

Vision

The Dictionary definition of is below.

vision *noun* **1** the ability or faculty of perceiving with the eye; sight. **2** an image conjured up vividly in the imagination. **3** the ability to perceive what is likely, and plan wisely for it; foresight. **4** an image communicated supernaturally, especially by God; an apparition. **5 a** the picture on a TV screen; **b** the quality of such a picture. **6** someone or something of overwhelming beauty • *a vision in pink taffeta*.
visional *adj.*

It is probable that some of the possible uses of the word have some aspects which can be looked at when seeking to understand the Christian concept of vision.

It is clear that we have vision and visions. Joel tells us “And 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”.

So young men are to see visions following the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, and the source of those visions is to be the Spirit of God. Peter saw the vision of the sheet, with the animals, descend out of heaven; but by the vision he heard the word of God. That is essential when visions are seen. Paul talks of visions and revelations so he clearly had visions as the result of being filled with the Holy Ghost. It is first clear that when men had visions of the Lord they were humbled by the experience. Isaiah was “undone”, aware of his sin and Daniel and John both fell at the feet of the one they saw in the vision. No arrogance will be seen in someone who has had a true vision of God. Learn of me said the Lord Jesus “I am meek and lowly of heart”.

In Proverbs 29.18, we read “Where there is no vision, the people perish”. This implies that for people to have a future there must be some vision for that future. Politicians will often tell us they have a vision for the future of the country; so please elect us and we will fulfil that vision for you. Usually they don’t fulfil what they promise, but where there is no vision there is little hope for the future. It is true with Christian work too, there must be a vision, it could be said to be a “calling”; a knowledge of what God has said and a trust to see the Lord’s word outworked. That vision must come from the Lord Himself and not be the creation of the person in their own mind. We shall see more of that later.

Paul saw the vision of the man from Macedonia asking for help (Acts 16.9.). He immediately went and found a boat to take him to Macedonia to preach the gospel, believing that the Lord had given him the vision to go and preach the word in that place. The vision seen led to a vision of purpose and expectation that the Lord wanted to work, and would work in Macedonia, so off they went to preach.

The Lord always communicates by His word. “Jesus is the word made flesh” the natural expression of Spirit is the word. God is a spirit and to communicate with us He does it by His word, so the Lord Jesus is God’s son and His total communication with mankind is “the word

made flesh". Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10.17) and "We live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God". So the vision to go to Macedonia speaks to Paul and he obeys in faith, to serve the Lord.

Paul when telling King Agrippa of his vision of the Lord Jesus and His commission to preach the gospel says "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision". This vision had a word, in fact in Paul's vision the communication is by word. "Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?", "Who are you Lord?", and so on. We are told much more about what was said during the vision than what was seen. The words spoken imparted a vision (calling if you like) to Paul for his whole ministry to the Gentiles. He was not disobedient to the vision, it came from heaven, and was of God, and completely changed his whole life. It worked too. Paul's testimony was "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"; "My God shall supply all your need" because He has provided everything for me. Faith is imparted through the vision and the ability to continue to right through to the end. Paul says "I have finished my course I have kept the faith". This is true evidence of a vision from God which provides a vision for the work, a total dependence on the Lord, and the ability to endure to the end to see the vision fulfilled. The Lord Jesus cried "It is finished and so fulfilled the work the Father had given Him to do. So a person with a true vision of the Lord will do just that; finish the work. Many missionary books have been written about those with a true vision and calling for the Lord's work and their dependence on Him and the fruit which has resulted from the true work of God.

Without vision the people perish, but with Paul's vision many heard the gospel and came to salvation through the Lord Jesus. The Lord will not work with a vision which we create ourselves. He will only work with His own will. It is no good having a vision for a ministry ourselves and then expecting the Lord to support our vision, our own ideas however good they seem are not the Lord Jesus' will and can never be blessed the way the Lord's own purposes can. Our own ideas are often born out of our own will and what we covet. The Lord will not serve the idols of our heart, but only cause us to serve Him.

When Samuel heard the Lord calling him it does not mention anywhere him seeing anything, but just "The Lord stood by him" and spoke to him. It says he was afraid to tell the vision to Eli (1 Samuel 3). So this was a vision and yet nothing specific was seen and yet the word was imparted to Samuel. It was a meeting with God and perhaps rather than always having to see something with our eyes it is what we see with our hearts and hear of the word of God that is important. "The entrance of your words gives light" (Psalm 119.130), so the word brings light to our heart, we see in our hearts and the Lord imparts vision to us of His will. That does not mean, of course that we don't see visions and that visions don't exist. It is just that when we look at the scriptures it is clear that visions come in different ways and we need to be open to all the ways in which the Lord imparts vision to His people. Clearly Christians had visions in the early church, even Cornelius had a vision which told him what to do, even before he became a Christian. There are wonderful testimonies of people

coming to the Lord Jesus when they have had a vision of Him before hearing the gospel at all through preaching. This is happening in countries where it is very hard or almost impossible to preach openly and yet the Lord Jesus in His love comes to the person and they have a vision of Him and receive Him. How very wonderful. The Lord is not limited.

