



John and Elaine McLachlan
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INTRODUCTION

The Old Testament is an extraordinary collection of books because so many of them are visions given to various followers of God. Particularly Isaiah (eg Isaiah 1:1 and 6:1), Jeremiah (eg Jeremiah 1:11&13), Ezekiel (eg Ezekiel 1:1-28) and Daniel (eg Daniel 1:17) had visions from God about their calling; that they were to be messengers to His people. To Joel it was promised that God would give old men dreams and that young men will see visions. (Joel 2:28) Amos records several visions (Amos 7:1; 8:1; 9:1) and Obadiah describes what he heard from the Lord as a vision. (Obadiah 1)

Yet many of the challenges to the seers or prophets came as "the Word of God". Seers are defined as persons who see; a prophet, a

person who sees visions, a person of supposed supernatural insights, especially as regards the future. The thesaurus lists words such as fortune-teller, oracle, clairvoyant, psychic. Because this definition from a modern publication conveys scepticism, especially with words like "supposed insights" and other actions that God has expressly forbidden, it seems to us (the writers of this booklet) that therefore all prophecy has become suspect. The result of this is that the Bible has become suspect and even irrelevant to people in these days. Yet the book which expresses the wisdom of Solomon declares, "Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint". (Proverbs 29:18)

1. VISION – THINGS ACTUALLY SEEN – EYESIGHT

God **saw** that His creation was good. (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31)
 "What may be known about God is plain...because God has made it plain...for since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – His eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen". (Romans 1:19&20) The eye-gate is a powerful help to our memory. God used a rainbow to remind Noah of His promise. (Genesis 9:12-16) God told Abram to lift up his eyes and look at all the land in every direction, to walk on it and to claim it by faith. (Genesis 13:14-17) God also asked Abram to look up and count the stars to understand how vast would be his descendants. (Genesis 15:5)

Our eyes enable us to see the possibilities of expansion and fruitfulness, which was God's original command in the Garden of Eden. (Genesis 1:28) Believing what God showed him and doing it

was credited to Abram as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6) God responded to this faith with more vision and more promises.

There are other fascinating stories about seeing God's goodness and His glory. They are called "Theophanies" because they are seen with the natural eyesight, but they are visitations by the Angel of the Lord, who is sent by God to deal with men as His personal agent and spokesman. He is virtually identified with God as an extension of the Divine personality. (New Bible Dictionary page 38) When He appears to men He is recognized as a Divine being and addressed as God. But these visitations were not necessarily to important people according to the world's thinking.

The situation during the time of Israel's judges (or saviours) was that after a very short time people wanted to hear from God (one generation) "another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what He had done for Israel". (Judges 2:10) This was in spite of the fact that Moses had told the people to "impress them (God's Law) on your children". (Deuteronomy 6:7) Therefore they desperately needed "saviours" because they followed and worshipped other gods and idols, and "provoked the Lord to anger". This was His chosen people who were to spread His love and goodness to all the nations, but instead they were readily adopting any practices that catered to natural superstitions, the creations of sinful man. So God allowed His own people to have very evil things done to them until they cried out to Him for help.

God is full of mercy. Indeed, He also requires this from us. (Micah 6:8) When His people at last cried out to Him He heard their

prayers, but He had a problem. How would they know Him? So the Angel of the Lord came to visit – Gideon (Judges 6:1-24) and Manoah and his wife. (Judges 13:1-22) But even visual manifestations only turned the people to God temporarily. The book of Judges ends with a sad statement. "In those days...every man did what was right in his own eyes". (Amplified Bible)

Even throughout the time of the Kings most followed this path, with a few exceptions. So these exceptions spoke out God's words according to the visions they received.

Some of the prophets were asked by God to do very strange actions so that the rebellious people could see openly what God wanted to say. Jeremiah was told to buy a linen belt, and after he had worn it, to then go and hide it in a crevice in the rocks. After a while the belt was ruined and completely useless. This was to be a sign that going after other gods would be completely useless. (Jeremiah 13:1-11) Ezekiel was told by God to pack his belongings for exile and as the people watch, set out for another place. (Ezekiel 12:1-3) This was to be a sign of God's coming punishment. (Ezekiel 12:11) God also asked Ezekiel not to do the customary mourning practices when his wife died, as a sign of what will happen when their sons and daughters die by the sword when invaders come. (Ezekiel 24:15-27)

Jesus' ministry was not only teaching but many visual actions – healings and other miracles. John called them "signs", and writes that Jesus revealed His glory to enable the disciples to put their faith in Him. (John 2:11) This is why Jesus asks His disciples to

demonstrate their faith in Him by doing the works He did, and even greater than these. (John 14:12) When people see the power and love of the Lord in action through us, He is glorified. Unfortunately the opposite is also true. When those who say they are believers do not demonstrate their faith and love, people also see, and God is dishonoured.

