

Dreams and Visions

Some time ago I was doing some research and came across an article on visions. The author of the article claimed that God had given him a series of visions that, among other things, offered glimpses into the future. He then started talking about the details of his visions and what they meant.

These days it is very easy to find people who claim to have special revelation from God – be it about Heaven, or Hell, or the future, or the Second Coming, or whatever. Many people claim that God told them exactly when the Rapture was going to happen, and others claim to have been given personal guided tours of Heaven – tours that they will be happy to tell you all about if you just buy a copy of their latest book.

I have to say that I am pretty skeptical about all this, for a host of reasons. One thing I noticed long ago is that these personal accounts of Heaven are rarely consistent. Although there are many books that supposedly offer guided tours of Heaven, the accounts in the books cannot be reconciled: it's as if each author visited an entirely different place. For example, one book said that the gates of Heaven were made out of a single giant pearl, another said that the gates were composed of thousands of tiny pearls, and another said that the gates weren't made out of pearls at all but just had a pearlescent look to them. Well, which is it? If you sit down and read several different accounts back-to-back you will see exactly what I mean. The accounts directly contradict each other.

If they were really all accounts of the same place then you would expect them to be similar, but they're not. It is something like questioning three different witnesses about a bank robbery and finding out that each witness had a completely different description of the bank robber. If this happened in a court of law then their conflicting accounts would be thrown out. Even if one of the descriptions was accurate, the fact that all three descriptions disagreed with each other would make it impossible to tell who was telling the truth and who was not. The only way to find out who was telling the truth would be to use some other piece of evidence – and if you already knew the truth then *you would not have needed the testimony of the witnesses in the first place.*

That brings us to another point. Many times the visions include details that directly contradict the Bible. For example, in one rather famous vision of Hell the person said that he saw demons there torturing lost souls. Now, I realize that this is a very popular concept that's deeply ingrained into our culture, but the idea that demons are in control of Hell comes from Dante's *Inferno*, not the Bible. In fact, Hell was actually created as a place to *torment demons*:

Matthew 25:41: “Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:”

The ultimate fate of the devil is to *be* tormented, *not* to be the chief tormenter of Hell:

Revelation 20:10: “And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”

Demons are not in charge of Hell. As a matter of fact, demons desperately want to *avoid* going there. At one point when Jesus cast out some demons they begged Him not to imprison them:

Luke 8:31: “And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep.”

The phrase “the deep” is actually the word “abyss.” This is the same place mentioned in Revelation 20:1 where the devil will one day be bound for a thousand years. Demons do *not* want to go to Hell; they are afraid of it and know that one day they will be tormented there forever and ever. They are *not* in charge of it and they do not run the place. That is a pagan idea that is not found in the Bible – but it is a popular part of our culture.

If this person had actually been given a genuine tour of the real Hell then I would have expected his account to conform to the Bible. Instead it contradicted the Bible and replaced its description of Hell with the one that we find in popular culture. This strongly implies that the person's vision did not come from God. After all, the Lord is *not* going to contradict what He has revealed in His Word.

That brings up another problem with these visions: they always end up being extra-biblical sources of divine revelation. The whole appeal of these type of books is that they offer details that aren't found in the Bible. For example, they give the reader a chance to discover what the afterlife is *really* going to be like, or they talk about events that the Bible doesn't mention, and so forth. These books offer themselves as “expansion packs” to the Bible – and that is exactly how cults get started. After all, the Book of Mormon is supposedly “special revelation” that Joseph Smith was given by an angel – a revelation that offered “truths” not found in the Bible. The same thing can be said about the Koran. In each case we're being told that the Bible just isn't enough: if you just read this new book over here then you will learn all sorts of *new* truths!

However, the Bible claims to be all that we need. It clearly states that it is a *complete* work that has *no need for expansions*:

2 Timothy 3:15: “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

Do you see what these verses are saying? Not only are the Scriptures said to be the very words of God Himself (and not the words of men) that are able to make you wise, but it also says that they give you everything you need for *all* good works. If the Bible has what you need to equip you to perform *all* good works then that means it doesn't have any gaps that would need to be covered by some new revelation (like the Book of Mormon).

These verses do *not* say “All Scripture is given so that the man of God may know some things, but there are other things that won't be clear until additional revelations come along to fill in the gaps.” Lots of cults like to claim that the Bible is not enough, but the Bible says otherwise. It really does claim to be all that we need.

If the Bible is really all that we need, then that means we don't need any new visions that give us “additional information” about Heaven. What the Bible already has to say about Heaven is enough to equip us to all good works. God has already provided the right level of detail about Heaven; we don't need anything more.

You may be surprised to learn that some people in the Bible were given a glimpse of Heaven and then told to *not* talk about it. That is exactly what happened to the apostle Paul:

2 Corinthians 12:1: “It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.

2 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 knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.

3 And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)

4 How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”

This person that Paul knew is actually Paul himself; out of modesty and humility he is talking in the third person. Notice, though, that Paul doesn't reveal what he saw. All he says is that he heard “unspeakable words.” We don't know what he experienced because he doesn't tell us.

Another person who had a vision of Heaven was the disciple John, who wrote the book of Revelation. It's true that Revelation has a lot to say about Heaven, but there is also a great deal that it doesn't say. God has had a lot of opportunities to fill in the missing details, but He did not do so. Am I really supposed to believe that even though God chose *not* to reveal the details of Heaven in the Bible, I can still learn all the answers through these highly contradictory visions? Is it really plausible to believe that God has chosen to *not* reveal the details of Heaven in the Bible but instead has given contradictory visions to random people whose claims cannot be independently verified? How could that possibly be a valid source of divine revelation?

Why is it that these modern authors are permitted to describe Heaven in such rich detail while Paul, John, and Isaiah were largely kept silent? We know without a doubt that these three men actually were in Heaven. Why would God say so little about Heaven through them, and so much through sources that we have no reason to trust or believe? Does no one find that odd? Isn't it much more likely that God has done no such thing and, in fact, all of these modern visions of Heaven are just frauds?

I think that our desire to find divine revelation outside of the Bible is a very dangerous trend that has led many people into error. The Bible claims to be all the divine revelation that we need, and the reason it makes that claim *is because it really is all the divine revelation that we need*. It is time that we started taking the Bible a little more seriously.