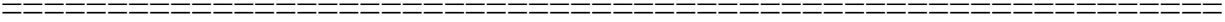


Theophanies – Manifestations of God Among Mankind

Definition: A ***theophany*** is an appearance of God. More precisely, it is a visible display to human beings that expresses the presence and character of God.

Ernie asked me a question about the Angel of the LORD ... and so this an opportunity to explore this + other appearances!



If I were to title this sermon the 7 appearances of God in Scripture ... would this be reasonable to cover in a sermon?

Well ... the BEST count I have is ... The **247 Theophanies in Scripture** ... and 36 are still future! ... so ... I have needed to select some “representative” examples for today.

One scripture that makes our exploration clearer ...

Joh_1:18 **No one has seen God** at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

Paul concurs ...

1Ti 6:16 (*God...*) **who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see,** to whom be honor and everlasting power.

Joh 4:24 God is Spirit ...

Spirit is invisible

Joh 3:8 **The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."**

But ... there are passages (some of the Theophanies) that “appear” to be Bible contradictions



Exodus 24:9-11 Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, **and they saw the God of Israel;** and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they saw God, and they ate and drank.

How is this “apparent contradiction” reconciled?

... by understanding that the Father is unseen (so far) & Jesus is God who is seen

The many passages that mention the Father and the Son, but make no reference to the Spirit. It reflects the New Testament writers’ view of God consisting of the Father & Jesus. Check **Matthew 11:27; Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2,3; Galatians 1:3,4; Ephesians 1:2,3; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:2,3; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 1:3; James 1:1; 1 John 1:3; 2:24; 5:20; 2 John 1:3,9; Jude 1:1; Revelation 21:22,23; 22:3.**

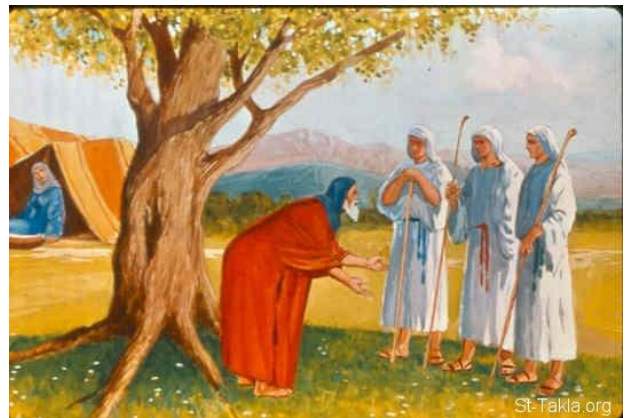
Why the Theophany? Or more specifically ... the Christophany? (which is an appearance of Christ prior to his arrival in the Gospels) ... with Moses and the Elders of Israel??

A theophany tends to serve a purpose. For instance, when God appears to Abraham, it’s to prophesy about a coming child in their family and to warn him about Sodom and Gomorrah. Theophanies can often have elements of prophecy or revelation, serve as a guide (the pillar of cloud and fire), or a turning point (Jacob’s wrestling), or some combination thereof.

1. The covenant meal with the *Elders of Israel* ... is a great reason for Jesus to appear!

With *Abraham & Sarah*...

Gen 18:1-3 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.



And wrestling with *Jacob ... Israel* ...

Gen 32:24-28 Then Jacob was left alone; and **a Man** wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!" So He said to him, "What is your name?" He said, "Jacob." And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for **you have struggled with God** and with men, **and have prevailed.**



The *Burning Bush* !?! & *Pillar of Cloud & Fire* !?!

Exo 3:1-6 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the **Angel of the LORD** appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn." So when the **LORD saw** that he turned aside to look, **God called to him** from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is **holy ground**."

Exo 3:6 Moreover He said, "I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.

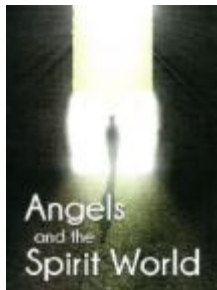
Exo 13:20-22 So they took their journey from Succoth and camped in Etham at the edge of the wilderness. And **the LORD went before them** by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people.



2. Sometimes, a situation or relationship is so important ... God (Jesus) wants to be there!

The Lord Speaks to Elijah

1Ki 19:9-13 And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of **the LORD came to him**, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" So he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life." Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire **a still small voice**. So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice came to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"



Who Was the “Angel of the Lord”?

