

## **WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT DREAMS AND VISIONS**

### **Dreams and Visions**

#### **Part 2**

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Our scripture is from Acts 2:17-18. Last week we spent some time seeing the meaning of this that in the last days the Lord promises in Joel that he "...will pour out his spirit upon all flesh, sons and daughters will prophecy, young men will see visions and old men will dream dreams." We indicated the beauty of that text is it is used in reference to all the 120 are Spirit filled and speak with tongues. Rather than quoting an Old Testament scripture which would validate the speaking in tongues Peter is motivated by the Spirit to quote Joel and say that in the last days the Spirit would be poured out and the form that the Spirit would be poured out would be in dreams and visions. On the day of Pentecost they were not dreaming and they were not visioning. They were speaking in tongues. Yet this serves as a proof text for what is happening, that the multitudes are looking at. Peter is saying here is what the scripture is saying.

If I were therefore to exegetically interpret now what Peter is saying in light of some of the studies that are going on in brain research and the like what appears to be happening is that Peter is saying by the Spirit that the scriptures say to us, that is from the resurrection of Jesus Christ until his return, his spirit is going to come upon us that we might function in a way that is different from a way that is different than processes of ordinary learning. That is going to operate in the intuitive, Spirit led area of our life where signs and wonders prophetic words, spiritual gifts function and take place. And this spiritual experience is going to lie outside of the logical processes the sequential processes, the analytical processes. When I use those words please don't let anybody think that I am being anti rational, anti mind, anti intellectual. What I'm simply saying in non-rational is that there is that side of us which cannot be diagrammed analytically.

In all of us whether we realize it or not function on both sides of our being – the rational and the non-rational or the picture side of us. Jesus said, Unless you become as a child you cannot enter the kingdom of God. We can all think back to childhood times in our learning processes why is it as a kid I would much rather go to Sunday school and read a funny book about Jesus and the apostles than the Bible itself? What was teaching me in pictures as a child I could understand pictures a lot better than I could understand analytical thought processes.

The same thing goes on in a learning process where a teacher is teaching history. Show me students turned on to history and I'll show you a teacher who teaches in visual images. He somehow helps young people to see the sweep of armies and kings and personal relationships and events in pictorial form. Rather than learn all the important dates between Columbus and Truman. We have trouble with that kind of left brain sort of learning and often it becomes garbage dump oriented in that tests become a measurement of the lists we can spit out rather than the real absorption and understanding that is a vital process of understanding history. Someone who is going to have a good sweep of history must operate somewhat in the visions and the dreams aspect of the personality where they're able to see things and make connections and even have visual impressions of events. Does that say throw out the left brain side, the date side and all that? No. Without that you can't rely on the reliability of the images that are happening on the picture side of the personality.

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Jesus understood this distinction when relating spiritual truth. For example, he would tell us stories about the kingdom of God rather than defining the kingdom of God as that present existential reality of the reign of God operative within the human heart received by voluntary response which in the kingdom to come will be opposed upon all and will no longer be volitional in character. That's the theological understanding as I know it of the then-now aspect of the kingdom of God. But Jesus said it's like seed that's sown in the ground that springs up. Aren't you glad he said it that way rather than giving us the theological definition?

It's from the visual imagery of course that we're able to construct the theological definition and understand it. But Jesus knows that the Spirit has access to our personality when we begin to think in visual imagery. The scripture does more than confront us with the theme, here are the things you need to know about God. The scripture confronts us with this: Know God. And in knowing God you will know the things about God. But knowing God is critical.

Tonight as we look at dreams and visions I want to especially concentrate on literal dreams and literal visions. Literal dreams are those sequencing of visual images, which occur to us while we are asleep. Visions is that condition of seeing visual imagery while we are awake or in a state often of reverie. This is a theme, which unfortunately I have too much material on. About in the middle of it tonight I'll cut it and pick it up next Sunday night.

These dream states and visionary states are very much a part of our experience. I indicated last week that the average person dreams a thousand significant dreams a year. Many of which we have no contact with because we do not remember them. We visualize all the time while we are awake. Frequently this has been denigrated as being day dreaming. Somehow there's something wrong with day dreaming. But day dreaming is that state of mind that we come into when we begin tuning out to what is perceptual and analytical around us when it kind of bores us and parks our mind for a while and we begin to see things and experience things. It's frequent to see in the scripture that people use these moments of day dreaming or visionary states to experience and know God.

