

This week's Audio, Video, and Teaching Notes are posted here.

Theophany (Know YHVH; The Secret Things Belong to God; Theophany – Appearances of God; No One has Ever Seen God; Theophanies Between Man and God; In the Garden of Eden; The Oaks of Mamre; Sodom; Bethel; Peniel; The Mountain of God; The Tent of Meeting; The Cleft of the Rock; In the Throne Room; YHVH Comes Down in the Cloud; Moses Speaks Face to Face; Are These Literal Theophanies or Visions and Dreams)

March 30, 2019 – Ross Nichols
Theophany

Audio/Video Link: <https://unitedisrael.org/theophany/>

TEACHING NOTES

-The topic of "Theophany" is what we will be teaching on today and was inspired by a comment that was noted on our Facebook site. Today's class is meant to address some of the conversation noted there and has broadly to do with knowing God, the nature of our creator. I have recently taught on knowing God and this is meant to be a little different. Knowing YHVH is essential. It's possible to know YHVH and for us to get to know YHVH.

-Isa 45:4-6 For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me. I am YHVH, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am YHVH, and there is no other.

-Isa 11:6-9 The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of YHVH as the waters cover the sea.

-Jer 31:31-34 "Behold, the days are coming, declares YHVH, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares YHVH. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares YHVH: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know YHVH,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares YHVH. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

-Some people propose that we cannot know God. He is unknowable and unsearchable and he is the one you just can't know. His ways are higher and his thought are higher than our thoughts. That which he has revealed is something we should work towards. There is quite a bit in scripture about knowing God and there are many ideas.

-Exo 34:5-7 YHVH descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of YHVH. YHVH passed before him and proclaimed, "YHVH, YHVH, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

-What is the nature and characteristics of our God? Here we find YHVH himself explaining himself and who he is. Scripture has much to say about YHVH our creator and his ways. It tells us much about his character and what he delights in, what he loves and cherishes, and what he hates. Scripture is all about making known the one God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There are some things that we can know and there are some things that we can't.

-Deu 29:29 "The secret things belong to YHVH our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

-There are some things that we will never know and are higher than we are capable of comprehending. Those things that are revealed, namely those that are written, we can read and have some level of comprehension can make it through most of the biblical text. What we are going to talk about today might be a little controversial, but it will be fun and informative.

-The word Theophany comes to us from the Greek and basically means, appearance of God. Today we will talk about appearances of God in the text. How well can we know God? Could we see God? Has anyone ever seen God? From theology, Jewish and Christian text state that no one can see God. Some of the stories in the biblical text may be in conflict with the statement that no one can see God.

-Maimonides, the great Jewish Thinker, made it very clear in his Guide of the Perplexed that in these encounters (theophanies) they didn't really see God like in a literal sense. He's saying in these text you are reading it one way but really it's not what you're reading. I'm not as concerned about what Maimonides says about scripture as I am with what scripture says. Some might be surprised that the text of Christianity can be read to say that God can be seen. However, given the nature of Jesus as he has come to be defined in Christianity, this might surprise you.

-Joh 1:18 No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

-Joh 5:37 And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen,

-Joh 6:46 not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father.

-1Tim 6:16 who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

-1Joh 4:12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

-Exo 33:20 But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live."

-Psa 17:15 As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness.

-Is this a contradiction about whether God can be seen? If so, what do we behold when we see God? Despite some beliefs, both Jewish and Christian, the text of the Hebrew

Bible employs Gods physical attributes. Then we have to ask, is that literal or were they dreams and visions? What did they actually see? The language is some of these stories could imply that God can be seen if allowed, and if one could survive such an encounter.

-Gen 3:8-10 And they heard the sound of YHVH Elohim walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of YHVH Elohim among the trees of the garden. But YHVH Elohim called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself."

-Gen 18:1-3 And YHVH appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth and said, "O Adonai, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant."

-Gen 19:1-2 The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth and said, "My lords, please turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night and wash your feet. Then you may rise up early and go on your way." They said, "No; we will spend the night in the town square."

-In Genesis 18, clearly conversation is taking place with Abraham and all three are seen and one of the three according to the text is YHVH. This is problematic for people who believe that no one can see God. Abraham is still standing while speaking with YHVH. All three of them eat and drink and there's a foot washing that goes on in this story and it sounds very literal. This is written in such a way that the reader begins to wonder if this is an actual encounter between a man and God.