It is clear from John 1:1–3, 10; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16–17; Hebrews 1:2; and Revelation 4:11 that God the Father created all things *through* Jesus Christ. Christ is the God-Being who, in the beginning, said the words, “Let there be light,” and who recreated the earth and populated it with every life form, including Man (Genesis 2:27).

The “angel of the Lord” is mentioned 79 times in the King James Bible. Some of the numerous appearances seem to be *theophanies*—manifestations of God in visible form. The angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar, spoke as though he were *God*, and was called God by her (Genesis 16:7–13). The Bible says the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush, but then says *God* talked to Moses on that occasion (Exodus 3:2; Acts 7:30–38). Exodus 13:21 says the Lord went before Israel in a pillar of cloud, while Exodus 14:19 says the angel of God was with the pillar of cloud. The angel of the Lord appeared to Israel in Judges 2:1–5 and spoke as *God*. Judges 6:11–24 describes the appearance of the angel of the Lord to Gideon and then says the Lord looked on Gideon. Again, the angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah and his wife, and they believed they had seen *God* (Judges 13:2–23).

Other visitations of the angel of the Lord do not indicate whether they were appearances of the preincarnate Jesus Christ Himself or not, although frequently people assume they were. Examples are the appearances to Abraham at Mount Moriah and to Balaam (Genesis 22:11–18; Numbers 22:22–35). Sometimes the angel of the Lord is clearly not a manifestation of God, but an angel identified as a separate being other than the Lord God. Examples are the appearances to David and to Zechariah (2 Samuel 24:16; 1 Chronicles 21:15–30; Zechariah 1:8–19). The angel of the Lord in the New Testament apparently is nothing more than an angel, and is not Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:20; 2:13; 28:2; Acts 8:26).

1. Always

In analyzing all these verses of Scripture, [some say that the angel of the Lord is *always* a direct manifestation of God. However, some of the instances mentioned above do not support this view, and actually contradict it. [Others maintain the angel of the Lord is a manifestation of God in some instances, and not in others. This second view seems to be consistent with the Scriptures.

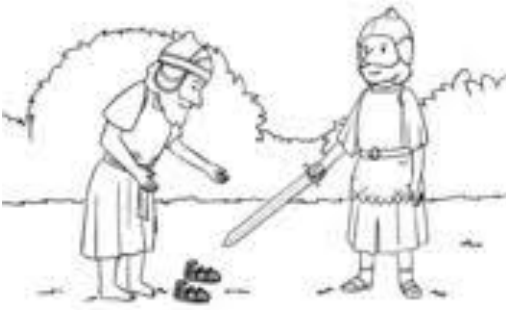
2. Some

3. Never

A [third view, however, is that the angel of the Lord is *never* the Lord but always a literal angel. To support this last view, one would emphasize that angels are mouthpieces, messengers, or agents of God. In other words, this view contends that it is proper to say “the Lord said” or “the Lord did” even though He said or did it through the agency of an angel. Under this view, a description of an act by God in the account of an angelic appearance is simply a shorthand way of saying God acted through the angel. Since the biblical writers make clear at the beginning of the accounts that an angel was the direct agent, no ambiguity or discrepancy needs to exist. In this view, the people who acknowledged the visitation of God were either mistaken in their belief that they had seen God Himself, or, more plausibly, they recognized that God was using an angel to speak to them and therefore addressed God through the angel. There is another way to reconcile this third view with verses of Scripture that identify the angel of the Lord with the Lord Himself: namely, the angel visibly appeared, but the Lord was also “invisibly pre-

sent." Therefore, references to the Lord acting or talking could mean literally the Lord, and not the angel.

In summary, it is evident that the angel of the Lord in the Old Testament was not always God Himself. A person can plausibly maintain that the angel of the Lord was never an actual "theophany," but he cannot seriously contend that the angel of the Lord was *always* a theophany. The simplest explanation is that the phrase, "the angel of the Lord" sometimes refers to a theophany of God, but at other times denotes nothing more than a commonplace angel doing the Lord's work.



Joshua removes his footwear ...

The Commander of the Army of the LORD

Jos 5:13 And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, "Are You for us or for our adversaries?"

Jos 5:14 So He said, "No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." And Joshua fell

on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?"

Jos 5:15 Then the Commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, "Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so.

The Lord speaks to Job...

Job 38:1 Then **the LORD answered** Job out of **the whirlwind**, and said:

Job 38:2 "Who is this who darkens counsel By words without knowledge?

Job 38:3 Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me.

