

Old Testament Manifestations

by John Fletcher

The sermon emphasizes the continuous manifestations of God throughout the Old Testament as a testament to His relationship with humanity.

Scripture: Genesis 1:26

Topics: "Divine Manifestation", "Faith and Revelation"

Description

John Fletcher discusses the continuous manifestations of God to His people throughout the Old Testament, emphasizing that these divine encounters were not limited to a select few but were available to many, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and others. He illustrates how these revelations served to strengthen faith, provide guidance, and establish a personal relationship with God, culminating in the understanding that such manifestations were essential for true communion with the divine. Fletcher argues that the experiences of the Old Testament saints demonstrate that God has always been present and active in the lives of His people, and he challenges the notion that such experiences ceased with the advent of Scripture.

Transcript

In an earlier chapter I wrote that, in my opinion, the Lord has regularly manifested Himself to His people, in every age. You may have found this assertion somewhat difficult to accept. Not wishing to have you misunderstand me, or think my views extreme, I would now like to prove that scripture and history are on my side.

I shall then, in this chapter, appeal to the manifestations recorded in the Old Testament. You cannot expect that all of the revelations of any particular child of God (much less those of everyone) to be mentioned in so short a document as that of the Bible. Nevertheless, enough is said on this point to convince me that in every age God has favoured the sons of men with special displays of His presence.

Let us go back as far as Adam himself. As you would expect, the Lord conversed with him before the Fall, when He presented Adam with a partner and when He brought every beast of the field before him, to see what Adam would call them. However, the Lord also visited him after the Fall, not only to pronounce His sentence, but also to promise that He would become the woman's seed, and bruise the serpent's head. And was not this manifestation granted to Abel, when the Lord had respect to his sacrifice-the very cause of Cain's envy, wrath, and murder! Did not Enoch's walk with God imply a constant union and communion with Emmanuel? And how could this union have taken place, if the Lord had not first revealed Himself to

the Patriarch? Must not two persons meet and agree, before they can walk and converse together?

We read that Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord, and-in consequence of it-was made acquainted with His righteous designs, and received directions how to escape from a perishing world. The story of Abraham is full of accounts of such manifestations. In one of them, the Lord called him out of his sins, and from his kindred, to go to both the heavenly and the earthly Canaan. In other revelations, he promised Abraham a son, Isaac, and Isaac's mysterious seed. Several years after, for the trial of his faith, God commanded him to sacrifice his son; and when the trial was over, He declared His approval of Abraham's conduct. He even went further! Read Genesis 18 and see how the divine philanthropy appeared, in His condescending manner. to clothe Himself with the nature He was later to assume in the virgin's womb, and to converse - in this undress - with the father of the faithful, like a prince with his favourite, or as a friend with his confidant.

Sarah, Hagar, Isaac, and Rebekah, all had their divine manifestations, but those of Jacob deserve our particular attention. When he fled to Syria, from the face of his brother Esau, and lay desolate in a field, having only a heap of stones for his pillow, the God of all consolation appeared to him and stood above a mysterious ladder, on which the angels of God ascended and descended, and said to him 'I am the Lord God of Abraham, thy father, and the God of Isaac : the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed ... and, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest.'

Jacob called that place Bethel, the house of God, and 'the gate of heaven'. This seems to have been an intimation that no one ever found the gate of heaven by his own efforts, but by a manifestation of Christ, who is alone the Way to the Father, and the door into glory. When the same patriarch returned to Canaan, and was left alone one night, a Man wrestled with him until daybreak. Then, when this extraordinary person said 'Let me go, for the day breaketh' he replied 'I will not let thee go, except thou bless me'; and we read that 'he blessed him there', acknowledging that Jacob had power with God, even with Him whose name is Emmanuel. Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, for, he said 'I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved....' The design of this manifestation was merely to strengthen Jacob's faith, and we learn from it that the children of faithful Abraham may wrestle in prayer with the Lord, as Jacob did, until they prevail and are blessed in the way that he was.

