

Theophany in the Bible, A Bible Study

1. The word theophany comes from two Greek words meaning “God” and “to appear”. It is defined as God appearing in visible form on the earth.
2. The ultimate Theophany is Jesus Christ coming as the Incarnate Deity, the Son of God. Prior to that, God visited the earth from time to time, and these occasions are recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures. It is on these visitations that we will fix our study.
3. The identity of Theophany in the Old Testament is God the Son. There are three lines of evidence for this. First, New Testament revelation of what was concealed in Old Testament days, namely that God the Son can and does manifest Himself this way. Second, God the Father and God the Holy Spirit are distinct from Theophany. Third, there is no strong biblical support for the idea that either Father or Spirit reveal themselves in flesh.
4. The usual Old Testament title of Theophany is “the Angel of the LORD”, with the definite article preceding “angel.” Other titles include “Man” and “Angel of His Presence.”
5. This cannot be an ordinary angel, because the Angel is found accepting worship, and working in concert with the Father as an equal. In some cases, He is even called YHWH, as they are one, even though distinguished as separate persons (John 10:30).
6. We begin by examining five clear and representative passages.
 - a. Exodus 3:1-6, the burning bush passage
 - b. Joshua 5:13-15, the Commander of God’s army
 - c. Judges 2:1-5, the God of the covenant (Cf. Genesis 12:1-3)
 - d. Judges 13:1-22, the God of miracles appears to Mr. and Mrs. Manoah
 - e. Isaiah 63:8-10, He does Christ-like work, Also Cf. Exodus 14:19-31
7. Here are five more clear passages.
 - a. Genesis 16:7-13, the God who sees appears to Hagar
 - b. Genesis 22:15-18, calls to Abraham from heaven
 - c. Genesis 32:24-30, the Man who wrestles with Jacob is God Himself
 - d. Numbers 22:22-31, appears to Balaam
 - e. Zechariah 1:12, counsels with the Father as an equal
8. Also, two disputed passages, which I believe are theophany passages
 - a. Genesis 14:18-20, in light of Hebrews 7:1-3, Melchizedek=Christ
 - b. Genesis 18:1-33, if only three “men”, one of them was God Himself