

## Seeing God

### Introduction

1. Some of the most difficult Bible passages relate to “Seeing God.” (Jn. 1:18; 1 Jn. 4:12; 1 Tim. 6:16; Exod. 33:20).

JOH 1:18 **No man has seen God at any time**; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

1JO 4:12 **No one has beheld God at any time**; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.

1TI 6:16 who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; **whom no man has seen or can see**. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

EXO 33:20 But He said, "**You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!**"

2. These verses set forth that no one has ever seen God, and “no man” can see God and “live.”

3. These verses are plain enough, but seem to contradict some verses that will be studied in this lesson.

### Nature of God

1. The Bible informs us that "God is Spirit." (Jn. 4:24).

2. Joseph Smith once falsely wrote, "the Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's" (**Doctrine and Covenants** 130:22).

3. He was in disagreement with Jesus who informed us God is not fleshly. (Matt. 16:17).

MAT 16:17 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

a. Jesus taught "spirit" does not have flesh and bones. (Lk. 24:39).

LUK 24:39 "See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."

b. Paul affirmed that God is “invisible.” (Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17).

COL 1:15 And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation.

1TI 1:17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

### Some Confusion

1. All of this creates some confusion in light of other scriptures.

- a. God is described as having body parts.
- b. Here are a few scriptures that speak of God as having body parts.

1) "Arms" (Deut. 33:27; Psa. 89:10).	3) "Hand" (Deut. 3:24; Exod. 7:5; 24:11).	5) "Face" (Num 6:24; Deut. 5:4; Psa. 11:7; Rev. 22:4).	7) "Mouth" (Num. 12:8; Psa. 33:6).
2) "Eyes" (2 Chron. 16:9; Prov. 15:3; Psa. 34:15; 1 Pet. 3:12).	4) "Feet" (Exod. 24:10).	6) "Back" (Exod. 33:23).	8) "Finger" (Exod. 31:18)

2. Here are a few scriptures where human language is used of God.

- a. God is all powerful (Jere. 32:17), but God rests. (Gen. 2:2; Jn. 5:17).

JER 32:17 'Ah Lord God! Behold, Thou hast made the heavens and the earth by Thy great power and by Thine outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for Thee, See Matt. 19:26.

GEN 2:2 And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.

JOH 5:17 But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working."

1) God "rested" in the sense He ceased creating.

2) God was not literally tires.

- b. God is in all places (Psa. 139:7-12), but He asks Adam where he was. (Gen. 3:9).

GEN 3:9 Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?"

- c. God repents (changes His mind). (Exod. 32:14, KJV). See NASB

1) God is sinless and cannot repent. (Jas. 1:13).

2) God can change His mind speaking in human terms.

- d. God remembers. (Gen. 9:16).

GEN 9:16 "When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it, to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth."

- e. God states He was sorry. (Gen. 6:6).

GEN 6:6 And **the Lord was sorry** that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

- f. God expresses regret. (1 Sam. 15:35).

- g. God knows all things (1 Jn. 3:20), but He said to Abraham. (Gen. 22:12).

GEN 22:12 And he said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; **for now I know that you**

**fear God**, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me."

- 1) The all-knowing God knew in advanced what Abraham would do.
- 2) God was testing his faith and is using human language of Himself.

h. God manifested the emotion of pity. (Judg. 2:18).

JDG 2:18 And when the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for **the Lord was moved to pity** by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them.

3. These scriptures use what is known as a anthropomorphism.

- This word comes from two Greek words “anthropos” [**ahn** throh pahs] (man) and “morphe” [mahr **fay**] (man).
  - a. This is speaking of God in human terms [humanization] even though God is not human.
  - b. It is when God attributes to Himself human characteristics.

4. These words are recorded in Psalm 91:4.

PSA 91:4 He will cover you with His pinions, And under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark. NASB Heb. has “el raw” meaning “feather, wing” and “kaw-newf” meaning “wings.” See also Psa. 57:1.

PSA 91:4 He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. NIV

- a. The author speaks of God’s “feathers” and “wings,” but no one argues that God literally has “wings” and “feathers.”
- b. This language was not intended to be taken literally to mean that God is a bird, but it is figurative language.

## Visible Appearances

1. God has manifested Himself in visible appearances.

- a. God appeared to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. (Gen. 3:8, 21).

GEN 3:8 And they heard the sound of the Lord God **walking** in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife **hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God** among the trees of the garden.

GEN 3:21 And the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.

- b. Jacob thought he had wrestled with God. (Gen. 32:24-30).

GEN 32:24 Then Jacob was left alone, and **a man wrestled with him** until daybreak.

GEN 32:25 And when he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him.

GEN 32:26 Then he said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking." But he said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

GEN 32:27 So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob."

GEN 32:28 And he said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men

and have prevailed."

GEN 32:29 Then Jacob asked him and said, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And he blessed him there.

GEN 32:30 So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, "**I have seen God face to face**, yet my life has been preserved."

1) "Jacob named the place Peniel" (the face of God).

2) The "man" was not God, but an "angel" [in human form]. (Hos. 12:3-4).

HOS 12:3 In the womb he took his brother by the heel, And in his maturity he contended with God.

HOS 12:4 Yes, **he wrestled with the angel and prevailed**; He wept and sought His favor. He found Him at Bethel, And there He spoke with us,

c. God appeared in a human form to Abram. (Gen. 18:1-5, 22; 19:1).

1) Abraham showed hospitality to three visitors without knowing their identity.

GEN 18:1 The LORD [Yahweh] appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day.

