

## 30 AMAZING BIBLE STORIES YOU MAY NOT KNOW

### #12: A Man Who Visited Heaven | 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

#### THE VISIT TO HEAVEN | 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-4

- Verse 12:1 –
  - Paul has been boasting (feeling foolish about it the entire time) since 2 Cor. 11:1. Now he feels the pressure of this "foolishness" and states that it is **not expedient...to glory** (boast), because the boasting would lead to **visions and revelations of the Lord** which are not something to "brag about." Because of this, beginning in verse two he switches to the third person rather than talking directly about himself.
  - Why do we believe this is about Paul?
    - Because of the introductory "apology."
    - Because Paul did not know whether the experience took place physically (v. 2).
    - Because Paul knows the things which cannot be known (v. 4).
    - Because Paul is conflicted about making boast of this incident (vv. 5-6).
    - Because Paul reverts to the first person in verse 7.
- Verses 12:2-3 –
  - Paul **knew a man** - The man (not the knowledge) was **in Christ**.
  - The incident was real but possibly not **in the body** (just as John's experience of the Revelation, see Rev. 1:10, or Ezekiel's experience in Ezekiel 8:3).
  - The experience was one of being **caught up to the third heaven**. Paul uses the Greek ἀρπάζω [harpazo], the same word used of his description of the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4:17.
  - The **third heaven** is a phrase only used here, and is defined in verse 4.
  - The revelation happened **above fourteen years ago**. Here is a simple (and approximate) chronology of Paul's early ministry:
    - Year 1 – Saul's Road to Damascus Experience – 35 AD
    - Year 3 – Three years later, Paul goes to Jerusalem and stayed with Peter 15 days (Gal. 1:18) - approx. 38 AD
    - Year 14 - Fourteen years after Damascus - Paul goes to Jerusalem for the Jerusalem Council (Gal. 2:1) - approx. 49 AD
    - Year 14+ - Paul writes Second Corinthians about 55 AD, referring to his vision, which took place **above fourteen years ago** (2 Cor. 12:1) – thus the vision was approx. 41 AD.
- Verse 4 –
  - Could the **unspeakable words** be *the mystery* of the Pauline Gospel? We do not know, but the timing would be correct for receiving the mystery at this time.

#### PAUL'S HUMILITY | 1 CORINTHIANS 12:5-6

- Verse 12:5 –
  - Paul has been talking about **such an one** (v. 2) and **such a man** (v. 3) and now again **such an one** (v. 5), yet all along is speaking of himself, we believe. Now

Paul steps back from the third person to the first person and begins to speak of **myself**.

- Almost doubtlessly, the enemies of Paul value mystical experiences. Paul, in humility, will defend himself but will not arrogantly use his experiences for his own credit. This is sadly unlike many "ministers" today, who gladly advertise their so-called heavenly visions, trips to heaven, etc.
- Coming away from the "folly" of the overall discussion, he says **I will not glory, but in mine infirmities**.
- Verse 12:6 –
  - Paul (like all of us) **would desire to glory** (in his spiritual experiences), and *if* Paul did that, he would **not be a fool** in what he said because he would **say the truth**.
  - However, he would rather **forebear** in order that people would not exalt him beyond that which is really is.

#### PAUL'S THORN IN THE FLESH | 1 CORINTHIANS 12:7-10

- Verse 12:7 –
  - Paul speaks of his infamous **thorn in the flesh**. This thorn was given to Paul for the sake of humility and was somehow demonic in nature (if we take **messenger of Satan** literally).
  - However, it could not have been *given by Satan*, for Satan would not desire that Paul would not be **exalted above measure**. So, God gave the **thorn** using Satan as His instrument.
- Verse 12:8 –
  - Sometimes in prayer it is best to stop praying when we have an answer. Paul did not feel the need for the "importunity" that is often taught in prayer (usually based on Luke 18:1-8).
- Verse 12:9 –
  - To live a life in God's sufficient grace rather than our own strength is the greatest of blessings.
  - In God's grace, we do not have to prove ourselves, develop our own worth, live the endless burden of people pleasing, fret over our inadequacies, and so much more!
- Verse 12:10 –
  - The verb **take pleasure** is not a self-loathing masochistic gratification from pain, but a translation of the word εὐδοκέω [eudokeo], based on *eu* (good) and *dokeo* (to think). It is another way of saying, **whatsoever things are true...honest...pure...lovely...of good report...think on these things** (Phil. 4:8).
  - The things that are mentioned in this verse are "dangers of missionary activity" and are thus **for Christ's sake**, not just general **infirmities**, etc. One should not take pleasure in general **infirmities** nor **reproaches** nor **necessities**, etc., for these are signs of the curse not of spiritual service, except when they arise from spiritual service (as did Paul's).