

# **Windows into the heavenly places**

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## **Introduction**

Since the 9/11 bombings in New York, we have been seeing an increase of terrorist activity across the world. Iraq, Jordan, London – terrorists appear to be able to move without hindrance. Is this expansion just one of those things which happen from time to time, or does it indicate a stepping up of the spiritual battle in the heavenly places? Is the Prince of Persia (Daniel 10:13) active again? Has the strong man managed to untie his chains? (Matthew 12:29) However we answer this question, and I think many of us would answer it in the affirmative, one fact is clear to those who move in the spirit – this is a spiritual battle, and has to be fought in the spiritual places. And here we run into two problems:-

1. Many of God's people are unaware of the heavenly places.
2. Many are aware of many bits of teaching, but have not had the opportunity of seeing them all put together in one place.

So in this material, I have gathered together much of what the Bible teaches, and have tried to present it in a united way, so that we can get a hold of the wide sweep of heavenly things. The purpose is to help us fight and pray more effectively. I know that what is written here is not the whole truth. Nor is what is written here meant to be a thorough theology, although I hope that the theology is sound. It is written to help with more effective prayer, intercession and warfare. It is written from a totally Christian context.

## **The heavenly places do exist**

### **The Chariots of fire. 2 Kings 6:8-17**

The king of Aram was determined to destroy the prophet Elisha. So he sent a force of soldiers to surround the city where Elisha was staying. When Elisha's servant got up in the morning, he saw the soldiers surrounding the city, and he was afraid. Strange to think that this man who had been with Elisha, and must have seen many things, had not grasped the significance of the spiritual world in which his master lived. Many of God's people are like him – faithful godly people, who have failed to grasp the significance of seeing things in the spiritual world first. Feet of clay have rooted so many to the earth, where fear and anxiety surround and negate faith.

Elisha was a man of the spiritual world. He saw nothing to fear in earthly troops, knowing of the heavenly battalions which surround God's people. (Ps 91:19) So he prayed, "Oh Lord, open his eyes that he may see." Elisha wanted to encourage his servant to enter the spiritual realms, and as he had prayed, so it happened:- "Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all round Elisha." (v.17) The servant entered the spiritual world, and we must learn to do the same.

The spiritual world is open to us, and from it we draw strength, understanding and courage – “those who are for us are more than those who are with them” (v.16) In these difficult days, we need, more than ever, to both hear and see the truth in these words.

## **Opposition is to be expected**

### **Daniel and the prince of Persia. Daniel 10:4-14**

In Daniel, we read this unusual story:-

“On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold round his waist. His body was like chrysalides, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude. I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; the men with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground. A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. He said, “Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you.” And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling. Then he continued, “Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come.” (Daniel 10:4-14)

This story is only unusual to those who are not familiar with the heavenly places. For in the spiritual world, there is intense opposition to the ways of God, the things of God and those who want to work with God. Satan has been defeated by the cross of Jesus, but even in defeat, he is still a dangerous foe, and he still tries to hinder God’s ways. In the heavenly places, we must expect opposition. In fact we will feel it and see it at its strongest in the heavenly places, and there, we have to claim again and again the victory of Jesus.

This story shows us one of the problems we will always have with spiritual things – our brain! These spiritual things can be tested, checked and analysed by our brain, and it is vital that we do use our brain in this way. We are not passing into a trance state. On the contrary, our intellect is wide awake to what is happening, But here is the problem – we experience spiritual things with our feelings and emotions, and so easily our intellect cuts in and says, “you’re not seeing or feeling that!” When we move in the heavenly places, we have to be aware of this struggle. We have to have the courage to take control of the whole experience. We need to be able to tell our brain – “I’ll deal with these feelings and emotions. I’ll refer to you later!”

## **God reveals his plans**

### **Gideon's dream. Judges 7:8**

Having seen most of his army disappear, Gideon was a little apprehensive, and who can blame him? So the Lord reveals his plans:-

“During that night the Lord said to Gideon, “Get up, go down against the camp, because I am going to give it into your hands. If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Pure and listen to what they are saying. Afterwards, you will be encouraged to attack the camp.” So he and Pure his servant went down to the outposts of the camp. The Midianites, the Amalekites and all the other eastern peoples had settled in the valley, thick as locusts. Their camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore. Gideon arrived just as a man was telling a friend his dream. “I had a dream,” he was saying. “A round loaf of barley bread came tumbling into the Midianites camp. It struck the tent with such force that the tent overturned and collapsed.” His friend responded, “This can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon son of Josh, the Israelite. God has given the Midianites and the whole camp into his hands.” When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he worshipped God. He returned to the camp of Israel and called out, “Get up! The Lord has given the Midianites camp into your hands.” (Judges 7: 9-15)

God has his plans, and he is willing to reveal them to us. These plans can be known by us as we spend time in the heavenly places. God does this because he wants to help us. This isn't a personal trip for personal satisfaction, but it is part of God's purpose to strengthen faith and guide us in his ways.

