

## Theophanies

A theophany is an appearance of God in visible form. Usually the appearance is temporary and it is not necessarily material.

**1. What problem do the following passages offer to the fledgling disciple?** (Exodus 33:20; John 1:18; 1 Timothy 6:16 cp Genesis 32:30; Exodus 24:9-11; Deuteronomy 5:24; Judges 6:22-23; 13:20-23; Isaiah 6:5; 1 John 1:1-2; 3:2; Revelation 1:16-17)

*On the one hand, no one is ever supposed to see God.*

- **Exodus 33:20 HCSB** But He answered, "You cannot see My face, for no one can see Me and live."
- **John 1:18 HCSB** No one has ever seen God. The One and Only Son--the One who is at the Father's side--He has revealed Him.
- **1 Timothy 6:16 HCSB** the only One who has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom none of mankind has seen or can see, to whom be honor and eternal might. Amen.

*This is not because He is like the wizard of Oz, hiding behind a curtain and protesting loudly when we draw it back. It is because He is a transcendent being. To see a transcendent being is to leave the material universe, e.g. to be destroyed.*

*On the other, we have plenty accounts of people who are startled into the realization that they have seen God and yet live!*

- **Genesis 32:30 HCSB** Jacob then named the place Peniel, "For," *he said*, "I have seen God face to face, and I have been delivered."
- **Exodus 24:9-11 HCSB** Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and 70 of Israel's elders, (10) and they saw the God of Israel. Beneath His feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire stone, as clear as the sky itself. (11) God did not harm the Israelite nobles; they saw Him, and they ate and drank.
- **Deuteronomy 5:24 HCSB** You said, 'Look, the LORD our God has shown us His glory and greatness, and we have heard His voice from the fire. Today we have seen that God speaks with a person, yet he still lives.'
- **Judges 6:22-23 HCSB** When Gideon realized that He was the Angel of the LORD, he said, "Oh no, Lord GOD! I have seen the Angel of the LORD face to face!" (23) But the LORD said to him, "Peace to you. Don't be afraid, for you will not die."
- **Judges 13:20-23 HCSB** When the flame went up from the altar to the sky, the Angel of the LORD went up in its flame. When Manoah and his wife saw *this*, they fell facedown on the ground. (21) The Angel of the LORD did not appear again to Manoah and his wife. Then Manoah realized that it was the Angel of the LORD. (22) "We're going to die," he said to his wife, "because we have seen God!" (23) But his wife said to him, "If the LORD had intended to kill us, He wouldn't have accepted the burnt offering and the grain offering from us, and He would not have shown us all these things or spoken to us now like this."
- **Isaiah 6:5 HCSB** Then I said: Woe is me, for I am ruined, because I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, *and* because my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Hosts.
- **1 John 1:1-3 HCSB** What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed, and have touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life-- (2) that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us-- (3) what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may have

fellowship along with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

- **1 John 3:2 HCSB** Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him as He is.
- **Revelation 1:16-17 HCSB (16)** In His right hand He had seven stars; from His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was shining like the sun at midday. **(17)** When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. He laid His right hand on me, and said, "**Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last,**

*The solution to this conundrum is to differentiate between the transcendent Father and the immanent Son.*
- **Colossians 1:15 HCSB** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation;

*Seeing Jesus is the closest we will ever get to seeing the invisible, unapproachable Father.*

- **John 14:8-9 HCSB** "Lord," said Philip, "show us the Father, and that's enough for us." **(9)** Jesus said to him, "**Have I been among you all this time without your knowing Me, Philip? The one who has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?**

## **2. What do the following passages teaches us about Jesus' history? (John 1:1-10; 8:58; Proverbs 8:22-31)**

- **John 1:1-10 HCSB** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 All things were created through Him, and apart from Him not one thing was created that has been created. 4 Life was in Him, and that life was the light of men. 5 That light shines in the darkness, yet the darkness did not overcome it. 6 There was a man named John who was sent from God. 7 He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light. 9 The true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was created through Him, yet the world did not recognize Him.
- **John 8:58 HCSB** Jesus said to them, "I assure you: Before Abraham was, I am."
- **Proverbs 8:22-31 HCSB** The LORD made me at the beginning of His creation, before His works of long ago. 23 I was formed before ancient times, from the beginning, before the earth began. 24 I was brought forth when there were no watery depths and no springs filled with water. 25 I was brought forth before the mountains and hills were established, 26 before He made the land, the fields, or the first soil on earth. 27 I was there when He established the heavens, when He laid out the horizon on the surface of the ocean, 28 when He placed the skies above, when the fountains of the ocean gushed forth, 29 when He set a limit for the sea so that the waters would not violate His command, when He laid out the foundations of the earth. 30 I was a skilled craftsman beside Him. I was His delight every day, always rejoicing before Him. 31 I was rejoicing in His inhabited world, delighting in the human race.