Jesus' teaching majored on people's knowledge of what they had seen in the natural world. He used parables to open the eyes of His hearers to understand that outward eyesight is to help us in our spiritual understanding.

The greatest challenge was when He took the bread and wine and asked His followers to eat and drink in remembrance of Him. (Luke 22:19&20) He had already taught that "unless you can eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you". (John 6:53) This statement had offended many and Jesus had asked His disciples if they too would turn away. (John 6:67) At each fellowship meal they would remember and believe, encouraged to continue on the road to eternal life, even through the persecutions and difficulties.

2. VISION – THINGS SEEN WHEN OUR EYES ARE CLOSED – DREAMS

"When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal Myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams". (Numbers 12:6)

The Bible describes Moses as a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth. (Numbers 12:3) God said he

could speak with him face to face, clearly and not in riddles, because he was "faithful in all God's house". Moses sees the form of the Lord. God clearly wants to relate to His man face to face, but this takes a special relationship – an attitude of deep trust and obedience. If this is not possible because of the man's attitude to Himself He chooses to speak in dreams, some more vivid than others, but to understand His meaning needs interpretation.

Daniel was a man to whom God gave the gift of interpretation of dreams. These are wonderful stories that are written for our understanding of God's ways in this regard. (2 Timothy 3:16) In the first story recorded (Daniel 2) the interpretation was needed to save the lives of Nebuchadnezzar's wise men including Daniel. "The mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision". (Daniel 2:19) Daniel gave all the glory and honour to God but at this time Nebuchadnezzar did not acknowledge God, and rewarded Daniel.

God has always wanted His followers to demonstrate His power and glory so He gave Daniel other opportunities. (Daniel 4) After this experience Nebuchadnezzar does acknowledge God. But Belshazzar does not (Daniel 5) and Darius does. (Daniel 6)

We can learn a lot from the life of Daniel, because his story shows his commitment to God's way. He sought God's way in everything, and so God increasingly trusted him with more revelation. There were many things that he was told to record, yet he did not understand, to do with things that have not yet happened, or have happened in history but will happen again until the end of the age. (Daniel 8:1-14; 9:21-27; 10:1 to 12:4) To encourage him

God gave Daniel a vision of Himself on the Throne in Heaven. (Daniel 7:9&10) Even more excitingly, he saw the Son of Man approach God (called the Ancient of Days), and saw Him given authority, glory and sovereign power, and all peoples, nations and men and women of every language worship Him. (Daniel 7:13&14)

There are many stories about God speaking to people in a dream, because culturally, among Jews, they believed that God really communicated in this way and therefore they valued those who could interpret them. Other Eastern pagan religions also valued this, but from a more superstitious point of view.

Thus Abimelech was warned in a dream that Abram had lied to him about Sarai being his sister when she was actually his wife. (Genesis 20:6)

Jacob had a dream where God told him that he had prospered because God gave him favour in breeding time, so that the large part of the flocks of sheep and herds of goats that belonged to Laban were spotted and speckled, which was the agreed wages for Jacob minding them. (Genesis 31:10&11)

Joseph dreamed that his family would bow down to him. When he told them his dream they took offence, but the dream eventually came to pass. (Genesis 37:5&9 and 43:26) He became an interpreter of dreams for fellow prisoners (Genesis 40:8), and then for the Pharaoh, (Genesis 41:16) which promoted Joseph and saved Egypt and his own family in the seven years of famine.

Another interesting dream was overheard by Gideon, being discussed by two enemy soldiers when, at the direction of the Lord,

he was creeping up on the Midianites and their allies, camped in the valley and ready to destroy God's people. (Judges 7:13) This encouraged Gideon that God was with them and that the Midianites were actually afraid, having interpreted the dream and believed that God was for the Israelites and against them.

