

God Manifested: In the Flame and in the Flesh

by David A. Huston

This article is presented to show that the biblical God is the One who has manifested Himself in the flesh.

AS MOSES WAS LEADING HIS FLOCK through the desert, he came to Horeb, the mountain of God. The Bible tells us that the Angel of the LORD appeared to him “in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush” (Exodus 3:2). Having noticed that the bush was not being consumed by the fire, Moses turned to investigate. When the Angel saw that he had turned aside to look, He called to Moses from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” Then, after beckoning to Moses to draw near, the One in the flame identified Himself saying, “I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” The Bible says, “And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God” (Exodus 3:3-6).

We see in this passage a burning bush, a man named Moses, and God Himself, speaking to Moses out of a flame in the midst of the bush. What exactly was this flame of fire? It was certainly a supernatural phenomenon, since the bush burned without being consumed. But it was more than a phenomenon. The flame was a manifestation of God. How do we know this? Because the Bible says that Moses was afraid to look, not upon the flame, but upon God; yet the flame was the only thing visible in the bush.

There are many passages in the Bible that teach that God is invisible. John 1:17, 1 Timothy 1:17, and Hebrews 11:27 are a few. Yet, this passage says that Moses, having realized who this was speaking to him, was afraid to look upon God. This is because God has the ability to manifest Himself. In the Old Testament, a manifestation of God was any kind of visible appearance of God, often called by scholars a *theophany*. In this case, God appeared as a flame of fire in the midst of a burning bush to speak to Moses. Jesus confirmed this when He said, “Have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him” (Mark 12:26). He did not say the flame spoke; He said God did. What Moses saw was the flame; yet seeing the flame was considered to be equal to looking upon God Himself.

This means that we could say that God was manifested in the flame. We could also say that the flame was an image, a visible representation, of the invisible God. Clearly, God was in the flame; therefore, to see the flame was to see God.

Since no one struck a match to ignite this fire, it is clear that the flame came from God in the sense that God originated it. As the originator, God was the father of the flame—He brought it forth. Yet, God and the flame were one. We can make a distinction between them, but we cannot separate them into two. The flame was the manifestation of the One who originated it.

The God who was in the flame was the same God Jesus referred to as His Father. In John 17:3, Jesus identified His Father as “the only true God.” In 1 Corinthians 8:6, Paul affirmed that “for us there is one God, the Father.” And in Jeremiah 10:10, the prophet declared, “The LORD is the true God.” The One in the burning bush called Himself “The LORD God of your fathers” (Exodus 3:15). He is therefore the true God, the only true God.

In the burning bush account, we see that there was but one mediator between God and Moses: the flame. This means that to come to God, Moses had to come through the flame. In this sense, to receive the flame was to receive the God who was in the flame. Conversely, to deny (or reject) the flame was to not have the God who was in the flame. In other words, to reject the manifestation of God was to reject the God who was being manifested. Yet, when Moses believed in the flame, he was in fact believing in the God who was in the flame.

When we discuss this story, we can speak of the flame, we can speak of God in the flame, or we can speak of God apart from the flame. While at times it may be important to make distinctions between God and His manifestation in the flame, we should never think of the flame as an entity that is separate from God. Neither should we think of it as a separate divine being from the God who originated it. The fire was God, manifested in the flame.

From Flame to Flesh

In 1 Timothy 3:16, Paul wrote, “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh...” The word “flesh” means humanity, or specifically a human being. In the encounter with Moses, God was manifested in the flame, but when Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, God was manifested in a human being. The same God, only a different manifestation.

When the Spirit gave Peter the revelation, He confessed this Man as “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). Paul described Him as “the image of

the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). Just as the flame was a visible image of the invisible Deity in the Old Testament, in the New Testament the only-begotten Son was the image. In 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, Paul wrote, “All things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ [just as God brought Moses to Himself through the flame], and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ [just as God was in the flame] reconciling the world to Himself...”

