

## 2<sup>ND</sup> CORINTHIANS 12:2-10

**2 Corinthians 12:2 I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.**

Verse 2. I knew a man in Christ] I knew a Christian, or a Christian man; for to such alone God now revealed himself, for vision and prophecy had been shut up from the Jews.

Fourteen years ago] On what occasion or in what place this transaction took place we cannot tell; there are many conjectures among learned men concerning it, but of what utility can they be when every thing is so palpably uncertain? Allowing this epistle to have been written some time in the year 57, fourteen years counted backward will lead this transaction to the year 42 or 43, which was about the time that Barnabas brought Paul from Tarsus to Antioch, Ac 11:25, 26, and when he and Paul were sent by the Church of Antioch with alms to the poor Christians at Jerusalem. It is very possible that, on this journey, or while in Jerusalem, he had this vision, which was intended to be the means of establishing him in the faith, and supporting him in the many trials and difficulties through which he was to pass. This vision the apostle had kept secret for fourteen years.

Whether in the body I cannot tell] Received information; but how it was brought about he did not know. Whether a vivid real presentation of strong will or thoughts preoccupied him; or whether the scene passed before the mind in a vision, so that he seemed to have been caught up to heaven, he does not pretend to know. The evident idea is, that at the time he was in a state of insensibility in regard to surrounding objects, and was unconscious of what was occurring, as if he had been dead. It seems that he lost all consciousness of anything about him at that time, and that he saw only the things in heaven. God knoweth with the mode in which it was done, God only could be acquainted. That the apostle was in an ecstasy or trance, something like that of Peter, Ac 10:9, there is reason to believe. Ezekiel and John and even Phillip were carried by the Spirit:

Chapter 12

*The apostle Paul, who had received many revelations from the Lord, met difficulties from various sources, and amid all his conflicts and discouragements he did not lose his trust and confidence in God. Under the special tuition of the Holy Spirit, his judgment was purified, refined, elevated, sanctified. The devisings of human beings and of the enemy against him were to him a means of discipline and education, and he declares that thus he gained most excellent knowledge, because he made the Lord Jesus his dependence. "Yea doubtless," he declares, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." How greatly this gospel enriches the garden of the soul, enabling it to produce most precious fruit (Letter 127, 1903)!*

The third heaven-The Jews talk of seven heavens, and Mohammed has received the same from them; but these are not only fabulous but absurd. I shall enumerate those of the Jews.

**1. The YELUM, or curtain, -** "Which in the morning is folded up, and in the evening stretched out." Isa 40:22: He stretcheth out the heavens as a CURTAIN, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in.

**2. The firmament, or EXPANSE,** "In which the sun, moon, stars, and constellations are fixed." Gen 1:17: And God placed them in the FIRMAMENT of heaven.

**3. The CLOUDS, or AETHER,** "Where the mill-stones are which grind the manna for the righteous." Ps 78:23, &c.: Though he had commended the CLOUDS from above, and opened the doors of heaven, and had rained down manna, &c.

**4. The HABITATION,** "Where Jerusalem, and the temple, and the altar, were constructed and where Michael the great prince stands and offers sacrifices." 1Ki 8:13: I have surely built thee a HOUSE TO

DWELL IN, a settled place for thee to abide in for ever. "But where is heaven so called?" Answer: In Isa 63:15: Look down from HEAVEN, and behold from the HABITATION, lwbzm, of thy holiness.

**5. The DWELLING-PLACE**, "Where the troops of angels sing throughout the night, but are silent in the day time, because of the glory of the Israelites." Ps 42:8: The Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day time, and in the night his song shall be with me. "But how is it proved that this means heaven?" Answer: From De 26:15. Look down from thy holy habitation, Nwemm, the DWELLING-PLACE of thy holiness; and from heaven, Mymvh, and bless thy people Israel.

**6. The FIXED RESIDENCE**, "Where are the treasures of snow and hail, the repository of noxious dews, of drops, and whirlwinds; the grotto of exhalations," &c. "But where are the heavens thus denominated?" Answer: In 1Ki 8:39, 49, &c.: Then hear thou in HEAVEN thy DWELLING-PLACE, Nwkm tbv, thy FIXED RESIDENCE.

**7. The ARABOTH**, Where are justice, judgment, mercy, the treasures of life; peace and blessedness; the souls of the righteous, the souls and spirits which are reserved for the bodies yet to be formed, and the dew by which God is to vivify the dead." Ps 89:14, Isa 59:17; Ps 36:9, Jg 6:24; Ps 24:4; 1Sa 25:29; Isa 57:20: All of which are termed Araboth, Ps 68:4. Extol him who rideth on the heavens, twbreb ba ARABOTH, by his name Jah.

