

Hearing and Seeing God

The teaching that Christ is the “God of the Old Testament” is largely based on the belief that no human being throughout history has ever heard God the Father’s voice or ever had any direct interaction with Him. This belief logically requires one to come to the conclusion that Christ is the “God of the Old Testament” as this belief assumes that any time scripture describes any kind of direct interaction between God and mankind the God being spoken of in these interactions must be the One who became Jesus Christ. If no human being has ever heard God the Father’s voice or had any interaction with Him then it would not be possible for Him to be involved in any of the scriptures that describe interactions between God and mankind. As a result those who hold the belief that Christ is the “God of the Old Testament” typically also believe that God the Father was unknown to Ancient Israel and the Patriarchs. They refer to Christ as the “God of the Old Testament” because they believe that Christ is the ONLY God being that Israel was aware of and that Israel was unaware of God the Father’s existence until Christ came to earth as a physical human and revealed Him to Israel.

However, the idea that God the Father was unknown to Ancient Israel and that Israel only knew about the One who became Jesus Christ is a very difficult position to defend. An easy way to demonstrate this is to look at the title “God of our fathers” in the Bible. Both the Old and New Testaments refer to the “God of our fathers”. The Old Testament references make it clear the “God of our fathers” is who Israel worshiped as their God and who they gave credit for leading them out of Egypt (Exodus 3:14-22; Deuteronomy 26:6-10; 1 Chronicles 12:17; 1 Chronicles 29:18; 2 Chronicles 13:10-12; 2 Chronicles 20:5-11; Ezra 7:27). If we look at the wording of both Deuteronomy 26:6-10 and 2 Chronicles 20:5-11 it is very clear that the “God of our fathers” is the God Israel gave credit for leading them out of Egypt, giving them the promised land, and whose presence they believed dwelt in the temple.

Deut 26:6-10

⁶ But the Egyptians mistreated us, afflicted us, and laid hard bondage on us. ⁷ Then **we cried out to the LORD God of our fathers**, and the LORD heard our voice and looked on our affliction and our labor and our oppression. ⁸ So **the LORD brought us out of Egypt** with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. ⁹ He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, "a land flowing with milk and honey"; ¹⁰ and now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land which you, O LORD, have given me.'

2 Chron 20:5-11

⁵ Then Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the **house of the LORD**, before the new court, ⁶ and said: "**O LORD God of our fathers**, are You not

God in heaven, and do You *not* rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand *is there not* power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You? ⁷ Are You not our God, **who drove out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and gave it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever?** ⁸ And they dwell in it, **and have built You a sanctuary in it for Your name**, saying, ⁹ 'If disaster comes upon us — sword, judgment, pestilence, or famine — we will stand before this temple and **in Your presence** (for Your name *is* in this temple), and cry out to You in our affliction, and You will hear and save.' ¹⁰ And now, here are the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir — whom **You would not let Israel invade when they came out of the land of Egypt**, but they turned from them and did not destroy them — ¹¹ here they are, rewarding us by coming to throw us out of Your possession which You have given us to inherit.

Based on the “God of the Old Testament” teaching, all of the these references and thus the title “God of our fathers” would have to be referring exclusively to Christ since the belief is that Israel didn’t have any interaction with God the Father and wasn’t even aware of His existence. How could they worship an individual and consider Him the “God of our fathers” that they didn’t even know existed? Based on this belief they would simply have to be referring to Christ with this title as it simply wouldn’t make sense for them to apply this title to anyone else and especially not someone they didn’t even know existed. However, when we look at who this title is applied to in the New Testament we find exactly the opposite of what would be expected based on the “God of the Old Testament” teaching. What we find is that the “God of our fathers” is always a reference to God the Father and many of the references are in the context of contrasting the Father and Christ so we just can’t misunderstand who the term is being applied to. Here are some examples:

Acts 3:13-15

¹³ The **God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers**, glorified **His Servant Jesus**, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let *Him* go. ¹⁴ But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵ and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.

Acts 3:25-26

²⁵ You are sons of the prophets, and of the **covenant which God made with our fathers**, saying to Abraham, '*And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*' ²⁶ To you first, **God, having raised up His Servant Jesus**, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one *of you* from your iniquities."

