

# Contents

Tables and Illustrations .....	13
--------------------------------	----

## **PART I: THE BIBLICAL THEME OF GOD'S APPEARING**

1 God's Coming .....	17
2 God's Appearing with a Thunderstorm .....	33
3 Appearing in Fire .....	41
4 Appearing in a Cloud .....	47
5 Appearing in Glory .....	53
6 Appearances of God's Court .....	59
7 Appearances of a Man .....	65
8 Appearing as a Warrior .....	73
9 Appearing with a Chariot .....	79
10 Other Appearances .....	83
11 Appearing in the Created World .....	85

## **PART II: THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S APPEARING**

12 Knowing God .....	99
13 Relation of Kinds of Appearances .....	107
14 Reflecting God .....	111
15 Reflecting God in Human Appearance .....	117
16 Reflections and the Spirit .....	123
17 Reflections and the Trinity .....	129

18	Reflections of God in the Book of Revelation .....	137
19	Reflections of God in Structures in Revelation .....	145
20	Patterns of Multiple Reflections .....	155
21	Reflections of God in Creation .....	167
22	A Pattern of Reflections in Clothing .....	173
23	The Dynamics in Reflections of God .....	177
24	Responding to God's Presence .....	187

**PART III: A HISTORY OF GOD'S APPEARING:  
THE OLD TESTAMENT**

25	Universal Presence of God in History .....	199
26	God's Presence in Creating the World (Day One) .....	203
27	God's Presence in Creating the World (Days Two–Six) .....	213
28	God's Appearing on the Seventh Day .....	221
29	God's Appearing in the Creation of Man (Genesis 2:4–25) .....	225
30	God's Appearing in the Fall (Genesis 3:1–24) .....	231
31	God's Appearing in Two Lines of Offspring .....	239
32	God's Appearing in the Flood .....	247
33	God's Appearing at Babel .....	251
34	God's Appearing to Abraham .....	255
35	God's Appearing to the Patriarchs .....	261
36	God's Appearing in the Exodus .....	271
37	God's Appearing in Conquering the Land .....	283
38	God's Appearing during the Monarchy .....	291
39	God's Appearing in the Prophets: Isaiah .....	305
40	God's Appearing in the Prophets: Jeremiah and Others .....	323
41	God's Appearing in the Poetical Books: Job .....	343
42	God's Appearing in the Psalms .....	349

43	God's Appearing in the Solomonic Books .....	369
44	God's Appearing in Postexilic History (Ezra–Esther) .....	375

**PART IV: A HISTORY OF GOD'S APPEARING:  
THE NEW TESTAMENT**

45	God's Appearing in the Earthly Life of Christ (Gospels) .....	381
46	God's Appearing in Acts .....	389
47	God's Appearing in the Letters of the New Testament .....	397
48	God's Appearing in Revelation .....	409
	Conclusion .....	413

**APPENDICES**

	Appendix A: "The Angel of the Lord" .....	417
	Appendix B: A Theophany in Genesis 1:2? .....	425
	Appendix C: Understanding Genesis 3:8 .....	429
	Bibliography .....	433
	General Index .....	437
	Scripture Index .....	451



# Tables and Illustrations

## **TABLES**

17.1	God's Attributes and Human Offices .....	135
17.2	The Triune God's Manifesting of Himself .....	135
18.1	Features in Revelation 1:12–16 and Revelation 4–5 .....	139
23.1	Stability, Dynamicity, and Relationality .....	182
23.2	Unfolding of Purpose in History .....	183
23.3	Unfolding Purposes in Theophany .....	183

## **ILLUSTRATIONS**

1.1	Interlocking Themes in the Bible .....	27
1.2	Interlocking of the Themes of Covenant, Kingdom, and Presence .....	27
1.3	Three Perspectives on History .....	28
1.4	God's Presence as a Perspective .....	29
1.5	Theophany and Presence .....	30
1.6	Theophany as a Perspective .....	31
2.1	Thunderstorm Theophany Manifesting God's Character .....	37
2.2	Fulfillment of Thunderstorm Theophany in Christ .....	38
3.1	Fire Manifesting God's Character .....	44
3.2	Fire Fulfilled in Christ .....	45
4.1	The Cloud Manifesting God's Character .....	50

