



THE QUESTION

"It is recorded in John 6:48 that Jesus said, 'Not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father.' Yet, a little while later, when Philip asks, 'Show us the Father', Jesus responds, 'He who has seen me has seen the Father'. Could you comment on the different statements?"

ON 'SEEING' THE FATHER.

The operative word here is the word 'seen' and we need to know in what sense the Lord Jesus used it. Clearly, he did not mean that the disciples had 'seen' the Father in the same sense as he himself had 'seen' Him. What, then, was the difference?

We must first notice that in the Old and New Testaments there are no fewer than 20 different Hebrew and Greek words that are translated 'see', all expressing the various shades of meaning carried by the word. For example, leaving aside those in the Old Testament, in the New Testament alone we find: -

- The word 'blepo', which is the usual word for 'see', as in (John 9:15).
- Then, there is 'theoreo', which means 'to view', or 'behold' (Matt.28: 1).
- And then we have 'kathorao', meaning 'see clearly' (Rom.1: 29).
- There is 'horao', which means 'to perceive' or 'understand' (John 20:8).

And there are also about six other words that are also rendered 'see', but I think the point has been made!

WHAT HAD THE DISCIPLES ALREADY 'SEEN'?

This conversation between Jesus and his disciples occurred on the night of his betrayal, when he told them, **"The hour has come"** (John 16:32). Thus, it was near the *close* of his earthly ministry and by that time the chosen apostles had been his constant companions for about three years, and had enjoyed the unique privilege of hearing his teaching and seeing his miracles.

Matt. 16:16 records that earlier, through Peter at Caesarea Philippi, they had declared that they believed him to be **"the Christ, the Son of the Living God"**, and even if we accept that they did not fully appreciate the profound significance of this affirmation of faith, I suggest that they should have had no difficulty in understanding him when he said, **"If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know Him and have seen Him."** (John 14:7).

This statement was followed by Philip's request and the Lord's familiar reply: **"Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."** (v.8).

BUT, IN WHAT SENSE HAD THEY 'SEEN' THE FATHER?

Obviously, not in a physical sense; not as they 'saw' Jesus at that moment. 'Mormon' doctrine claims that 'The Father' lives on a planet called 'Kolob' and has a physical body which may be seen and touched, but such a doctrine is so ludicrous as not to merit serious consideration.

It is sufficient to say here, that the notion of a physically embodied God, presents us with a God who is limited in time and space, and who, therefore, does not possess the quality of omni-presence, which, along with omnipotence, omniscience and immortality, is one of the essential characteristics of deity.

Jesus himself said, **"God is spirit"** (John 4:24), and after his resurrection he reminded his terrified disciples that, **"A spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see me have"** (Luk.24: 39).

Since, then, God is spirit and essentially invisible (1st Tim.1: 17), we can accept that **"No man has 'seen' God at any time."** (John 1:18). The 'Revised Standard Version' renders the rest of this verse beautifully, when it continues; **'It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known'**. The Greek word here rendered 'known' gives us the word 'exegeted'. He has 'exegeted' Him. Exegesis is exposition, explanation. Jesus has declared the Father; revealed Him to mankind. That is why, in Col.1: 15, Paul is able to describe Jesus as **'the image ('eikon') of the invisible God.'**

He is the visible manifestation, expression and representation of the One who, in His very nature, is invisible. Therefore, in acknowledging Jesus to be *'the Son of God'*, the apostles had recognized him to be the visible manifestation of the Father, and John was later able to write that the One who, in the beginning existed with God, who was himself Deity, and who was known as 'the Word', became Man and came to live among men. **"And we have seen ('theomai' = inspected, beheld attentively) his glory, the glory of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth."** (John 1:14).

He was 'God incarnate - Deity in human form. In him was revealed as much of Deity as mortal man could stand - or understand. Hence, Paul wrote, **"In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell."** (Col.1; 19). This was the revelation of God for which the ages had been waiting, and for which biblical history had been preparing mankind. It was God's fullest, and therefore his final manifestaton of Himself in human form, in the person of the Son.