Acts 5:30-31

³⁰ The **God of our fathers** raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree.
³¹ Him God has exalted to His right hand *to be* Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

Acts 22:12-14

¹² "Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt *there*, ¹³ came to me; and he stood and said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that same hour I looked up at him. ¹⁴ Then he said, '**The God of our fathers** has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth.

Notice in every scripture above the Father is clearly being referred to as the "God of our fathers" and He is being contrasted with Christ so there is no confusion as to who is being referred to. Again we have to ask the question if Israel only knew about Christ and did not know about the Father how can it make sense for them to refer to the God that they didn't even know existed as the "God of our fathers" while never referring to Christ with this title when He is supposed to be the only one they did know about and the One they would credit with leading them out of Egypt?

Notice that both Acts 3:25-26 and Acts 5:30-31 mention that the God of our fathers "raised up" Jesus. This makes it very clear that God the Father is being referred to here as "the God of our fathers". Christ certainly didn't resurrect Himself nor did He by His own power do any of the works He performed during His physical life (John 5:30). It was clearly God the Father who "raised up" Christ in every way that statement can be interpreted. So, it is clear that God the Father is being referred to here with the title "God of our fathers". This means Ancient Israel and the Patriarchs had to be aware of God the Father. It would not make any sense for Israel to give this title to a God being that "the fathers" were not even aware of and thus would not have actively worshipped as their God.

Since it is clear that Israel was in fact aware of God the Father and that He was the God they gave credit for leading them out of Egypt and giving them the promised land, how are we to understand the New Testament scriptures that seem to indicate that no human has ever had interaction with God the Father? To understand this subject we need to take a closer look at these scriptures. This subject breaks down into two major categories. These categories are: 1) hearing God the Father, and 2) seeing God the Father.

Hearing God

The entire concept that no human has ever heard God the Father's voice is entirely based on one single scripture. This scripture is John 5:37. No other scripture in the Bible makes any similar statement regarding hearing the Father. Like any scripture we have to take the context into consideration when interpreting its meaning. Here is this verse in its context.

John 5:31-43

³¹ "If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true. ³² There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true. ³³ You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. ³⁴ Yet I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you may be saved. ³⁵ He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light. ³⁶ But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish — the very works that I do — bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me. ³⁷ And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. **You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form.** ³⁸ But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. ³⁹ You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. ⁴⁰ But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life. ⁴¹ "I do not receive honor from men. ⁴² But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you. ⁴³ I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive.

First of all notice that what Christ actually stated in verse 37 was "You have neither heard His voice at any time..." He stated "you". He did not say "no one". While we might interpret Christ's use of the word "you" as an all-inclusive statement applying to all of mankind, we also have to consider the possibility that He could have been simply addressing those He was directly speaking to when He used the word "you". Notice that in the verses following verse 37 Christ makes a number of dogmatic statements using the term "you". If we try to insert the meaning of "no one in the history of mankind" into any of these other statements it becomes very clear that this simply cannot be the meaning Christ intended. Clearly it would not be accurate to say that no one in the history of mankind has ever had the word of God or the love of God abiding in them or that no human has ever accepted Christ as the Messiah.

Additionally, there are other contextual issues to consider as well. If you look at John 5:31-43 in a New King James Version of the Bible you will notice a subheading prior to verse 31 that states "The Fourfold Witness". Of course, these words were added by the translators and are not part of the inspired text. However, this statement accurately describes the verses that follow. In verses 31-40 Christ describes four different "witnesses" to His claim that He is the Son of God. These "witnesses" are 1) John the Baptist, 2) the Father Himself, 3) the works Christ

performed while on earth, and 4) the Old Testament scriptures that prophesied about Him coming to earth as a human.

Just before making His comment about the people having not heard the Father's voice, Christ states that "the Father **Himself**....has testified of Me". Notice the emphasis expressed by His use of the words "the Father **Himself**". He is stressing the point that God the Father has personally testified to the legitimacy of Christ's claim that He is the Son of God. Logically we have to ask the question, if the Father has been completely behind the scenes so much so that Israel was not even aware of His existence until Christ came to tell them about Him then how exactly can it be said that the Father has personally testified of Christ? How exactly would that work? If God the Father has had no interaction with Israel and Israel has not even been aware of His existence what personal testimony could He have possibly given?