### **Key summary: Isaiah's vision. Isaiah 6**

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.” (v.1-4)

In the call of Isaiah, we relearn some things we already know, and new experiences are opened to us. For those who want to move in the spiritual places, this is a key passage, combining so many truths:

### **We can go in**

There was no doubt in Isaiah's mind. He didn't have to make any intellectual decision. He was just there, and so can we be, any time. In fact we have an even better access, than even Isaiah, because Jesus has made the way for us.

## **Worship is often the key**

Isaiah was caught up as he waited on God and worshipped. In fact we can go a little further and say that it was as he joined with the worship of heaven, that he was caught up into the spiritual places. Heaven is full of worship (Rev.4:8-11), and when we begin to worship, it's so easy to pass from the earthly to the heavenly places.

## **We feel things**

This is such an exciting revelation. We don't pass into the heavenly places in some vague cloud! We go there with our whole personalities. Isaiah shows us that we can know, and be known. We can see and be seen. We can feel. This last is so vital. Our emotions and feelings are such a crucial part of our life experience. Without them we might as well be a computer! We feel. Isaiah felt his sinfulness:-

“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.” (v.5)

Others have felt things – Jeremiah felt his youth, (Jer.1:6), Jonah was afraid (Jonah 1:3), the writer of Revelation was overwhelmed. (Rev.1:17). We do need to keep our brain active, so that we can test and evaluate what we are seeing and feeling. As I have said before, our brain is a big hindrance to allowing our spirit to rise into the spiritual world. But it is a very useful ally in helping us understand what we are seeing, and to reject that which is not of God.

## **Only God can enable us to stay**

As soon as Isaiah began to move in the spiritual places, he became aware of his sinfulness. Archbishop William Temple once wrote, “The nearer I get to God, the more of a sinner I feel.” This is just what Isaiah felt, and we will feel it too. For him, cleansing came through the touch of the burning coal, and the pronouncement of God's forgiveness. For us it comes because of the blood of Jesus (1 John 1:7). Not only are we invited into the heavenly places, we can stay there. We don't have to feel uninvited guests. Our place there is secure, because of Jesus.

## **We have a part to play**

God needed someone to serve him - that's what Isaiah heard, and that was the call to which he responded. We are not just spectators in what goes on in the spiritual world. We can be contributors. God could have fulfilled his commission himself, or sent angels. But he wanted Isaiah. God wants to use us, in the spiritual as well as in the earthly places. So let's not take our seat when the match begins. We are expected to be on the pitch!

## **The New Testament experience**

A brief overview of the New Testament underlines many of the things we have already learnt, and also adds to our understanding.

### **Angelic activity - The birth of Jesus**

There are a number of insights into the heavenly places to be found at the birth of Jesus.

“Once when Zechariah’s division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshippers were praying outside. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.” (Luke 1:8ff)

“The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.” Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; his kingdom will never end.” (Luke 1:28ff)

“And there were shepherds living out in the fields near by, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests.” (Luke 2:8ff)

“But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” (Matt.1:20ff) When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.” So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt.” (Matt 2:13ff)

“ After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.” So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.” (Matt 2:19)

It’s clear that the angels have an instructional function. They have received a message from God in the spiritual world, which they deliver into the earthly environment. If they can do it, so can we! The angelic vision for the shepherds gives us a glimpse of the fantastic splendour and glory of the spiritual world. A great gathering of spiritual beings, all radiating the glory of God, and giving him honour and praise. We have been moving towards this window as we have been studying the Bible. For me, this is the joy of angelic revelations. They show me what is mine, and what I can see, have and do.

### **God’s plans: The baptism of Jesus**

“As soon as Jesus was baptised, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” (Matt 3:16-17)

By now we should be getting familiar with these images. In this passage “heaven was opened” is exactly what we have come to understand. The Spirit descends in the form of a dove (see also Gen.1:2) and God’s voice speaks. (See also 1 Kings 19:9) This passage confirms for us that in the spiritual world, we see and experience things.

### **Key passages: The Transfiguration and Gethsemane**

These two incidents are key ones for understanding what happens in the heavenly places, and our experience of them.

“After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters— one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” (Mark 9:2-7)

“He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.” (Luke 22:41-44)

In the Transfiguration, Jesus is seen speaking with two great men of the Old Testament. We can do the same! We have the same access that they have - in fact we have greater access. The very least in the Kingdom is greater than John the Baptist.

(Matthew 11:11) What better and more positive invitation can we have to move in the spiritual places? The doors are wide open.