GEN 18:2 Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

GEN 18:3 He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by.

GEN 18:4 Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree.

GEN 18:5 Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way-- now that you have come to your servant. "Very well, "they answered," do as you say. "

2) It is later learned that two of the three visitors were angels. (Gen. 19:1).

GEN 19:1 The **two angels** arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground.

3) The third visitor was "Jehovah" Himself in human form. (Gen. 18:22). Heb. lit. has "Yahweh" or "Jehovah."

GEN 18:22 Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the Lord.

4) Abram [Abraham] began to intercede [bargain] with God in behalf of Sodom. (Gen. 18:22-33).

d. At the burning bush "Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God." (Exod. 3:1-6).

EXO 3:1 Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

EXO 3:2 And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed.

EXO 3:3 So Moses said, "I must turn aside now, and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up."

EXO 3:4 When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, **God called to him from the midst of the bush**, and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

EXO 3:5 Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

EXO 3:6 He said also, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." **Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.**

e. Moses and others were permitted to see a theophany of God on Mt. Sinai. (Exod. 24:9-11).

1) The word “theophany” comes from the Greek word “theos” [ the **ahs**] meaning “God, god” and the Greek verb “phaino” [**fi** noh] meaning “to appear.”

2) It means “an appearance or manifestation of God” in some visible form.

f. We have an theophany of God on Mt. Sinai.

1) God appear to Moses in “a fiery, thick cloud.” (Exod. 19:9,18).

EXO 19:9 And the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I shall come to you in a thick cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe in you forever." Then Moses told the words of the people to the Lord.

EXO 19:18 Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently.

2) Moses did not see the face of God, but he did hear God who spoke from “a thick cloud.”

g. God later appeared to Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the seventy elders of Israel. (Exod. 24:9-11).

EXO 24:9 Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up

EXO 24:10 and **saw the God of Israel**. Under his **feet** was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself.

EXO 24:11 But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank

1) These men were permitted to see a visible representation of God.

2) They saw “His feet” and “something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself” “under His feet.”

h. God later reminded them of what they had seen on Horeb. (Deut. 4:15-19).

DEU 4:15 "So watch yourselves carefully, since **you did not see any form** on the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire,

DEU 4:16 lest you act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female,

DEU 4:17 the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the sky,

DEU 4:18 the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water below the earth.

DEU 4:19 "And beware, lest you lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven.

1) The children of Israel, standing at the foot of Mount Sinai, when God came down in a fiery, thick cloud “did not see any form .”

2) One could not see God, as He is, and live. (Exod. 33:17-20).

EXO 33:17 And the Lord said to Moses, "I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight, and I have known you by name."

EXO 33:18 Then Moses said, "I pray Thee, show me Thy glory!"

EXO 33:19 And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion."

EXO 33:20 But He said, "**You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!**"

- i. Moses was then permitted to see the "back" of God. (Exod. 33:21-23).

EXO 33:21 Then the Lord said, "Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand there on the rock;

EXO 33:22 and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by.

EXO 33:23 "Then I will take My hand away and you shall see **My back**, but My face shall not be seen."

## 2. **The greatest theophany of all occurred in a stable about 4 or 5 B.C. in Bethlehem of Judea.**

- a. Mary gave birth to a Son named "Immanuel" meaning "God with us." (Matt. 1:23).

- b. In this baby boy all the fulness of the Godhead [Deity] dwelt bodily. (Col. 2:9). See Col. 1:15.

COL 2:9 For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form,

- c. Jesus was Deity having become flesh. (Jn. 1:1, 14, 18).

JOH 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

JOH 1:14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

JOH 1:18 No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

- d. Jesus could say "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." (Jn. 14:9).

JOH 14:9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how do you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

- 1) Jesus was not speaking of His physical body.

- 2) He was speaking of His Divine attributes. (Col. 2:9).

### **Conclusion.**

1. These passages reveal that no one has ever seen God as He is because God is invisible Spirit - not flesh.
2. Men have seen God appear in various forms called theophanies.
3. Though human eyes will never see God, one day we shall "see God" if we are "pure in heart." (Matt. 5:8).
4. We shall see God "as He is." (1 Jn. 3:2).

1JO 3:2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know

that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

5. One day we shall be privileged to see God's face. (Rev. 22:4).

REV 22:4 and **they shall see His face**, and His name shall be on their foreheads.

6. The words of King David will be realized. (Psa. 11:7).

PSA 11:7 For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice; **upright men will see his face**.

PSA 17:15 As for me, **I shall behold Thy face** in righteousness; I will be satisfied with Thy likeness when I awake.

7. In the midst of his suffering Job spoke these words of hope. (Job. 19:26, 27).

JOB 19:26 "Even after my skin is destroyed, Yet from my flesh I shall see God;

JOB 19:27 Whom I myself shall behold, And whom my eyes shall see and not another. My heart faints within me.

8. Though God is a "Spirit" Being, it does not mean He is without form.

- a. Jesus is Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), but He has a spiritual body. (Phil. 3:21). Lit. "Jesus [is] a life-giving Spirit." The "is" is more correct than "became." Christ created all things. (Jn. 1:1-3; Col 1:15; Heb. 1:3).

PHI 3:21 who will transform the body of our humble state **into conformity with the body of His glory**, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

- b. One day, at the resurrection, we will have a new spiritual body like that of Christ's. (1 Jn. 3:2; Phil. 3:21; 1 Cor. 15:49-53).

1CO 15:49 And just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

1CO 15:50 Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

1CO 15:51 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

1CO 15:52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

1CO 15:53 For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

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