The Greek word for "testified" in verse 37 is the same Greek word translated in verse 33 as "borne witness". It is "martureo" (Strong's # 3140). Thayer's Greek Lexicon by Joseph Thayer defines this word as, "to be a witness, to bear witness, testify, i. e. to affirm that one has seen or heard or experienced something, or that he knows it because taught by divine revelation or inspiration". How can one do this if they silently sit in the background and have no communication or interaction with anyone? Verse 33 is referring to John the Baptist and we know his testimony of Christ included active interaction with those he was testifying to. To further make this point, the Greek word translated as "witnesses" in verse 32 is the same Greek word translated as "testimony" in verse 34. In both cases it is referring to God the Father. The Greek word is "marturia" (Strong's 3141). Thayer's defines this word as "what one testifies, testimony.....in a legal sense, of testimony before a judge". Again how does one do this if they sit silently in the background having no communication or interaction with anyone they are supposed to have "witnessed" to? How exactly would that work?

Christ listed the Old Testament scriptures and the works He performed through the Father's inspiration during His physical life as separate "witnesses" from "the Father Himself". So, He was obviously referring to the Father personally testifying to His legitimate claim to be the Son of God and not the Father simply working through others. Since Christ emphasized that the Father had personally testified that He is in fact the Son of God, we should ask the question "Does the Bible gives us any examples of the Father personally testifying that Christ is His Son?" In fact, the Bible gives us at least 2 different instances recorded in 7 different scriptures that document the Father plainly stating to a human audience that Christ is in fact His Son. Many often dismiss these scriptures by saying it is an angel that is speaking in these verses and not God the Father, but please note that nowhere does the Bible ever state that an angel is involved in these accounts and the wording never suggests that anyone else is speaking on the Father's behalf.

The first instance where the Bible records God the Father testifying that Christ is His Son was at Christ's baptism.

Matt 3:16-17

¹⁶ When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. ¹⁷ And suddenly **a voice came from heaven**, saying, "**This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.**"

Mark 1:9-11

⁹ It came to pass in those days *that* Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. ¹¹ Then **a voice came from heaven**, "**You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.**"

Luke 3:21-22

²¹ When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. ²² And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and **a voice came from heaven which said**, "**You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.**"

The second instance where the Bible records God the Father testifying that Christ is His Son was at the transfiguration.

Matt 17:5-8

⁵ While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly **a voice came out of the cloud, saying**, "**This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!**" ⁶ And when **the disciples heard it**, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." ⁸ When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

Mark 9:7-8

⁷ And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and **a voice came out of the cloud, saying**, "**This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!**" ⁸ Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves.

Luke 9:34-36

³⁴ While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ **And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!"** ³⁶ When the voice had ceased, Jesus was found alone. But they kept quiet, and told no one in those days any of the things they had seen.

Later Peter mentions this event in his second epistle. Notice that in Peter's account of this event he states that the One he heard speaking was "the Excellent Glory" which is a clear reference to God the Father.

2 Peter 1:16-18

¹⁶ For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. ¹⁷ For He received **from God the Father** honor and glory when such **a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory**: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." ¹⁸ And **we heard this voice** which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

God the Father is the only individual in existence who can make the claim that Christ is His Son. There is no one else who can say this. In addition, there is nothing stated in any of these scriptures to indicate an angel is speaking on the Father's behalf. Not only is this never stated or even implied in any of these scriptures, but the statement "This is My beloved Son" is stated in first person which gives us no indication that there is an intermediary that is speaking on the Father's behalf. Given Christ's clear statement in John 5:37 that "the Father Himself (i.e. personally)...has testified of Me" and the fact that Bible gives us examples of this in at least 7 different scriptures, it is clear that Christ's use of the word "you" in John 5:37 should be understood as a reference to the specific audience he was speaking to when he made this statement and not as an all-inclusive statement meant to apply to all mankind.