*The Son of God existed before Abraham. He pre-existed the universe. In fact He has always been around in one form or another. He existed and interacted with humans long before His incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth.*

**3. In what ways does the intrinsic nature of the Father and the Spirit preclude their being seen or handled?** (Luke 24:39; Romans 1:19-20; Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17)

- Luke 24:39 HCSB Look at My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself! Touch Me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have."
- Romans 1:19-20 HCSB since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. 20 From the creation of the world His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what He has made. As a result, people are without excuse.
- Colossians 1:15 HCSB He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation;
- 1 Timothy 1:17 HCSB Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

*The Father and the Holy Spirit are both Spirit and thus have neither flesh nor bone. Also, again, they are transcendent beings and thus cannot be perceived by immanent creatures like ourselves. How would one "see" an omnipresent being?*

*Therefore we can confidently state that any physical appearance of God in the Bible must be ascribed to the Son.*

**4. What do we glean from the Lord's appearances to Abram? What do we learn of His character and purpose?** (Genesis 17:1-4, 9-10, 15-16, 22; 18:1-3)

- Genesis 17:1-4, 9-10, 15-16, 22 HCSB When Abram was 99 years old, the LORD appeared to him, saying, "I am God Almighty. Live in My presence and be devout. 2 I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you greatly." 3 Then Abram fell to the ground, and God spoke with him: 4 "As for Me, My covenant is with you, and you will become the father of many nations...9 God also said to Abraham, "As for you, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations are to keep My covenant. 10 This is My covenant, which you are to keep, between Me and you and your offspring after you: Every one of your males must be circumcised... 15 God said to Abraham, "As for your wife Sarai, do not call her Sarai, for Sarah will be her name. 16 I will bless her; indeed, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she will produce nations; kings of peoples will come from her."... 22 When He finished talking with him, God withdrew from Abraham.
- Genesis 18:1-3 HCSB Then the LORD appeared to Abraham at the oaks of Mamre while he was sitting in the entrance of his tent during the heat of the day. 2 He looked up, and he saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to meet them and bowed to the ground. 3 Then he said, "My lord, if I have found favor in your sight, please do not go on past your servant...10 The LORD said, "I will certainly come back to you in about a year's time, and your wife Sarah will have a son!" Now Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent behind him.

**5. Read Genesis 16:7-14. What clues lead us to identify the Angel of the Lord as a theophany? What significance does His appearance to Hagar have?**

- Genesis 16:7-14 HCSB The Angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. 8 He said, "Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" She replied, "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai." 9 Then the Angel of the LORD said to her, "You must go back to your mistress and submit to her mistreatment." 10 The Angel of the LORD also said

to her, "I will greatly multiply your offspring, and they will be too many to count." 11 Then the Angel of the LORD said to her: You have conceived and will have a son. You will name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard your cry of affliction. 12 This man will be like a wild ass. His hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand will be against him; he will live at odds with all his brothers. 13 So she named the LORD who spoke to her: The God Who Sees, for she said, "Have I really seen here the One who sees me?" 14 That is why she named the spring, "A Well of the Living One Who Sees Me." It is located between Kadesh and Bered.

Though He is called the Angel of the Lord, clearly distinguishing between Him and the Father, notice that He speaks for God in the first person (v.10). Further, Hagar understood Him to be God and called Him such (v.13) without receiving any rebuke or correction. Every other time an angel was wrongly worshipped they were quick to stop it and acknowledge their proper place. For a more complete study of the Angel of the Lord, read that study.

#### **6. How does Genesis 22:10-12 support the idea that the Angel of the Lord should be identified as God?**

- Genesis 22:10-12 HCSB Then Abraham reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son. 11 But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" He replied, "Here I am." 12 Then He said, "Do not lay a hand on the boy or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your only son from Me."