Dreams are a common part of our night time, and often from experiences of the past, relived. Sometimes, though, they are our personal hopes for in the future. We have a friend who saw himself preaching in a strange place. He was one of four "angels" on each corner of that place and many people were listening intently to good news about Jesus. Years later he met someone who told him a strange story. He came from a primitive tribe who had four angels come to them and tell them about Jesus. Many of them believed the message and the person who was telling our friend his story was one whose life had changed. This affirmation is life-changing for the dreamer too and encourages us to use our imagination, according to the promise of God – "To Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen." (Ephesians 3:20&21)

3. VISION – THINGS SEEN IN OUR IMAGINATION – VISUALISATION

Each person born into this world, by the design of the Lord, has gifts and abilities which are unique to them. There is, of course,

some commonality with others, but we believe that God has an ideal path of life for each person, and the family they are born into and the natural gifts and talents, and even the weaknesses, are what God considers "very good". He is well satisfied with how He has made us in our mother's womb. David's poem (Psalm 139:13, 14&16) seems to prove this point. "You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made...all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be".

Because we are all different we also see things from different perspectives. For example, two people might go on the same journey. One focuses on scenery and the other on the people. When they recount their adventure their stories barely coincide. This certainly happened when the apostles tell their story of their relationship and adventures with Jesus. There are many differences in their recall of events as they went about with Him. One shares details that another did not even see. These differences prove the reality of their witness, though sceptics who try to disprove the truth of the Bible make out otherwise.

But everyone sees what is in front of them according to their own imagination. It is actually very difficult to be a totally impartial witness, and sometimes those very differences of testimony become an important part of the story because of the differences in the personality of the witness. One sees beauty and the other sees ugliness, one the negative side and the other the positive, one sees the big picture and the other the minutiae.

This visual imagination is even more interesting when we hear stories or read them. Our imagination is fired up as we try to take in the spoken or written words. We have to decide whether they are true, based on our own experiences or what we know about the teller of the story. When one is a believer in God and has learnt to trust Him, the Bible becomes a resource as a manual for living a good life. Those who have not "tasted and seen that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8) are at a disadvantage, and if bad things have happened in their lives (and who has not experienced this?) and they have imagined that God caused it, they might visualise that God is to be avoided at all costs. But as David expresses in Psalm 139, God is all-seeing. "O Lord, You have searched me and you know me...You are familiar with all my ways...where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence? Your hand will guide me, Your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, surely the darkness will hide me...even the darkness will not be dark to You; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to You."

Most of us have a trait that God can capitalise on – a chink in the armour that might keep Him out of our lives. Most of us have hopes and dreams for our lives, for our future.

4. VISION – THE LONGINGS OF OUR HEART – ENVISAGING BY FAITH

There is a passage of Scripture which we love. Paul prays that Christ (the Anointed One and His anointing) may dwell in your hearts through faith, and that you, being rooted and established in love,

may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love which surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (which is the glory of Christ). Paul finishes with this. "Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever." (Ephesians 3:17-21) Paul obviously prayed that we would use our imagination to "see" what we hope for.

God told Abraham to go outside and see the stars in the sky, to try to count them. This vision was to assure him that God's promise of offspring and nations would come to pass. (Genesis 15:5&6) Because Abraham believed the Lord, this was credited to Abraham as righteousness. Just as God made the world by speaking it into being, Abraham was creating his future and his promised family by agreeing with the Lord. Paul refers to this when he writes to the Romans (4:16-24), "the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring – not only those who are of the law but also those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written; I have made you a father of many nations. He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed – the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were. Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, so shall your offspring be...he did not

waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what He had promised. This is why it was credited to him as righteousness. The words, "credited to him as righteousness" were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness – for us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

Hebrews, (chapter 11), is full of commendations for those who had faith. Those commended had longed for many different things. Abel offered God an acceptable offering (in love), Enoch just wanted to walk with God in fellowship; Noah built a huge boat because of a flood he could only imagine but he loved his family; Abraham longed for that promised son and believed God even though he was so old; Isaac and Jacob are recorded as blessing their sons; Moses was willing to lead God's people into freedom from slavery; then there are all those who exercised their faith in unusual ways according to their circumstances. What did they long for? They must have believed that only God could bring about what they had visualised. They held the truth that God had made them for a purpose and had given them a dream, a hope to be fulfilled as they obeyed the inner urges of their souls and spirits, putting into action the steps to accomplish whatever that longing was. Even if they did not see the results, their faith said to them that it will happen because God has promised. This kind of trust brings more revelations which build into a greater relationship with our God.