All this is sufficiently unphilosophical, and in several cases ridiculous.

In the sacred writings three heavens only are mentioned. The first is the atmosphere, what appears to be intended by Gen 1:6. The second, the starry heaven; where is the sun, moon, planets, and stars; but these two are often expressed under the one term, the two heavens, or expansions, and in Gen 1:17, they appear to be both expressed by, the firmament of heaven. And, thirdly, the place of the blessed, or the throne of the Divine glory, probably expressed by the words, THE HEAVENS OF HEAVENS.

Much more may be seen in Schoettgen, who has exhausted the subject; and who has shown that ascending to heaven, or being caught up to heaven, is a form of speech among the Jewish writers to express the highest degrees of inspiration. They often say of Moses that he ascended on high, ascended on the firmament, ascended to heaven; where it is evident they mean only by it that he was favoured with the nearest intimacy with God, and the highest revelations relative to his will, &c. If we may understand St. Paul thus, it will remove much of the difficulty from this place; and perhaps the unspeakable words, 2Co 12:4, are thus to be understood. But also this I say is wrong.

**4 How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. {lawful: or, possible}**

**Verse 4. Caught up into paradise]** The Jewish writers have no less than four paradises, as they have seven heavens; but it is needless to wade through their fables. The Mohammedans call it [Arabic] jennet alferdoos, the garden of paradise, and say that God created it out of light, and that it is the habitation of the prophets and wise men.

**Which it is not lawful for a man to utter]** The Jews thought that the Divine name, Yehovah, should not be uttered, and that it is absolutely unlawful to pronounce it; indeed they say that the true pronunciation is utterly lost, and cannot be recovered without an express revelation. Not one of them, to the present day, ever attempts to utter it; and, when they meet with it in their reading, always supply its place with Adonai, Lord.

*Through Paul God has given many wonderful lessons for our instruction. In his visions Paul saw many things not lawful for a man to utter. But many other things which he saw in the heavenly courts were woven into his teachings. The truth flashed from his lips as a sharp, two-edged sword. The impressions made upon his mind by the Holy Spirit were strong and vivid, and they were*

*presented to the people in a way that no one else could present them. Paul spoke in the demonstration of the Spirit and with power (Letter 105, 1901).*

*The apostle Paul was highly honored of God, being taken in holy vision to the third heaven, where he looked upon scenes whose glories might not be revealed to mortals. Yet all this did not lead him to boastfulness or self-confidence. He realized the importance of constant watchfulness and self-denial, and plainly declares, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (RH May 3, 1881).*

*Mysteries which had been hidden for ages were revealed to him [Paul], and as much as he could bear of the workings of God, and of His dealings with human minds, was made known. The Lord told Paul that he must preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. Light was to be given to the Gentiles. This is a mystery which had been hidden for ages (ST Jan. 30, 1912).*

*Paul had a view of heaven, and in discoursing on the glories there, the very best thing he could do was to not try to describe them. He tells us that eye had not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for those that love Him. So you may put your imagination to the stretch, you may try to the very best of your abilities to take in and consider the eternal weight of glory, and yet your finite senses, faint and weary with the effort, cannot grasp it, for there is an infinity beyond. It takes all of eternity to unfold the glories and bring out the precious treasures of the Word of God (MS 13, 1888).*

**6 For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me.**

Verse 6. I shall not be a fool] Who that had got such honour from God would have been fourteen years silent on the subject?

I will say the truth] I speak nothing but truth; and the apostle seems to have intended to proceed with something else of the same kind, but, finding some reason probably occurring suddenly, says, I forbear-I will say no more on this subject.

Lest any man should think of me above] The apostle spoke of these revelations for two purposes: first, lest his enemies might suppose they had cause to think meanly of him; and, secondly, having said thus much, he forbears to speak any farther of them, lest his friends should think too highly of him. It is a rare gift to discern when to speak, and when to be silent; and to know when enough is said on a subject, neither too little nor too much.

**7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.**

Verse 7. And lest I should be exalted] There were three evils to be guarded against: 1. The contempt of his gifts and call by his enemies. 2. The overweening fondness of his friends. And, 3. Self-exultation.