4.2	Cloud Fulfilled in Christ .....	51
5.1	Glory Manifesting God's Character .....	54
5.2	The Temple Theme and the Glory of God .....	57
12.1	Frame's Square of Transcendence and Immanence .....	101
12.2	Summary of Transcendence and Immanence .....	102
12.3	Transcendence and Immanence in Knowledge of God .....	104
17.1	Triunal Manifestations .....	136
19.1	God's Dominion .....	146
19.2	God's Dominion Reflected in Human Dominion .....	147
19.3	God's Dwelling .....	148
19.4	Dual Functions of Christ's Triumph .....	150
19.5	The Function of Human Rulers .....	151
19.6	The Consummate Dwelling of God .....	152
20.1	Reflections of Light .....	158
20.2	Reflections of Glory .....	161
20.3	Reflections of Fire .....	162
20.4	Reflections of Beauty .....	164

PART I

THE BIBLICAL THEME  
OF GOD'S APPEARING





# God's Coming

In the Western world, we live in a time of doubt. People ask, “Does God exist? If he does, where is he? How can we find him?” To some people, the words of Job may seem appropriate: “Oh, that I knew where I might find him” (Job 23:3).

## **The Experience of Job**

To many, it seems that God cannot be found. But what if God actually came and met you? What if he spoke to you? According to the Bible, just such a thing happened to Job (Job 38–41), and it was overwhelming. We should not be surprised that it was. It would be overwhelming for us, if we were to meet the God of infinity, who made the galaxies and the stars, and who also made you and me. Meeting God turns out to be an earthshaking experience that may change you forever.

When God met Job, he not only spoke; he *appeared* to Job in a whirlwind: “Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind” (Job 38:1). Job knew that he had met God. There was no mistaking it. Not only did God speak words with divine authority and wisdom, but the visible accompaniment in the whirlwind reinforced the solemnity of the occasion. Job knew that he was meeting the all-powerful God.

Job was changed by the experience. He says,

“I know that you can do all things,  
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.” (Job 42:2)

Even before this point in time, Job would have said that God was all-powerful. But when God met him, the truth became new and living for Job—it took on fresh depth. Job had a deep change, a change of heart.

### **Meeting God Today**

Job's experience was unique. Why does God not give the same experience to everyone else? We cannot say. God decides when and how he will meet us, when and how he will come to us. God deals with each one of us according to his wisdom. He takes into account everything that we are; he treats each person in his individuality and uniqueness (Psalm 139). If we think we want to have an experience like Job's, we might first think about whether we really want the "full package," so to speak. For example, do we want to go through the suffering that Job experienced that led up to the climactic encounter with God? And even if we could avoid the suffering of Job, do we really want to be overwhelmed by encountering the infinite God as Job did? In reality, it is frightening.

But God can and does come to meet people in a real and deep way today. For one thing, he does it when they hear how he met Job and how he met other people in cases recorded in the Bible. The Bible is not just a record of past works of God. God had it written so that we might still learn about him *today*. The Bible is the very word of God, and he still speaks what it says *today*. The word of God is alive and active (Heb. 4:12). So meeting God happens when we listen to the Bible.

We can learn more by focusing on the places in the Bible that describe God as coming and meeting with people. Among these, we will focus especially on the cases where God *appears* to people, like the whirlwind in which God came to Job. These cases are among the most intense instances when God comes. We can learn from them the meaning of who God is and how he comes to us today.

### **Does God Appear?**

According to the Bible, God is invisible. But the Bible also describes incidents in which God makes himself visible, by appearing to human beings. How do we fit these two sides together?<sup>1</sup>

Answering this question helps us understand God, ourselves, and our place in the world. God has made us as creatures, to whom he

---

1. See Andrew Malone, *Knowing Jesus in the Old Testament? A Fresh Look at Christophanies* (Nottingham, UK: Inter-Varsity, 2015), 44–79, and the further discussion in appendix A of the present work.

makes himself known. To know God is all-important. Many people have questions about God. We can receive satisfactory answers only if we come to know him. And we come to know him when he comes to us and shows himself to us. He manifests himself. How?

### Seeing God in Christ

The issue gains in depth because the supreme instance of God's becoming visible is found in Christ. God makes himself known supremely in Christ. And when Christ was on earth, he was visible. What does it mean to see Christ? And do we see God through him? Christ himself gives an answer in a dialogue with the apostle Philip:

Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? *Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.* How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (John 14:8–9)

Jesus indicates that it *is* possible to see God. "*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*" (John 14:9); that is, the person he describes has seen God the Father.

