

Were the resurrection appearances of Jesus down to daydreams and imagination being counted as visions?

INSPIRED IMAGINATION

Barnett's 1991 study of dreams found that a significant number of people who dream of the dead dream that they are getting advice from them. The mind is certainly capable of being shut down in sleep and still able to give you a believable message. Imagine what it can do if you are awake and trying to have visions!

The Old and New Testament recipients of alleged divine revelation had several ways of obtaining revelations. For some it was just a matter of feeling inspired. For others, they felt God giving them "visions" in some way. Sometimes it was dreams or through inspired imagination. The idea is that God can use anything he wants to put a message across.

Seeing and hearing things in your imagination has always counted as a real way of getting communications from God. The Old and New Testaments say that God talks to you in your heart.

St Theresa of Avila stated that God can give you visions and locutions in your imagination in her book, Foundations. (See quote in Mother of Nations by Joan Ashton, page 147).

The gospels speak of visions of the risen Jesus. But they don't say what kind of visions.

We know from the history of mysticism that visions is a very broad thing. You can have tangible visions of a being from another world or Heaven. You can have spiritual visions and see beings inside your head. You can have visions without seeing anything – without the mind's eye and your physical eyes ie intellectually. St Teresa of Avila had visions of this kind. She believed that her soul had these visions and spoke of it as sight. We speak today of seeing the light meaning we have intellectual vision. This kind of sight is actually stronger and better than physical or spiritual sight because physically seeing things or spiritually seeing things does not prove they are real but intellectual sight does or is thought to.

An intellectual vision is when you realise something or notice something and feel it is a vision to your soul. Your soul sees it not with eyes but with the eyes of wisdom.

The gospels reporting the seeing and hearing and touching of the risen Jesus could mean intellectually for they don't treat the risen Jesus as being the same as the Jesus as he was before his death. They keep saying that Jesus referred them to and they kept going to the scriptures to see if Jesus had risen. The appearances were only regarded as proving the resurrection not by themselves but by showing that the scriptures proved it. The idea that the apostles had intellectual visions of Jesus through thinking his resurrection was predicted in the Old Testament is possible. The women at the tomb could have been the first to start this. We must remember they found an open tomb but no indication is given in the gospels that this was a miracle for Jesus could have been stolen before they got around to looking in. This could have been the trigger.

Mystics in the past have believed they encountered beings from other realities that they touched in their visions despite thinking the visions were mystical. They believed that God giving you a revelation in your mind that somebody is talking to you and touching you is real but not real in the way we usually mean it. If Jesus touches you in a vision that does not mean he is really in the room with you in the sense that your friend could be. It is real but not in the natural understanding of the word.

The New Testament never says that the witnesses to what the risen Jesus was like and what he said would have all agreed with what it said happened. It never says it checked them all out for consistency.

Mystical visions of the risen Jesus could easily lead to legends in which Jesus seemed more solid and natural and as if he were actually physically present with them.

THE RISEN CHRIST – A DAYDREAM?

The gospels say that a miracle healing man called Jesus Christ lived. They say he died by crucifixion and three days later he rose again. The tomb he was placed in was found wide open with the stone that had been across the entrance moved back and the tomb was mysteriously empty. His body was gone. Certain witnesses claimed that Jesus appeared to them as a resurrected being.

Perhaps, the witnesses to the risen Jesus saw him and heard him in some way that is not like the way you would see or hear

anybody else. It may have been intellectual or mystical.

Some object, "But this would seem to fit only some visions of Jesus. The appearance of Jesus to Thomas to let him feel him would see to be one exception. Therein Jesus told Thomas to doubt no longer but believe."

But then you can touch things in your imagination. If your imagination is being used by God to bestow visions then the touching is real. The gospel says that Thomas didn't believe before the appearance of Jesus. Jesus didn't tell him to disbelieve no more but to doubt no more. This would suggest that Thomas had periods of belief which he later doubted.

You cannot say that the resurrection visions were not in the imagination on the grounds that there is no biblical evidence for that. But then the Bible does not explain in what way the visions came about. The apostles would not have been the first to undergo suffering for what they felt God was making them sense in their mind's eye or imagination. Most of the biblical characters had done the same. The fanatical Christian today is doing the same for they can't tell you why they believe in any really rational or well-thought out sense. Yet they would die and cause a lot of trouble for their faith.

The early Church arbitrarily and shamelessly bragged that its charisms or miraculous powers like speaking gibberish were from God and those of other cults were demonic. It was capable of depending on creative visualisation as a vehicle of revelation.

Mormons suffer for their religion and it is based not on evidence though Mormons say there is evidence but on feeling that their religion is true and they think this feeling is a revelation from God. Why should the apostles have been any different with their feeling and daydreams?