-Gen 28:10-22 Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, YHVH stood above it and said, "I am YHVH, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely YHVH is in this place, and I did not know it." And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then YHVH shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you."

-In verse 12 and in verse 16 it says very clearly that this is a dream but there is an envisioning of YHVH that takes place in the text.

-Gen 32:23-30 He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered."

-In this story Jacob is alone, it's at night, and he wrestles with what the text calls a man all the night to the break of day and at the conclusion he asks for a blessing. His name is changed to Israel for he contended with El. He fought with God and with man and he names the place Peniel for he has seen God face to face. Does he think he is wrestling with a man or with God?

-Hos 12:2-5 YHVH has an indictment against Judah and will punish Jacob according to his ways; he will repay him according to his deeds. In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his manhood he strove with God. He strove with the angel and prevailed; he wept and sought his favor. He met God at Bethel, and there God spoke with us— YHVH, the God of hosts, YHVH is his memorial name:

-In context, Hosea is commenting on the fight that's mentioned in Genesis 32. He said he fought with God, with an angel and the name is YHVH of hosts.

-Exo 3:1-7 Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of YHVH 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. And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." When YHVH saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then YHVH said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings,

-Moses is keeping the sheep, he's in the remote parts of the desert and he comes to the mountain of God and he sees this great sight. It says the angel of God appeared to him and then God called to him out of the midst of the bush. Who is it that Moses encounters in the bush? Is it the angel, is it YHVH who sees that Moses turns, or is it Elohim who calls to him from the bush?

-Exo 24:9-11 Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.

-They saw God and they beheld and ate and drank. The writer wants to make the point that God didn't do anything to them for seeing him. There is this concern in the biblical text that if you behold God you will die. Here they saw God but they didn't die. In the story it describes what under God's feet, this paved sapphire stone.

-Exo 33:7-11 Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought YHVH would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise up, and each would stand at his tent door, and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and YHVH would speak with Moses. And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door. Thus YHVH used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

-This sounds pretty literal, Moses takes a tent, he sets it up the tent of meeting, an appointment tent, then this cloudy pillar you can see it. People from all over the camp, when they would see the cloudy pillar descend down to Moses tent of meeting where he speaks to him face to face as a man speaks to his friend.

-Exo 33:17-23 And YHVH said to Moses, "This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name." Moses said, "Please show me your glory." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'YHVH.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." And YHVH said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."

-Previously in this chapter it said, Moses spoke face to face with YHVH, but here it says you can't see my face. Some of this is the language and we will dig deeper. He says I'm going to descend, I'm going to come and I'm going to proclaim my name as we read in the opening verses of this class.

-Exo 34:4-7 So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the first. And he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as YHVH had commanded him, and took in his hand two tablets of stone. YHVH descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of YHVH. YHVH passed before him and proclaimed, "YHVH, YHVH, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

-YHVH comes down in the cloud, the same cloud which we just read about in Chapter 33 which would come down to the entrance of the tent and he would communicate with Moses. Who's in the cloud?

-Num 12:4-8 And suddenly YHVH said to Moses and to Aaron and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tent of meeting." And the three of them came out. And YHVH came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance of the tent and called Aaron and Miriam, and they both came forward. And he said, "Hear my words: If there is a prophet

among you, I YHVH make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of YHVH. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"

-Deu 34:10-12 And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom YHVH knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and the wonders that YHVH sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.

-The Torah has quite a bit of this interesting material, we have studies that we have to do on the malek (angels/messengers). What do we know about the malek? What do we know about the cloud and pillar? Is it the malek in the cloud and pillar? Who is in the bush? Is it YHVH, is it the malek of YHVH, is it Elohim? Why is the writer giving us all of this language while on the one hand it says no one can see me and live and on the other hand it says Moses spoke face to face and beheld the form of God? It's a great mystery.

-Isa 6:1-12 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw Adonai sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is YHVH of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, YHVH of hosts!" Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for." And I heard the voice of Adonai saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me." And he said, "Go, and say to this people: "'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." Then I said, "How long, O Adonai?" And he said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, and Adonai removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.

-1Kin 22:19-20 And Micaiah said, "Therefore hear the word of YHVH: I saw YHVH sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; and YHVH said, 'Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said one thing, and another said another.

