



Conducted by
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"In the Old Testament we read that on several occasions men saw God, sometimes face to face (see Ex. 33; Gen. 22:30 etc.), and yet Jesus says in John 1:18 that no man hath seen God at any time. How can we reconcile these statements?"

It is not an easy matter to reconcile all the passages to everyone's satisfaction, or indeed to *anyone's* satisfaction, and I can but pass on my thoughts in this matter. The O.T. not only talks about men *seeing* God but also of men *hearing* the voice of God; and yet Jesus says in John 5:37 "Ye have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His shape." So we not only have the problem of explaining God's appearing but the hearing of His voice as well.

In the garden of Eden, Adam said, referring to God, "I heard thy voice in the garden and I was afraid" (Gen. 3:9, 10); Jacob (in Gen. 32:30) called the name of the place Peniel, "for," said he, "I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved." Apparently he was surprised he should see God and still live.

Isaiah says (in Isa. 6:1) that "In the year king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple."

In Ex. 24:9, 11 we read, "Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel: and they saw the God of Israel . . ."

In Ex. 33 we read that God spoke to Moses face to face (v. 11) and also (v. 20) that because Moses could not look upon God's face and live he would see only God's back parts.

In John 1:18 Jesus says, "No man hath seen God at any time" (a very broad and categorical statement). Again in John 5:37, "Ye have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His shape." Paul writes in 1 Tim. 6:16, with reference to God, "whom no man hath seen; nor can see." John says in his first epistle chap. 4:12, "No man hath seen God at any time."

Seeing Yet Not Seeing

At the outset I think we can take it that no man has actually seen God at any time—Jesus has confirmed this as a fact. Paul informs us that not only has man not seen God but that it is not possible for man to see God (1 Tim. 6:16) God being spirit. Man has seen a *form* or a *representation* of God, and in some cases has seen an angel of God. In Gen. 32:30, when Jacob said, "I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved" he was referring to the fact that he had been "wrestling with God" (or rather with an angel of God). In Hosea 12:4 we read of the incident concerning Jacob's wrestling match; and Hosea, with reference to Jacob says, "Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed . . ." We might wonder why the angel of God should be referred

to as God or "the Lord." Perhaps the answer is to be found in Ex. 23:20, 21: "Behold I send an Angel before thee . . . beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions; *for my name is in him.*" From this quotation we learn that the angel bears God's name. Hence "the Lord" who went before Israel, and was seen by Moses in the bush and with whom Moses talked "face to face" on Mount Sinai, was the angel sent forth from the presence of Jehovah. This is confirmed by Acts 7:35, 38, which says, "This Moses, whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of *the angel* which appeared to him in the bush," and v. 38: "This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with *the angel* which spake to him in Mount Sinai, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us." The *appearances* of "the Lord" therefore in the O.T. are often, if not always, the appearing of the angel, or angels, who appeared visibly and talked with men.

In the case of Isaiah (Isa. 6) we read that all that transpired took place in a *vision* and so doesn't really call for explanation, for many strange things happened including the placing of a live coal on the mouth of Isaiah by a seraph with six wings.

The Angel of the Lord

Notwithstanding Acts 7:3 (quoted above), which states that it was *an angel* "which spake unto Moses in Mount Sinai," it may be felt by some that the language of the closing verses of Ex. 33 denotes something other than an angel, where "the Lord" says to Moses (v. 22, 23) "And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen." Some will perhaps be further puzzled by the fact that, in spite of Moses' desire for "the Lord" not to show his face, it is recorded in v. 11 that "the Lord spake unto Moses face to face." On this latter point it should be remembered that the conversation took place within the cloudy pillar and the darkness therein must have been such as to preclude the viewing of the Lord's face. Two people could converse in a darkened room face to face and not see one another's face.

On the former point of an angel being particular of not being seen (when as a rule angels have not been concerned about this; as witness the angel who wrestled with Jacob) and that he would only show to Moses his back parts, it is presumed that an angel is not mentioned in Ex. 33:21, but it is the very God himself (notwithstanding Acts 7:38). Even if this view could be sustained God is equally capable of presenting himself to people in a form of God's own choosing and suitable to the requirements of man. Indeed, there is an interesting statement in Numbers 12 which lends strength to this point of view. God is angry with Miriam and Aaron for criticising Moses behind his back. God calls Moses, Aaron and Miriam together and points out just how highly he esteems Moses. To other prophets God reveals things by means of a vision, but Moses was different: "With him will I speak mouth to mouth, *even apparently*, and not in dark speeches; and *the similitude of the Lord* shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" Moses was to see "*the similitude of God.*" It would seem to me that this would include the appearing of God as an angel or in any other manner or form chosen by Jehovah.

A similitude means "a form" or "a likeness," and although the word appears a few times in the Bible the "similitude" of Numbers 12:8 (which comes from the Hebrew: *temunah*, and means "form or likeness") occurs only four times—once in Num. 12:8 and the other three times in Deut. 4. In these instances in Deut. 4 Moses gives us a grand definition of the word and helps this study considerably for he explains why the people saw no "similitude of God" on Horeb and also tells us precisely what is meant by a similitude (v. 12): "And the Lord spake unto you out of the midst of the fire [on the mount]: ye heard the voice of the words but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice." Verse 15: "Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire: lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude

of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast that is on the earth” They saw no similitude of God, lest they should copy it:

Space has gone, but to sum up briefly we might say that whereas man has not seen God at any time, nor can see Him, he has seen God’s representative angel and has seen the similitude of God and has heard the similitude of God’s voice. The Holy Spirit in much the same way once manifested Himself in the form or similitude of a dove (Luke 3:22).

We can see God in a *form*; indeed Jesus said, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.”