Seeing God

The issue of "seeing" God the Father is a much more complex subject. First of all there are several scriptures in the Bible that obviously make dogmatic and all-inclusive statements regarding God the Father not being seen by any human.

John 1:18

18 No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared *Him*.

John 6:46

46 Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father.

1 John 4:12

12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.

These verses are obviously making dogmatic and all-inclusive statements that no human has ever seen God the Father. In light of the above scriptures how are we to understand the numerous Old Testament scriptures that speak about God appearing to humans or having face to face interaction with humans? Do these references to God appearing to humans or speaking with them face to face automatically mean that these scriptures could not possibly be speaking about God the Father and that they MUST be referring to the One who became Jesus Christ? To answer this question we need to take a closer look at both of these issues.

Face To Face

There are a number of scriptures in the Old Testament that describe God having “face to face” interactions with humans (Exodus 33:11; Numbers 12:8; Numbers 14:14; Deuteronomy 5:4; Deuteronomy 34:10; Ezekiel 20:35). Given that several New Testament scriptures make dogmatic all-inclusive statements that no human has ever seen the face of God the Father, it is often assumed that any scriptures that describe God having “face to face” interactions with humans MUST be referring to the One who became Jesus Christ as it would not be possible for any of these scriptures to be speaking about God the Father. This assumption is based on how we today typically use the English term “face to face”. When we use this term today we normally mean we are able to directly look into the eyes of the person we are speaking with and they are also able to look into our eyes. For example, we typically do not use the phrase “face to face” to describe a telephone conversation we might have with a friend. Although we can have a direct two way conversation via a telephone, the fact that the two parties involved in this conversation are not standing directly in front of each other and able to look into each other’s eyes would cause us not to describe this interaction with the term “face to face”. However, it is important to understand that the Bible uses this phrase much more broadly than we typically use it today.

There are several clear examples of this in the Bible. For example, Moses uses the term “face to face” to describe God’s interaction with the people of Israel when He spoke the Ten Commandments to them and made the covenant with them at Mount Sinai.

Deut 5:1-4

¹ And Moses called all Israel, and said to them: "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your hearing today, that you may learn them and be careful to observe them. ² The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. ³ The LORD did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, those who *are* here today, all of us who *are* alive. ⁴ **The LORD talked with you face to face on the mountain from the midst of the fire.**

However, the previous chapter makes it very clear that in this “face to face” conversation Israel did NOT actually see God.

Deut 4:15-19

¹⁵ "Take careful heed to yourselves, **for you saw no form when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire**, ¹⁶ lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure: the likeness of male or female, ¹⁷ the likeness of any animal that *is* on the earth or the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, ¹⁸ the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground or the likeness of any fish that *is* in the water beneath the earth. ¹⁹ And *take heed*, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and *when* you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them, which the LORD your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage.

Moses makes a similar comment about God’s interaction with the people of Israel in the book of Numbers.

Num 14:13-14

¹³ And Moses said to the LORD: "Then the Egyptians will hear *it*, for by Your might You brought these people up from among them, ¹⁴ and they will tell *it* to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, LORD, *are* among these people; that You, LORD, **are seen face to face** and **Your cloud stands above** them, and **You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night.**

Notice that Moses describes this interaction using the term “face to face” but also makes it clear that what the people of Israel actually saw was a cloud during the day and a fire at night. They did not see God’s face and were not able to look into his eyes.

The term “face to face” is used similarly in Exodus 33 to describe Moses’ conversation with God.

Ex 33:11

11 So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. And he would return to the camp, but his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tabernacle.

However, just a few verses later it becomes clear that Moses didn’t actually see God’s face.

Ex 33:18-23

18 And he said, "Please, show me Your glory."

19 Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." **20** But He said, "**You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.**" **21** And the LORD said, "Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. **22** So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. **23** Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; **but My face shall not be seen.**"

Since it is clear in all of the above examples that the face of God was not seen by the humans He was interacting with, the term “face to face” should be understood more in the sense of a direct interaction taking place without necessitating that the parties involved are able to see each other’s face and look into each other’s eyes. We can see this concept explained in God’s comments to Miriam and Aaron in Numbers 12.