Moses was favoured with numerous manifestations, sometimes because of his official position as a leader, and at other times only on the grounds of him being a common believer. 'And the Angel of the Lord* appeared unto him, in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed ... And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see the bush, God called unto Moses out of the midst of the bush.' Many witnessed a sight which was equally glorious, however, on another occasion 'Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel saw the God of Israel; there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in its clearness. And upon the nobles of the children of Israel He laid not His hand; also they saw God, and did eat and drink.' Sometimes all Israel shared in the manifestation : 'They all drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them' comments Paul 'and that rock was Christ.' The cloud of the Lord was upon the tabernacle by day, according to the Jewish historian, and fire was upon it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel. 'It came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses. And all the people saw the cloudy pillar ... all the people rose up and worshipped, every man in his tent door. And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.' (*The reader may be surprised to see that the author is equating this special angel with the Son of God. If he refers to the opinions of our

forefathers he will discover that this is not an unusual idea)

So gracious was Emmanuel to Moses, that when this Jewish leader said 'I beseech thee, shew me thy glory' the Lord answered 'I will make all My goodness pass before thee ... but thou canst not see My face, for there shall no man see Me and live.' These displays of divine goodness and glory left a deep impression upon even the countenance of the man of God; his face shone in such a glorious way that the children of Israel were afraid to come near him, and he was obliged to put a veil over his face before conversing with them. Though this appears to be very extraordinary, the Apostles inform us that the change which took place in the countenance of Moses, now occurs in the souls of believers. By faith they behold the Lord through the glass of gospel promises and, beholding Him, they are made 'partakers of the divine nature'-changed into the same image from glory to glory.

Joshua, Moses' successor, was blessed with many similar manifestations, each of which conveyed to him new degrees of courage and wisdom. To give one example only: when Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, there stood a man over against him, with his sword drawn in his hand; and Joshua went up to him, and said to him 'Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?' And he said 'Nay, but as Captain of the host of the Lord am I now come'. And Joshua (aware that it was Jehovah speaking) fell on his face to the earth, worshipped his Visitor, and said 'What saith my Lord unto His servant?' And the Captain of the Lord's host said to Joshua 'Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy'; and Joshua did so. Every true personal discovery of Christ has a similar effect; it humbles us and makes us worship Him. Those who are blessed by an open revelation see holiness to the Lord written upon every surrounding object; they are loosed from earth and earthly things, and the towering walls of sin fall down, like those of Jericho fell down soon after this manifestation occurred to Joshua.

After Joshua's death a heavenly person, called the Angel of the Lord, came from Gilgal to Bochim and spake such words to all the children of Israel, that the people were universally melted; 'they lifted up their voice and wept ... and they sacrificed there unto the Lord.' Nothing can so effectually make sinners relent as a sight of Him whom they have pierced; when they have such a revelation, whatever place they are in becomes a Bochim, a valley of tears and adoration.

Not long after this, the Lord manifested Himself to Deborah; by the wisdom and fortitude communicated to her in that revelation, she was enabled to judge Israel and lead desponding Barak to certain victory, through 900 chariots of iron.

The condescension of our Emmanuel appears in a still more striking light in the manifestation which He granted to Gideon. The mysterious Angel of the Lord (repeatedly called Jehovah) came and sat under an oak in Ophrah, and after appearing to Gideon, said 'The Lord is with thee ... and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.' And the Lord looked upon him (what a courage-inspiring look this was : as powerful, no doubt, as that which met cursing Peter's eye and brought repentance to his heart!) and said, 'Go in this thy might ... have not I sent thee?' And Gideon said 'Alas, O Lord God ! for because I have seen an Angel of the Lord face to face.' And the Lord said unto him 'Peace be unto thee; fear not; thou shalt not die.' Thus strengthened and comforted, Gideon built an altar to Jehovah-Shalom and threw down the altar of Baal. From this, we learn that when Jesus manifests Himself to a sinner. He fills him with a noble contempt of the devil and gives him an effectual resolution to break down Satan's altars, together with a divine courage to shake off the yoke of the spiritual Midianites. He imparts to an awakened sinner a comfortable assurance that the bitterness of death is past, and that Jehovah Shalom, the God of peace,

even Christ our peace, is with him; and the sinner, constrained by the love of Christ, offers his believing heart and makes sacrifices of thanksgiving on that best of altars. In this way, there begins a free exchange between the Lord and a modern Gideon-only of a far more spiritual and more delightful nature.

Some years later, the same Angel of God appeared to Manoah's wife, and promised her a son. Her husband prayed for the same manifestation and God hearkened to his voice; the heavenly Personage manifested Himself a second time. Manoah asked Him for His name, and the Angel said to him 'Why askest thou thus after My name, seeing it is secret?' Manoah offered a burnt offering; the Angel received it at his hands and, while He ascended in the flame of the altar, Manoah fell on his face to the ground; he knew that this was the Angel Jehovah and so he said to his wife 'We shall surely die, because we have seen God.' However, in due course, the birth of Samson (and not their death) resulted from this unusual two-fold manifestation.

