

“Where There Is No Vision”

“Where there is no vision, the people perish but he that keepeth the law, happy is he,” Prov. 29:18. The word “*vision*,” as used in this verse, is translated from *chazon* (Hebrew), and denotes revelation from God. In fact, in the NKJV the word is translated “*revelation*.” That it denotes revelation (divine revelation) is suggested by the usage of the same word in other references. For example, the book of Isaiah begins thusly: “*The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem...*,” Isa. 1:1. It was written of Daniel that he had “*understanding in all visions...*,” Dan. 1:17. In the first verse of the book of Nahum we find these words: “*The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.*” Other references could be cited to further emphasize that *chazon* (translated “*vision*”) had to do with revelation, usually inspired revelation from God, which enabled “*holy men of God*” to speak “*as they were moved by the Holy Spirit,*” 2 Peter 1:21.

This revelation from God was essential, because without it “*the people perish,*” Prov. 29:18. On the other hand “*he that keepeth the law*” is described as “*happy.*” It is well to emphasize, however, that we today are not living in the age of open visions, or supernatural revelation from God. Jesus Christ fulfilled all that was “*written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms concerning*” Him, Luke 24:44; He died on the cross, blotting out the Mosaic Law, causing its requirements to no longer be binding on man, Col. 2:14. And by reason of His death, Jesus became the “*mediator of the new covenant,*” which became effective following His death, Heb. 9:15-17. He also sent out His ambassadors (apostles) with the promise that the Holy Spirit would guide them into “*all truth,*” John 16:13. Hence, “*all truth*” (regarding the revealing of God’s will to man) was made known to them, which they wrote down, Eph. 3:3-4, and which we have preserved for us today in the Bible.

“*Where there is no vision, the people perish...*,” Prov. 29:18, in principle, has application today; that is, when God’s people turn from His revelation (the Bible) to make their own, rules “*the people perish.*” The quickest and surest way for a congregation to cease to have the approval of God is for God’s people to lose their respect for “*the law*” of God. They may continue for a while to have “*a name*” that they are alive, but, like the church at Sardis, God will view them as “*dead,*” Rev. 3:1.

Having shown the contextual meaning of the word “*vision*,” as it is used in Prov. 29:18, I want us to now consider the word in an accommodative sense to denote a current idea of “*vision*” as also referring to one’s ability to imagine, to plan, and to anticipate. Many preachers, elders, and “church leaders” lack “*vision*” in this sense, and thus fail to perceive the growth and progress that could be accomplished if they would lift up their eyes and look on the fields which “*are white already to harvest,*” John 4:35. Too many churches merely seek to maintain the present “*status quo,*” simply because they lack the capacity to look beyond present reality so as to consider and work toward future possibility. This is why potentially strong churches continue to drift along with a “*ho-hum*” complacency that results in a spiritual stupor instead of a spiritual awakening.

Could it be that we lack vision? Could it be that we have so conditioned our minds in negativism and defeatism that we have failed to develop the capacity to set worthwhile goals toward which to press onward, and for which to strive? Could it be that we lack the “*I-can-do-all-things-through-Christ-who-strengthens-me*” attitude that characterized the apostle Paul, Phil. 4:13? Brethren, let us truly “*lift up*” our eyes to the opportunities and possibilities before us, set Scriptural goals, and work to reach them. Remember we do not have to “*see* visions” in order to **have** vision; rather we need to develop greater faith.

*** —B. Witherington

“Behold, I Thought”

Naaman was “*a great man*,” an “honorable” man, and a “*mighty man in valor*.” He was also the “*captain of the host of the king of Syria*,” and doubtlessly could rejoice in his great success among men. However, he had one grave problem. “*He was a leper*,” 2 Kings 5:1.

Naaman, however, was more fortunate than most lepers. A little captive Jewish maid, who “*waited on Naaman’s wife*,” informed her of a prophet in Samaria who could “*recover him of his leprosy*,” v. 3. Anxious to find a cure for a disease, generally regarded as incurable, Naaman journeyed to Samaria and in the course of time he “*stood at the door of the house of Elisha*,” v. 9.

Elisha, instead of personally welcoming Naaman, sent a messenger to him, “*saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean*,” v. 10.

The instruction was simple, easy to understand, and to obey. “*But Naaman was wroth*” and was filled with unrighteous indignation. He cried, “**Behold I thought**, *He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place and recover the leper*,” v. 11. Instead of hastening to heed the instruction, Naaman “*turned and went away in a rage*,” v. 22. He was yet a leper, possessing the grim prospects of a much shortened life.

Regarding the way he thought he would be healed, Naaman said “*Behold, I thought...*” He already had it “cut and dried” in his own mind, and any other way, to him, was unthinkable. He could not conceive of his being cured apart from the way he had preconceived. But Naaman, in this respect, has many living counterparts today. It is amazing how many believe an infinite God is regulated by the limited thinking of finite man!

“**I think** instrumental music in worship sounds good and that we ought to have it.” “**I think** once a month is often enough to partake of the Lord’s supper.” “**I think** sprinkling for baptism is alright; I don’t personally see anything wrong with it.” “I don’t **think** it makes much difference what you believe so long as you are sincere.” “Yes, **I think** there are Christians in all denominations.” Etc., etc., ad. Inf.

Frankly, I find it amazing how people who never take time to study, or bother to meditate, can so frequently introduce a statement of a religious nature by saying, “I think!” If some of the statements I hear are the result of thought, I wonder what they’d come up with if they didn’t bother to think!

However, in getting back to our subject, let us emphasize that God’s plan of salvation is

not determined by your and my puny thoughts. *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts,”* Isa. 55:8-9. *“...it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps,”* Jer. 10:23.

The reason God gave us the Bible and preserved it for our use is because He knew we were not capable of devising a satisfactory system of salvation. Without the Bible we have no idea of **what** to think!

Naaman was not healed of leprosy until he ceased being guided by his stubborn will, ceased trying to substitute his rivers for God's (cf. 2 Kings 5:12), and turned in humble obedience to the word of God as it was uttered by the prophet of God, 2 Kings 5:14.

The instruction given to Naaman was not based upon the fact that he was *“captain of the host of the king of Syria,”* but rather upon the fact that *“he was a leper.”* The biblical instructions given to you are not determined by the fact that you may be regarded by your contemporaries as a successful person, but rather upon the fact that you are **a sinner** and need, therefore, to be saved in Christ!

The Bible tells us **what** to think and what not to think. Those who march in the army of God know that their weapons are spiritual, *“not carnal,”* and result in *“casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringng into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ,”* 2 Cor. 10:3-5.

**** —B. Witherington