Num 12:4-8

4 Suddenly the LORD said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!" So the three came out. **5** Then the LORD came down in the

pillar of cloud and stood *in* the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both went forward. ⁶ Then He said,

"Hear now My words:

If there is a prophet among you,

I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision;

I speak to him in a dream.

⁷ Not so with My servant Moses;

He *is* faithful in all My house.

⁸ I speak with him **face to face**,

Even plainly, and **not in dark sayings**;

And he sees the form of the LORD.

Why then were you not afraid

To speak against My servant Moses?"

Here again we see the phrase "face to face" used but we know Moses did not see the face of God as God had previously stated to Moses in Exodus 33 that it was not possible for him to see God's face. What He is explaining here is He has direct two way communication with Moses "as a man speaks to his friend" rather than just one way communication as would occur with communication via a dream. Also, think about how we communicate with God today. We talk to God in prayer and He speaks to us through His word and by influencing our thoughts through the Holy Spirit. We do not have direct two way communication with Him "as a man speaks to his friend". God's relationship with Moses was unique in that God would have interactive conversations with Moses "as a man speaks to his friend".

If we look at the Hebrew words that are translated into the English phrase "face to face" in the scriptures that describe God having "face to face" interaction with humans, we will see that the meaning of the Hebrew words do not require the parties involved to be able to look into each other's eyes. In fact, the primary meanings of these words are just general expressions for direct communication.

The Hebrew word translated as "face to face" in Exodus 33:11, Deuteronomy 5:4, Deuteronomy 34:10, and Ezekiel 20:35 is "paneḥ" (Strong's # 6440). The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the Old Testament by Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter defines this word as "A masculine plural noun meaning a face. Although the literal meaning of face is possible....**most of the time this word occurs in a figurative, idiomatic phrase.**" So, we see the meaning of the Hebrew in these verses is consistent with "face to face" being understood as

an expression referring to direct communication without requiring the literal meaning we typically apply to this phrase in English today.

There are two additional Hebrew words that are translated into English as "face to face" that we need to consider as well. In Numbers 12:8, the Hebrew word translated as "face to face" is "peh" (Strong's # 6310). Baker and Carpenter define this word as "A masculine singular noun meaning mouth. **Besides the literal meaning, this term is used as the instrument of speech and figuratively for speech itself.**"

In Numbers 14:14 the Hebrew word translated as "face to face" is "ayin" (Strong's # 5869). This word has a very broad usage with a variety of different meanings. However, Baker and Carpenter include as one of these meanings, "**By extension, it refers to being in the presence of another.**" Given that Numbers 14:14 makes it clear that Israel only saw the cloud during the day and the fire at night in this "face to face" interaction with God, it is clear that the meaning of "being in the presence of another" is what is meant in this verse by the phrase "face to face".

God Appearing To Humans

There are numerous accounts in the Old Testament that describe God appearing to humans. Often the use of the word "appeared" in these accounts is interpreted to mean that we can assume that the humans in these accounts actually saw the face of God. As a result, it is also assumed that all of these accounts **MUST** be referring to the One who became Jesus Christ as it would not be a possibility for God the Father to be being spoken of if His face is seen by humans. However, concluding that we can always assume that any reference to God appearing to a human always means the One who became Jesus Christ is being referred to can result in significant Biblical contradictions. For example, in Genesis 17 we have the account of God telling Abraham about the covenant that God made with him. The story begins by telling us that God appeared to Abraham.

Gen 17:1-2

¹ When Abram was ninety-nine years old, **the LORD appeared to Abram** and said to him, "I *am* Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. ² And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly."

If we assume that the God being spoken of in this account **MUST** be the One who became Jesus Christ then we run into a significant contradiction if we compare this assumption to what is recorded in Acts 3.

Acts 3:13-26

¹³ The **God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers**, glorified **His Servant Jesus**, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let *Him* go. ¹⁴ But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵ and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.....²⁵ You are sons of the prophets, and of the **covenant which God made with our fathers**, saying to Abraham, '*And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*' ²⁶ To you first, **God, having raised up His Servant Jesus**, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one *of you* from your iniquities."

