



# VISION

NUMBERS 12:6-8

*What is the relationship between prophetic vision and vision in terms of a hoped-for future?  
How might vision for a church or person best be defined today?*

Throughout the Bible there are prophets and saintly people who share visions of a hoped-for future. From the beginning, God has allowed his character and word to us to be revealed through visions he gives to his people. Through visions, the Lord reveals what he wants known about his desires or what he wants to do, and shows it to an appointed person elected for this purpose.

What is vision? Basically, it is an act of prophetic seeing, an imaginative intellectual or spiritual perception of things. The visionary person in this sense addresses the real-life circumstances and issues of his day. Ultimately, this is a message to the church that warns, educates, challenges, or foresees the future. The focus is on the creation of a new reality.

Biblical visions are concerned both with immediate and specific situations such as God's speaking to Abraham (Genesis 15:1-21) and Moses (Numbers 12:6-8), injustices such as Peter's being put in jail (Acts 12:7), and future events of the kingdom of God, as in the prophetic writings of Ezekiel, Daniel, Isaiah, and John in the Book of Revelation. It is recorded how some visions came to people in the day (Daniel 10:4-9; Acts 9:3-4; 10:3, 9-10), while others came at night (Genesis 46:2; Job 33:15; Acts 18:9).

One of the Hebrew words often translated as vision comes from a root word related to the beholding of a vision while in a trancelike state, which is in fact how many of the visions are recorded as having come to pass (Isaiah 1:1), especially among the prophets. In this sense it points to a special awareness of God shared by devoted and committed people (Daniel 2:19; Acts 9:10; 16:9-10). Another word also used means vision as revelation, such as when God addresses Moses, Aaron, and Miriam with the words, "When a prophet is among you, I, the LORD, will show myself to him in visions; I will speak to him in dreams" (Numbers 12:6; see also 1 Samuel 3:15). As we see in the lives of the Old Testament prophets, it is often compounded by a deep dissatisfaction with things as they are because of a vision of how things could be. "The vision that Ezekiel sees is for a time many years from now. He is prophesying about times far away" (Ezekiel 12:27). It begins with indignation over the way things are, and it grows into looking for something from the future that will make a difference in the present.

Old Testament history is filled with examples of just this kind of vision. Moses was very upset by the cruel oppression of his fellow Israelites in Egypt. But he remembered God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and was sustained throughout his long life by the vision of the Promised Land. The Scriptures suggest that God trusted Moses so much to lead his people that he spoke "face to face to him—clearly, not with hidden meanings" (Numbers 12:7-8). While Nehemiah was a captive in Persia, he heard that the wall of the Holy City was in ruins, and its inhabitants in great distress. The news overwhelmed him, until God put into his heart a vision of what he could and should do. "Come, let's rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, so we won't be full of shame any longer. . . . Then they answered, 'Let's start rebuilding'" (Nehemiah 2:17-18).

Moving on to New Testament times, we see this theme of vision especially in the public ministry of Jesus. He was very dissatisfied with the way things were because he knew how they could be. He was angry over disease and death, and the spiritual hunger of a people who wanted to know God. But while he was angry, he also felt compassion. This is a powerful combination, and at the very center of true vision.

At the center of Paul's defense of himself and his ministry before King Agrippa was his retelling of his vision of the Lord at his conversion on the Damascus Road. He told how God said to "tell people the things . . . that I will show you. . . . I am sending you to them to open their eyes so that they may turn away from darkness to the light, away from the power of Satan and to God" (Acts 26:15-20). The person to whom God has given the vision has a responsibility to obey it (Acts 26:19). Finally, this shared vision is always and basically about repentance and turning to God.

The early Christians were the subject of much of Rome's hatred, as well as the victims of much Jewish animosity. But Jesus had told them he had given them the power to "go and make followers of all people in the world" and armed them with the promise "I will be with you always, even until the end of this age" (Matthew 28:18-20). Indeed, it was this vision that gave them the courage and freedom to take the Gospel to a world that often didn't want to hear it.

These then are the biblical examples for the Christian community today as we try to understand God's vision for God's people.

True vision has as much to do with the ability to see what is present as it does with an ability to imagine the future. While such an ability might seem rather ordinary, real vision helps make God's direction for the present clearer. Examples of this are Moses and his circumstances while leading the people of Israel to the Promised Land, and before him, Abraham (see Genesis 12:1-3). The Lord did not talk to Moses "with hidden meanings." He was clear about the vision he gave him (Numbers 12:8).

Vision is not only about the grand events of history such as the leading of a people or the building of a church. It also concerns itself with the opening of an individual's eyes "so that they may turn away from darkness to the light, away from the power of Satan and to God. Then their sins can be forgiven" (Acts 26:18).<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup>**Vision:** For additional scriptures on this topic go to Genesis 15:1.