I would especially note imagery when it comes to worship in regard to the awakened state. For example, when I am in worship I have found worship to be enhanced by if I don't close my eyes, at least closing the eyes of my mind so that I look beyond the room that I am in, the people that I am with and come into the Lord's presence. Revelation shows us some excellent ways to be in his presence. To visualize the Lord is standing in the midst of his church and that his church or his people are seven lamp stands that are gathered around him, whose lights are continually burning but he is in the center. We look toward him as the focus.

Or we see in our worship the Lord high and lifted up and a great throne of stone and light that cannot be quite described but surrounded by a sea of glass where no one can approach and living ones called beasts and elders and saints and innumerable multitude gathered on the edge of that glassy sea. Worshipping him and praising him and raising their hands. It becomes a matter of great ease for me in the worship service to very comfortably begin to lift my hands in worship to the Lord as I step outside of the reality of this room into the reality of the other room where he and his eternal presence is. I don't find that uncomfortable at all to suddenly find myself participating in a visionary state of awakened consciousness to God.

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Isaiah had this experience in Isaiah 6. “In the year that King Uzziah died he saw the Lord high and lifted up and his train, that flow of garment which comes after him filled the temple and the glory of the Lord did fill the house.” He saw. He had a visionary state of the Lord.

If when you worship you simply function with a non visionary kind of worship you look at pages that are in a hymnal and all you do is sing the words off that hymn and hear some prayers that are said and hear some scripture that is read and never through that come in contact in a visual way with the God who reaches out and presents himself to us not only with the image of heaven but the imagery of earth. Christ, the good shepherd looking for the lost sheep. Christ who enfolds the children in his arms. Christ who represents the father throwing his arms around the child who comes home. All of these kinds of things are ways in which our worship we begin to lift ourselves up into a state of being with him in that side of our personhood.

I think it's important therefore that with the apostle John we be in the Spirit on the Lord's day. That we take advantage of chorus times and extended sessions of prayer and individual response and corporate worship. With all that in mind when I look specifically at dreams and specific visions in the Bible I find 13 major dreams described in the Old Testament and 5 or 6 major dreams in the New Testament. There are 4 specific visions in the Old Testament up to the time of Samuel. And from Samuel on the visions explode because with the prophets who think and speak in visual imagery there is continual reference to visions and continual visuals being given.

In the New Testament there are 8 specific visions, five of which are Paul's visions, excluding John's visions of Revelation. Both the Old and New Testament are replete of examples of dreaming and visions. There's much to instruct us about the types of dreams and visions that come to us by simply watching the scriptural record. We're going to look at 4 or 5 different types of dreams and visions lumping them together that come to us.

One type of dream and vision that we all experience are what might be called for lack of a better term daily house cleaning dreams. Or daily house cleaning visions. These dreams or visions are either a review or a preview. They either look back upon an event and think upon it and in some cases regret it or in some cases relish it. Or they preview. There's something of great importance that's happening this week and in a dream you might get a kind of apprehension or you might get an assurance, a kind of inner calm about that.

This week for example now that I've had a heightened state of consciousness in this consideration of dreams and visions it's remarkable how much I'm aware of my dreams, how much I'm dreaming. I'm always dreaming, I'm just not always in touch with it. But when I begin to think about it and realize God is touching that side of my life it's amazing what's been happening this last week. Housecleaning dreams that gave me tremendous insight on things.

Have you had any dreams that reviewed and gave you insight in daily life? Dreams that previewed something that was coming up? Dreams that ministered to you of God's faithfulness. Healing dreams.

These dreams are like brushing your teeth. They regularly help us and if we don't keep track of this kind of regular housecleaning we can wind up with maybe some things happening in our subconscious life that are as bad for us as not brushing our teeth on a continual basis. We must remember what the dream psychiatrists and neurologists are saying that you must dream. And if

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you don't dream you'll come into a neurotic state. These dreams can help us regularly have insight into a conscious life. They perform a mirror function. Sometimes they are way out and far away and appear to be nonsensical and have no meaning. Maybe we shouldn't even bother worrying about what it said. I'm not saying every dream you have has some deep mystical inner truth you've got to grab hold of. But I'm saying as a function they mirror reality to us in very splendid ways.