These verses tell us that the God who made the covenant with Abraham "raised up" Jesus Christ and that Jesus is "His Servant". Both of these statements make it clear that it was God the Father who made the covenant with Abraham. Christ certainly didn't resurrect Himself nor did He by His own power do any of the works He performed during His physical life (John 5:30). It was clearly the Father who "raised up" Christ in every way that statement can be interpreted. Similarly, Christ is not a Servant of Himself. He is the Servant of God the Father.

So, given that Acts 3 tells us that the God Who made the covenant with Abraham was in fact God the Father, how are we to understand the statement in Genesis 17 that this same God Being appeared to Abraham? The key to understanding this is understanding the Hebrew word translated as "appeared" in these accounts. The Hebrew word that is translated into the English word "appeared" in the Old Testament is "raa" (Strong's # 7200). Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words defines this word as "raa is the most frequent Hebrew word for "seeing", **encompassing a variety of actions including physical, visionary, and mental**.....to see, look, view, to realize, know, consider; to be selected; to become visible, appear, show oneself, to be seen.....**meet with; a general word for visual perception**". While this word can certainly mean that one is able to fully "see" the individual that is "appearing" to them, this word can also have some rather broad meanings. It can refer to an "appearance" in the form of a vision, it can be a general word for any type visual perception, or it can even mean to meet with.

If we look at some of the scriptures where this word is used we can see that it can have a broad number of meanings that do not require the party that is being "appeared to" actually seeing the physical form of the one "appearing" to them. For example it can refer to an "appearance" through a vision or dream.

Dan 8:1

¹ In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar **a vision appeared to me** — to me, Daniel — after **the one that appeared to me the first time**.

1 Kings 3:5

⁵ At Gibeon the **LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream** by night; and God said, "Ask! What shall I give you?"

This word can also be used to describe a God being appearing before humans but not actually revealing to the humans involved His actual form.

Ex 3:1-3

¹ Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

² And **the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire** from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. ³ Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn."

Ex 16:10

¹⁰ Now it came to pass, as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, **the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.**

Deut 31:14-15

¹⁴So Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves in the tabernacle of meeting. ¹⁵ Now the **LORD appeared at the tabernacle in a pillar of cloud,** and the pillar of cloud stood above the door of the tabernacle.

Num 16:42-43

⁴² Now it happened, when the congregation had gathered against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tabernacle of meeting; and **suddenly the cloud covered it,** and **the glory of the LORD appeared.** ⁴³ Then Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of meeting.

In all of these examples there is an “appearance” of a God Being to humans but what the humans actually “see” is a fire or a cloud. The humans do not actually see the form of the God being appearing to them. While the above scriptures make it very clear that the form of the God being in these accounts was not actually seen by the humans being appeared to, there are also scriptures that do not specifically state that the form of the God being appearing was not actually seen by the humans involved but we can see that this is the case if we look at other related scriptures

Lev 9:23-24

²³ And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of meeting, and came out and blessed the people. Then the **glory of the LORD appeared to all the people,** ²⁴ and fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When all the people saw *it*, they shouted and fell on their faces.

Num 16:19

¹⁹ And Korah gathered all the congregation against them at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then **the glory of the LORD appeared to all the congregation.**

Num 14:10

¹⁰ And all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Now **the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of meeting before all the children of Israel.**

In the scriptures above we see that the LORD is described as having appeared before all of the people of Israel. However, in Deuteronomy 4 Moses explains that God purposely did not allow Israel to see any type of representation of His form as He knew that if they saw any kind of representation of His form given their idolatrous background they would make an idol out of that image and would worship it.

Deut 4:15-19

¹⁵ "Take careful heed to yourselves, **for you saw no form** when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, ¹⁶ **lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure;** the likeness of male or female, ¹⁷ the likeness of any animal that *is* on the earth or the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, ¹⁸ the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground or the likeness of

any fish that *is* in the water beneath the earth. ¹⁹ And *take heed*, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and *when* you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them, which the LORD your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage.