What does it mean, then, to have "seen the Father"? In the next verses Jesus explains more fully how this seeing takes place:

"Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father *is in me*? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who *dwells in me* does *his works*. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of *the works* themselves." (John 14:10–11)

Seeing in the right sense goes together with believing—believing that "I am in the Father and the Father is in me." And that in turn goes together with understanding the meaning of Jesus's works. Jesus's opponents saw him with their physical eyes. But they opposed him. They did not accept his claims. It was not enough merely to see him physically. The opponents did not rightly understand the significance of his works. They did not understand who he was, nor the reality that the Father was in him.

### Understanding the Works

Jesus more than once points to the significance of his works, if people will only take to heart that significance:

But Jesus answered them, “My Father is *working* until now, and I am *working*.” This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father *does*, that the Son *does* likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater *works* than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and *gives them life*, so also the Son *gives life* to whom he will. (John 5:17–21)

Jesus answered them, “I have shown you many good *works* from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?” The Jews answered him, “It is not for a good *work* that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.” (John 10:32–33)

God appears to human beings in Jesus, as Jesus himself affirms to Philip. But people must interpret what they see. They must see God the Father’s works in the works of Jesus, and God the Father’s words in the words of Jesus:

“For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a *commandment*—what to *say* and what to *speak*. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I *say*, therefore, I *say* as the Father has *told* me.” (John 12:49–50)

“The words that I *say* to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me *does his works*.” (John 14:10; also 17:8)

In sum, the “seeing” is not merely a physical seeing but a spiritual seeing. This kind of seeing takes place through believing in Jesus. It is enabled by the words of the Father and the Son, which the Son gives to his disciples. The words are received and understood by the people whom the Father gave to the Son:

“you [God the Father] have given him [God the Son] authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to *all whom you have given him*.” (John 17:2)

“I have manifested your name to the people *whom you gave me* out of the world. Yours they were, and you *gave them to me*, and they have kept your word.” (v. 6)

### Seeing and Not Seeing

So there is more than one *kind* of seeing in the Bible. A person can “see” and yet not understand:

And he [God] 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.” (Isa. 6:9–10)

To “see” the Father, in the way that Jesus described to Philip, is possible only when a person *understands*.

In addition, there is a sense in which even believers who have divinely been given understanding do not “see,” because it is never possible to master God or to grasp him the way one grasps a leaf or an apple within one’s vision. The Bible in this sense says that God is invisible and will remain invisible:

To the King of the ages, immortal, *invisible*, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. (1 Tim. 1:17)

He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 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. (1 Tim. 6:15–16)

Other passages, however, combine invisibility and visibility, reminding us that this invisible and unmasterable God does make himself known. He makes himself known through the works of creation:

For his *invisible* attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly *perceived*, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. (Rom. 1:20)

Supremely, God makes himself known in Christ, who is the “image of the *invisible* God” (Col. 1:15). Moses in his day knew God, as described

in Hebrews 11:27: “By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as *seeing him who is invisible*.”

### **Old Testament Anticipations**

The Old Testament contains many anticipations of the time when Christ would come to earth and would accomplish salvation. These anticipations or “shadows” of what was to come include instances where human beings experience visible manifestations of God. Some experiences take place in dreams, some in broad daylight. These manifestations look forward to the day when God will appear in a climactic and final way, in Christ:

And the Word [Christ] became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his *glory*, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

John 1:14 uses the word *glory* in a way that evokes the Old Testament instances where God appears in glory. By using this word, John is indicating that Christ brings to fulfillment the Old Testament instances when the glory of God appeared (e.g., Ex. 16:10; Num. 16:19).

A few verses later, after John 1:14, the Gospel indicates how Jesus answers the desire to see God:

No one has ever *seen* God; the only God,<sup>2</sup> who is at the Father's side, he has *made him known*. (John 1:18)

The verse begins by observing that “no one has ever seen God.” But the rest of the verse indicates that we come to know him intimately through Jesus, who is “the only God, who is at the Father's side.” The implication is that this intimate knowledge is a kind of seeing.

