

THEOPHANIES
Study Notes Compiled by Pastor Jonathan Homesley
11/2/2023

I. Definition

- a. An appearance or manifestation of God; a compound word derived from the Greek noun for God and the Greek verb “to appear.” (Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible)
- b. A theological term referring to either a visible or auditory manifestation of God. (Evangelical Dictionary of Theology)

II. Types of Theophanies

- a. Human Form (Ex. 24:9-11)
- b. Vision (Num. 24:3-4; Is. 6:1-13; Ezek. 1; Dan. 7:9)
- c. “Angel of the Lord” (Gen. 16:7-13)
- d. In Nature/Non-Human Form (Ex. 3:2; Ex. 13,21; Ex. 16:10; Ezek. 10:4)

III. Key Texts

- a. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. (Gen. 3:8)
- b. Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. (Gen. 12:7)
- c. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. (Ex. 3:2)
- d. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. (Ex. 19:18)
- e. ¹² And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. (1 Kings 19:12)
- f. In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. (Is. 6:1-13)
- g. In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” (Mk. 1:9-11)

IV. Characteristics of Theophany

- a. God takes the initiative to reveal himself.
- b. Theophanies are never full or permanent revelations of God.
- c. Theophanies are typically mysterious appearances.
- d. Theophanies are concentrated in the Old Testament, occurring especially during the time of the Patriarchs and Judges.
- e. Those who experience theophany typically realize (during the experience or after) that they have met God.
- f. Christ's incarnation makes theophanies less necessary.

V. Theophanies & the Divine Nature

- a. The Scriptures never fully define God. Rather, the Scriptures speak most often of his attributes (power, knowledge, invisibility) and his acts (creation, redemption, judgment).
- b. "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:24)
- c. Though a theophany is a visible or auditory appearance of God, we must not think of God as material.

VI. Theophanies vs. Anthropomorphic Language

- a. Throughout Scripture we find physical descriptions of God that are not theophanies because they are not appearances. Rather, they are anthropomorphic metaphors for God's attributes.
- b. The "hand" or "arm" of the Lord refers to the attribute of his power.
 - i. fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (Is. 41:10)
- c. The "eyes" of the Lord refer to his knowledge.
 - i. The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good. (Prov. 15:3)

VII. Theophany & the Incarnation

- a. Unlike theophanies which are temporary and partial revelations of God, the incarnation of the Son is a permanent and full expression of God.
- b. Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. (Hebrews 1:1-3)
- c. “Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” (John 20:27)
- d. Chalcedonian Definition (A.D. 451)
 - i. Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us.
- e. Second London Baptist Confession (Chapter 8, Paragraph 2)
 - i. The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with Him who made the world, who upholds and governs all things He has made, did, when the fullness of time was complete, take upon Him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities of it,⁹ yet without sin;¹⁰ being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her: and the power of the Most High

overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures;¹¹ so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.¹²

VIII. The Identity of Melchizedek

a. Texts

i. **Genesis 14:7-24**

¹⁷ After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). ¹⁸ And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) ¹⁹ And he blessed him and said,

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,

Possessor of heaven and earth;

²⁰ and blessed be God Most High,

who has delivered your enemies into your hand!”

And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. ²¹ And the king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself.” ²² But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have lifted my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, ²³ that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich.’ ²⁴ I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me. Let Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share.””

ii. **Psalm 110:4**

⁴ The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”

iii. **Hebrews 5:5-10**

⁵ So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him,

“You are my Son,
today I have begotten you”;

⁶ as he says also in another place,

“You are a priest forever,
after the order of Melchizedek.”

⁷ In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. ⁸ Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. ⁹ And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, ¹⁰ being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

iv. Hebrews 6:19-7:20

¹⁹ We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, ²⁰ where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, ² and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. ³ He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.

⁴ See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! ⁵ And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. ⁶ But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. ⁷ It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. ⁸ In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. ⁹ One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, ¹⁰ for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

¹¹ Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? ¹² For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. ¹³ For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. ¹⁴ For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

¹⁵ This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek,¹⁶ who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. ¹⁷ For it is witnessed of him,

“You are a priest forever,
after the order of Melchizedek.”

¹⁸ For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness ¹⁹ (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

²⁰ And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, ²¹ but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him:

“The Lord has sworn
and will not change his mind,
‘You are a priest forever.’”

²² This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

²³ The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, ²⁴ but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.

²⁵ Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

b. Views on the Identity of Melchizedek

- i. An Angel, Possibly Michael?
 1. Is this why he “has no father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life and like the Son of God.”?
- ii. The Son of God, the Second Person of the Godhead?
 1. Angels had a “beginning of days,” therefore, perhaps this is Christ himself? (Christophany)
- iii. A Historic Person Serves as a Type of Christ
 1. Melchizedek is not the eternal Son of God appearing before his incarnation. Instead, Melchizedek was a real human who foreshadowed Christ.

c. Evidence for Melchizedek as a Historic Person Who Serves as a Type of Christ

- i. Whereas theophanies are typically mysterious, we know much about Melchizedek (his name, his position, his city etc.)
- ii. In Genesis, Melchizedek represents the Most High God.
- iii. In Hebrews Christ is distinguished from Melchizedek, though he is of his priestly order. (7:15)
- iv. That Melchizedek is “without father and mother” is simply a comparison that is being made with Christ. Melchizedek shows up in the Genesis narrative, without a genealogy. In Genesis, we do not see a “beginning of days,” or “end of life.” Levitical Priests were required to have a priestly genealogy, but like Melchizedek, Christ is appointed a priest solely on the call of God.
- v. Commentator William Lane interprets “without father or mother or genealogy,” as, “His father, mother, and line of descent are unknown.”
- vi. “resembling the Son of God,” seems to indicate that Melchizedek is a type of which Christ is the anti-type.

d. Comparison Between Melchizedek & Christ

Melchizedek is both a king and priest.	Christ is both king and priest.
Melchizedek refreshes Abraham	Christ refreshes all who come to him
Abraham paid a tithe to Melchizedek recognizing him as a priest of God	Those who come to Christ acknowledge that everything belongs to him.
Melchizedek is a king of righteousness and peace.	Christ is the sun of righteousness (Mal. 4:2) and prince of peace. (Is. 9:6)
Melchizedek appears without reference to father or mother.	The Son of God truly has no beginning or end of days.