

Bringing the Future to Life

We are beings with senses, and we like to be able to feel things. If we can see it, hear it or touch it, then we believe it. We often hear that 'first hand' experience is best, we want to 'see things for ourselves' and we tend to trust 'what we can feel'.

The British poet John Keats once wrote in a letter: 'Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced.' Great efforts are made to bring concepts or ideas 'to life', to make them real so that people can experience them.

Bible Realities

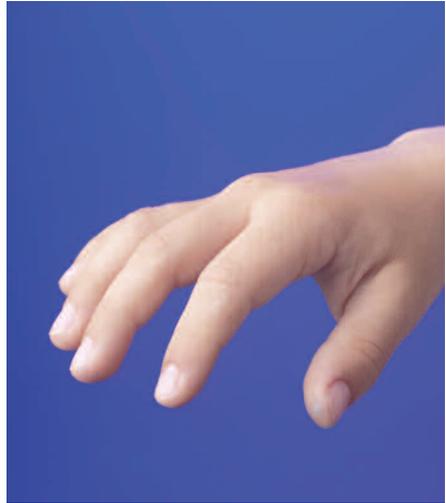
God recognizes that human beings need to feel things in order to really believe them, and so He shows His purpose in ways people can experience. Right back in the Garden of Eden, He warned Adam and Eve about the consequences of disobeying Him:

Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die (Genesis 2:17).

When they did defy Him, He told them that they would die and demonstrated it to them by clothing them in dead animals' skins (Genesis 3:21).

In teaching Israel to worship Him, God gave them a system of priests, the tabernacle (a tent of worship) and eventually the temple in Jerusalem. These things were not for His benefit, but He established them to help His people better understand Him, and how He wants to be approached.

To show men and women what He is like, and what He wants us to be like,



God used the ultimate example. He sent His Son, the Lord Jesus, to bring those godly qualities to life in everything that he did.

Living Promises

When God makes promises to men and women, He does the same thing. His promises are not empty, vague or open to loose interpretation. They are specific and concrete, and typically have a real experience associated with them.

God promised a number of great things to Abraham in Genesis chapters 12 to 22. These included the land of Israel, a great number of descendants, and one specific descendant – the Lord Jesus – in whom all people will be blessed. How could God make Abraham 'feel' these? At least two ways are described.

When promising the land, God told Abraham to experience it first hand, to look at it and to walk up and down in it:

And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: "Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are – northward, southward, eastward, and westward... Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you" (Genesis 13:14–17).

The promise of descendants would have been particularly poignant for Abraham, as Sarah his wife was barren. They had no children and they were now too old, without God's help. In Genesis 18:1–15, angels told Abraham that he would have a son by Sarah, and this was fulfilled precisely:

And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him (Genesis 21:1–2).

So Abraham had this brought to life, the experience both of having a son and of God's promises being fulfilled.

The Real Kingdom of God

Thankfully, this applies to God's promises and prophecies to all men and women. The Bible explains that Jesus will return to set up the world-wide Kingdom of God, where faithful believers will be raised from the dead (if necessary) and live for ever in a perfect world. This is a marvellous prospect, but how can we imagine it? We do so through the very specific pictures of the kingdom 'painted' in the Bible, and through the physical demonstrations God gave.

When we read the descriptions of God's kingdom, we find that they are really detailed in terms of the places

and conditions involved. Look at the following examples:

For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:3).

There will be an abundance of grain in the earth (Psalm 72:16).

There shall come forth a rod from the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots (Isaiah 11:1). This names the future king's ancestor Jesse. He was the father of David, a great ancestor of Jesus.

The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:8–9).

It is worth reading the whole of these chapters to get a fuller picture, which really is detailed and gives a great sense of what the kingdom will be like.

What about raising the dead and living for ever? Well, on several occasions Jesus raised the dead, describing himself as 'the resurrection and the life' (John 11:25). When Jesus himself was raised from the dead and made immortal, he met with his disciples several times and there were over 500 eye witnesses of the risen Son of God (1 Corinthians 15:3–8).

God brings the future to life in His word and gives us real, tangible evidence that His kingdom will come soon and will be wonderful. Let's take time to read about it!

Editor