

God Appears To Rev. C. L. Franklin

A black resident of the Mississippi Delta told me this story, probably in 1967. You need to know that although Aretha Franklin, the famous singer, was born in Memphis and grew up in Detroit, her father, the famous preacher and Gospel singer C.L. Franklin, was born in Sunflower County, Mississippi, and then moved to Shelby, a small town in Bolivar County, both in the Delta. Historian James C. Cobb titled his book on the Delta "*The Most Southern Place On Earth*." It is also the setting for my first book, [*The Mississippi Chinese: Between Black and White*](#).

In his early twenties, Rev. Franklin moved to Memphis, continued preaching, and then moved to Detroit, where he built up a large congregation, New Bethel Baptist Church, and became nationally known for his sermons and his singing.

Not commonly known is the fact that in about 1960, God appeared to Franklin in his study in Detroit, on a Sunday morning as the reverend was putting the finishing touches on his sermon. "Rev. Franklin!" boomed the Lord, in a voice Charlton Heston could but envy.

"Y-y-y-yes, Lord," replied Franklin, his voice shaking.

"I have looked down upon my people in the Mississippi Delta."

"Y-y-y-yes, Lord," replied Franklin.

"My people – nay, *thy* people – are sore afflicted."

"Y-y-y-yes, Lord," replied Franklin. "That's why I moved to Detroit."

"They are in need!"

"Y-y-y-yes, Lord," replied Franklin.

"I want thee to go minister to thy people," sayeth the Lord.

"Oh, no, Lord," Franklin protested. "Not Mississippi. *Lord* no!"

"Reverend Franklin!" the Lord replied. "This is the Lord thy *God*."

At this rebuke Rev. Franklin fell to his knees and could only say, "Yes Lord."

"And what is thy reply?" God asked.

"Can I have some time to think about it?"

"I'll give you a *week*," said God.

The week passed swiftly, though it seemed to take forever to Rev. Franklin. He grew haggard. He couldn't sleep. His sermon lay in shambles. All too soon it was Sunday morning again, and he was back in his study.

Again the Lord appeared. "Rev. Franklin!" he boomed.

"Y-y-y-yes, Lord," replied Franklin, again in awe.

"Have you considered my ... proposition about thy people in Mississippi?"

"Oh, Lord," Franklin replied, "I've thought about nothing else."

"And what is thy reply?"

"Well, Lord," C.L. said, "Thou art the Lord my God. I've decided I shall go minister to my people in the Mississippi Delta if Thou wilt be by my side."

"Well ... er ..." said the Lord, "I'll go as far as Memphis."