

The Opened Heavens

F. A. Hughes.

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The thought of "opened heavens" is not exclusive to the New Testament; there are references bearing upon it to be found in the Old.

In Genesis 7: 11 we read, "the windows of heaven were opened," a scene in which the wrath of heaven was poured out upon a world of violence and corruption. In Malachi 3: 10 we read of God's desire and promise to "open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." A deluge of judgment — necessitated because of the holy character of God; but a deluge of blessing expressive of the love of God's heart.

In Ezekiel we have the only place in the Old Testament where the heavens are actually said to be "opened" for a man to look in. The prophet says in chapter 1: 1, "The heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God." What comfort it was to Ezekiel, in a day when God's people had forsaken Him, and were characterized by "wickedness more than the nations" (5: 6), to be allowed this vision of heaven, including the "appearance of a man," and thus to know that God had everything under control!

It is, however, in the New Testament writings that we find the fullest thoughts of the "opened heavens," and we turn with delight to Matthew chapter 3 where we read that when Jesus came up from the waters of baptism "the heavens were **opened unto Him.**" It was a "vision" in the days of Ezekiel, but there is no mere vision here. As another has most beautifully said, "The heavens open upon an Object worthy of their attention The heavens open unto Jesus, the Object of God's entire affection on the earth."

How fitting that this first reference to the "opened heavens" should be the occasion for the Father to express His delight in the Son of His love, "And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." May we not say with profound reverence that the heaven must of necessity be opened upon such a scene, a blessed Man here on earth in absolute accord with the heart of the blessed God. In Genesis chapter 1 the Spirit of God brooded over a scene of emptiness and darkness; now the voice of the Father is heard expressing His delight in One who was to bring into the scene the light of eternal love and fill the whole earth with the glory of God. Is it not our present joy to find delight in this same blessed Person?

Mark in his gospel tells us that Jesus "saw the heavens opened." In this gospel the Lord Jesus is presented as the Servant. His was a service of infinite grace and love, involving the giving of His life (10: 45); but it was a service unappreciated by men. Would not the accents of the Father's voice "**Thou art My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased**" be the solace and stay of this blessed Man as He pursued a pathway of devotion to God and love to man? May we, too, in whatever little service is entrusted to us, seek only the approval of heaven, experiencing something of the joy that must have been the portion of the disciples of whose service it is said "the Lord working with them" (16: 20).

In Luke 3: 21 the heavens were opened upon Jesus as He was praying. What absolute dependence and joy of communion with His God ever marked the Lord. With what holy joy the Father contemplated One in whom the self-will and independent spirit of this world had no place at all.

How easy it is for us to become marked by the spirit of a world which is alienated from God and marked by self-will. The word of Micah would be a salutary one to each of us, " He hath showed thee,

O man, what is good; and what doth God require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, **and to walk humbly with thy God?**

The Lord Jesus Christ is now in heaven and it is our joy to behold Him there. How fitting it is that the first reference to the "opened heavens" in this the Holy Spirit's day should be in relation to a man in whom the moral features of Christ were so beautifully displayed! (Acts 7: 56). Stephen saw "the heavens opened, and the **Son of Man** standing on the right hand of God." We read "the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected." This was Stephen's position as he looked up into those opened heavens, and what comfort it must surely have been to him as he took account of the place of glory and triumph in which the Son of Man was. The atmosphere of that glory was a known reality to that suffering martyr, and the spirit of that heavenly sphere was reflected in his words and movements.

Peter says in his Epistle — "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the **Spirit of glory** and of God resteth upon you (1 Peter 4: 14). Thus if fidelity to Christ brings reproach on earth, the knowledge of our heavenly portion can be our **present** joy in the power of the Spirit of God.

In the first verse of the Bible the Holy Spirit speaks of "the heaven and the earth," an order which is consistent throughout Scripture. May we be helped to allow the things of heaven, which have been made available to us in Christ and which are ours now in the power of the Spirit of God, to have the first place in our lives.