This is illustrated by what Ethan wrote (Psalm 89:19). "Once You spoke in a vision, to Your faithful people You said: 'I have bestowed strength on a warrior; I have exalted a young man from among the people'". This man was an Ezrahite and considered very wise in God's wisdom and compared with Solomon, who the Bible says was the wisest man of his time. Ethan had God's revelation about King David, who was God's choice of king after the people's choice of Saul, who had been chosen because he looked good. David loved God from a young age and relied on God completely to fight against Goliath.

Habakkuk sought God about the problems in his own society. God spoke the answers into Habakkuk's heart but he was shocked and asked a further question. He was then asked to write it because the answer was not yet. "Write down the revelation and make it plain...for the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and it will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay". (Habakkuk 2:2&3) The answer he was given – For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. (Habakkuk 2:14) These longings of the hearts of God's family enable God to bring His will into the earth.

Even when God's people have wrong motives His principle still works. Balaam was God's appointed prophet and recognised as such by an enemy king. Balaam longed to be rich and famous and this enemy king offered him money to prophesy curses on God's people. However Balaam was unable to curse those whom God

has blessed. The enemy king refused to pay up. He saw that God had stopped His prophet's mouth. "One who hears the word of God, who sees a vision from the Almighty...whose eyes are opened". (Numbers 24:4) But Balaam was condemned because of his unfaithfulness. (Jude 11 & Revelation 2:14)

5. REVELATIONS FROM GOD'S HEART – IN RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM

God has conferred His authority on His children, that is, those who not only believe His word but obey it. It is a tremendous privilege to partner with Almighty God in the rule of the world. This is what God conceived even as He created Adam and Eve, but it was to be under His guidance. When God gave this authority He could not take it back, but the disobedience of Adam and Eve gave the rule to the devil by default. That is why John writes, "the whole world is under the control of the evil one". (1 John 5:19) The good news is that Jesus, by dying in our place, has won back that authority. Not only has He taken back the authority from the evil one, but He has conferred it, first to His 12 Apostles and then to 70 others (Luke 10).

This conferring is very significant because 70 is a governmental number – God's administration of the world. After the flood the world was repopulated through 70 descendants of Noah (Genesis 10); 70 persons went down to Egypt (Genesis 46:27); 70 elders were appointed to help Moses administer Israel in the wilderness (Numbers 11:16); the people of Israel spent 70 years of exile in Babylon (Jeremiah

25:11& 29:10); 70 weeks, (sevens), were decreed by God as the period in which Messianic redemption was to be accomplished (Daniel 9:24); Jesus sent forth the Seventy (as we have already mentioned) and He enjoined forgiveness until 70 times seven (Matthew 18:22). (New Bible Dictionary page 898)

Though the number is significant, towards the end of Jesus' ministry on the earth He commissions His disciples, those present and those to come, "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you to the very end of the age". (Matthew 28:18-20) This age ends of course when Jesus returns.

It is very interesting that Jesus deliberately mentions all three persons of the Godhead. It is our revelation that evangelism has three thrusts and we wrote this into the Evangelism Manual, available on our website, but we will repeat it here. Three baptisms in one and/or one in three?

What is the Father's viewpoint?

Genesis 1:28 makes this plain. Humankind is created in God's image – His ultimate desire (planted in the human psyche too) is to have children like Himself, to be His family. He said it was VERY good! HE is Spirit, but these, His own children, were born to **RULE** in the place He had prepared for them – the earth, or more specifically at this time, Eden. (Psalm 115:16 and Psalm 8:6)

His children were equipped with the blessing of God – filled with HIS nature, LOVE, JOY, PEACE, PATIENCE, KINDNESS, GOODNESS, FAITHFULNESS, GENTLENESS, SELFCONTROL. He told them to be fruitful and multiply, not only numerically but also to **spread these qualities** all over the earth – to fill the earth.

He also instructed them to subdue the earth. Increase means growth, and animals and especially plants with seeds grow fast, so herding and gardening were essential to “control” the growth. This, then, is the Father’s original plan.

What is the Son’s viewpoint?

John 14:10-14 makes it plain that He expected His followers would not only continue His work on earth but INCREASE it. In the great commission Jesus says that all authority has been given to Him.

We go in His Name, by His authority. In His prayer, (John 17:1-26), He makes it plain that He has taught everything that needed to be taught for His followers to be able to carry on His work.

