



Israel and even more so, between God and Moses.

Another example of this is found in the book of Judges. What is called the “Angel of the Lord” appeared to Gideon (6:12) and Gideon later declared, **“Alas, O Lord GOD! For I have seen the Angel of the LORD face to face”** (6:22). It is often unclear in Scripture when the phrase “Angel of the

Lord” is talking about an angelic being sent by God, and when it means some manifestation of God’s presence. Numbers 14:14 described Israel as seeing the Lord **“face to face”** but then refers to the pillar of cloud and of fire. Exodus 14:19 uses the term “Angel of God” to describe the glory of the pillar of fire. This seems to indicate that this was some manifestation of God. In the same context in which God passed before Moses, God’s “Angel” is promised to go before the Israelites in taking Canaan (Exod. 33:2). This is what allows them to be described as having a “face to face” relationship with God (Num. 14:14), and may even be called His **“Presence (*panim*)”** (Exod. 33:14). Clearly, however, this is a restricted aspect of His presence. If His full presence had come into “their midst” they would have been consumed (Exod. 33:3, 5). That *consuming* power probably refers to the same thing He calls His “face (*panim*)” elsewhere, that no one has seen, nor can see lest he die.



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ISSUE

14.39

BULLETIN OF  
THE OLSEN  
PARK CHURCH  
OF CHRIST

# Faithful Sayings

September 23  
2012



## Services

Sunday: 9:30 AM  
10:20 AM  
6:00 PM  
Wednesday: 7:00 PM

## Elders:

Pat Ledbetter  
Jeff Nunn  
Kyle Pope

## Deacons:

Dean Bowers  
Eddie Cook  
Bill Davis  
Steve Dixon  
Pat Goguen  
Jack Langley  
Neil Ledbetter  
Brady McAlister  
Walker McAnear  
Lance Purcell  
Rusty Scott

## Evangelist:

Kyle Pope

## Did Moses See the Face of God?

By Kyle Pope

The apostle John, through the Holy Spirit wrote, **“No one has seen God at anytime”** (John 1:18; 1 John 4:12). The Old Testament, however records some instances where God’s people were said to see some aspect of God. Exodus 24:10 tell us that Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders **“saw the God of Israel.”** Moses was even said to have had the unique honor of speaking to God **“face to face”** (Deut. 34:10). *Did Moses actually see the face of God?*

To answer this, we must first understand one of the terms that Scripture uses. The word that is translated “face” in Exodus 33:20 is the Hebrew word *panim*. While this word can have a specific, literal, and anatomical sense in reference to the front of a person’s head (Exod. 10:28), it can also refer to the surface of something – **“the face (*panim*) of the earth”** (Exod. 33:16), the front of something – **“the forefront (*panim*) of the tent”** (Exod. 26:9), it can mean to be before someone – **“your males shall appear before (*panim*) the Lord GOD”** (Exod. 23:17), or it can

even refer to the presence of someone – **“they were driven out from Pharaoh’s presence (*panim*)”** (Exod. 10:11).

When it comes to God, it is clear that *panim* can have these same distinct applications in different contexts. For example, while God told Moses **“My face (*panim*) shall not be seen”** (Exod. 33:23), He also promised the Israelites a few verses before this **“My Presence (*panim*) will go with you**



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**and I will give you rest”** (Exod. 33:14). What we must conclude is that there is some element of the grandeur of God that cannot be witnessed by human beings, that Exod. 33:20-23 calls His **“face (*panim*)”**. At the same time, we must also conclude that there is some other limited aspect of His glory that can be seen, to which the same word can sometimes apply—and most translations call His **“Presence (*panim*)”**.

Let’s notice a few things that support this conclusion. In Exodus 24:10 Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders go up on the mountain. We know that Moses was allowed to go further (Exod. 24:2), but the others were to **“worship from afar”** (Exod. 24:1). It is from this more remote distance that it is said:

**...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. But on the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand. So they saw God, and they ate and drank** (Exod. 24:10-11, NKJV).

Now then, if this was all we had we might conclude that they saw the full grandeur of God but were spared death, since it says God did not **“lay His hand”** on them. However, there is more to it. What they were allowed to see, was some aspect of what Exodus 24:16 calls **“the glory of the Lord,”** that came down on the mountain. Its appearance is described as **“a consuming fire”** (Exod. 24:17). Was this the full *glory* of the Lord? No. After this even, Moses begs the Lord, **“Show me you glory”** (Exod. 33:18). It is in response to this that God covers Moses in the **“hollow of his hand,”** sets him in

the **“cleft of the rock”** and passes before Moses (Exod. 33:19-23). It is in this context that God allows Moses to see his **“back”** (33:23) but declares, **“You cannot see My face (*panim*); for no man shall see Me, and live”** (Exod. 33:20). It is clear in this text that when God says “see Me” He does not mean his “back” (Exod. 33:23), nor whatever aspect of His glory that Aaron and the other saw (Exod. 24:10). What God calls His **“face (*panim*)”** in Exodus 33:20 and 33:23 must be some fuller manifestation of His glory. As noted at the beginning of our study, New Testament writers confirm this distinction. When John wrote, **“No one has seen God at anytime”** (John 1:18; 1 John 4:12), he is clearly talking about that fullest part of God’s glory that no one has yet seen. To see some aspect of God is not to behold the fullness of His glory. That honor belongs only to the “blessed” in heaven. Jesus promised, **“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”** (Matt. 5:8).

Finally, let’s notice a couple of things that help us further clarify this. The expression “face to face” is an important phrase used in Scripture. Throughout the Old Testament it is used of the close relationship that God had to Moses (and with Israel). It is first used when Jacob wrestled with the Lord and God named him “Israel.” Jacob says, **“I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved”** (Gen 32:30). Now this can’t mean that he saw what God calls His face in Exodus 33:20 or he would be dead, and the New Testament claims that no one has seen God would be false. *So, what does it mean?* Jacob saw some aspect

of God’s glory, but not His full “face (*panim*).” Even so, he was blessed with a close encounter (if you will) with Deity. As noted at the beginning, the same is said of Moses numerous times (Exod. 33:11; Num. 12:8; Deut. 5:4; 34:10), but it is also said of God’s treatment of the Israelites:

**...You, LORD, are among these people; that You, LORD, are seen face to face and that 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** (Num. 14:14).

Now obviously the Israelites as a whole hadn’t even seen what Moses saw of God’s glory, but it is still described as knowing Him **“face to face.”** This makes it clear that what is being described is the closeness of the relationship between God and