Old Testament Appearances of Christ

Theophany is a combination of 2 Greek words, “theos” which means “God” and “epiphaneia” which means “a shining forth,” or “appearance” and was used by the ancients to refer to an appearance of a god to men (Vine’s, “appear” in loc.). In theology, the word “theophany” refers to an Old Testament appearance of God in visible form.

Christophany is by definition an Old Testament appearance of Christ, the second person of the Trinity. Most theophanies (Old Testament appearances of God) are Christophanies (Old Testament appearances of Christ). We will examine some of these Christophanies and see how to discern which ones are actually appearances of Christ or not.

Dr. John Walvoord in his great book, Jesus Christ Our Lord, makes the following statement about these Old Testament appearances. “It is safe to assume that every visible manifestation of God in bodily form in the Old Testament is to be identified with the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Walvoord, 54)

In John 8, Jesus made the statement that Abraham rejoiced to see His day. Earlier we asked the question, “Did Abraham meet the pre-incarnate Jesus?” (Pre-incarnate = before the incarnation, or before Jesus’ birth by Mary in Bethlehem.) Jesus’ enemies understood the implications of His statement and questioned him about it. They were so enraged by Jesus’ claim to be older than Abraham that they picked up stones to try and stone Him to death.

In this chapter we will investigate that question. (We could also ask, “Did Moses ever meet the pre-incarnate Christ?”)

Let’s look at a list of Scriptures that have been compiled by Bible teachers over the years that seem to be Christophanies. We will also compare a few passages where people thought they were seeing God, but were only seeing an angel. Will will look at a list of interpretive “signposts” that will help us decide if the “person” referred to in the Bible passage is actually Christ, or merely an angel. And we will look at a few very specific passages with significant characters who met Christ in the Old Testament.

A List of Old Testament Christophanies

In the Old Testament we run across a mysterious “being” in numerous places who is most often called, “The Angel of Jehovah.” He is a mysterious “being” because He is like no other angel we meet in the Old Testament.
He is identified with God:

- Genesis 16:7-13
- Genesis 22:15-18
- Genesis 31:11-13
- Exodus 3:1 ff
- Acts 7:30-35
- Exodus 13:21
- Judges 6:11-23
- Judges 13:9-20

He is also revealed to be a distinct Person.

- Genesis 24:7, 40
- Numbers 20:16
- Zechariah 1:12-13

Some interesting thoughts about Theophanies and Christophanies.

“The Angel of Jehovah” no longer appears after the Incarnation.

Both “the Angel of the Lord” and Jesus are sent by God the Father to reveal truth and lead and protect Israel.

No one has seen God the Father (John 1:18).

Old Testament references to the Trinity.

Genesis 1:26 “Let us make man in our image.”

Genesis 2:24 “They shall be one flesh.”

Deuteronomy 6:4 “One” = “Unity”

Genesis 3 God walking in the Garden. Who was that?

Begin looking for Jesus in your Old Testament.

Some Interpretive “Signposts”

The writers of Scripture give us some clues or signposts that can guide us as we seek the meaning of a passage. Here are some interpretive questions to ask as you consider these passages to determine if they are referring to Jesus Christ or
someone else.

Some Interpretive Questions:
- Is the person identified as the second Person of the Trinity?
- Is the person identified as God?
- Is the person given any characteristics that are reserved for deity?
- How do others in the story respond to him?
- Does the person receive worship?

Let’s examine some other definite instances where Christ appeared and where He definitely did not appear.

Revelation 1:12-18 (Definitely Jesus Christ—Post Resurrection & Ascension, not a Christophany, but definitely Jesus.)

12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; 13 and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. 14 His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. 15 His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. 17 When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

This is definitely a New Testament appearance of Jesus to the Apostle John on the Isle of Patmos. What signposts let us know this? (Ask the questions that were given above.)

Read and examine the passages below.

Revelation 10:1-11 (Not Jesus Christ, but a Very Powerful Angel)

Daniel 10:2-14 (Not Jesus Christ, an Angel from God)

Genesis 18:1 (Christophany)

1 Now the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day. 2 When he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth, 3 and said, "My Lord, if now I have found favor in Your sight, please do not pass Your servant by. 4 "Please let a little water be brought and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree; 5 and I will bring a
piece of bread, that you may refresh yourselves; after that you may go on, since you have visited your servant." And they said, "So do, as you have said." 6 So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Quickly, prepare three measures of fine flour, knead it and make bread cakes." 7 Abraham also ran to the herd, and took a tender and choice calf and gave it to the servant, and he hurried to prepare it. 8 He took curds and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and placed it before them; and he was standing by them under the tree as they ate.

9 Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "There, in the tent." 10 He said, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him. 11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. 12 Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" 13 And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, `Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?" 14 "Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son." 15 Sarah denied it however, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh."