1. They need to KNOW the Father and Jesus CHRIST (the Anointed One and His anointing).
2. They need to be ONE with Father and Son (intimately and personally associated with).
3. They need to TRUST in Father and Son and be filled with JOY, clothed in GLORY, walk together in LOVE and UNITY.

From the first, when He sent out “labourers”, He instructed them to preach repentance, and that the Kingdom of God is near.

What is the Holy Spirit's viewpoint?

1. He convicts of sin...because people do not believe in Jesus (John 16:8). This refusal of the leading of the Holy Spirit in this matter is the ultimate SIN which puts us out of reach of our heavenly home.

(Matthew 12:32) Jesus says "men love darkness rather than light" – (John 3:19).

2. He convicts of righteousness...Jesus arose from the grave – He has conquered sin and death and made a way into the presence of God. Our righteousness is Jesus' gift to us.

3. He convicts of judgment...the devil is exposed and condemned. The only power the devil now has is what those still in darkness allow him. Jesus disarmed the powers and (satanic) authorities, triumphed over them by the cross. (Colossians 2:13-15)

So God's plan is very clear, and Jesus proclaimed it, first to His Apostles, and to all who believe their message. (John 17:20) Jesus said, "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear (carry in your minds and hearts). But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to Me by taking from what is Mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is Mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take what is Mine and make it known to you". (John 16:12-15)

It is therefore plain that revelation from the heart of God is for every Christian. John writes in his letter, "you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to

you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth... See that what you heard from the beginning remains in you". (1 John 2:20, 21 &24) "His anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit – just as it has taught you, remain in Him". (1 John 2:27)

6. RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

The disciples were interested in the end of the age and asked Jesus to explain. Matthew writes about Jesus' teaching at length. (Matthew 24) Jesus begins by speaking about the near future, fulfilled in 70AD, when the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. But He goes on to warn about many things.

Many will come in My name, claiming, "I am the Christ", and deceive many. Many Jews followed Lubavitcher, who was a Ukrainian Jew, born in April 1902 and died in 1950, just 2 years after the restored state of Israel was formed. He had great influence and some thought he was Messiah. Many Muslims think Mohammed is the 'last prophet' and greater than Jesus. There have also been many cult leaders who have made similar claims to be followed and even worshipped in the way that only Messiah deserves.

You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. There have always been wars, but certainly our world has been in a continuous state of war for the last 100 years. But it is one thing to protect your land, your country from an invader, but modern science is inventing atrocious weapons to

wreak the worst possible havoc, and adding to this there is germ warfare. Yet Jesus goes on – **such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.** The church, supposed to represent God's kingdom, is carrying less and less influence and the kingdom of the world, with the devil as default god, seems to be rising up to be the greater power, yet there are more Christians, the true Church, than ever before, because God's kingdom was decreed to advance.

There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.

Jesus does not mention tsunamis, cyclones and volcanic eruptions and other 'natural' disasters, including pandemics, but He says – **all these are the beginning of birth-pains.**

Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of Me.

History tells us of the martyrs down through the centuries, but this is still happening in the world. But even in countries that we might call 'developed' there is much hatred expressed by atheists, and also discrimination and mockery when people stand up for God's principles against those who are eager for social changes which defy God's laws.

At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. From the day that one denomination or church group began comparing and debating their particular dogmas and interpretations of the Bible, arguing against another as

to who is right, there has been opportunity for the evil one to cause division and even hatred because they want to prove that they are right, and must therefore prove the other wrong. This tendency must be why Jesus commanded us to love one another. Once division occurs there seems to be no limits to extremism, and this is happening to the present day.

Because of the increase of wickedness (a twisted version of the truth, as in a candle wick,) **the love of most will grow cold.** There is a noticeable drift away from the church and particularly the influence of the church has reduced enormously. When their leaders do express God's laws they are ridiculed as out of date.

But Jesus finishes on a high note – **the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. And the gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.**

These then are the signs of the times. Maybe some of these signs have been obvious across the 2000 years since Jesus spoke them. But Peter had something to say about this. "Do not forget this one thing...With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. God is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief..." (2 Peter 3:8-10)

7. ETERNAL PROMISES TO BELIEVE BY FAITH

The Bible states how God speaks to His children. "For God does speak – now one way, now another – though man may not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night when deep sleep falls upon men as they slumber in their beds, He may speak in their ears..." (Job 33:14-16) But under the new Covenant which Jesus came to introduce, Jesus assures us that "My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me". (John 10:27) Perhaps some think that this is not literally true, but we (the writers) believe that we can and even should take God's word literally. We understand the argument that some experts make that there is hyperbole in the Bible and also poetic language. But children are literal thinkers who believe and trust, and Jesus does clearly say, "I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." (Luke 18:17)