### **The Word *Theophany***

Theologians have a specialized word to describe the instances when God appears to human beings. A visible manifestation of God within the Old Testament is called a *theophany*. The word *theophany* derives from two Greek words, the word for God (*theos*) and the word for appearing

---

2. Some New Testament manuscripts have “only Son” instead of “only God.” Since the Son is God (John 1:1), the overall thrust is similar if this is the original reading.

(*phainō*, which in the passive means *appear*). That is, a theophany is an appearance of God.

We can use this word *theophany* more narrowly or more broadly. In a broader use, it would encompass not only obvious instances describing an appearance of God, but also appearances that are more veiled, as when God appears in a cloud and no one can see inside the cloud. A broad use would also include appearances of God in the New Testament, including the appearing of Christ himself. In his incarnation, Christ is the *permanent* “theophany” of God.

### **The Significance of Theophany**

The theme of theophany—the theme of God’s appearing—is important for several reasons. First, as we just observed, the theme has at its center the person of Christ, who is the permanent theophany anticipated by the temporary theophanies in the Old Testament. Second, the theme finds its culmination in the final vision of God described in the book of Revelation: “They [the saints] will *see his face*, and his name will be on their foreheads” (Rev. 22:4). Thus, theophany is central to Christian hope. The final destiny of redeemed mankind is to experience the final theophany, when we “see his face.”

It helps to remember the larger plot of history. God’s purpose in history is to establish communion with mankind. That communion comes to consummation in the new heavens and the new earth (Rev. 21:1–22:5). At that time, the consummate communion takes place in a final theophany. God comes. God appears, and the Lamb appears on the throne (22:1). God’s promise is that his servants “will *see his face*” (v. 4). This purpose of God is behind the whole history leading up to the consummation. It drives all of history. So it is important to reckon with it.

The purpose of God also has practical implications for us. It is God’s purpose for the church, for each one of *us* who belong to Jesus Christ. It defines who we are by showing what God’s plan is for us. Even now, in this life, we can experience communion with God through Jesus Christ. In the Bible, theophanies show us this same God. They show us that God comes to us and establishes communion with us in Christ. Understanding God’s appearing reorients the meaning of our lives and enables us to know the purpose of our life by knowing God.

Third, a focus on this theme of God's appearing reminds us and encourages us concerning the God-centered character of the Bible and of the Christian faith. We should seek communion with God, not just enjoy his benefits or focus on ourselves as beneficiaries of salvation.

Theophany is also an important theme within the Old Testament. Theophanies occur in the Old Testament more often than most people realize. It is easy for modern people quickly to pass by the descriptions of theophany when they are trying to find out what happens to the human recipients. Theophanies include symbolism that needs to be appreciated, rather than passed over as a puzzle. Moreover, theophany in a narrow sense has connections with the broader theme of God's presence, a theme that runs through the whole Old Testament.

### **Favorite Themes: Promise, Covenant, Kingdom, and Presence**

It is helpful for us to see how the theme of God's presence integrates with other themes in the Old Testament. Several themes are important in understanding the Old Testament. Among the prominent ones are the theme of promise and fulfillment, the theme of covenant, the theme of kingdom, and the theme of God's presence. Any one of the themes offers a powerful way of understanding the entire record of God's dealings with his people, in the Old Testament and New Testament alike. Let us consider them briefly, one by one.

First, God makes *promises*. From very early, he promises to send a redeemer to undo sin and its effects (Gen. 3:15), to save people from their rebellion against God. God's promises include long-range promises about the coming of Christ, as well as short-range promises about acts of redemption within the Old Testament period. The promises include the central promise that God will *be God* to his people (e.g., Gen. 17:7). He will have a personal, intimate relation with them. Since the promises of God are trustworthy, they imply that God is able and willing to fulfill what he has promised. The promises imply that God rules all of history and will surely accomplish his purposes, including the final purpose of dwelling with mankind in the new heaven and the new earth (Rev. 21:1–3). The promises of God give us, in summary form, the plan of God for all of history. History moves forward in harmony with God's promises, and moves toward the goal of fulfilling his promises.



The second theme is the theme of *covenant*. God makes *covenants* with mankind. A covenant is a solemn agreement that involves personal commitments and a personal relation between the parties to the covenant. The whole of biblical history can be viewed as the outworking of two covenants: the covenant of works that God made with Adam before the fall, and the covenant of grace after the fall.<sup>3</sup> In the Old Testament we find a record of a number of distinct covenants: the covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. All these are particular expressions of the covenant of grace. They express God's plan for salvation, which comes to culmination in the work of Christ.