Gethsemane offers a balancing view. We have the access, but it is going to be very hard to keep that access open, to pass through it, and to stay in the Spirit. Even Jesus had to have divine strength to maintain his link. There are so many encouragements for us:-

- \* If it was hard for him, then I don't need to feel so bad if it is hard for me.
- \* If he needed strengthening, then I can also ask for it.
- \* The struggle is not going to pass away. I am going to have to stand firm in faith if I am going to move in this area. (Exodus 14:13)
- \* Victory is mine! (Romans 8:37)

I have always felt greatly encouraged by the angelic content of this passage. Angels are created to serve. (Hebrews 1:14) Their function is to assist me as I serve God. They have no intermediary function as such. Much angelology has strayed into this mistake - the Mormons in excess. Fundamentally, because of the cross, we don't need anything except the Holy Spirit. I can speak directly to the Lord any time I want. But the battle is hard, and the Lord has provided this additional strength for me. God is merciful and generous, and wants to help us as much as he can. Angels are another revelation of that love, and here in this passage we see them working totally within their calling - they assist. No worship for them from us, nor any dependence. But what a blessing their assistance is to us - helping us to do the will of God.

## **New lessons: The Resurrection**

The resurrection narratives underline much of what we have learnt already, and I'm not going to repeat the lessons already learnt. But there are some things which are new.

### **Doors shut**

“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”(Jn 20:19)

From reading the text, (and to it we could also add the walk to Emmaus. Luke 24:13ff), it appears that movement between the physical and the spiritual world doesn't have any boundaries or restrictions from the spiritual side. Jesus comes and goes at will, and nothing impedes his progress. This was not the general rule before his resurrection. So it would appear that, as a general rule, we will not have this ability in the physical, until we have our resurrection bodies.(Although Philip's experience is interesting. Acts 8:39-40). It's good however, to have our expectation and imagination stretched. There are many amazing experiences awaiting us in the spiritual world which can be ours today. We should be excited, and look forward to ever new and deeper revelation.

## **Do not hold on to me**

“Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father.”  
(John 20:17)

Here is another great encouragement – we will recognise people in the spiritual world. Those who teach that we become disembodied spirits, floating round in some great cloud of unknown, are way off the mark. In the Christian spiritual world, we know and are known. Yet Mary did not immediately recognise Jesus. How are we to understand this?

What Mary saw was the resurrected body of Jesus - that body which we will all receive when the new heaven and the new earth is established. (1 Cor.15:35-44) This body will, if we understand the Bible rightly, contain all that is essentially us, and apparently even our physical appearance. Yet it will not be our current bodies, but our perfect whole new post resurrection body, which will have subtle differences. We don't have to worry about this. As soon as Jesus spoke, Mary knew who he was. Only Jesus has this resurrected body at the moment. The rest of us are having to wait on his time.

So it seems that those we encounter in the spiritual world will be recognisable as we knew them. However, a word of caution here. Those we meet are the great men and women of the Bible. Supremely we meet Jesus and hear from him. The Bible does not encourage us in the belief that we should be seeking friends we once knew. Let's do in the spiritual what the Bible encourages - fix our eyes on Jesus. (Hebs.12:2)

## **A good reminder: The Ascension Acts 1:11**

“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”( Acts 1:11)

This is a window which is very precious. Basically the angels said to the disciples, “Haven't you got work to do? Are you going to stand here forever!” We may move in the spiritual, and one day we may live there until after the final resurrection, but our work is here on earth as well. We may look with spiritual eyes, but we have work to do. Let's move in the spiritual, and get on with the tasks which are before us here on earth. This way, we get the best of both worlds.

## **The rest of the New Testament**

### **The windows keep opening:**

Stephen.	(Acts 7:55-56)
Cornelius.	(Acts 10: 1-6)
Peter.	(Acts 12: 7-10)
Paul.	(Acts 18:9)

All these are precious, but I'm not going to comment on them, because we have already learnt the lessons they would teach us..

## Revelation

There are so many windows here. Just look at these few verses - the bold text is my addition:-

"I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord's Day **I was in the Spirit**, and I heard behind me **a loud voice like a trumpet**, which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea." I turned round to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned **I saw seven golden lampstands**, and among the lampstands was **someone "like a son of man"**, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash round his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "**Do not be afraid**. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. "**Write, therefore**, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches." (Rev.1:9-20)

\* John was "in the spirit", and this compares with Isaiah's vision, and with the call of Ezekiel.

\* He "heard", and he "saw". We have seen feelings and experiences many times in the Old and New testament.

\* He saw "seven golden lampstands." This was his figurative/imaginative experience. His intellect and knowledge of the scripture would have given him the interpretation of what he was seeing.

\* He was told "do not be afraid", which was what the angels said to Gideon and Mary.

\* He was told to "write." He wasn't experiencing all this for his own satisfaction, but as an aid to God's people.

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