

2 Corinthians 12

12:1 - I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.

- A. Visions/Revelations experienced by Paul. We know of these listed in Scripture:
1. On the Road to Damascus – Acts 9:3; 22:6; 26:12
 2. Trance in Jerusalem – Acts 22:17
 3. Vision in Jerusalem – Acts 11:29
 4. Vision and message from Angel on prison ship to Rome – Acts 27:23-24
 5. Went to Jerusalem because of a revelation – Galatians 2:2
 6. Vision of Macedonian Man while in Troas – Acts 1:9
 7. Lord spoke to Paul in Corinth – Acts 18:9
 8. Lord appeared to Paul in Arabia – Galatians 1:17
 9. “The mystery made known to me (Paul)” mentioned in Ephesians 3:3
 10. The Gospel Paul received from the Lord (not from men) in Galatians 1:11-12
 11. What happened to Paul when he was stoned to death in Lystra? (Acts 14:19)

12:2 - I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows.

- A. Fourteen years ago
1. Second Corinthians is written in the fall of 56 AD. So, 56 AD minus 14 years = 44 AD
 - i. Paul was converted on the road to Damascus in 35 AD
 - ii. 44 AD Paul is in Antioch preaching and teaching with Barnabas.
 - iii. 44 AD
 1. Agabus, a prophet from Jerusalem, visits Antioch church
 2. Antioch church sends Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem with an offering (Acts 11:29-30)
 3. James is beheaded by Herod Agrippa I
 4. Peter is arrested by Agrippa I, but released by an angel in Jerusalem
 5. Herod Agrippa I dies in Caesarea (Acts 12:20-23)
 6. 45 AD Paul returns to Antioch
 7. 46 AD Paul, Barnabas and John Mark are sent on their first missionary journey where Paul will travel through Galatia including Pisida and be stoned in Lystra.
- B. “Third Heaven”
1. Ancient religions at this time spoke of seven heavens. This does not figure into Paul’s discussion.
 2. OT word for “heavens” was **shamayim**. Note the “-im” makes the word plural, or dual.
 3. This word shamayim is found in:
 - i. Dt. 10:14 in the phrase “Heaven of Heavens”
 - ii. Psalm 68:33 – God rides in the Heaven of Heavens
 4. This concept seems to lead to the three dimensions:
 - i. Atmosphere – one heaven
 - ii. Outer Space – two heavens
 - iii. Heaven, the abode of God, beyond physical universe – third heaven
 5. John in Gospel and Revelation never uses the plural “heavens” (except Rev. 12:12 where he quotes OT)
 6. New Testament in book of Hebrews:
 - i. Hebrews 4:14 – Jesus passed through the heavens

ii. Hebrews 7:26 – Made higher than the heavens

C. Paul begins to use the third person here, but returns to first person in 12:7

D. Paul is speaking about himself in the third person. Paul knows these details:

1. Exact time of the revelation
2. Content of the revelation that was beyond words
3. The revelation was directly connected to the thorn in the flesh, and Paul had the thorn.
4. Paul did not know if it occurred in or out of the body, but Paul knew that only God knew. Paul did not say only God and this other guy knows...
5. Since the argument is between Paul and the false teachers it would be of no use to relay the experience of another unnamed person to prove his point.
6. Paul's ultimate point is not the glory of the flesh, but the grace in weakness

12:3 - And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—

12:4 - and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.

1. “cannot be told” (NIV “inexpressible things”) – Greek word is **arretos** and means “unspeakable, unutterable.” The word refers to divine secrets or knowledge not intended for human beings.
2. “which man may not utter” (NIV “things that man is not permitted to tell”) – “may not” and “not permitted” is from the Greek **echon** which means “it is allowed”. In this context along with the word **anthropo** (“man”) this means it is not allowed for man to speak.
3. These words do NOT indicate Paul was allowed to know the information, but not allowed to tell anyone. The words mean the things/information that Paul saw was beyond human understanding. It was God's knowledge and no man (not just Paul) was able to understand, express, communicate as a man and could not speak in human language.

12:5 - On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses—

12:6 - though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth; but I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me.

12:7 - So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, ha messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.

1. Paul's thorn:
 - a. Must remain uncertain
 - i. Though a few details can be established
 - ii. And, the list of options may be narrowed
 - b. The fact that no description is given would seem to indicate that the Corinthians knew about the “thorn”
 - c. Most scholars assume it was a physical problem
 - d. Physical ailments that have been suggested are:
 - i. Migraines
 - ii. Ophthalmia – inflammation of the eye
 - iii. Malaria – transmitted by bites of infected mosquitoes. Parasites multiply in the liver and infect red blood cells. Symptoms include fever, headache, vomiting
 - iv. Epilepsy

- v. Gallstones – solid particles formed from bile cholesterol in the gallbladder. These stones can be as small as a grain of sand to the size of a golf ball. They cause pain or blockage.
- vi. Gout – inflammation in joints from uric acid crystals causing severe pain and swelling in joints
- vii. Rheumatism – arthritis with inflammation and pain in the joints and muscles.
- viii. Intestinal disorder
- ix. Speech impediment
- e. Besides Physical ailment it has been suggested Paul's thorn was:
 - i. Emotional
 - ii. Mental/psychological
 - iii. Social
 - iv. Persecution
 - v. Spiritual
- f. History of interpretation or conjecture:
 - i. Earliest was Tertullian (155-240 AD) who said Paul's thorn was a Headache or an earache
 - ii. Next in history around 380 AD were Chrysostom, Pelagius, Primasius who also said it was a headache
 - iii. Jerome (347-420) used Galatians 4:13 to say it was a Headache, also.
- g. Latin Vulgate mistranslated it as "stimulus carnis"
 - i. "stimulus" would be a "goad" as in an ox goad or a "spur" as used by a cowboy to drive a horse
 - ii. "carnis" was understood to refer to the carnal nature of Paul
 - iii. Thus, the Latin (Roman Catholic) understood this as something goading or spurring on Paul's impure lusts and immoral thoughts. This interpretation continued through the medieval period and Catholic writers were universal in this understanding in the 1600's
 - iv. Calvin rejected the above and said it referred to "every kind of temptation" Paul faced.
 - v. Luther rejected the Latin suggestion and claimed it to be a bodily ailment in Paul's flesh based on :
 - 1. Gal. 4:13...Gal. 4:15 seems like more than a metaphor since the words "if possible" are used
 - 2. Gal. 6:11
 - 3. Namely defective eyes and poor eye sight supported with:
 - a. Acts 9:9, 18 where scales fell from Paul's eyes
 - b. Acts 23:5 where Paul fails to recognize the High Priest.
 - vi. A constant suggestion has been Epilepsy
 - vii. Current is malarial fever
 - viii. Roman 9:1-3 suggests it was his burden for the Jewish nation

12:8 - Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.

11:9 - But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.