19–20.

¹⁴ Socrates Scholasticus, “The Ecclesiastical History, by Socrates Scholasticus,” in *Socrates, Sozomenus: Church Histories*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. A. C. Zenos, vol. 2, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1890), 57.

To Him did Moses bear witness, and said: “The Lord received fire from the Lord, and rained it down” (Gen 19:24). Him did Jacob see as a man, and said: “I have seen God face to face, and my soul is preserved” (Gen 32:30). Him did Abraham entertain, and acknowledge to be the Judge, and his Lord (Gen 18:25, 27). Him did Moses see in the bush (Ex 3:2).¹⁵

JEWISH

R. Ishmael b. Yosi (170-200 C.E.), Gen 19:24 (*b. Sanh.* 38b or 4:5, V.11 A-C)

*A min said to R. Ishmael b. R. Yosé, “It is written, ‘Then the Lord caused to rain upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord’ (Gen. 19:24). It should have said, ‘From him.’” A certain laundryman said to him, “Let me answer him. It is written, ‘And Lamech said to his wives, Ada and Zillah, Hear my voice, you wives of Lamech’ (Gen. 4:23). It should have said, ‘my wives.’ “But that just is how Scripture says things, and here too, that just is how Scripture says things.”*¹⁶

Genesis Rabbah 51.2

Abba Hilfi, the son of Samkai, said in the name of R. Judah [2nd c. A.D.]: *Then the Lord caused to rain, etc.* refers to Gabriel; *From the Lord (out of*

¹⁵ Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., “Constitutions of the Holy Apostles,” in *Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries: Lactantius, Venantius, Asterius, Victorinus, Dionysius, Apostolic Teaching and Constitutions, Homily, and Liturgies*, trans. James Donaldson, vol. 7, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 448.

¹⁶ Jacob Neusner, *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*, vol. 16 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 192.

heaven, to the Holy One, blessed be He). R. Leazar [1st – 2nd c. A.D.] said: Wherever ‘And the Lord’ occurs, it means, He and His heavenly Court.