

## Visions

When someone speaks about a vision they have had these days people associate it with occult involvement and in some cases this can be correct, but many years ago for a person to have visions was expected to be common place. The Prophet Joel predicted that the day would come when God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh, this was partially fulfilled at Pentecost when the disciples and the whole crowd experienced an outpouring of God's Spirit on human flesh. Joel chapter 2 verses 28 and 29 reads thus: "It shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit."

Before the day of Pentecost it was rare for anyone to receive a vision from God, though specially chosen people such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel and Ezekiel along with Samuel received many visions. In the days of Samuel a person who received visions was called a seer. 1 Samuel chapter 9 verse 9 reads as follows: (Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to enquire of God, thus he spoke, Come, and let us go to the seer: for he that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer.) As you will see from God's outpouring at Pentecost people's ability to receive visions from God was much greater as most were then baptised in The Holy Spirit.

From the language that Peter uses in Acts chapter 2 visions were at that time (and still are today) not restricted to special people of God but most people who had received the Baptism of The Holy Spirit were able to receive (and some even to interpret) visions from God. Proverbs chapter 29 verse 18 says this: "Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keeps the law, happy is he." There are two clear and separate definitions of "vision" in scripture, the first is seeing something pictorially as in Acts chapter 10 the other is having an understanding of the purpose and direction that God is leading you and the fellowship you belong to.

Both types of vision should be active in the church today. It should not only be the Pastors or Ministers who receive vision and clear direction from God it was intended to be (and still is) most of the people in the fellowship who know what God is doing amongst them and understand where He is leading them individually and collectively. God's intention from the beginning was that His people would work in harmony with each other and that His servants would be in such a humble position that they were willing and able to receive what God wanted to convey to them from anyone, member of the church or visitor who has just come on the one occasion. However, some Pastors are very insecure and whenever somebody from outside their leadership team brings a word of direction for them and the church they are viewed with extreme suspicion as though they were trying to take over from the Pastor. Those who are secure in who they are in God and what God has called them personally to do will not take this view but will be very open to receive and prayerfully consider anything that others might say.

Before Pentecost both Daniel and Joseph had the gift of interpreting visions, after Pentecost this gift was distributed by The Holy Spirit to many different people at His sovereign will, as we can see from the list of spiritual gifts In 1 Corinthians chapter 12 verses 1 to 11 inclusive Paul lists some of the gifts that should be operational in the church: “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. You know that you were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as you were led. wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

There are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. There are diversities of operations, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit everyone in the church. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these are worked by one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.” Among those categories can be included visions and interpretation of visions.

It should be clear then that visions and the interpretation of visions are gifts that are much needed in every church today. Not everybody will have these gifts just as not everybody will have the spiritual gift of healing though they can be used in that gift occasionally. Similarly from time to time a person might receive or give the interpretation of a vision received by someone else. It might not be a regular thing for that person to do this but they might be able to from time to time as The Spirit of God moves upon them. In a similar way it is clear from the latter chapters of Paul’s first letter to the church at Corinth that all may prophesy from time to time but not all are called to the Ministerial office of a Prophet which is a very different calling altogether.

Many people today have had near death experiences, sometimes known as “out of body” experiences where they become clinically dead but when they are brought back to life by skilled doctors they tell of their experiences between times. Sometimes out of body experiences can be occult and should always be avoided, but there are some experiences similar to it that are very much of God. In his second letter to the church at Corinth, chapter 12 and from verse 2 onwards Paul tells us of what is almost certainly his own experience of heaven.

Others have similar experiences of hell, this study is a description of both heaven and hell but it begins with the first of these experiences with a vision and literal experience of hell.

Whilst praying for the lost of the city this man had an unusual experience of God, it was as though He had taken him away from the physical environment that he was in and placed into a spiritual one. He felt that the experience he was about to have would be very

real but God would be with him through it all as he was not to be abandoned by God there but just made to feel the minimum of what the lost will feel for eternity.

The first thing he remembers was feeling **terrific** heat, so great that he felt like passing out, except that now he was no longer in a physical body so could not. The heat made him feel extremely ill though there was nothing he could do about it. Then he remembered (and was greatly grieved by) the times when people had told him of the gospel of Jesus Christ but he had refused to listen because he thought the people were weird or had gone too far in their enthusiasm for the Saviour. He had always been taught that if he led a good life trying to help others and did not do anything seriously wrong then he would be certain to go to heaven when he died, even though he had no personal relationship with Jesus. He could see now that he had been wrong in thinking this.