The use of the concept of the covenant of grace does not imply that we would ignore the differences between different historical covenants, with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, or Jeremiah's promise of the new covenant (Jer. 31:31–34). Rather, the covenant of grace is a theological category expressing the unity of *one* way of salvation throughout the course of biblical history. Salvation is by grace through faith, on the basis of Christ's work. The concept of the covenant of grace encourages us to focus on this one salvation expressed in the various historical covenants.

Third, consider the theme of *kingdom*. God rules over all of history as *king* (Ps. 103:19; Dan. 4:34–35). God exerted his kingly power and authority when he created the world. The world is his kingdom. He made mankind in his image with the purpose that mankind would exercise *dominion* over the world, in imitation of God's dominion (Gen. 1:28–30).

Even after the fall, God continues to rule over all history. At the climax of history, in the coming of Christ, God exerts his power and his rule to bring salvation through the work of Christ. In the Gospels, the expression *the kingdom of God* is used in a focused way to designate God's presence in bringing *salvation*, not just his rule in providence. God's kingly rule achieves its final realization in the new heaven and the new earth, in which the central reality is the rule of God on his throne (Rev. 22:1).

Fourth, consider the theme of God's *presence*. From creation onward, God expresses his presence in the things that he has made, but especially in the ways in which he establishes a personal relation with human beings. God's personal relation with mankind was disrupted when Adam

---

3. See the Westminster Confession of Faith, 7.

fell into sin. But God renews the relation in preliminary forms in the Old Testament, especially with Abraham and his descendants. Then he opens the way to intimate fellowship with himself through Christ, who bore the penalty for sins and purified the people of God to make them fit to come into his presence. The final enjoyment of the presence of God comes in the new heaven and the new earth, when his saints “will see his face” (Rev. 22:4).

These four themes—promise, covenant, kingdom, and presence—intertwine with each other. They reinforce one another, and any one of them can be used as a perspective on all of history. The promises of God, as we have noted, express in summary form an outline of all of history. The high points of history occur in the fulfillment of God’s promises. The promises of God come in the context of covenants, and are integrated into the covenant relation between God and his people. So promise-and-fulfillment can be seen as a subordinate theme within the theme of covenant. The promises are *covenantal* promises, so covenant serves as a perspective on promise. The events of fulfillment express God’s faithfulness to his covenant.

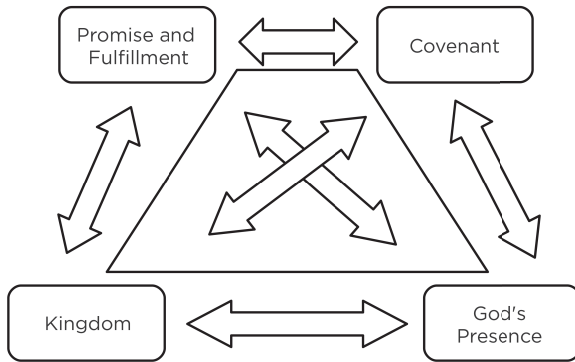
The covenants that God makes involve the expression of God’s power and authority as king. Because he is the great king, his covenants are binding on us. So covenant is an expression of kingship. Since God’s kingly rule is always in harmony with his covenantal words, kingship itself can be seen as an expression of covenant.

We can see the significance of the theme of the presence of God by observing its coherence with the themes of promise, covenant, and kingship. God’s promises are forms of his presence, where he commits himself to fulfilling his words. Fulfillments of promises take place by God’s coming to bring about the fulfillment. When God comes, whether in the visible appearance of a theophany or in another way, he is intensely present. So fulfillment manifests the presence of God. At the heart of God’s covenantal relationship with mankind is the promise, I “will be your God, and you shall be my people” (Lev. 26:12; Jer. 7:23; etc.), a promise that includes the *presence* of God with his people. This presence finds its New Testament fulfillment in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in believers.

Similarly, God’s kingly rule over his people and over all the world involves his presence in power, to actually exert and make manifest his rule. So the kingdom of God always involves the *presence* of God.