Given that God made a specific point out of not letting Israel see any type of a representation of his form, we can conclude that in the above scriptures that describe the LORD appearing before the entire nation whatever the people visually saw they did not see the actual form of God. These examples make it clear that when we read scriptures in the Old Testament that describe God appearing before human beings it is **NOT** a safe assumption to conclude that these humans actually saw the face or form of God. Therefore, we cannot automatically conclude which God being is being spoken of on this basis alone.

The Form of the LORD

One of the scriptures that is often used as proof that the God Moses interacted with **MUST** be the One who became Jesus Christ is Numbers 12:8

Num 12:4-8

⁴ Suddenly the LORD said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!" So the three came out. ⁵ Then the LORD came down in the pillar of cloud and stood *in* the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both went forward. ⁶ Then He said,

"Hear now My words:

If there is a prophet among you,

I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision;

I speak to him in a dream.

⁷ Not so with My servant Moses;

He *is* faithful in all My house.

⁸ I speak with him face to face,

Even plainly, and not in dark sayings;

And **he sees the form of the LORD.**

Why then were you not afraid

To speak against My servant Moses?"

This verse states that Moses "sees the form of the LORD". The Hebrew word translated as "form" in this verse is "temunah" (Strong's # 8544). Baker and Carpenter define this word as "A feminine noun meaning a likeness or a form". So, this is definitely saying that Moses actually saw a likeness or form in at least some of his interactions with God. To view this statement in its overall context we have to keep in mind that Deuteronomy 4:15-19 makes it very clear that the rest of Israel saw absolutely no likeness or form of God whatsoever when He interacted with them lest they make an idol out of any form or likeness they were allowed to see. This contrast is what makes the statement "he sees the form of the LORD" a significant statement to make. However, we also need to keep in mind that on Mount Sinai Moses had specifically requested to fully see God and was told this was not a possibility.

Ex 33:18-23

¹⁸ And he said, "Please, show me Your glory."

¹⁹ Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." ²⁰ But He said, "**You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.**" ²¹ And the LORD said, "Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. ²² So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. ²³ Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; **but My face shall not be seen.**"

So, we know for sure that the statement "he sees the form of the Lord" cannot mean that Moses actually saw the face of God. It is also important to look at how this same Hebrew word is used in the book of Job.

Job 4:13-16

¹³ In disquieting thoughts from the visions of the night,

When deep sleep falls on men,

¹⁴ Fear came upon me, and trembling,

Which made all my bones shake.

15 Then a spirit passed before my face;

The hair on my body stood up.

16 It stood still,

But **I could not discern its appearance.**

A form was before my eyes;

In this account, Eliphaz is relating an encounter he had with a demon. In relating the story, he mentions that he saw some type of “form” in front of him but could not discern what he was actually seeing. This shows us that this Hebrew word can be used to refer to a “form” that is non-distinctive. So, when we apply this understanding to Numbers 12:8 we can see that in contrast to the rest of Israel, when Moses interacted with God He was allowed to see some type of form. However, this does not mean that Moses definitely saw God in detail. We know for sure that He was not allowed to see God’s face (Exodus 33:18-23). So, what Moses actually saw was some type of visionary likeness of God and he did not actually see God in detail.

Glorified State vs Non-Glorified State

A common argument regarding Exodus 33:18-23 is that God was simply telling Moses that he could not see His face in a “glorified state” and the assumption is made that Moses was able to see God’s face in a “non-glorified state”. This idea comes from the fact that in verse 18 Moses makes the statement “Please show me your glory”

Ex 33:18-23

18 And he said, "**Please, show me Your glory.**"

19 Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." 20 But He said, "**You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.**" 21 And the LORD said, "Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. 22 So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. 23 Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; **but My face shall not be seen.**"

However, please take note of the fact that when God emphatically states that “no man shall see me and live” He does not state any such distinction regarding a glorified vs non-glorified state. He simply dogmatically states that humans cannot see His face and live to tell the story. To understand the reference to “glory” in this verse, we need to look at a number of other scriptures where this same term is used.

