

Was Jesus God Even Though God Is Invisible?

by Servetus the Evangelical

The Bible says no sinful, mortal human has ever seen God. It further declares that sinful people literally cannot see God and live. Yet most Christians have believed Jesus was God. How could he have been God if many people saw him and didn't die?

The Bible relates several incidents in which people thought they literally saw God when they really saw "the angel of the LORD." When it happened they thought they would die because they believed that humans cannot literally see God and live. Because of this and other biblical data, scholars describe God as "transcendent," that is, separate from, or beyond, the material universe.

For example, right after God delivered Israel from bondage in Egypt he told Moses he was going to send his angel to guard Israel on its way to the promised land and taking possession of it (Exodus 23.20, 23; 33.2). But Moses asked God to personally accompany the nation. God answered, "Say to the sons of Israel, 'You are an obstinate people; should I go up in your midst for one moment, I would destroy you'" (33.5).

Then Moses said to God, "show me Your glory" (Exodus 33.18). God replied, "no man can see Me and live" (v. 20). Then God hid Moses in the cleft of a rock and showed part of his glory to Moses, but he did not show him his face (vv. 21-23; 24.5-6).

God's glory is covered with an intense light that is unapproachable to sinful mortals. The psalmist states, "O LORD my God, You are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty, covering Yourself with light as with a cloak" (Psalm 104.2). The Apostle Paul echoes this truth by saying that God the Father "alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see" (1 Timothy 6.16). And Paul describes the Father as "immortal, invisible, the only God" (1.17). Notice that Paul says the Father is "the only God," so that Jesus cannot be God.

In the prologue of the Gospel of John, the author writes, "No man has seen God at any time" (John 1.18). And in his text he quotes Jesus as saying, "Not than any man has seen the Father" (John 6.46). Then Jesus adds concerning himself, "except the One who is from God, He has seen the Father."

So, Jesus said that no human except himself had ever seen God. Due to such claims, his opponents sometimes questioned who he was (e.g., John 8.25). Once he answered that he was "a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God" (v. 40).

The New Testament (NT) often affirms that Jesus was a man. The main reason is that in the 1st century, incipient Gnosticism existed in the Hellenistic world. It advocated a Greek philosophical dualism—that physical matter is evil, or the cause of evil, and only spirit is pure and good. So, the human body was considered evil.

Out of Gnosticism arose Docetism. It asserted that Jesus "seemed" (Gr. *dokeo*="to seem") to have had a body of flesh and blood, but he really had only a spiritual body. So, Docetists alleged that Jesus' crucifixion and death were an illusion. The New Testament (NT) refutes this grievous error (John 1.14; 1 John 1.1-3; 4.14; 2 John 7).

Christians have wrongly emphasized that Jesus was God and deemphasized that he was a man. Scholars agree that Christians have tended toward Docetism.

Many Christians repudiate the idea that humans will ever literally see God. But they misunderstand the spiritual realm by claiming that God is spirit (John 4.24).

Angels do not possess a fleshly body. Yet the Bible records many incidents in which they instantly appeared and disappeared to humans. They always appeared human and even could eat food (e.g., Genesis 18.2, 8). Jesus said of children that “their angels in heaven continually behold the face of My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 18.10). Thus, Jesus affirmed that angels in heaven literally see God.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth of the future resurrection because some church members denied there would ever be a resurrection (1 Corinthians 15.14). Others questioned the nature of the resurrection body (v. 35). Paul mentions different types of flesh, different glories of stars, and a difference between the heavenly and the earthly (vv. 39-41). Then he states that at the resurrection the human body will be “raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body” (v. 44). Paul adds that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (v. 50). So, he calls the resurrection body “a spiritual body,” saying it is not made of flesh and blood. But he does not mean that it will be ghostlike, an apparition that cannot be touched.

The several post-resurrection appearances of Jesus in the NT gospels show what Paul means. The risen Jesus instantly appeared and disappeared, just as angels do. Perhaps the risen Jesus has a body like that of the angels since Paul said there are two kinds of bodies: natural and spiritual. Yet the disciples sometimes touched the risen Jesus (Matthew 28.9). Once he said to them, “touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have” (Luke 24.39). Then they saw him eat some fish (vv. 41-43).

But the future resurrection of the righteous will enable us to literally see God. Job said of that time, “Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes will see” (Job 19.26-27). David wrote of that blessed event, saying to God, “I shall behold Your face in righteousness; I will be satisfied with Your likeness when I awake” (Psalm 17.15).

Then Jesus’ beatitude will ultimately come true—“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5.8). It will occur in New Jerusalem, where God’s people “will see His [God’s] face, and His name will be on their foreheads” (Revelation 22.4).