Daniel talks of the “visions of my head”. In fact there are many references in the book of Daniel to visions, he was clearly a man with an understanding of dreams and visions which were not only relevant to the time in which he lived, but also through the future even to the coming of the Lord Jesus, and later to His eternal kingdom. Daniel had a vision of the angel but also “Visions of his head”, this means they were within his mind, within his imagination and this was the place where the Lord was able to speak to him. The Lord gave Daniel understanding through the things he saw in his mind. Daniel, if we read in the first chapter of book of Daniel was, with 3 other men, a man of great discipline. He forsook the means of Babylon and its idolatry and its special food to be separated unto God. He was “all for the Lord” and lived accordingly. The Lord blessed him but through his discipline of mind and body; the Lord was very much in control of Daniel in every part of his life. He was not even afraid of death when put into the Lion’s den, committing himself to the Lord, who alone is able to save. That is why he was open to the Lord speaking to him and why he had so many visions even through to the second coming of the Lord Jesus.

It is not that there is a need for us to just eat vegetables, as Daniel did, to be disciplined in life but it is clear that there is a great need to be separated from the things of this world and its ways, so as to be under the control of the Lord Jesus in mind and body and spirit so as to be available to receive visions. This is why the Lord could work with Daniel and how he can work with us. Many are not prepared to be that “given to the Lord” which is why they don’t get true visions of God, and why they don’t see Him and hear much from Him. There is no gain in the Christian life without sacrifice, so if we are to really be the servants of God and not only have visions, but vision for His work which comes only from Him, then we need to be set apart for His work. No flesh will glory in the Lord’s presence. If we are to be in the Lord’s presence to get the vision we cannot come there in our flesh, but only by the Spirit of God. This sort of spiritual discipline keeps us safe too in the realms where there is so much deception.

The definition of vision at the start says “an image conjured up vividly in the imagination”. It was within his imagination that Daniel saw the things the Lord showed him. Yet in Genesis 6 we read “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”. So sin produces evil in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart. Here lies the danger with visions, if the source of them is not right. At the beginning we recognised that visions have to come from the Lord Himself and not from any other source. The imaginations of men and women are able to conjure up or produce visions from themselves, out of their own hearts. Imaginations are the places where images are seen or produced and where visions are created. A lot of occult activity centres around visualisation. This happens when people, witchdoctors for example see things they want and things that someone wants to have or happen in their

imaginations, in their mind's eye and produces that outcome through the power of the soul involving demonic means.

We read in Jeremiah these 2 verses which speak of lies, divination and visions, which are of the deceit of their own heart.

Jeremiah 14:14

Then the LORD said unto me, the prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart. Jeremiah 23:16 (King James Version)

Jeremiah 23:16

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD.

The Lord had not spoken and yet the prophets still spoke but out of the deceit of their own hearts. They made it up themselves, in their imagination and yet they were false prophets. In the New Testament we read of people taking to themselves teachers having itching ears. In other words ministers who tell them what they want to hear rather than the truth. In the days of Israel there were many false prophets as the nation went away from the Lord, and so it is today, that there are many within the "churches worldwide" who are false prophets, working after their own imaginations and visions rather than doing the will of the Lord Jesus; "Everyone does that which is right in his own eyes" true in the days of the Judges and just as true now. False Prophets are usually seeking wealth, money, reputation, fame and importance through their visions and the words that they give, rather than the glory of God in a meek and lowly heart. They will draw men and women after themselves to follow and exalt the prophet, rather than cause the listeners to truly follow the Lord Jesus and know Him for themselves.

As soon as men or women start using their own imaginations to "conjure up" visions and dreams satan will soon get to work in them, and in their minds, and lead them and those who follow them even further away from the truth. As soon as anyone works in their own imagination they become vulnerable to the devil and are open to satan working in them.

The Tower of Babel was built because men wanted to reach to heaven. That is humans trying to reach up to God themselves rather than letting the Lord lift them up through grace. They built the tower. Somewhere in their imaginations the vision of the tower appeared and they built what they saw. It was against the Lord, and He came and sowed the confusion among them.

Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of Babylon had an image of the huge statue, which he then built. The idea came out of his imagination. He required everyone to worship the idol. That is what happens with the idols men create in their imaginations, they want everyone to serve the thing they have seen and made. We are only to see the Lord Jesus in the spirit and

worship Him alone. That is why the Lord gave no likeness of Himself when he appeared to Israel on Mount Sinai, it was so that they could not make an idol of Him and worship it. They eventually made an idol of the golden calf which came out of the imagination of Aaron. How many churches have statues, idols, icons and pictures of the Lord Jesus which they try and use in their minds to serve Him. It is all quite wrong; we are to see the Lord Jesus in our hearts and spirits, and worship Him in spirit and truth.

Here are some verses from the book of Jude which describe these of people sort who bring in false visions. It shows what they are like, how they behave, in that often there is sexual immorality in their lives and much greed, looking for financial gain.

⁴For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities.

¹¹Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.

¹²These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withers, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots;

¹³Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.

Balaam was of course the false prophet asked to use divination against Israel for money.

The good description is that they are clouds without water. They look good and promise much and yet bring little or nothing. The apostle/prophet, or whatever they are called, who says miracles will happen and they don't; money will come and it does not. They are false prophets, filthy dreamers, Jude calls them, they are unclean in mind and body and spirit, the enemies of the church of Jesus Christ and under the wrath of Almighty God.

We must do what Jude says;

³Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints.

We need to be strong and fight spiritually for the gospel of the Lord Jesus that those who receive Him will serve Him for ever and not seek their own financial gain through being a Christian.

"Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling" is how Jude ends.

In all these difficult days we look to the Lord Jesus alone who is able to keep us from falling and present us faultless in the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.

If it were possible the very elect would be deceived, we must be wise as John tells us that "There are many false prophets gone into the world"; they will use false visions to deceive the people. So many will follow what is popular as it looks good to start with but usually ends in disaster.

The secret for our spiritual safety is for our hearts and minds and imaginations to be totally subject to the Lord Jesus. Paul writes the weapons of our warfare..... are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. There is no divination against the people of God. Praise the Lord.

So we see the true and the false with vision and visions.

John in Revelation says "I turned to see the voice that spoke to me". He then saw the wonderful vision of the Lord Jesus with all the different things, the feet like brass, and the two-edged sword, which indicate by signs the aspects of the Lord Jesus as Lord and Christ, with all power and authority. John also saw things to come and many things hard to understand. The book of revelation is called a prophecy, and is probably to greatest vision we have in the whole scripture, as it is given by the Lord Jesus to the church from His throne in Heaven. It is a prophecy, it is the true word of God and yet much is a vision.

We see that visions must speak the word of God. John turned to see the voice and in all visions there is the communication of word, of faith, of revelation, of understanding, all by the word of God. This ministers faith and vision, hope, expectation to the heart of those who see the vision and hear the word and is passed on to those with whom they share the vision. It sets them to work in the will of God, knowing what that will is, God has spoken, Jesus Christ is glorified and declared as Lord. All who hear from the Lord through the vision are drawn to Him to meet their need and direct them further. All will only seek the glory of God and not their own fame or wealth.

The Lord Jesus when in the wilderness we are told saw "All the kingdoms of the earth in a moment". The Lord was then told that if He would worship satan all these kingdoms would be His. It was a lie; the vision had come from the enemy and the word from satan too. Our disciplined Lord Jesus says what was in His heart, the word of God written there, "You shall serve the Lord you God and Him only will you serve". The word of God in His heart kept Him from error. Isaiah 53 verse 10 tells us

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

Our Lord Jesus when He offered Himself to the Father on the cross saw His seed. He saw all those who would come to Him through His death and resurrection. This was the true vision of God. He saw His church, all the Christians in every generation until He comes again. It was all Jesus' soul longed for and was how the work of God prospered in His hand. Jesus prolonged His days. That is why He was raised up and obtained an eternal inheritance for His people.

Forsaking the vision of satan, the pleasure of sin for a season, Jesus saw true vision of God as a result of submitting to His death on the cross. We have seen this discipline in Daniel, but now supremely in the Lord Jesus. May we follow Him because the more disciplined we are in our lives before the Lord, by being subject to Him in mind and body and spirit, the safer we are. We are not children blown about by every wind of doctrine. Then the Lord can give us more visions and a greater vision for His work. He can speak to our hearts knowing that we will not become proud or foolish but wise in our use of that which He has given us. Amen