The next thing he remembers is feeling was tremendous anger when he thought about the times when people had been so hurtful to him, even though some of the pain was caused many years ago he still had not forgiven them and was burning with desire to take revenge, though it was now very much too late. He was then reminded of the many times when he had hurt other people, even unintentionally. He grieved terribly that whilst he was in his physical body he never did make it right with them.

The next thing he felt was the worst experience of them all, the feeling of **knowing** that you have been abandoned by God and that what he was experiencing was for eternity, it was now too late to change anything. The feeling of being eternally abandoned by God caused him to feel a terror like he had never felt when in his physical body. This terror, the anger and the regrets would remain with him forever. It was at this point that he returned to my physical body and realised he had experienced something of what those who die without having received Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour would feel unless he could reach them with the true gospel first, then there would be a chance that they might escape this terrible place that would be their home for all eternity.

Many people might say “If God really is a God of love then why would He punish anyone by sending them to hell for all eternity? However, if anyone rejects the only way hell can be avoided then they must bear the consequences of their own actions which are eternal. Some raise the question “Surely there will come again when the people have been punished enough?” But in putting this question they overlook what will have taken place by that point – the abolition of time itself that is the way eternity is, literally timeless.

Jesus Christ has done everything that could be done to ensure that nobody ever goes to hell – the only thing He has not done is to take away our free will to choose whether we believe Him or believe the great lie. There are those who literally seek to ensure our demise for all eternity, they are the enemies of God. In many parts of scripture – particularly in the book of Ephesians it is made clear that we are not fighting flesh and blood but the principalities and powers of darkness who seek to de-throne God and take His place themselves. They will never be allowed to succeed. Ephesians chapter 6 verse 12 reads as follows: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against

principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” The truth is that it is only through Jesus and through putting our faith, trust and commitment in Him that anyone will escape the consequences of their own wrong-doing for eternity. Either you suffer the penalty yourself or you accept that Jesus has already paid that penalty for you through his death on a cross and His resurrection on that wonderful Sunday morning.

Now for visions of heaven beginning with what is believed to have been Paul’s experience. In 2 Corinthians chapter 12 verses 2 to 7 we read the following: “I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knows) such a one caught up to the third heaven. I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knows) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, that it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such a one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. Though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he sees me to be, or that he hears of me. Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.”

For an even more detailed description of heaven read the book of Revelation chapter 21 verses 10 to 27 inclusive This reads as follows: “And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; and had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: on the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. He that spoke with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof.

The city lies foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. He measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel. The building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst. the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every gate was made from one single pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God

did lighten it, and the Lamb *is* the light thereof. The nations of them that are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honour into it. The gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. They shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. There shall no body enter into it or bring in anything that defiles, or works abomination, or make a lie: but they who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

There are many people who have attempted to describe heaven how could anyone match up to this one that we have just read but this is one individual's account of theirs. He was welcomed at the gate to the city by a bearded man whom without being introduced or spoken to he knew without doubt that it was Moses, what he did not know is that this man was to meet up with Moses later in the vision. Once through the gate he was welcomed by Jesus and his visit to the city began. He found himself walking along a pavement of gold, so pure it was transparent. As he was led down the street he saw mansions, so magnificent it is impossible for the human mind to describe them, but this would be the dwelling places of the people of God for all eternity. He was taken inside one of these magnificent places.

The room was generously wide and long with a table and a couch inside it. On the table there was a bible. When read at any point it is not just like reading an account of an historical event but rather it was so real it was as though he were actually there at the time. He lay back on the couch to spend a moment or two in worship to God. Instantly he felt the presence of God fill the room to such a degree that it felt hundreds of times greater and more intimate than anything he had ever felt on earth at anytime. Jesus then told him that the time had come for him to move on since he was not yet to spend eternity there and must return to complete the work God has for him.

On the way they went up the street paved with gold even further, at the end of which they could see creation as it was always intended to remain, as beautiful as it was on earth originally before it was defiled by sin. Running through the centre of what seemed like a huge park was a river. Together they entered the river and had much fun inside it. Later they came out and a warm and gentle breeze was felt, drying off their clothes. Further down he was shown a room in which were men and women from all races, tribes, nationalities and languages who were all listening to a speaker who was almost completely unknown outside his own village. He was testifying to the great things that God had done in and through his life, giving **all** the glory to God. As more and more great things were revealed by the speaker the same bearded figure who had greeted him at the gate could be seen leaping for joy at the person's testimony.

At this point the man had to return to his natural environment to finish the work that God had given him to do and to bring this testimony as an encouragement to his fellow believers. This man was nobody special, only another believer in The Lord. Of the many testimonies written down and recorded many of the things this man experienced have been authenticated by other men and women of God who have had similar experiences. You may ask then why was this man given such a revelation from God? The answer is very simple – the grace and kindness of God.