3. We can often place God in a box, thinking He'll act one way or another, but as Job learned through seeing *God appear in a whirlwind*, we can never quite figure out the mind of God.

4. God can choose to appear one way to one believer and in another way to another. Some have seen Jesus in dreams, and others encounter Jesus through a powerful sermon or through the words of Scripture. **Joh_20:29** Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. **Blessed** are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

God appears to Solomon to ASK...

1 Kings 3:5 At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask! What shall I give you?"

Lessons from Moses

Exo 33:8 So it was, whenever Moses went out to the tabernacle, that all the people rose, and each man stood at his tent door and watched Moses until he had gone into the tabernacle.

Exo 33:9 And it came to pass, when Moses entered the tabernacle, that the pillar of cloud descended and stood at the door of the tabernacle, **and the LORD talked with Moses.**

Exo 33:10 All the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the tabernacle door, and all the people rose and worshiped, each man in his tent door.

Exo 33:11 **So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.** And he would return to the camp, but his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tabernacle.

Moses' Intercession

Exo 33:12 Then Moses said to the LORD, "See, You say to me, 'Bring up this people.' But You have not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found grace in My sight.'

Exo 33:13 Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation is Your people."

Exo 33:14 And He said, "**My Presence** will go with you, and I will give you rest."

Exo 33:15 Then he said to Him, "If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here.

Exo 33:16 For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth."

Exo 33:17 So the LORD said to Moses, "I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name."

Exo 33:18 And he said, "Please, show me Your glory."

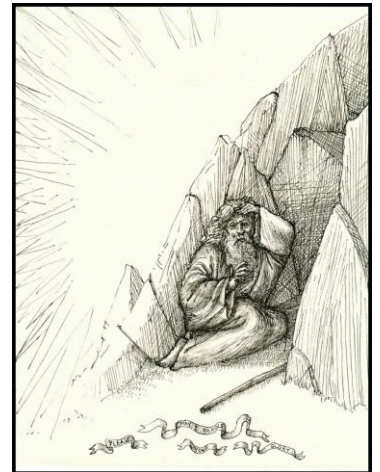
Exo 33:19 Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

Exo 33:20 But He said, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live."

Exo 33:21 And the LORD said, "Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock.

Exo 33:22 So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by.

Exo 33:23 Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen."



4. God's appearance (via Jesus) comforts Israel, that they are doing right

Daniel 3:25 "Look!" he answered, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth **is like the Son of God.**"

5. God's presence (via Jesus) shows (to the nations) Israel to be a separate people

6. God's appearance with Moses "face to face" evidenced His friendship

Ezekiel's Chariot rider!

Eze 1:26-28 And above the firmament over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it. Also from the appearance of His waist and upward I saw, as it were, the color of amber with the appearance of fire all around within it; and from the appearance of His waist and downward I saw, as it were, the appearance of fire with brightness all around. Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness all around it. This was **the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.** So when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard a voice of One speaking.

7. Certain worldviews like deism have made God out to be distant and uncaring about the world. Theophanies in the Old Testament disprove this. God *literally* steps onto the scene. He's with Job during his most dire moments, helping lead the Israelites out of Egypt, and encourages Abraham and his wife when they think their childbearing years are over.

Everybody remembers THIS example ...

Genesis 3:8 And they heard the sound of the **LORD God walking in the garden** in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

8. We see elements of God through these appearances. In the fiery pillar and tempest, we see God's power. When He appears a man to Abraham, He reveals He has elements of His character that are similar to mankind, meaning He made us in His image. When He wrestles with Jacob, He shows His willingness to wrestle with us, especially in the moments we feel

most like running away. Theophanies give us an enduring glimpse of the truth that **God is always with you**, wherever you are.



Luk 12:6-7 "Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

9. Theophanies can also help us understand the future & future events in God's plan

Isaiah 35:2 It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice,
Even with joy and singing.
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
The excellence of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the LORD,
The excellency of our God.

Isaiah 40:5 The glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
And **all flesh shall see** it together;
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

Isaiah 40:10 Behold, the **Lord GOD shall come** with a strong hand,
And His arm shall rule for Him;
Behold, His reward is with Him,
And His work before Him.

Micah 1:3 For behold, **the LORD is coming** out of His place;
He will come down
And tread on the high places of the earth.

10. Theophanies can reveal comforting promises.

1Th 4:16-18 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to **meet the Lord** in the air. **And thus we shall always be with the Lord.** Therefore comfort one another with these words.



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