

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 offered glimpses into the future. He then started talking about the details of his visions and what they meant.

These days it's easy to find people who claim to have special revelation from God – about Heaven, or Hell, or the future, or whatever. There are quite a few people who claim that God told them exactly when the rapture is going to happen, or that God gave them a personal guided tour of Heaven – tours they'll be happy to tell you all about if you buy a copy of their book.

I'm pretty skeptical about all this for a lot of reasons. One thing I noticed long ago is that these personal accounts of Heaven aren't consistent with one another. Although There are many books which claim to describe true visions of Heaven, the accounts can't be reconciled: it's as if each author visited an entirely different Heaven. For example, one book said that the gates of Heaven were made out of a single giant pearl, while another said that the gates were composed of thousands of tiny pearls, and still 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 “Heaven tourism” books back-to-back you'll see exactly what I mean. The accounts contradict each other.

If they were true accounts of the same place then I would expect them to be similar, and yet they're not. It's something like questioning three different witnesses about a bank robbery and learning 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. The only way to find the truth would be to use a different piece of evidence to compare the stories against – but if you knew the truth then *you wouldn't need the testimony of these 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 popular concept which is deeply ingrained into our culture, but the idea that demons are in control of Hell comes from Dante's *Inferno*, not the Bible. 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 tormentor 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 aren't in charge of Hell. In 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.” It's the

same place which is 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're afraid of it and know that one day they'll be tormented there forever and ever. They are *not* in charge of it and they don't run the place. That's a pagan idea that's 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 Hell then I'd expect his account to conform to the Bible. Instead it contradicts it and describes a version of Hell that fits nicely with what the culture teaches. This strongly implies that the person's vision didn't come from God. After all, the Lord is *not* going to contradict what He's revealed in His Word.

That brings up another problem with these visions: they are extra-biblical sources of divine revelation. The appeal of these “Heaven tourism” books is that they offer details about Heaven which aren't found in the Bible. They give the reader a chance to discover what the afterlife is *really* like, or they talk about events that the Bible doesn't mention. These books are essentially “expansion packs” to the Bible – and that's 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” which aren't found in the Bible. The same thing can be said about the Koran. In each case we're being told that the Bible isn't enough: if you just read this new book then you will learn all sorts of *new* truths!

However, the Bible says that it contains everything that we need. It clearly states that it's a *complete* work that has *no need for expansions*:

2 Timothy 3:15-17: “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. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be

perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

Do you see what these verses are saying? The Scriptures are the words of God, not the words of men; they are able to make you wise; and the Scriptures give you everything you need to to equip you to perform *all* good works. If the Bible has what you need to perform *all* good works then that means it doesn't have any gaps which would need to be covered by some new revelation.

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 claim that the Bible isn't enough, but the Bible says otherwise. It really does teach that it's all we need.

If the Bible is all that we need then that means we don't need new visions which give us “additional information” about Heaven. What the Bible already has to say about Heaven is enough to equip us to do all good works. God has already provided us with exactly the right amount of information about Heaven. We don't need anything more!

I find it interesting that the few people in the Bible who were given a glimpse of Heaven didn't say very much about it. For example, this is what the apostle Paul said:

2 Corinthians 12:1-4: “It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. 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. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”

The person who Paul knew was actually Paul himself. (He referred to himself in the third person out of a sense of humility.) Notice, though, that Paul didn't reveal what he saw. The only thing he was willing to say was that he heard "unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter". We don't know what he experienced because he doesn't tell us – and it seems that the reason he didn't tell us was because he wasn't allowed to.

Another person who had a vision of Heaven was the apostle John, who wrote the book of Revelation. It's true that Revelation has a lot to say about Heaven, but there's also a great deal that it doesn't say. This was a perfect opportunity for God to give us all sorts of rich detail about Heaven but He didn't do that.

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 contradictory, extra-biblical "Heaven tourism" books? Is it plausible that God has chosen *not* to reveal the details of Heaven in the Bible, but instead chose to speak through random people whose claims can't be independently verified? That seems unlikely to me.

Why is it that these modern authors are permitted to describe Heaven in such rich detail while Paul, John, and Isaiah were kept silent? We know without a doubt that these three men were given a true vision of Heaven. Does it make sense that God would say so little about Heaven through them, and would instead speak through people we have no reason to believe? Isn't it much more likely that God has done no such thing, and these modern visions of Heaven are just frauds?

The desire to find divine revelation outside the Bible is dangerous and has led many people into error. The Bible teaches that it's all the divine revelation we need, and the reason it makes that claim is because *it really is all the divine revelation we need*. That is why I have no interest in "Heaven tourism" books (or any other new claims of divine revelation).