But God does not speak so much to the mind as to the heart. The Holy Spirit convicts or convinces, either by God's written Word or by our consciences. In relationship with God as Abba, Father, we learn His heart's desires, through His love and care of us. This relationship begins when we allow Him into our hearts. This is why the church has taught us to ask Jesus into our hearts. This does not make any sense in natural (and worldly) thinking. This is the first act of faith we meet and God proves this statement through experience. Every subsequent act of faith results in growth. At this point we might remind ourselves what is Biblical faith. "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

This is what the ancients were commended for." (Hebrews 11:1&2) This passage of Scripture goes on – "without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him." (Hebrews 11:6)

So we can expect that some people will mock us for what they think of as naivety. But the Bible says about God's Word, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man (and woman) of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16&17)

The practice of faith in God's promises is a great adventure. First this kind of faith, belief in God's promises, gives us credit as righteous before our Holy God. (Romans 4:3) "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man (or woman) whose sin the Lord will never count against him." (Psalm 32:1&2 and Romans 4:7&8)

This right standing with God who creates by calling things that are not yet as though they were by the power of His Word, enables us also to create in the same way. This is the faith that pleases God. We are truly representing Him on this earth, as He asks us to do. (2 Corinthians 5:20) Of course it is up to God to do the creating, but when we get it right and what we speak in His Name comes to pass, God's generous heart is manifest on earth as it is in Heaven. The longings of God's heart and the authority He conferred on mankind in the beginning, which was lost when Adam and Eve

sinned, and then won back at great cost by Jesus, is enforced. This is the promise to believe.

8. ETERNAL PROMISES TO RECEIVE BY FAITH

This extraordinary promise, the ultimate desire of God is on offer, but will never be forced upon us. We are made in the image of God and we are to represent Him and rule with Him. The price has been paid when Jesus died on the Cross. John writes that in this world we are like Him (1 John 4:17) and everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he (or she) that believes that Jesus is the Son of God. (1 John 5:4&5)

There is a difference between believing and receiving the promises. Many people give mental assent to our right standing with our Holy God. They say they believe, but when they make a mistake or when the devil attacks, they move into condemnation or a fleshly response. Unfortunately the established church has emphasised that we are sinners, rather than that we have been given our right standing in God's sight as a gift. The writer to the Hebrews states that we are still infants if we are not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. (Hebrews 5:13)

Paul writes that ministers are given their gifts to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed

back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of...the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ. (Ephesians 4:12-15)

Paul offers more advice in Romans. (Romans 12:1&2) In view of God's mercy...offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will.

James has more to say. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lack wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and NOT doubt, because he who doubts is like the waves of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. (James 1:4-6)

One of the exciting things about reading the Bible, which of course we have chosen to believe even when we do not understand everything, is that God has put His promises out through a great variety of writers. The experiences of these writers give God's answers to the problems of life and the wiles of the devil. God does not show favouritism (Romans 2:11), so what He has done for one He will do for any who put their trust in His Word.

The Psalms are a rich source of examples.

"Cast you cares upon the Lord and He will sustain you; He will NEVER let the righteous fall. (Psalm 55:22)

"Praise the Lord, O my soul and do not forget all His benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit (destruction) and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." (Psalm 103:2-5)

There are other writers too who want to encourage us to take God at His Word. "See I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in Him will never be put to shame." (1 Peter 2:6, a quote from Isaiah 28:16)

Solomon, who asked God for wisdom, wrote, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths." (Proverbs 3:5&6) Isaiah wrote, "You will keep in perfect 'shalom, shalom' him (or her) whose mind is steadfast, because he (she) trusts in You." (Isaiah 26:3) 'Shalom' repeated emphasises the full meaning of this Hebrew word – peace, completeness, welfare, health and harmony and can be described as "a harmonious state of the soul and mind which encourages the development of the faculties and powers. The state of being at ease is experienced both internally and externally." (Quote from Vines 'Dictionary of Biblical Words')

Moses was instructed to bless the people with a beautiful prayer, because God's words always come to pass. "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn His face towards you and give you

peace (shalom). (Numbers 6:24-26) Who would not want to receive all these beautiful promises?