There was a time when Samuel did not know the Lord, and also when the Word of the Lord (that Word which was afterwards made flesh) was not revealed to him. The devoted youth worshipped 'in the dark' until the Lord appeared again in Shiloh, until He came, stood, and called Samuel. From that memorable time, the Lord was with him, and he did not let any of God's words 'fall to the ground'. The fellowship between God and this prophet soon grew to such a degree that the sacred historian says the Lord told him in his ear what He wanted Samuel to know.

David had many manifestations of Christ, and of His pardoning love; and, far from supposing this blessing peculiar to himself (as a prophet) he declared that 'for this shall every one that is godly pray unto Thee Lord, when thou mayest be found.' He knew his Shepherd's inward voice so well that, without it, no outward message (though ever so comfortable) could restore peace to his troubled mind. When he had been convinced of his sins of adultery and murder (by the close application of Nathan's parable) the prophet assured David that the Lord had put away his sin and so he should not die. Such a report would content many of our modern penitents, but nothing short of a full and ready manifestation of our forgiving God could comfort the royal mourner - 'Wash thou me' he prayed 'and I shall be clean'. Nathan's words of comforting assurance, though ever so true in their way, could not give David an awareness of forgiveness; 'speak thyself merciful Lord and make me to hear joy and gladness, so that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.'

Solomon was favoured with a quite remarkable revelation : In Gibeon, to which place Solomon had gone to sacrifice, the Lord appeared unto him in a dream by night; and God said 'Ask what I shall give thee'. And Solomon said. ... 'Give, therefore, thy servant an understanding heart'... The speech pleased the Lord ... and God said unto him 'Because thou hast asked this thing ... I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and understanding heart ... and that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honour.' Though this promise was made to Solomon in a dream only, he knew by the change which he found in himself, after he awoke, and by the powerful evidence which accompanies divine manifestations, that it was glorious reality. Fully persuaded of the promise, he did not hesitate to offer peaceofferings and to make a feast for all of his servants, to mark the occasion. Nor was this the only time Solomon was thus favoured : when he had finished building the temple and had prayed for a blessing upon it, the Lord appeared to him a second time, as He had appeared to him in Gibeon and said 'I have heard thy prayer'.

Elijah has always been famous for the power which he had, through the prayer of faith, to obtain divine manifestations, that James in his Epistle uses him as an example to the church, for a pattern of successful 'wrestling with God'. Who is the God of Elijah but that same Lord Who manifests Himself to His

worshippers still, in opposition to Baal and other false gods ! The Lord answered Elijah by fire at the foot of Mount Carmel, and by showers on the top of the same. When Elijah lodged in Mount Horeb, in a cave `Behold, the Word of the Lord came to him... "What dost thou here, Elijah? Go forth and stand upon the mount before the Lord". And behold, the Lord passed by.'

Micaiah, another man of God `saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right hand and on His left.'

Elisha was not only blessed with frequent manifestations of the Lord and of His power, but also of His heavenly retinue. He saw in an hour of danger `the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire' ready to protect him. And, at his request, the Lord condescended to open Elisha's servant's eyes, so that his drooping spirit might be revived.

Job, after long debates with his friends, met with the Lord Himself `out of a whirlwind' and saw a manifestation which caused him to utter these famous words : `I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.' From this, we learn that nothing apart from a personal discovery of the Lord can silence vain reasonings and unbelieving fears; a revelation of the Lord, alone, makes us to lie prostrate at our Maker's feet.

John, in his Gospel, informs us that Isaiah saw Christ's glory and spoke of Him, when he described the glorious manifestation in which he received a new seal of pardoning and sanctifying love : `I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple' ... `then said I "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts". Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand ... from off the altar ... he said... "Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged"...' Many are not truly aware of the forgiveness of their sins, until they see-by faith-the Lord of Hosts, and are melted into repentance, then inflamed with love at the glorious sight. Isaiah not only beheld Christ's glory, but was blessed with the clearest view of His sufferings. He saw Him as `a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.' These revelations were not only intended for the good of the Church later, but also for the establishment of the prophet's faith then.

I shall not mention those of Ezekiel, for they are so numerous that a complete account of them would fill a book alone. I suggest that you re-read the Second Book of Kings, with this subject in mind, in order to recall the wonder of those days.