Ex 24:16-17

¹⁶ Now the **glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai**, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. ¹⁷ **The sight of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel.**

Ex 40:34-35

³⁴ Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and **the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.** ³⁵ And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and **the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.**

Lev 9:5-6

⁵ So they brought what Moses commanded before the tabernacle of meeting. And all the congregation drew near and stood before the LORD. ⁶ Then Moses said, "This is the thing which the LORD commanded you to do, and **the glory of the LORD will appear to you.**"

Lev 9:23-24

²⁴ And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of meeting, and came out and blessed the people. Then **the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people,** ²⁴ and fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. **When all the people saw it,** they shouted and fell on their faces.

Num 14:10

¹⁰ And all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Now **the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of meeting before all the children of Israel.**

Num 14:20-23

²⁰ Then the LORD said: "I have pardoned, according to your word; ²¹ but truly, as I live, **all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD** — ²² because **all these men who have seen My glory** and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, ²³ they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it.

As the above scriptures demonstrate, the phrase "glory of the LORD" is a term used to mean God's presence or demonstrations of His power. As previously mentioned, Exodus 33 does not state any such glorified state vs non-glorified state distinction. This entire idea is an assumption that is based simply on the fact that Moses asked "Please, show me your glory." Considering the full context, we can see that Moses was asking to see God in detail and God denied the request stating that "no man shall see Me and live".

They Saw The God of Israel

It is often assumed that the God that made the Covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai MUST be the One who became Jesus Christ because Exodus 24 mentions a group of people seeing Him and therefore it would not be a possibility for this to be God the Father. This idea is based on the following scripture.

Ex 24:9-11

⁹ Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, ¹⁰ and **they saw the God of Israel**. And **there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity**. ¹¹ But on the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand. So **they saw God**, and they ate and drank.

Notice that Moses is included in this group. We have seen that unlike the rest of Israel Moses actually saw some type of form when he interacted with God (Numbers 12:8) whereas God made a specific point of not letting the rest of Israel see any kind of form or likeness of Him out of concern they would use this image to make an idol to worship (Deuteronomy 4:15-19). We also saw that later in Exodus 33 (after the account above in Exodus 24) Moses requests that God allow him to see God in detail and God denies the request. If Moses had seen God in detail here in Exodus 24 he wouldn't be making this request in Exodus 33. So, logically we can conclude that this group didn't see God in detail either. They simply saw a visionary likeness of

God and the statement “they saw God” is significant because this group was the only people in Israel allowed to see this. Everyone else just heard God’s voice coming out of the midst of the fire but was not allowed to see any form or likeness of God.

Notice that in the account described in Exodus 24:10 it states “And *there was* under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone”. This description matches the description recorded in a vision revealed to the prophet Ezekiel. In the first chapter of Ezekiel we are told that Ezekiel “saw visions of God” (Ezekiel 1:1). This chapter gives a very detailed description of the vision Ezekiel saw of God and the area surrounding His throne. The description of God’s throne in this vision directly matches the description of God in Exodus 24.

Ezek 1:26-28

²⁶ And above the firmament over their heads was **the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone**; on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it. ²⁷ Also from the appearance of His waist and upward I saw, as it were, the color of amber with the appearance of fire all around within it; and from the appearance of His waist and downward I saw, as it were, the appearance of fire with brightness all around. ²⁸ Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness all around it. **This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.**

So, Ezekiel “saw God” but it was a vision of God and not His actual appearance. We also need to consider the fact that the book of Acts directly tells us that Stephen “saw God” as well.

Acts 7:55-56

⁵⁵ But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and **saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God,** ⁵⁶ and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

Here we are told that Stephen “saw” both God the father and Jesus Christ. Since scripture is clear that no one can see the face of God the Father, Stephen must have “seen” some type of visionary image of God the Father without actually seeing His actual appearance. So, we can see from this account that we need to be careful when interpreting the exact meaning of the Bible’s statements regarding humans “seeing” God. Similar to Ezekiel and Stephen, Moses and the elders of Israel saw a visionary image of God, but they did not see His actual appearance. If Moses had seen God’s actual appearance in Exodus 24 there would be no reason for him to make his request to actually see God in Exodus 33.

Considering all of the information presented here, we can see that many of the conclusions that are often drawn in regards to the issue of “hearing and seeing God” are incorrect or incomplete. As a result, we have to be careful with using this issue to make dogmatic conclusions regarding which God Being is being addressed in any particular Old Testament scripture.