

ON JACOB'S LADDER

And He is further saying to him, "It is certainly true (or: Amen, amen; = Most truly). I am presently saying to you folks (or: men), you will see the heaven being one that is opened back up again, and God's agents repeatedly (progressively; continuously) ascending (stepping back up again) and habitually (progressively; continuously; repeatedly) descending (stepping down) upon the Son of the Man (or Mankind's Son; the Son of man; the Human Son). John 1:51

This is a startling statement. What was Jesus talking about? Did the disciples "see" this happen? Should we expect to see it happening? Was there a symbolic meaning to this statement? Why did Jesus say this?

This verse has often been connected to Gen. 28:12, 13

"And [Jacob] dreamed, and lo! a stairway [or: ladder] planted earthwards, with its top reaching towards the heavens, -- and lo! messengers of God ascending and descending thereon; and lo! Yahweh standing by him..."
(Rotherham)

Commentators have suggested that just as Jacob was then given the promise of God, in the succession from Abraham and Isaac, that this symbolic reference to "the Son of man" was equating him with "God's chosen One," the One who was God's representative on earth, just as Jacob, and later, Israel, had been. A.T. Robertson suggested that as "Son of man," here, He was representing the race of mankind. Others tie this in with the heavenly, messianic figure of Dan. 7:13. The Geneva Study Bible commentary says, "Jacob saw in a dream the reunion of heaven and earth; Christ brought it about in reality." The Jerome Biblical Commentary says that "the reference to the angels [agents] is to signify the meeting and communication of God with man." Jamieson Fausset and Brown paraphrases Jesus thus: "By and by ye shall see this communication between heaven and earth thrown wide open, and the Son of man the real Ladder of this intercourse." Dodd says that this refers to "keeping the heavenly and the earthly in perpetual unity."

Vincent correlates heaven standing open, here, with the story of Stephen's martyrdom in Acts 7:56. Was this one example of what Jesus was talking about, and why He said it? Was He referring to the man caught up to the third heaven and shown things, as Paul relates? Or, to the Unveiling of Jesus Christ, which Jesus showed to John on Patmos? I suspect that all of these are correct, but I'd like to share another view, presented by C.H. Dodd in his *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*.

This statement in John 1:51 was made right before John relates the story of the marriage in Cana, and "the beginning of signs," which was the turning of water into wine. Other signs follow. "The whole series of 'signs' which follows, culminating in the supreme sign of the cross and resurrection, is the vision of the heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. And these 'signs' are history. 'The Logos was made flesh - and we beheld His glory.' Whatever else, therefore, the Gospel story is to be, it is to be a realized apocalypse [unveiling]." (Dodd, p. 294)

In John 2:11, following the sign of the water-to-wine, Jesus says that, doing this, "[He] set His glory in clear light." Thus were they beholding His glory. Thus was the life, and performed signs, an open vision for the disciples, seeing Jesus in continuous union and communication with His Father (heaven, in the symbolic

statement of 1:51). The agents, or messengers, were in this figure constantly bringing the directives to the Christ, and returning Christ's communications to the Father. The signs manifested His glory. Now folks, keep in mind that this "vision" also applies to us, His body, His present Israel.

I will leave you with some thoughts from Dodd:

"The primitive eschatological Gospel of Christianity declared that that which was to come has come: 'Old things have passed away: behold new things have come into being.' The Prologue, on the other hand, is based upon the philosophical conception of two orders of being, distinguished not by succession in time, but by the greater or less measure of reality which they possess. There is the order of pure reality, transcendent and eternal, which is the very thought of God, and there is the empirical order, which is real only as it expresses the eternal order. The world at various levels - the lower creation, the human race, spiritually enlightened humanity - displays an increasing penetration of the lower order by the higher, an increasing dominance of light over darkness, of being over not-being, of truth over error. In terms of such a philosophy, the absoluteness of the Christian revelation is affirmed in a proposition which declares that in one single area of the universe of space and time phenomena have completely absorbed the reality of the eternal archetype, and that this area is co-extensive with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ." (p. 295)

And now we, in Him, are in that same "area."

In a footnote, Dodd quotes Origen, in regard to the first sign: "And truly before Jesus the Scripture was water, but from the time of Jesus it has become wine for us." Dodd, however, sees a broader application of that sign: the water pots, "habitually lying there, corresponding to the cleansing (purifying) practice (ritual, or ceremony, of washing) pertaining to the Jewish customs..." were a figure of the whole Jewish cultus of the Law ("the entire system of Jewish ceremonial observance - and by implication for religion upon that level, wherever it is found, as distinguished from religion upon the level of [truth]" - Dodd, p. 299). The changing of the water into wine was a sign of the change from the old order to the new.

Thus, Jesus spoke figuratively, in ch. 1:51, about His life and ministry which was to follow. In that He said that heaven "is opened back up again," I suggest that He was referring to the restoration of the Edenic relationship with the Father, our participation in the Tree of Life, and our return into Him.

Jonathan