Jeremiah, speaking of God's people, wrote that the Lord had appeared to him, saying `Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee.' Daniel enjoyed the same favour: `I beheld ... the Ancient of Days ... and one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven.' We may assume that Daniel's three hebrew companions, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, were also aware of their heavenly Deliverer's presence. In fact, they must have been more concerned at the discovery than Nebuchadnezzar, who himself cried out `Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.'

It would be absurd to suppose that the lesser prophets, and other men of God down through the centuries, to whom the word of the Lord came, had no awareness of the Lord himself-the essential Word. If some display of His presence had not attended their every revelation, might they not have said `Thus saith my warm imagination'; `Thus saith my enthusiastic brain', instead of `Thus saith the Lord'?

From the variety and authenticity of these manifestations left upon sacred record, I conclude that the doctrine which I maintain far from being new and unscriptural is supported by the experiences of God's children from the creation of the world until the close of the Old Testament.

Concerning what is extraordinary (as to the design and circumstances of some of these manifestations) I refer you to the distinction which I made on that subject in the third chapter. Should you raise the objection that the contents of that chapter prove only that God favoured the Patriarchs and Jews with immediate revelations of Himself, because they had neither the Gospel nor the Scriptures, I answer

1. The Gospel was preached to them, as well as to us. The Patriarchs had tradition, which answered the end of the Scriptures in their day; the Jews, in the time of the Judges, had not only tradition but a considerable part of the Scriptures also, consisting of at least all the writings of Moses. Under the kings they had the Psalms, Job, Ecclesiastes, the Proverbs, and a thousand and five songs of Solomon, only one of which has been handed down to our times. They had also the book of Nathan the prophet, the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and the visions of Iddo the seer, which are now lost. These contained the substance of the Bible.

2. When the Lord answered Saul no more—neither by prophets nor by dreams—the reason assigned for it by the Holy Spirit is not that the canon of Scripture was filled (so that there was no further need for open revelations), but that the Lord was departed from him, and had become his enemy!

3. David (who had the honour of being a sacred writer himself), after his relapse into sin, could no longer find satisfaction in the Psalms he had written, but mourned, prayed, and watered his bed with his tears; he could not be calmed until the Lord revealed His pardoning love to him, saying to his soul 'I am thy salvation'.

4. If, because we have the letter of Scripture, we must be deprived of all immediate manifestations of Christ and of his Spirit, we are great losers by that blessed Book, and we might reasonably say 'Lord, bring us back to the dispensation of Moses. Thy Jewish servants could formerly converse with Thee face to face, but now we can know nothing of Thee except by their writings. They viewed Thy glory in various wonderful appearances, but we are left only with black lines telling us of Thy glory. They had the bright Shekinah; we have only obscure descriptions of it. They were blessed with lively oracles; we only with dead letters. The ark of Thy covenant went before them, and struck terror into all their adversaries, but a book of which our enemies make daily sport, is the only revelation of Thy power among us. They made their boast of Urim and Thummin, and received immediate answers from between the Cherubim; but we have only general ones, by means of Hebrew and Greek writings, which many do not understand. They conversed familiarly with Moses their mediator, with Aaron their high-priest, and with Samuel their prophet; these holy men gave them unerring directions in doubtful cases; but alas! ... the Apostles and inspired men are all dead, and Thou, Lord Jesus, our Mediator, Priest, and Prophet, may not be consulted to any purpose, for Thou dost manifest Thyself no more! As for Thy sacred Book, Thou knowest that sometimes the want of money to purchase it, the want of learning to consult the original, the want of wisdom to understand translations, the want of skill or sight to read it, prevent our making the most of it, and keep some from reaping any benefit from it at all. O Lord, if because we have this blessed picture of Thee, we must have no discovery of the glorious Original, have compassion on us, take back Thy precious book, and impart Thy more precious Self to us, as Thou didst do to Thine ancient people.'

5. Paul declared, that although the Mosaic dispensation was glorious, that of Christ exceeds it in glory! However, if Christ revealed Himself to the Jews, but to Christians only by the letter of a Book, it is plain that the Apostle was mistaken. How can anyone deny that it is far more glorious to see the light of God's countenance and to hear His voice, than merely to read something about them?

6. Particular manifestations of Christ, far from ceasing with the Jewish era have increased in brightness and spirituality during the Christian dispensation. I shall endeavour to prove this to you in the next chapter.

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