As we started the building process of this sanctuary the Lord gave me a dream of Dedication Day. We had finished the project. It was great in the dream seeing the whole thing done then all we had out here was a hole in the ground. It was hard to believe anything was ever going to come out of that hole in the ground. In the dream the Lord spoke this word to me and said "The building is done but did I get done in your life what I wanted to get done during this time?" That was a tremendous shock to me and helped me all during this building sequence to focus upon the fact that this building will come and in God's time it will go. Hopefully not for a hundred years but in God's time it's passing. But I'm not. I and you are the permanent part of what God's doing. This is all passing away. It does not exist for eternity. It will melt with a fervent heat. It will dissolve but you and I won't. God's more concerned about what's being built in us. The dream made me aware of that.

You may say, "I don't have a clue of what you're talking about because I never dream." I'd say to you, "Yes you dream. If you want to remember your dreams begin focusing consciously on the fact that you have them and begin writing down what you dream when you dream them."

Many of the daily housecleaning dreams are romantic or sexual in character. This is because the Lord made us to be sexual beings. These sexual dreams are many times a review and a preview of our life. Sometimes they are wholesome and sometimes they are not. Sometimes the relationship or the activity represents actions, which we would never take in a conscious state. We're tempted at that point to become Freudian in our interpretation of the dream. That there is an irrational subconscious part of us called the libido that wants to do anything it wants without moral restraint. But the superego sets in charge of the libido and makes it obey and makes it be restrained and sometimes our dreams are reflection of the libido in us wanting to go to work in us and do its thing. The superego is trying to repress it. Freud may have had some insight although I really dismiss that all dreams are from a sexual orientation. Jung had a much more wholesome view on that than did Freud.

How can we deal with these real life dreams that are sexual in scope? We must realize again that they are reviewing and previewing life. That they can be God ordained to help us in a state of wholeness and cleanness. But they also on the conscious level from time to time when the romantic or the sexual dream becomes unwholesome in perspective need to be informed by our conscious or rational level that they must be brought into obedience to God's word lest in the day time we live out the reverie of the nighttime.

Sometimes dreams on the daily level are nightmares. Dreams like you're running real fast and you're only taking a step and the train is baring down. It's a mile away and you're on the tracks. There's plenty of time but you can't get out of the car. Just as the train is a whisker away and you're still on the tracks you scream and with a fright you wake up.

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We ought not to dismiss nightmares because nightmares like pain may be a tip off to deeper struggles that we're going through. They may reflect that we are in conditions where we have real fears in our life that maybe the dream is calling to a level of awareness.

It's interesting to see how Job, who was one of the sickest men that ever was in terms of his condition. He says in Job 7:11-16 "Therefore I will not keep silent. I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit. I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. Am I the sea or the monster of the deep that you put me under guard? When I think my bed will comfort me and my couch will ease my complaint even then you frighten me with dreams and terrify me with visions so that I prefer strangling and death rather than this body of mine. I despise my life. I would not live forever. Let me alone. My days have no meaning." That's before he learned to say, "I know that my redeemer liveth." That's the product of a nightmare – sea monsters and strangling and all those sorts of things.

If you're being bothered by nightmares it may reflect indeed real fears that you're having in life that you will do well to take a look at. Scripture does not really have a lot to say about the housecleaning type of dreaming as it does other sorts of dreaming. In fact the writer of Ecclesiastes who tended to be down on a lot of things was also down on dreaming. 5:5 "Much dreaming and many words are meaningless." But then he said life was meaningless too.

The psalmist however gives positive insight in the meaning of daily dreams. Psalm 16:7-8 "I will praise the Lord who counsels me. Even at night my heart instructs me." My heart, the non-rational intuitive side of me even at night it is instructing me. I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand I shall not be shaken."

Daniel 2:30 gives us a word in respect to the meaning of dreams. Daniel says to the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar "But as for me this mystery has not been revealed to me for any wisdom residing in me more than any other living man. But for the purpose of making the interpretation known to the king and that you may understand the thoughts of your heart." Modern translations use "mind" but the word there is "heart." Again that intuitive, non-rational side of us. Nebuchadnezzar being told that God would have him to understand the thoughts of his heart.

Listen to some of those daily dreams. Begin to say, Is there meaning for me? Is there perspective? Is there a way that I should look at life? Be forewarned. Be encouraged from them.