-Jer 1:4-10 Now the word of YHVH came to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." Then I said, "Ah, Adonai YHVH! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." But YHVH said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares YHVH." Then YHVH put out his hand and touched my mouth. And YHVH said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over

kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

-The language sounds pretty literal. Is it a vision? Is it a dream? The text communicates as if this took place but like the vision in Isaiah 6, there is a touching of the mouth.

-Eze 1:25-28 And there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads. When they stood still, they let down their wings. And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance. And upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around. And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him. Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of YHVH. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

-Eze 10:1-10 Then I looked, and behold, on the expanse that was over the heads of the cherubim there appeared above them something like a sapphire, in appearance like a throne. And he said to the man clothed in linen, "Go in among the whirling wheels underneath the cherubim. Fill your hands with burning coals from between the cherubim, and scatter them over the city." And he went in before my eyes. Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the house, when the man went in, and a cloud filled the inner court. And the glory of YHVH went up from the cherub to the threshold of the house, and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was filled with the brightness of the glory of YHVH. And the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard as far as the outer court, like the voice of Elohim Almighty when he speaks. And when he commanded the man clothed in linen, "Take fire from between the whirling wheels, from between the cherubim," he went in and stood beside a wheel. And a cherub stretched out his hand from between the cherubim to the fire that was between the cherubim, and took some of it and put it into the hands of the man clothed in linen, who took it and went out. The cherubim appeared to have the form of a human hand under their wings. And I looked, and behold, there were four wheels beside the cherubim, one beside each cherub, and the appearance of the wheels was like sparkling beryl. And as for their appearance, the four had the same likeness, as if a wheel were within a wheel.

-Eze 10:18-22 Then the glory of YHVH went out from the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted up their wings and mounted up from the earth before my eyes as they went out, with the wheels beside them. And they stood at the entrance of the east gate of the house of YHVH, and the glory of the Elohim of Israel was over them. These were the living creatures that I saw underneath the Elohim of Israel by the Chebar canal; and I knew that they were cherubim. Each had four faces, and each four wings, and underneath their wings the likeness of human hands. And as for the likeness of their faces, they were the same faces whose appearance I had seen by the Chebar canal. Each one of them went straight forward.

-Dan 7:9-10 "As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.

-Dan 7:13-14 "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

-This is a vision which requires interpretation which is given in the text. Does the text say it's a vision? We need to explore these things more deeply. All through the prophets they have conversations but I am looking for visuals that they report.

-Amo 9:1 I saw Adonai standing beside the altar, and he said: "Strike the capitals until the thresholds shake, and shatter them on the heads of all the people; and those who are left of them I will kill with the sword; not one of them shall flee away; not one of them shall escape.

-We have only scratched the surface today. I wanted to lay the groundwork and get into a deeper exploration of these theophanies in the next few weeks. We will explore who is the malek of YHVH? What is the cloud and pillar? On the one hand it says, no one can see me and live, but on the other hand we have interesting encounters and they are not just with visionaries, and prophets, and seers, and kings. Common people encountered what they felt was God. The patriarchs, common people both men and women and we are going to take a deeper look at all these because it's informative and interesting. Encounters with the divine is expressed in a number of ways. Next week we will talk about the cloud and what they saw according to the text of the Hebrew Bible. Join us next week for the cloud and the pillar.

Shabbat Shalom, Shavua Tov; See you next week!

THIS WEEK IN TORAH

MARCH 30, 2019

This week's Torah Portion Shemini: "Eighth" (Leviticus 9:1 – 11:47) Priestly service begins, YHVH accepts Aaron's offering, The death of Nadab and Abihu, Commandments to Aaron against intoxicants, Disposition of the day's offering, The dispute between Moses and Aaron, Laws of Kashrus, Clean and unclean animals, fish, birds, and insects.

"This Week in Torah" FB Page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/571648826269105/>

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UPCOMING EVENTS

-UIWU 76th Annual Meeting and Conference, April 26-28, 2019, Charlotte, NC:

<https://uiwu.unitedisrael.org/conference-2019/>

-UNCC Mt. Zion Archaeological Project, Dig Mt. Zion (2019):

<https://digmountzion.uncc.edu/>, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/digmountzion/>

-Blossoming Rose Israel Tours

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