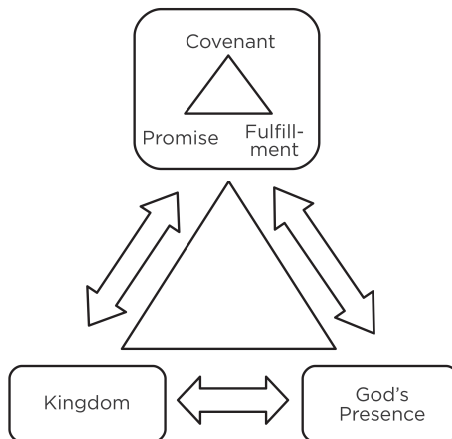
Thus, there is coherence among four themes: (1) promise and fulfillment; (2) covenant; (3) kingdom; and (4) presence (see fig. 1.1).

Fig. 1.1: Interlocking Themes in the Bible



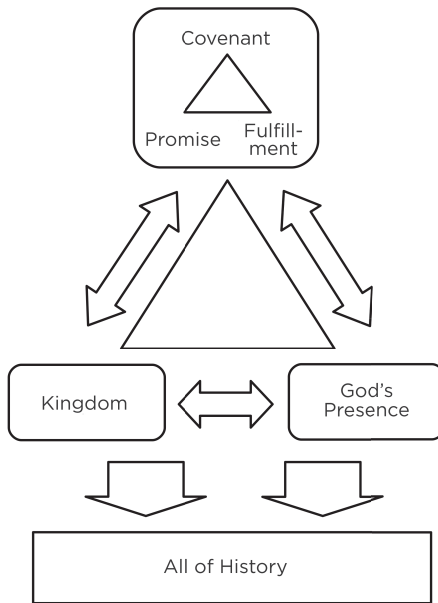
If we treat promise-and-fulfillment as a subtheme under covenant, we can say that there is coherence among three themes: covenant, kingdom, and presence (see fig. 1.2).

Fig. 1.2: Interlocking of the Themes of Covenant, Kingdom, and Presence



Each of the three themes runs through the entire Bible. Each gives us a perspective on all of history. (See fig. 1.3.)

Fig. 1.3: Three Perspectives on History



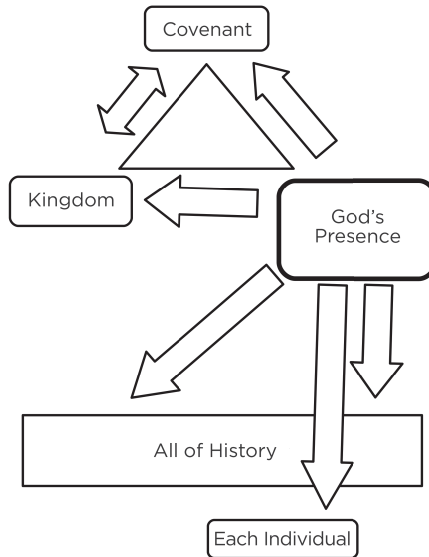
In this book, we are especially focusing on the theme of God’s presence. Like the themes of covenant and kingdom, the theme of the presence of God encompasses all of biblical history. It gives us a comprehensive picture of God’s purposes. It is important for us to reckon with the presence of God, because it illumines the meaning of all of history. It also illumines the meaning of each person’s life, each person’s individuality. Within history, God chooses to come and establish a personal relation with each one of us who belong to Christ. He comes in person, and in intimacy.

God also has a personal relation with people who do not belong to Christ. This relation is broken, because of sin. But no one escapes God; all of us are accountable to him. And from time to time even unbelievers may have intense encounters with God, as happened several times in the Bible: Cain (Gen. 4:9–15); the dreams of Pharaoh’s cupbearer and baker (Gen. 40:1–23); Pharaoh himself (Gen. 41:1–36); Balaam (Numbers 22–24); Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4); and Belshazzar (Daniel 5).

Understanding the presence of God illumines not only the broad

sweep of history but also the smallest bits of history, including the story of each one of our lives, and the details in these stories, because God is present in the details. God is present in every verse of the Bible, because it is his word—it is what he speaks. But in addition, God has included in the Bible the specific *theme* of his presence, and he teaches us about this theme in order that we may grow in understanding him, in understanding his purposes, and in understanding ourselves as included in his purposes. God comes to be present with us and even *in* us, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. (See fig. 1.4.)