16 Then the men rose up from there, and looked down toward Sodom; and Abraham was walking with them to send them off. 17 The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do,

18:1 "Lord" = “Yahweh” Three Primary Names used of God in the Old Testament, “Yahweh,” “Elohim,” and “Adonai”

The Lord came personally to Abraham and Sarah and made his promise in the intimacy of a meal. What a wonderful picture of the close relationship the Lord wants to have with each of us. Cf. Revelation 3:20

19:1 1 Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. (The Other Two Guys from chapter 18)

Genesis 22:1-19 (Christophany or not? Apply the signposts)

New Testament Cross Reference (Another Signpost: What does the NT say?)
Hebrews 6:13-19
13 For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, "I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU." 14 And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. 16 For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. 17 In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the
unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, \(^{18}\) so that by two
unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken
refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.
\(^{19}\) This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast
and one which enters within the veil,

Genesis 22 is a definite test for Abraham. It came after he had received the
promised son he had so long awaited.
Since it was a test, God never intended to let Abraham actually sacrifice his son.
God however did sacrifice His Son. Cf. Romans 8:32.

Romans 8:32 \(^{32}\) He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us
all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

After this Divine Intervention, The Angel of the Lord, restates the Abrahamic
Covenant or Promise, but this time, both Abraham and Isaac hear it.

Question: Do you think Abraham rejoiced to see "His" day? Cf. John 8:58

**Did Jacob ever meet the pre-incarnate Christ?**

Consider a couple of new questions:
- Does the scriptural writer (Moses, for example) leave you with the
  understanding that the person is God?
- Using the Principle that "Scripture interprets Scripture," are there other
  passages in the Old Testament or the New Testament that shed light on
  the identity of this person as Christ?

Genesis 31:11-13 Jacob's Dream
11 "Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, `Jacob,' and I said, `Here I
am.'\(^{12}\) He said, `Lift up now your eyes and see that all the male goats which are
mating are striped, speckled, and mottled; for I have seen all that Laban has
been doing to you.\(^{13}\) `I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where
you made a vow to Me; now arise, leave this land, and return to the land of your
birth.'"

Genesis 32:24-32 Jacob's Wrestling Match with a Man (not called "Angel of the
Lord")

24 Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.\(^{25}\)
When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his
thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him.\(^{26}\)
Then he said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking." But he said, "I will not let you
go unless you bless me."\(^{27}\) So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he
said, "Jacob."\(^{28}\) He said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you
have striven with God and with men and have prevailed." 29 Then Jacob asked him and said, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And he blessed him there. 30 So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved." 31 Now the sun rose upon him just as he crossed over Penuel, and he was limping on his thigh. 32 Therefore, to this day the sons of Israel do not eat the sinew of the hip which is on the socket of the thigh, because he touched the socket of Jacob's thigh in the sinew of the hip.

Apply the signposts.

Questions:
- In the context of the story, do you think Jacob wanted to initiate a fight?
- Who initiates this wrestling match: Jacob or the "man?"
- Is this an ordinary man? Why or Why not?
- Why would God have wanted to "fight" Jacob?
- Have you ever been in a fight?
- Have you ever fought with God?
- In what way is this an example of prayer?
- Who did Jacob believe this person was? "Peniel"
- Does Jacob's statement in verse 30 conflict with John 1:18?

Compare What the Prophet Hosea wrote about this incident.
Hosea 12:2-5
2 The LORD also has a dispute with Judah, And will punish Jacob according to his ways; He will repay him according to his deeds. 3 In the womb he took his brother by the heel, And in his maturity he contended with God. 4 Yes, he wrestled with the angel and prevailed; He wept and sought His favor. He found Him at Bethel And there He spoke with us, 5 Even the LORD, the God of hosts, The LORD is His name.

Did Moses ever meet the pre-incarnate Christ?


1 Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. 3 So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." 4 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." 5 Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 He said also, "I am the God of your
father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Ask the interpretive questions:
- Does Exodus (Written by Moses) seem to leave any doubt about the identity of this “Angel”?
- What is Moses’ response to the Angel’s appearance?
- Do you think this is an encounter that Moses initiated?
- Was this an encounter that Moses expected or sought?
- Is there any consistent thread about the appearance or message of this “Angel” in the book of Genesis and Exodus?

(Answer: The Covenant or Promise that is made with Abraham. At every point there is a connection to keeping that covenant which will eventually result in the Messiah’s coming.)

Acts 7:30-35  Stephen’s last sermon before he was martyred.
(PS  Why was Stephen martyred? Did it have anything to do with his “Christology?”)

30 “After forty years had passed, AN ANGEL APPEARED TO HIM IN THE WILDERNESS OF MOUNT Sinai, IN THE FLAME OF A BURNING THORN BUSH. 31 "When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he approached to look more closely, there came the voice of the Lord: 32 'I AM THE GOD OF YOUR FATHERS, THE GOD OF ABRAHAM AND ISAAC AND JACOB.' Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look. 33 "BUT THE LORD SAID TO HIM, 'TAKE OFF THE SANDALS FROM YOUR FEET, FOR THE PLACE ON WHICH YOU ARE STANDING IS HOLY GROUND. 34 'I HAVE CERTAINLY SEEN THE OPPRESSION OF MY PEOPLE IN EGYPT AND HAVE HEARD THEIR GROANS, AND I HAVE COME DOWN TO RESCUE THEM; COME NOW, AND I WILL SEND YOU TO EGYPT.' 35 "This Moses whom they disowned, saying, 'WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND A JUDGE?' is the one whom God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush.

Exodus 13:21 and Exodus 14:19 identifies the “Angel of God” with the Pillar of fire.