

Theophany Defined

A theophany is a manifestation of God in the Bible that is tangible to the human senses. In its most restrictive sense, it is a visible appearance of God in the Old Testament period, often, but not always, in human form. Some of the theophanies are found in these passages:

1. [Genesis 12:7-9](#) – The Lord appeared to Abraham on his arrival in the land God had promised to him and his descendants.
2. [Genesis 18:1-33](#) – One day, Abraham had some visitors: Two angels and God Himself. He invited them to come to his home, and he and Sarah entertained them.
3. [Genesis 32: 22-30](#) – Jacob wrestled with what appeared to be a man, but was actually God (vv. 28 – 30).
4. [Exodus 3:2 – 4:17](#) – God appeared to Moses in the form of a burning bush, telling him exactly what He wanted him to do.
5. [Exodus 24: 9-11](#) – God appeared to Moses and Aaron and his sons and the seventy elders.
6. [Deuteronomy 31:14-15](#) – God appeared to Moses and Joshua in the transfer of leadership to Joshua.
7. [Job 38-42](#) – God answered Job out of the tempest and spoke at great length in answer to Job’s questions.

Frequently, the term “*glory of the Lord*” reflects a theophany, as in [Exodus 24: 16-18](#); the “*pillar of cloud*” has a similar function in [Exodus 33:9](#). A frequent introduction for theophanies may be seen in the words “*the Lord came down,*” as in [Genesis 11:5](#); [Exodus 34:5](#); [Numbers 11:25](#); and [12:5](#).

Some Bible commentators believe that whenever someone received a visit from “*the angel of the Lord*”, this was in fact the pre-incarnate Christ. These appearances can be seen in [Genesis 16:7-14](#); [Genesis 22:11-18](#); [Judges 5:23](#); [2 Kings 19:35](#); and other passages. Other commentators believe these were in fact *angelophanies*, or appearances of angels. While there are no indisputable Christophanies in the Old Testament, every theophany wherein God takes on human form foreshadows the incarnation, where God took the form of a man to live among us as Emmanuel, “*God with us*” ([Matthew 1:23](#)).