A thorn in the flesh] The word signifies a stake, and, to be tied to a stake by way of punishment; and it is used, to signify the most oppressive afflictions. Whatever it was, it was, in the flesh, i.e. of an outward kind. It was neither sin nor sinfulness, for this could not be given him to prevent his being exalted above measure; for sin never had and never can have this tendency. What this thorn in the flesh might be has given birth to a multitude of conjectures. God permitted this to keep the apostle humble, and at last completely delivered the Church out of the hands and influence of this deceiver; none, not even the incestuous person, having been turned finally out of the way by the false doctrines there preached. I strongly believe that what Paul was talking about had to do with his eyes Galatians 4:15 that he was

partially blind is intimated in Galatians 6:11 which hampered him writing his letters and made it costly in that by using large letters, much paper was used and considering the preciousness of such a material in those days it could only call for a humbled man to carry on with the work of evangelism in such modes that Paul used. The cause of this partial blindness? His conversion Acts 9:18. which am convinced he never recovered full sight.

*Paul had a very humble opinion of his own advancement in the Christian life. He says, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect." He speaks of himself as the chief of sinners. Yet Paul had been highly honored of the Lord. He had been taken, in holy vision, to the third heaven, and had there received revelations of divine glory which he could not be permitted to make known (ST Jan. 11, 1883).*

### **8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.**

Verse 8. I besought the Lord] That is, Christ, as the next verse absolutely proves. And if Christ be an object of prayer in such a case as this, or indeed in any case, it is a sure proof of his divinity; for only an omniscient Being can be made an object of prayer.

Thrice] Several suppose this to be a certain number for an uncertain; as if he had said, I often besought Christ to deliver me from this tormentor: or, which is perhaps more likely, the apostle may refer to three solemn, fixed, and fervent applications made to Christ at different times; at the last of which he received the answer which he immediately subjoins. It is worthy of remark, that our Lord in his agony acted in the same way: at three different times he applied to God that the cup might depart from him; and in each application he spoke the same words, Mt 26:39-44. There is, therefore, a manifest allusion to our Lord's conduct in these words of the apostle.

*Paul had a bodily affliction; his eyesight was bad. He thought that by earnest prayer the difficulty might be removed. But the Lord had His own purpose, and He said to Paul, Speak to Me no more of this matter. My grace is sufficient. It will enable you to bear the infirmity (Letter 207, 1899).*

*A deep sadness still rested upon the mind and heart of Paul because of his apprehensions concerning the Corinthian church. While at Philippi he commenced his second epistle to them, for they hung as a heavy weight upon his soul. The depression of spirits from which the apostle suffered was, however, attributable in a great degree to bodily infirmities, which made him very restless when not engaged in active service. But when working for the salvation of souls, he rose superior to physical debility. He felt that the disease under which he suffered was a terrible impediment to him in his great work, and repeatedly besought the Lord to relieve him. God did not see fit to answer his prayers in this respect, though He gave him assurance that divine grace should be sufficient for him (LP 175, 176).*

### **9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.**

Verse 9. My grace is sufficient for thee] Thou shalt not be permitted to sink under these afflictions.

My strength is made perfect in weakness.] The more, and the more violently, thou art afflicted and tried, being upheld by my power, and prospered in all thy labours, the more eminently will my power be seen and acknowledged. For the weaker the instrument I use, the more the power of my grace shall be manifested.

Will I rather glory in my infirmities] Therefore, his infirmities do not mean his corruptions, or sins, or sinfulness of any kind; for it would be blasphemous for any man to say, I will rather glory that God leaves my corruptions in me, than that he should take them away.

That the power of Christ may rest upon me.] That it may overshadow me as a tent, or tabernacle; affording me shelter, protection, safety, and rest. This expression is like that, Joh 1:14: And the word was made flesh, and made his tabernacle among us-full of grace and truth. The same eternal WORD promised to make his tabernacle with the apostle, and gives him a proof that he was still the same-full of grace and truth, by assuring him that his grace should be sufficient for him. Paul, knowing that the promise of grace could not fail, because of the Divine truth, says: Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my afflictions, that such a power of Christ may overshadow and defend me. The words are also similar to those of the Prophet Isaiah, Isa 4:5: On all the glory shall be a defence. God gives the glory, and God gives the defence of that glory. The apostle had much glory or honour; both Satan and his apostles were very envious; in himself the apostle, as well as all human beings, was weak, and therefore needed the power of God to defend such glory. Grace alone can preserve grace. When we get a particular blessing we need another to preserve it; and without this we shall soon be shorn of our strength, and become as other men; hence the necessity of continual watchfulness and prayer, and depending on the all-sufficient grace of Christ.