On the other hand, on a practical and a warning dimension, don't withdraw from the left brain to focus on the dream as a priority. Don't live in that nether world of letting all your actions be "I'm going to do this because I dreamed it." Or because I had a vision. That's not the way biblical people live. But let your dreams reflect meaning to you.

That's the first category of dreaming. The least category the scriptures deal with.

A second category of dreaming is a form of dreaming that I might call interpretation of personal history. The Lord through a dream kind of unfolds a whole pattern of life for us. There are two significant dreams of personal history found in scripture. One of them in Genesis 15, the account of Abraham which is a combination of both a vision and a dream. The whole chapter. The Lord in a visionary state and a dream state makes an assurance to him that he is going to be the father

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of many nations and in turn in the course of a deep sleep reveals to him that his ancestors are going to spend 430 years in Egypt but he [God] will finally bring them out to the land of promise. It is a very deeply interpretive personal dream that unfolds not only Abraham's destiny but the destiny of Abraham's people.

Genesis 37 is another example of a dream, which sheds light on a person's whole personal history. Joseph dreams that there will come a day when his mother and father represented in standing grain stalks will bow down before him and his life is a living out of that interpretive dream that he will be the means of bringing salvation or deliverance to his family and that ultimately they will respect him and bow down before him even as now they despise him. It's a very deeply interpretive personal dream.

Do inventories. Think of some of the dreams over your life that the Lord has given you. I became aware that not only do I have daily housecleaning dreams but I also have had dreams of interpretive personal history.

When I was a child I dreamt that the rapture had come and I was left. When anyone is scared into the kingdom of God they're still born. That's one of the reasons why in terms of my preaching and teaching I do not try to use fear as motivation to get people to respond to Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is capable of using fear without me doing it. If the Holy Spirit wants to use me to do that I'm open to it but I have a feeling that people who are scared in spiritual experiences take time to wrestle through those until they come to maturity and actually begin growing.

It was refreshing 5 or 6 years ago to have another dream of the Lord's return and I actually started up. I sensed myself getting about a foot off the ground. My earlier dream had told me you're not going up. So I fully expected any moment to come back down but I kept going. I got up about housetop height and I said to myself "When he finds out that he's made a mistake in calling me and I'm not in that number it's going to hurt when I fall back down!" But I kept on going. I got into that 20,000-30,000 foot category where I was becoming a small dot from earth's category and I felt myself really beyond the possibility of being dropped. At that rarified altitude I threw my arms out and screamed to anyone in sight at the top of my voice "I made it!" Needless to say I woke up. But it was a great re-instruction of that wrong personal history dream.

Dreams sometimes do give us insight into our personhood. Those dreams of the Lord's return have played very significant roles in my life.

There is a third kind of dreaming in which there's a number of subcategories. A dreaming that I would call supernatural revelation. Most psychologists think of dreams as accessing the subconscious. That is think of your personality as an iceberg. Only 15% of it or so is above water and the rest of it is beneath the water line. There are those who tell us that a great deal of our personhood is below the water line. Buried, repressed. Most of us cannot remember in detail all the events of our childhood for example. It's all there in tapes somewhere. If they struck the right little fiber maybe it'd come out. But basically it's not there in terms of our conscious awareness. So psychologists think of dreams and visions as accessing or giving into, having access to this aspect of our personality that is in our subconscious.

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But scripture presents dreams and visions as doing far more than accessing the subconscious. The weight of scripture in terms of emphasis is that dreams and visions access or give us access to the supernatural. That they can bring us into direct contact with God in a visual way. It is in this area of the supernatural rather than the subconscious that every dream or vision that occurs to a biblical person happens. That is, no dream recorded in scripture – 13 in the Old Testament, 6 in the New – none of these occur as an insight of a person having access into their subconscious. All of them involved them having some kind of visionary experience with God. Having a supernatural revelation. It's there that I especially want to concentrate. Because we as a people having the Spirit of God can on that side of our personality have tremendous dynamic access to God which informs our lives, and forms our lives and shapes our lives and gives us real emotional power and energy.

