

The Coming King – The Incarnation December 16, 2007 - Skip MacMillan

Daniel 3:25 - "He said, 'Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.'"

Incarnation (God taking on flesh), to be with us; Immanuel, "God with us".

2 Veins:

Prophecy – spoken word of God about the incarnation.

Theophany – manifestation of God, personal encounter between God and man.

God uses both to make Him known, to "dwell with us", in word or physically, and both are letting the world in the Old Testament times know the King is coming, pointing to the Incarnation.

"Every theophany wherein God takes on human form foreshadows the incarnation" -Williams.

Theophany

Defined: *theo* = God and *phany* (*phainein*) = to show forth

A visible appearance of God in the Old Testament period.

A Manifestation of God tangible to the human senses.

God revealing himself to man, a divine disclosure.

Some would also include in this term Christophanies (preincarnate appearances of Christ).

Mystery: " . . . it needs to be remembered that theology without mystery is sheer nonsense. God in His wisdom does not restrict Himself to one method of self-revelation" -Feinberg, professor of Old Testament.

Characteristics:

- Temporary and transient, a brief moment in time
- Various Forms: human, plant, cloud, pillar of smoke, pillar of fire, or angelic form. Human forms are anthropomorphisms. Anthropomorphism = interpretation of what is not human or personal in terms of human or personal characteristics. These should be seen as an attempts to express the truth about God through human analogies (relational, conversing, caring, sees, hears, etc.). God is not material. **Jesus said**, "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).
- Theophanies in angelic form as the pre-incarnate Christ: "The appearances of the Angel of the Lord, which some have taken to be Christophanies, reason that since the angel of the Lord speaks for God in the first person and the human addressed often attributes the experience to God directly, the angel must therefore be the Lord or the preincarnate Christ" -Williams.

Gen 22: 15 - "The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, 'I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky . . .'"

Angels deny any and all worship and refuse to be called the LORD.

Verbal introduction for Theophanies:

- "the LORD appeared" (Genesis 12:7)
- "the LORD came down" (Exodus 34:5)
- "glory of the Lord" (Exodus 24:16-18)

Theophanies and Heathen Mythology

"If the story (Genesis 18) of the visit of the Almighty with Abraham is seen to have striking parallels in heathen mythology, we naturally explain this coincidence by the simple observation that the truth

of this experience penetrated far into other nations and their indication of their authority by making the inquiry” -Herbert C. Leupold.

Scriptural References for Various Forms of Theophanies

- Adam and Eve - human form, Genesis 3:8 - “Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.”
- Abraham: unknown form, Genesis 12:6-7 - “The LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.”
- Human form, Genesis 18:1ff - “The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby.”

God revealed His nature and dwelled with Abraham (temporarily).

Nature: His omniscience, authority to judge, and omnipotence – power to bless and judge - retributive and punitive justice in order to clear the path for . . . His people.

Dwelling with Abraham: God is relational. “Abraham is treated as a trusted/intimate friend and initiated (brought) into the counsels of God.”

- Moses: as a burning bush, Exodus 3:2-4:17 - “The Angel of the LORD appeared to him in the flames of the bush”, but then goes on to have a direct conversation with God himself, Exodus 3:1ff.
Sovereignty of God over all creation, nations and empires (especially Egyptian here).
- Human form to Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the seventy elders of Israel, Exodus 24:9-18 - “Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank.”
- Cloud over Mount Sinai, the “glory of the Lord,” Exodus 24:16-18 - “When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within the cloud.”
- Pillar of fire and pillar of smoke, Exodus 13:21 - “By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night.”
- Mystery, face to face with God, Exodus 33:11 - “The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks **with his friend**. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.”
God would call us His friend with the Incarnation: “I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15).
- Moses saw the form of God, Numbers 12:6-8 - “He (The LORD) said, ‘Listen to my words: When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak **face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD**. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?’ ”
The LORD graciously granted Moses a vision of Himself, based on God’s relationship to Moses and not Moses’ education, status, position in the world, but God choosing him.
Moses is said to have “persevered because he saw him who is invisible” (Hebrews 10:25).

