

MSB 218

MORE Seed and Bread

BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

Otis Q, Sellers, Founder - David R. Hettema, Director

THE THEOPHANIES OF GOD

by Howard W. White

The meaning of the word theophany comes from the Latin theophania and the Greek theos, god, and phainein, to show. When used of the theophanies of Yahweh, it means God manifest. A theophany of our God is a manifestation of Yahweh Elohim. These appearances of God in the OT have been a puzzle to many, for Moses had said to God, "I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory." And God had replied, "I will make all My goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the Name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy... Thou canst not see My face: for there shall no man see Me and live" (Ex. 33:18-20, AV throughout).

Moses was able to experience God's goodness passing before him in an act of grace, but he could not have endured His glory; he would have died. So God hid him in a cleft of the rock and covered him with His hand while He passed by. Then He took away His hand to show Moses His back parts: "but My face shall not be seen" (v. 23). God's glory would have shown forth from His face.

First God shows His grace and mercy to men, whereas, His glory is reserved for the future when men will be conditioned to see it. The answer to our puzzlement seems to be that when God appeared to men in the OT, it was in a veiled form where the glory of the Absolute Deity did not shine forth. This in itself was a wonderful act of grace.

God has progressively revealed Himself to men in the Bible record. Little could be known of God Absolute until He began to "speak unto the fathers by the prophets". At first men did not know Him by His Name Yahweh until He revealed it to Moses. Yet He manifested Himself at different times to certain people.

The Bible says that Adam heard the voice of God walking in the Garden of Eden, but we are not told to what extent, if at all he saw God's glory. It is understandable that he would not be able to see it after he sinned. Enoch walked with God until God took him. We are not told whether he beheld the glory of God. It must have been well known that sinful man could not see or look upon God without perishing.

We learn of Hagar's experience: "And she called the name of the LORD (Yahweh) that spake unto her, 'Thou GOD (EL) seest me:' for she said, 'Have I also here looked after Him that seeth me?'" (Gen. 16: 13). Translate: "Do I see, here, even after the Vision?" i.e., "Do I live after seeing God?" The Fig. Metonymy (of Adjunct) implying living as well as looking. She saw enough of God to know Who He was, but God did not disclose to her His glory. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

The LORD (Yahweh) appeared to Abram, and said unto him, "I am the Almighty GOD (El Shaddai); walk before Me, and be thou perfect" (Gen. 17:1). On different occasions God manifested Himself to Abraham as in Gen. 18:1,22,33 probably in some human form. "And the LORD appeared (was manifested) unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground" (18:1, 2). One of the three 'men' was Yahweh; the other two were angels. "And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the LORD" (v. 22). "And the LORD went His way, as soon as He had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place" (v. 33). As a man, God's glory was not in evidence.

We also read of the experiences Jacob had going to and from Padan-aram. At Bethel he had the dream of angels ascending and descending on a ladder to heaven with the LORD standing above it (Gen. 28: 10-19). Returning from Padan-aram he wrestled with a 'Man,' also called God (Gen. 32:25-29) an Angel, and Yahweh Elohim (Hos. 12:4, 5).

"And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel (Heb. God's face): 'for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved'" (Gen. 32:30). Jacob actually came into physical contact with this Being while they wrestled. People had encounters with angels without harm and recognized them as supernatural beings. With Jacob Yahweh took upon Himself the form of an angel who was man-like in appearance in order to preserve Jacob's life. There is no indication that God intended to show Jacob all His glory.

In Ex. 3:4,6 God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush; Moses was afraid, trembled and hid his face. Obviously all God's glory did not shine forth from the bush. In Ex.33:11 "The LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend." The reason for Moses' safety and that he was able to turn again into the camp lies in the phrase 'as a man speaketh unto his friend.' God had somehow veiled His glory in a man-like manifestation.

In Ex. 6:2, 3 God declared to Moses, "I am the LORD; And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of GOD ALMIGHTY, but by My name YAHWEH was I not known to them." In Ex. 34:5-7 "And the LORD descended in a cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, 'The LORD, The LORD GOD (Yahweh El), merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and That will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.'" Here Yahweh passed before Moses but, as it were, hidden in a cloud. That He did so was an act of grace. Only faith permits us to understand how God could manifest Himself to men in this manner. Despite their claims to have seen Him face to face, we are still told in Jn. 1: 18, "No man (i.e., no human eye) hath seen God at any time; the only Son (God), Who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him."

The most remarkable of all theophanies, if we dare to call it that, was when the Word Who is God became flesh. This was not simply .a temporary manifestation; God became flesh. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only [One] of the Father) full of grace and truth" (Jn. 1: 14). John even says, "We beheld His

glory." Meaning that some of His glory as the Absolute Deity was seen in the One and Only Son of God; God manifested in the flesh, 1 Tim. 3: 16. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us)" (1 Jn. 1:1, 2). "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God" (1 Jn. 4:2). It was a marvelous act of grace for God to send His Son for "No man hath seen God at any time" (v. 12). When God manifested Himself in the flesh, became flesh and dwelt among us, it became possible to hear and see Him, look upon and handle Him and come to the fullest understanding possible of the Deity.

This also gives us an answer to what the theophanies of God were like, that they were only partial manifestations of God, and yet they were unmistakable revelations of God Himself. He "hath in these last days spoken unto us in His Son" (Heb. 1:2). Praise God for His wonderful revelation of Himself! Some day we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life" (1 Jn. 5:20).

END

ISSUE NO. 218 Published Jan. 20, 1997