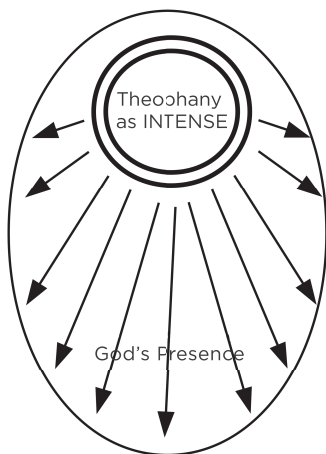
Fig. 1.4: God's Presence as a Perspective



### Theophany and the Presence of God

Now what is the relation of the presence of God to the theme of theophany? Theophany represents an intensive form of the presence of God. So theophany is like a subtheme within the broad theme of God's presence. At the same time, the intensive forms of God's presence show us a lot about the meaning of God's presence in the broadest sense. (See fig. 1.5.)

Fig. 1.5: Theophany and Presence



The intensive presence of God in theophany offers a key for understanding more deeply the broader instances of God's presence. As we shall see, theophanies of the most spectacular kind have a significant relationship to other forms of God's presence. For example, poetic language that evokes memories of theophany can be used to describe God's presence in a broad sense. And more spectacular theophanies can be compared to less spectacular theophanies and then to instances of God's presence that may not clearly have a special visible component. All these expressions of the presence of God receive illumination from what we find with the more spectacular theophanies. (See fig. 1.6.)

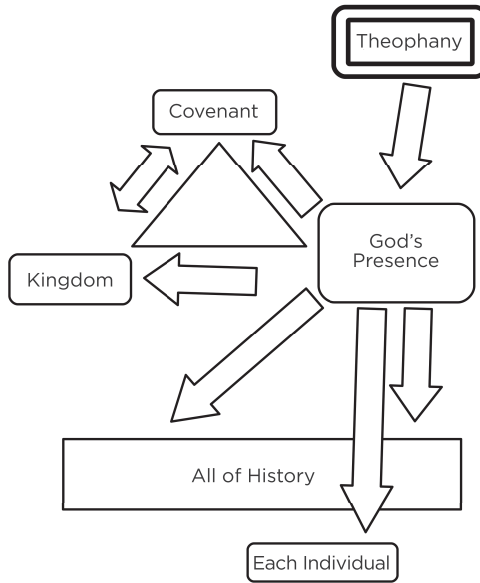
So let us use a definition of theophany that has some flexibility built into it:

*A theophany is a manifestation of divine presence accompanied by an extraordinary display mediating that presence.*<sup>4</sup>

The word *display* focuses on *visual* phenomena. The visual phenomena may be more or less "extraordinary," so there is flexibility in this defini-

4. I am not sure where this definition came from, but I suspect that it did not originate with me. I have made my own modifications. I am sorry that I can no longer remember and cannot credit the author. Also, readers may note that my definition does not directly distinguish temporary from permanent manifestations. Other definitions may choose to make distinctions in other ways. For example, if we wish, we may highlight the uniqueness of the incarnation by building an explicit distinction in terminology between the incarnate Christ and Old Testament theophanies that foreshadow it.

Fig. 1.6: Theophany as a Perspective



tion. The flexibility increases if we extend our definition beyond visual phenomena to phenomena in sound—that is, divine speech. The Bible contains quite a few instances describing God’s speaking to a human being, where the text does not specifically indicate whether there was an unusual visual display. God is present in his speech, and manifests his character by speaking, as well as in instances with an unusual visual display. In a broad sense, any speech of God to man is theophanic in nature. God could also express his presence internally to someone’s spirit, without either a special visual or a special auditory display (Job 32:8). The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in believers is a special expression of God’s presence (Rom. 8:9–10; 1 Cor. 6:19).

What are the implications? When we want to consider how the Bible applies to us, we should pay close attention to what it teaches about theophany and about God’s presence. The God who reveals himself intensively in theophany is the same God who comes to each one of us as an individual. He establishes and maintains his presence with individuals through the work of Christ, who is the permanent theophany of God. And Christ sends the Holy Spirit, who brings new birth and establishes his dwelling in each person who believes in Christ. The narrow

theme of theophany and the broader theme of God's presence both have pointed lessons for us, because they show us what it means to enjoy God's presence in blessing—or, alternatively, to experience his presence in wrath against sin. Because there is only one way of salvation, the way of Christ (John 14:6), God's presence with each of us as an individual reflects the same principles that we see intensively in the records in the Bible. These principles have a climactic manifestation when Christ accomplishes his work on earth.