9. OVERCOMING THE WORLD

We want to know what overcoming the world looks like. We have written about vision – and where there is no vision (no redemptive revelation of God) the people perish. (Proverbs 29:18 Amplified Bible) Thus our salvation depends on our vision of God as trustworthy. But the world's thinking falls far short of God's ways. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:9)

During the times of the Old Testament there were many sad things written about vision and God's redemptive revelation.

"In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions." (1 Samuel 3:1)

"The Lord has sealed your eyes (the prophets); He has covered your heads (the seers). For you this whole vision is nothing but words sealed in a scroll." (Isaiah 29:10&11)

"Prophets and priests stagger when seeing visions." (Isaiah 28:7)

"Prophets I have not sent are speaking in My name, false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds."

(Jeremiah 14:14) (Jeremiah 23:16).

"Prophets no longer find visions from the Lord." (Lamentations 2:9)

"They will try to get a vision from the prophet." (Ezekiel 7:26)

"Night will come over you without visions...because there is no answer from God." (Micah 3:6)

This came about because the Israelites, God's people, chosen to be a light to all the nations on the earth, disobeyed God's Word and worshipped other gods of the pagan nations where they lived – gods of wood and stone that were idols. The full statement (in Proverbs 29:18) is, "where there is no vision the people cast off restraint; but blessed is the one who keeps the law. (Attends to these revelations)."

In the fullness of time Jesus came to overcome on our behalf. "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) The Bible describes this victory: "Christ...cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; He took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities (the devil's right of rule with his demon slaves), He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." (Colossians 2:14&15) So Jesus, having won back the authority from God to rule with Him, has a right to expect us to do the same overcoming.

John writes very fully on this responsibility. "I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father... I write to you, young men because you are strong, and the Word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one." (1 John 2:13-14)

"This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." (1 John 5:4&5)

John writes more in his vision on Patmos, where he begins by telling "what must soon take place", and "blessed is the one who reads the words...and blessed are those who hear it and take it to heart." (Revelation 1:1-3) Seven churches in seven cities are warned of their shortcomings and commended for what they have done well, and the first four letters finish with the words – "he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give..." (Revelation 2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:26-29) The other three letters also give promises for those who "have an ear, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. "The seventh finishes with the promise that to him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with Me on My throne, just as I overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." (Revelation 3:5-6; 3:12&13 and 3:21-22) This indicates how much God wants us to learn to rule and reign with Him. John had a very interesting vision of how the devil was cast out of heaven. "There was war in heaven, Michael (guardian of the Jews – God's chosen people) and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But the dragon was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray." (Revelation 12:7-9) This is still the devil's mission, but John writes, "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the

authority of His Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down." But **the brothers** (Jesus' followers) **overcame him** (the devil and his angels) **by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony** (what God has done in our lives which has given us more understanding and greater love of and for Him); **they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.**" (Revelation 12:11)

When Jesus was teaching He told His disciples "If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it." (Mark 8:34&35) Overcoming begins with death to self. This is the price asked of us in order to be an overcomer.

But while the Old Testament has sad stories of failure the New Testament has stories of some who had powerful visions. Ezekiel had prophesied – "The days are near when every vision will be fulfilled." (Ezekiel 12:23-27) He was a faithful prophet and had remarkable visions. (Ezekiel 1:1; 8:4; 11:24; 43:3)

John the Baptist's birth was told to Zechariah in the temple, (Luke 1:11-22) and Jesus' birth to both Joseph and Mary. (Matthew 1:20 and Luke 1:28)

Ananias was given a vision to tell him about the vision that Saul had, (Acts 9:10 and 12) so that Saul would be healed to become a mighty evangelist and missionary.

Cornelius was a seeker after God and was given a vision so that he and others would receive the Holy Spirit. (Acts 10:3)

Peter's vision was to change his direction towards an understanding that both Jews and Gentiles were precious to God. (Acts 10:9-13)

Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia, (Acts 16:9&10) another assuring him of God's protection, (Acts 18:9) and his conversion experience (Acts 9:3) which he further recounts as his testimony. (Acts 26:12-19)

One of the most glorious visions was given to Peter, James and John when they saw Jesus transfigured. (Matthew 17:1-9)

These visions were given so that God's purposes would be carried out, so there is every reason to expect that God still desires us to fulfil that for which we were born. Our vision will enable us to be the overcomers for which God looks. It might as well be as big as we can imagine, because God has promised that He is able to do even more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Ephesians 3:20&21)