In this passage, the Angel of the Lord stopped Abraham from sacrificing Isaac. Here the Angel clearly describes Himself as God.

#### **7. Jacob is one of Israel's three great patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). What was his view of the Angel of the Lord? (Genesis 32:24-30; 48:15-16)**

- Genesis 32:24-30 HCSB Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. 25 When the man saw that He could not defeat him, He struck Jacob's hip as they wrestled and dislocated his hip socket. 26 Then He said to Jacob, "Let Me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me." 27 "What is your name?" the man asked. "Jacob!" he replied. 28 "Your name will no longer be Jacob," He said. "It will be Israel because you have struggled with God and with men and have prevailed." 29 Then Jacob asked Him, "Please tell me Your name." But He answered, "Why do you ask My name?" And He blessed him there. 30 Jacob then named the place Peniel, "For," he said, "I have seen God face to face, and I have been delivered."
- Genesis 48:15-16 HCSB Then he blessed Joseph and said: The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, 16 the Angel who has redeemed me from all harm--may He bless these boys. And may they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they grow to be numerous within the land.

Isaac's son Jacob also had a life-changing encounter with the Angel of the Lord. In this difficult engagement, Jacob's name (which meant "usurper" or "supplanter") was changed to Israel (which meant "God struggler"). He was reclaimed and made useful by the Angel of the Lord – a habit particular to the Son of God.

Jacob would later refer back to this moment as he blessed his grandchildren from his deathbed. Isaac understood the Angel who redeemed Him to be the same God whom his ancestors worshipped.

**8. Notice that the Angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in the flaming bush. How did he identify Himself? What was Moses' reaction? Why was his reaction significant?**

- Exodus 3:2-6 HCSB Then the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire within a bush. As Moses looked, he saw that the bush was on fire but was not consumed. 3 So Moses thought: I must go over and look at this remarkable sight. Why isn't the bush burning up? 4 When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called out to him from the bush, "Moses, Moses!" "Here I am," he answered. 5 "Do not come closer," He said. "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." 6 Then He continued, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God.

**9. Compare the following three passages and write down what conclusions you draw from that comparison.**

- Exodus 3:2-6 (see above)
- Hebrews 12:28-29 HCSB Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us hold on to grace. By it, we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and awe; 29 for our God is a consuming fire.
- Revelation 1:14-15 HCSB His head and hair were white like wool--white as snow, His eyes like a fiery flame, (15) His feet like fine bronze fired in a furnace, and His voice like the sound of cascading waters.

**10. What do we learn of the Angel of the Lord's role and attitude from His encounter with Gideon?**

- Judges 6:11-24 HCSB The Angel of the LORD came, and He sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash, the Abiezrite. His son Gideon was threshing wheat in the wine vat in order to hide it from the Midianites. 12 Then the Angel of the LORD appeared to him and said: "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior." 13 Gideon said to Him, "Please Sir, if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened? And where are all His wonders that our fathers told us about? They said, 'Hasn't the LORD brought us out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and handed us over to Midian." 14 The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and deliver Israel from the power of Midian. Am I not sending you?" 15 He said to Him, "Please, Lord, how can I deliver Israel? Look, my family is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house." 16 "But I will be with you," the LORD said to him. "You will strike Midian down as if it were one man." 17 Then he said to Him, "If I have found favor in Your sight, give me a sign that You are speaking with me. 18 Please do not leave this place until I return to You. Let me bring my gift and set it before You." And He said, "I will stay until you return." 19 So Gideon went and prepared a young goat and unleavened bread from a half bushel of flour. He placed the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot. He brought them out and offered them to Him under the oak. 20 The Angel of God said to him, "Take the meat with the unleavened bread, put it on this stone, and pour the broth on it." And he did so. 21 The Angel of the LORD extended the tip of the staff that was in His hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread. Fire came up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Then the Angel of the LORD vanished from his sight. 22 When Gideon realized that He was the Angel of the LORD, he said, "Oh no, Lord

GOD! I have seen the Angel of the LORD face to face!" 23 But the LORD said to him, "Peace to you. Don't be afraid, for you will not die." 24 So Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and called it Yahweh Shalom. It is in Ophrah of the Abiezrites until today.