- Thunderstorm, Job 31:35 - While he suffered, Job had complained that he sought an audience with God (31:35). At the conclusion of the book the Lord appears in a thunderstorm to deliver two discourses, designed to grant Job's request for a hearing and arguably to supply at least one of the meanings for Job's affliction: God is sovereign.
- The fourth man, "Son of the gods," Daniel 3:25 - "He said, 'Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.'"

Some others: Elijah, Ezekiel, Isaiah.

New Testament:

Holy Spirit as a Dove, Matthew 3:16 - "And Jesus when he was baptized, went up straightway from the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him."

Holy Spirit as tongues of fire, Acts 2:3-4 - "And there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

Why Theophanies?

We cannot see God - "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!" (Exodus 33:20). God would assume these forms for our sake, manifesting Himself to us through Theophanies. Only partial revelations of God due our human limitations and weakness.

The Purpose of Theophanies:

1. **To commune with man**, Genesis 3:8. **Immanuel**, "God with us".
"Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden."
Reveals God's desire to commune with man, to return to a Garden-like state of intimate communion.
2. To personally communicate His will and Word, blessings or judgments.
Blessing, Genesis 18, Abraham and Sarah to have children.
Judgment, Genesis 18 Sodom and Gomorrah.
3. **To lead His people through a difficult time**, Exodus 13:21
4. **To rescue His sons and daughter from trouble**, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, Daniel 3.
5. The ultimate purpose of all Theophanies is to point us to the Incarnation. Theophanies are a precursor or foreshadowing of the Incarnation (God taking on flesh, John 1).
"Every theophany wherein God takes on human form foreshadows the incarnation, both in matters of grace and judgment" -William C. Williams.

God's communion with man, communicating blessing and judgment, clarifies the gospel, to lead the way and rescue His people for all eternity those who believe in the Incarnation.

Is the Incarnation a Theophany? Temporary versus eternal.

"A theophany, says Augustine, is temporary and transient; the incarnation is perpetual (eternal)."
"The incarnate Christ was not, and indeed is not, a theophany. The phenomena of theophanies were temporary, for the occasion that required them and then disappeared. On the other hand, in the incarnate Christ His deity and humanity were joined, not for time alone, but for eternity" -Feinberg.
"The logos appeared in the form of a man, he united Himself with it, so that it became a constituent (essential) part of his person" -William C. Williams.

Take Away: God has been speaking to us throughout history, through repeated theophanies and prophecies.

Theophanies are temporary manifestations of God to us;

Prophecies are God's spoken words of truth to us.

Both represent God's heart to speak with us, to dwell with us, and to redeem us.

God is not distant; throughout the centuries He has been making Himself known to you and me. His final and complete revelation came when He took on flesh, became a man, and redeemed us.

Do Theophanies occur today?

"Only in the Old Testament economy did God's people need a theophany; since the incarnation, there is no such necessity. The New Testament doctrine of God is final and complete. God is always present in the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit. Still, at times, God's people are more aware of that Presence than at others" -Feinberg.

There is no need because *"God is always present in the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit."*

Jesus said in John 14:17 "He (Holy Spirit) lives with you and will be in you."

The Incarnation made this possible.

Theophanies do not occur today but God does speak to us in individual and personal ways.

The problem is, we become too cold with facts and too "spacey" and "out there" with spiritual experiences only. One has no emotion, no personal attachment while the other is contradictory and too subjective. The fullness of Christianity is that God provides us with both personal experiences and eternal truth, in Scripture.

Example: God, Jeanne, and a bird; thinking how God takes care of the birds and how He would take care of her. Matthew 6:26 - "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?"

Christianity is about Spirit and Truth: Spirit = God providing personal experiences, God in us; Truth = Scripture. This is Christianity.

Jesus: "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).