

Dreams and Visions 1

One way that God speaks to us is through dreams and visions. They are God's message to us. God's message through a dream comes while we are sleeping. God's message through a vision comes while we are awake and praying.

They can be powerful dreams that wake us up and we recall what the dream is and its detail. They can come to us when we are moving out of our deep sleep and into a lighter sleep. You then wake up remembering the dream.

We all dream but we don't remember all dreams. Not every dream is a message from God. They can be a product of what we are thinking and considering during that day and struggle to get to that deep sleep at night.

The first recorded dream in the OT is in Genesis 20. Abraham has just rescued Lot and they have separated. Abraham and Sarah are now living in Kerar. He fears the godless Abimilech and so passes off his wife as his sister. She was actually his step sister.

God appears in a dream to Abimilech and confronts him with what he has done. Abimilech appeals to God and is told to give back Sarah to Abraham. Abimilech is so shaken by his experience that he not only gives back Sarah but also funds their lifestyle with sheep and cattle and silver. Abraham and Sarah are given permission to stay in the land of Kerar under Abimilech's protection.

The encounter with God in a dream can be an un-nerving experience. You are confronted with what you have done and what you need to do to rectify it as in Abimilech's case.

But this should not put you off asking for dreams and visions. It is the promise of God given to Joel and then re-articulated by Peter at Pentecost.

Dreams and visions are a sign of the presence, power and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Instead, this is what the prophet Joel spoke about: 'This is what I will do in the last days, God says: I will pour out my Spirit on everyone. Your sons and daughters will proclaim my message; your young men will see visions, and your old men will have dreams. (Acts 2:16,17)

One way that God speaks to us is through dreams. We see three types of dreams in the Bible.

There is the **simple message dream** eg Matthew 1 and 2 where Joseph was given instructions about marrying Mary and warning about Herod's plans to kill the boy children.

There is the **simple symbolic dream** where the symbolism is clear enough that the dreamer and others can easily understand it without any complicated interpretation. For instance when Joseph had his dream in Genesis 37, he fully understood that it was about his brothers, as did his brothers, though it contained the symbols of sun, moon and stars.

There is the **complex symbolic dream** which needs interpretative skill from someone with God given gift of interpretation. This type of dream was given to Joseph in prison about the dream of Pharaoh and in Daniel 2 and 4 about the dreams of King Nebuchadnezzar.

Many of the symbolic dreams need God's revelation for full understanding of what has been given. This understanding can be given to the one who has received the dream or someone with the gift of interpreting dreams.

The dreams normally carry a message from God or a warning from God. It is important that you take note of your dreams and seek God about whether the dream is from Him or not.

Do not dismiss your dreams but take note to see what God may be saying to you. Dismissing your dreams can lead you into perilous waters.

One third of your life is spent in the dream world and while your body rests, your subconscious is actively involved in dreaming. The dream world is not about the objective world of facts and figures but it is more spiritual and symbolic.

Dream interpretation is like a giant jigsaw puzzle with thousands of tiny pieces that must be fitted together in exactly the right order. The quickest way to complete a jigsaw puzzle is to start with the border, the framework. The same is true for dream interpretation.

In order for your dreams to work to the fullest, you must learn the vocabulary of dreams and then their message will move from mystery to clarity.

Firstly we must learn to distinguish between the two main categories: *intrinsic* or internal dreams, and *extrinsic* or external dreams. Intrinsic dreams are dreams of self-disclosure. They are about you and God and God's plans for you. They come as messages of encouragement, exhortation, direction, correction, inspiration and cleansing.

A small percentage of dreams fall into the extrinsic category. They are dreams of outside events. They may involve you personally but will also have a wider scope. External dreams relate to your sphere of influence. Sometimes these dreams will be used to call you to something but not fully release or commission you into it. They can be God's "teasers" to help you get further down the road. He shows you a glimpse of what lies ahead in order to whet your appetite and inspire you to continue pressing forward. The most common purpose is to draw us into intercession.

Read the dreams found in Genesis 37:5-11; 40:6-23; 41:1-40. Are they intrinsic or extrinsic dreams? How were they interpreted? Were there any patterns to help you from one dream to the other?