"SEEING" GOD.

In the course of biblical history there had been other 'Theophanies'; other appearances of Deity in human form - too many to be discussed here in detail, but consider the following.

1. As early as Gen.18: 1, *'The LORD'* -('Yahveh') - 'the Becoming One' - appeared to Abraham in what must obviously have been a form that did not terrify him. Not only was He *seen* by Abraham, He even *ate* the meal that the patriarch prepared for Him, and the passage closes with Abraham *'standing before the LORD'*. Yahweh said, **"Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I am about to do?"** And there followed the familiar account of Abraham's audacious plea for the wicked city of Sodom.
2. In Exodus 24: 9-11 we read that Moses, Aaron and his two sons Nadab and Abihu, accompanied by the Seventy Elders of Israel, went up Mt. Sinai **"and they saw the God of Israel."** (v.10). What did they see? That verse also tells us, **"there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the very body of heaven in clearness"**. Beyond this, there is no attempt to describe the One whom they saw, but these 75 men were granted what can only be described as an amazing, inexplicable and, I repeat, indescribable experience. Notice that the phrase *'as it were'* occurs twice in verse 9, because it throws light on the event.

On Mt. Sinai, there was the manifestation of a Presence, the appearance of which was beyond their ability to express in human language. The Invisible God made Himself visible to them, in what must surely have been a form familiar to them, and, as far as it was possible for human eyes to see, His glory was revealed to them. They were not afraid and they were unharmed: **"God did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel. They beheld God."** (v.11) They felt so secure that *'they ate and drank in His presence'*.

3. The next account of an event of a similar nature is in Ex.33: 18-23. This time it involved Moses alone, after he had begged God, **"I beseech thee, show me thy glory"**. (Could it be, I wonder, that Philip had this event in mind when he made his own request?).

To strengthen the over-burdened leader of Israel, God said, **"I will make all my goodness pass before thee...."**, and to this He added, **"Thou canst not see my face, for there shall no man see my face, and live."** The last phrase in the chapter is clear, **"but my face shall not be seen."** Once again there was a visible manifestation and a presence, but no attempt to describe it.

4. There is also the most familiar description of the experience of the prophet Isaiah, in Isa.6, when, on the occasion of the death of Judah's King Uzziah, the prophet saw the King who never dies, the Yahweh, sitting on His elevated throne in His Temple. The Hebrew word here translated 'temple' is *'heiron'*, which means 'palace' Isaiah was overwhelmed – not by the sight of the glory, the smoke and the shaking of the Temple, all of which may have made him think of Sinai – but with a sense of his own unworthiness. But, when he had been 'cleansed' he was able to speak to God; "Here am I, send me" (v.8).
5. In Ezek.1, the prophet Ezekiel himself records seeing the Throne and the One who is seated on it. Read the chapter and notice how often such words as *'like'* and *'likeness'* occurs. Here, too, Ezekiel makes no attempt to describe God. That these events were Theophanies cannot be doubted or denied, but the men of the Old Testament who experienced them could no more describe them than could John, when, in Rev.1, he reports his vision of the glorified Christ. John also uses the word *'like'* five times.

IN CONCLUSION.

There is a most significant passage in John 12:37-41, in which the inspired writer explains why the Jews did not believe in Jesus. John quotes the 10th verse of Isaiah 6, the passage recording the vision of Isaiah already mentioned. Beginning at that 37th verse notice that the personal pronouns used by John refer to the Lord Jesus. He is clearly the subject of the passage. John tells us **"Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke of him"**. In other words, the glory that Isaiah saw was the glory of the pre-incarnate Word, who was in the beginning with God and was himself Deity.

What Philip and his fellow-apostles saw in the flesh, and what you and I see today in the inspired record, is one who in his words and deeds, and in his unblemished and perfect life, revealed to mankind the goodness and grace of a loving God, who stooped to Earth to lift us to Heaven.

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