Moses beheld a fiery image in a bush; the apostles beheld a human image on a cross. This is why Jesus said in John 14:9, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father...” (John 14:9). The flame could have said the same thing to Moses, since he who was seeing the flame was seeing the Father.

In John 8:42 Jesus said, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me.” The Man, Jesus, had His origin God. It was God who conceived the idea of manifesting Himself in the flesh and then brought forth the conception in the womb of Mary (1 Peter 1:19-20; Luke 1:35). Yet in John 10:30 Jesus stated, “I and My Father are one,” just as the flame and the God in the flame were one.

The Bible goes on to say, “Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, ‘Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?’ The Jews answered Him, saying, ‘For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God’” (John 10:31-33). Of course, the flame had not made itself God; God had made Himself a flame. Likewise with Jesus, God had made Himself a Man.

In 1 Timothy 2:5 Paul wrote, “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus...” Moses came to God through the flame; in the same way Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). It is the Man, Christ Jesus, who is the Mediator between God and man. As Peter wrote, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). Yet, the Man is God Himself manifested in flesh, which means that God is His own Mediator. He did not assign this role to another, but took it upon Himself. For God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself—not to another but to Himself.

In John 13:20 Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” For the Israelites in Egypt, receiving Moses was equal to receiving the God who had sent Moses. But God did not send Moses apart from speaking to him

through the flame; therefore receiving Moses was equal to receiving the flame, God's manifestation.

In His first epistle, John warned that "whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also" (1 John 2:23). To reject the manifestation is to reject the One being manifested. Likewise, to acknowledge the manifestation is to have the One being manifested. To Moses, the flame was God manifested in the fire. To us, the Son is God manifested in the flesh.

The Old Testament is the beginning of God's revelation of Himself to man. The New Testament is the completion. Therefore, the flame was only a partial revelation of God, while the Son was the fullness. This is because God is much more than an impersonal phenomenon such as a flame; He is the Living God who desires a living relationship with living men. Therefore, we could say that the flame was a temporary, partial revelation of God, while in Jesus Christ dwells "all the fullness of the Godhead bodily..." (Colossians 2:9).

The Purpose of Manifestations

The writer of Hebrews began his epistle with the words, "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son..." (Hebrews 1:1-2). One of the purposes of the Son was so God could speak to us. In fact, God's purpose in manifesting Himself throughout human history has been to communicate and make Himself known to man. In this sense, we can say that God's manifestation is His messenger. This is why the burning bush account first identifies the One in the flame as "the Angel of the Lord" (Exodus 3:2). This is not speaking of an angel in the sense of Gabriel or Michael but in the broader sense of a messenger or spokesman.

In John 12:49 Jesus said, "For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak." In other words, the Man Jesus was the messenger of the Father, speaking only what was given to Him by the Spirit.

When communicating to Moses through the flame, God said, "Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:10). When communicating to the apostles through the Son, God said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). To Moses He said, "I will certainly be with you" (v.12). To the apostles He said, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the

age” (Matthew 28:20).

Before accepting God’s commission Moses asked, “Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?” (Exodus 3:13). God answered Moses with these words, “I AM WHO I AM.” He then said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you... This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.’” (v.14-15). We see then that one of Moses’ assignments was to make God’s name known to the people of Israel.

When Jesus came to be baptized in the River Jordan, John the Baptist said to the people, “I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water” (John 1:31). In other words, one of the purposes of water baptism is to reveal God’s Son—His manifestation in the flesh. Therefore, speaking through His manifestation God told His apostles to “make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). Baptism was to be in the Father’s, the Son’s, and the Holy Spirit’s name. But in Luke 24:47 Jesus said that repentance and remission of sins should be preached specifically “in His name to all nations.” This command was fulfilled in Acts 2:38 when Peter preached, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” Through water baptism God is revealed in the name of Jesus. How could the name of the manifestation be different from the name of the One being manifested?

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