When Peter said that we must trust the Scriptures even more that we should trust the voice of God if we hear it from Heaven for the Scriptures give a more sure way of revelation from God (1 Peter 1:21) then it follows that the Bible is more convincing than visions and revelations. This tells us that empty tombs and Jesus appearing is not enough but only the Old Testament and its predicting of the resurrection matters. The tomb and the visions might only be important for making us see what the Old Testament means but they are not the basis for belief in the resurrection. Only the prophets are. This is an admission from an alleged witness of the resurrected Jesus that the visions and stuff did not matter. It tells us that the apostles might have believed in the resurrection on the basis of a new interpretation of the Old Testament and claimed that it did not matter how silly or unbelievable their visions were. This makes the resurrection less credible for those who are dissatisfied with their interpretation. It also shows that they were unreliable and made themselves believe things that did not make sense for nobody in their honest and right mind would be content with their interpretation. 1 Peter rejects any attempt to make it look as if Jesus performed miracle signs so it bids us not to pay any attention to the gospels which do exactly that. The miracles would detract from the duty to depend only on the Old Testament and apostolic doctrine. Using the resurrection then to verify that the Bible is true which is a game played by many fundamentalists does not work and is quite illegitimate. So when Peter the rock weakens our faith in the resurrection the other apostles would have even a more damning effect.

THE REFUTATION OF REAL VISIONS OF THE RESURRECTION FROM FAITH

The Early Church put such a bizarre stress on irrational faith that it is possible that if the resurrection was hallucinated the reason was because the faith the Church sought was a hallucination. They held it was more important to believe in the resurrection than to see Jesus risen so faith was behind it all and all the way.

Jesus in Mark, the earliest gospel says something very very interesting. Jesus cursed a fig tree and later it was found withered. "And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursed is withered away. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed and casted into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:21-24).

Jesus taught that faith is necessary for miracles and it must be extremely strong faith indeed. And it can do stupendous miracles.

Jesus' miracles then boasted Jesus' faith. They glorified his faith. He did them to show his own faith and to show off. Miracles do not happen because they should or because they are needed but because of the faith of the miracle-worker.

Also, Jesus was advocating miracles just as acts of showing off. Had he advocated miracles as acts of love that temporarily change nature he would have used the example of, "That whosoever shall say to the cancer disappear right now and let this man live and it will be done." Christians say he was only using an extreme example about the mountain to illustrate the power of prayer which can move mountains if God so wills. They claim that he was not saying you should try and move

mountains by prayer. But most people run after miracles out of fascination at their magic and Jesus was speaking to ordinary men and not theologians. He meant what he said.

He said that if you pray and believe the prayer is already answered it will be answered. This is magic. It is about controlling God. Jesus thinks that God will do whatever you want if you have enough faith.

Miracles are not signs calling you to faith. They are signs of faith in the miracle-worker. They show how much he believes and how great he is. They do not bring real glory to God. Jesus is saying that if you believe properly and without doubting you will be able to do miracles so miracles cannot bring anybody else to proper faith in God for few can do miracles.

Miracles do not support belief in the power of God but belief in the power of faith.

In this light, if Jesus came back from the dead the return was occultic. It was occultism brought him back. If you make your faith strong enough it will lead you to the conviction that you saw Jesus and spoke with him after his death in a vision. The first account of Jesus' words supersedes anything that came later. Mark is the oldest gospel so we must listen to it when it refutes the Christian idea that the resurrection of Jesus was a holy miracle that brought honour to God.

Paul is more important than any gopeller for he was writing closer to Jesus than they were so no matter how accurate the gopellers may be Paul's beliefs about Jesus have more weight for we have no reason to doubt him. And the foundation of Paul's theology was the idea that faith is not caused by our natural reason and feelings but by God. Paul was certainly accepted as a true witness to the resurrection of Jesus by the apostles so they must have agreed about faith for it was a very basic issue.

When the Bible says that faith is not from ourselves but from God and so is the gift of God it follows that evidence does not cause faith but faith is God testifying to you and revealing to you. For example, instead of one working out like a detective that Jesus rose again one has to experience God and experience that God is telling one that the resurrection is true. Then why do people think that God has told them stuff and then found that they were wrong and that God couldn't have told them? If God gave evidence it would be churlish and sinful and unreasonable to ignore it in favour of what you think he is telling you. The early Christians then were unduly gullible or biased or both and it is pure arrogance to say that God has told you x, y and z instead of looking at the evidence then you are really exalting your own thinking over God for a good God would be pro-evidence and pro-reason. They needed witnesses to the resurrection not so that they could believe in the resurrection but that God could witness to those who hear what the witnesses say and that God could witness internally to the witnesses that what they saw and heard was from him. This was how they answered the theological problem of saying you listen to God when you listen to people who say they speak for God which is not the same as listening to God. It is like when Paul said that no man could sincerely call Jesus Lord except by the power of the Holy Spirit. So man needs God to provide the help so man cannot do it on his own. He means those who have belief and no faith yet as well as those who have both for belief happens first and then it becomes faith when coupled with repentance. This is a denial that any other evidence was important. If it was not important then it probably never existed for it would be immoral to ignore it.

Everything in this chapter is compatible with efforts made in the Bible to provide evidence but the evidence alone was not what was important. God had to testify internally that the evidence was there and was interpreted right so the faith was not based on evidence but on the divine testimony. This is no better than the claim of the Mormon to have a supernatural internal testimony of the Holy Spirit that the Book of Mormon is true.

The Devil must have been behind the resurrection reports if he existed.

We conclude that the bias of faith could have led to the witnesses of the resurrection imagining the whole experience. The gospels are careful to say nothing about how the appearances took place. They only say what the witnesses seen not what the cause was. They don't even say, "God with whom nothing is impossible sent the Lord to appear to Peter etc."

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