**In this passage He didn't appear AS fire but walking IN the fire with the three Hebrew "children".**

- Daniel 3:22-25 HCSB Since the king's command was so urgent and the furnace extremely hot, the raging flames killed those men who carried Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego up. 23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego fell, bound, into the furnace of blazing fire. 24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in alarm. He said to his advisers, "Didn't we throw three men, bound, into the fire?" "Yes, of course, Your Majesty," they replied to the king. 25 He exclaimed, "Look! I see four men, not tied, walking around in the fire unharmed; and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."

**11. Compare that with the following passages and briefly discuss how this perception of the Son of God differs with the popular, Culturally Christian view of Jesus.**

- Joshua 5:15 HCSB The commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, "Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.
- Matthew 26:52 HCSB Then Jesus told him, "Put your sword back in place because all who take up a sword will perish by a sword.
- Zechariah 1:8-13 HCSB I looked out in the night and saw a man riding on a red horse. He was standing among the myrtle trees in the valley. Behind him were red, sorrel, and white horses. 9 I asked, "What are these, my lord?" The angel who was talking to me replied, "I will show you what they are." 10 Then the man standing among the myrtle trees explained, "They are the ones the LORD has sent to patrol the earth." 11 They reported to the Angel of the LORD standing among the myrtle trees, "We have patrolled the earth, and right now the whole earth is calm and quiet." 12 Then the Angel of the LORD responded, "How long, LORD of Hosts, will You withhold mercy from Jerusalem and the cities of Judah that You have been angry with these 70 years?" 13 The LORD replied with kind and comforting words to the angel who was speaking with me.

Jesus meek and mild has a very different alter ego. The Son of God, as the Angel of the Lord also holds the title of Captain of the Lord's Armies. He apparently leads the armies for the Lord of Hosts who would be God the Father. As such He commands all of the angelic hosts.

In this passage we determine that the angels routinely report to the Son of God as to the conditions on earth (cp Job 1:6-7; 2:1-2). Since He is immanent, He is not capable of being omnipresent, which limits His omniscience. This limitation is self-imposed and is part of His unbelievable sacrifice to save mankind (Philippians 2:3-11). Many read the Philippian passage and believe that it refers to His incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth. I personally believe it took place long before at the very foundation of the universe (Proverbs 8:22-31 cp Hebrews 1:5; Psalm 2:7; Acts 13:33; Colossians 1:15)

This voluntary limitation on His omnipresence has caused Him to use angels as information gatherers. He also descended from heaven to the tower of Babel to see what was going on (Genesis 11:5) and to Sodom to see if things were as bad as He heard (Genesis 18:20-21).

Many of the so-called “contradictions” in the Bible are created by readers who may be nominally Trinitarian, but functional Unitarians. A misunderstanding of the nature of the Godhead can bring about tremendous theological difficulties.

**12. Based on the following two passages, what does Jesus look like now?**

- Ezekiel 1:26-28 HCSB The shape of a throne with the appearance of sapphire stone was above the expanse. There was a form with the appearance of a human on the throne high above. 27 From what seemed to be His waist up, I saw a gleam like amber, with what looked like fire enclosing it all around. From what seemed to be His waist down, I also saw what looked like fire. There was a brilliant light all around Him. 28 The appearance of the brilliant light all around was like that of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day. This was the appearance of the form of the LORD's glory. When I saw it, I fell facedown and heard a voice speaking.
- Revelation 1:12-18 HCSB I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me. When I turned I saw seven gold lampstands, 13 and among the lampstands was One like the Son of Man, dressed in a long robe, and with a gold sash wrapped around His chest. 14 His head and hair were white like wool--white as snow, His eyes like a fiery flame, 15 His feet like fine bronze fired in a furnace, and His voice like the sound of cascading waters. 16 In His right hand He had seven stars; from His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was shining like the sun at midday. 17 When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. He laid His right hand on me, and said, "Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last, 18 and the Living One. I was dead, but look--I am alive forever and ever, and I hold the keys of death and Hades.

Ezekiel and John's awe-inspiring description of the Son of God match. This is the God we serve. This is the Lord we follow. This is the King we expect to return soon. Maranatha! Even so come quickly Lord Jesus.