The sub categories of dreams with supernatural revelation is as follows. The first one this evening one kind of dreaming or visions with supernatural revelation is what I would call when God gives someone a call. These are dreams or visions, which call a person. Call a person for example to a life work. To a life destiny. Inevitably these kinds of dreams are accompanied by a promise from God no dream that is of a call nature is a dream which is without promise. Every one contains promise. Some of the people that have them are Abraham – Genesis 15, Jacob – Genesis 28 where he has the dream of a ladder from heaven and angels accessing the ladder and when a promise given to him that indeed his children would inherit the land. Joseph who has this call of his destiny in Genesis 37. Samuel who has a vision in 1 Samuel 3 of the Lord calling him and revealing to him a promise of the destiny of Eli's house. Isaiah in Isaiah 6 envisioning the Lord calling him – In the year that king Uzziah died, "I saw the Lord high and lifted up and his train filled the temple." From that day Isaiah's long prophetic ministry occurred. A promise that God gave to him was that it would go to a people who would reject his message. What a glorious promise! But it was a promise that was kept.

There was Paul in the New Testament who had this visionary experience on the road to Damascus which when later he appeals to King Agrippa in Acts 26:19 about his call in that vision, his promise that he would carry the name of the Lord before gentiles and before kings and governors. He says to Agrippa "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." That is what I sought as a kid growing up in a Pentecostal framework. I sought a call to the ministry that was visionary in character. That's what drove me to the altar and to prayer time and time again that I wanted to be able to authenticate my call with a vision. It's probably why I never became a missionary because I never got a vision. Missionaries – many of the great missionaries – would always describe their call from visionary experiences and would say, "That's how God called me."

God gave them a revelation. I've learned since, my left brain has taught me that a call can be visionary in character or it can be volunteers. I like what a great missionary said, "I never got a call. I just volunteered." That blew me a way – all my Pentecostal teachings on calls. God can use volunteers. But I wanted a visionary experience but I never got one of those in character. But God does give those kind of experiences to his people and we ought to be open to them. I especially encourage young people to be open to those kind of experiences with God. If you don't have a vision or dream that calls you at least the fact that you are open will be a means which God uses to put you where he wants you. That being open to God counts more than anything else. Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near. Let there

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be an intensity of your heart wanting to relate to him and do his will and being open to letting God implant his dreams and visions on your mind.

If you have a dream or vision I'd like to give you some teaching on what to expect.

It will inevitably from Biblical example involve great hardship and suffering. Everybody that has a lifetime call with a dream or a vision goes through the pits, hell, suffering, torture – terrible things happen to him. That's probably why they're needed to begin with. To be sustained through the long hours of the night when there is no dream or revelation. I suppose there's a tradeoff of not having one. But if you have one start getting ready.

Secondly any persons biblically who is called with a dream or a vision, never takes matters in their own hand to force that dream to come to pass. They don't go to work saying, "We've got to get this dream going. God gave me the dream and I've got to get it going!" They wait. God brings it to pass. Furthermore they don't base their credentials upon their vision or dream exclusively. Their credentials are wider than their vision or dream. Their ministry gifts or their calling or their life vocation are in themselves credentials to that call. People don't simply with biblical dreams and vision say, You've got to hear me because I've had a dream or vision. There are other things that authenticate the call. Paul says, "Follow me as I follow Christ." He doesn't appeal to people to follow him on the basis of a vision. He only uses that when his apostleship is at stake. If somebody says to you, Follow me because I've had a dream or vision, watch out!

Third, this type of dream vision in the life time call occurs in the context or the matrix of overwhelming problems and challenges. People that are most open to these kind of dreams and visions on the supernatural side are people who are going through intense times of personal struggles. Abraham is childless when in Genesis 15 God breaks through to him in the supernatural state in the dream or vision. He has that background of facing giving his household over to Eliazer his servant. Jacob when he has his dream of the angels ascending and descending upon the ladder is fleeing for his life from Esau and from Isaac. He is in a state of tremendous stress and anxiety and uncertainty about the future when God gives him his call. Joseph when he has his dream of his brothers and his mother and father bowing down to him is in a state of experiencing the hatred of everybody except his father. Samuel when he has his vision in 1 Samuel 3 of the Lord calling him is an "orphan" child. He is taken away from his loving mother and he's in the household of an old man, an old doting man, whose sons are coming abomination and over whom that father has no control. Yet here is Samuel in that kind of orphan environment. God breaks through and speaks to him.

Solomon has his dream at the beginning of his kingdom after the dedication of his temple, "What do you want?" And in his dream he says, "Give me wisdom!" That's a dream. Scripture specifically says it's a dream where he said give me wisdom. But again he was in a state of overwhelming responsibility. It was the right time for a dream.

Isaiah has his vision of the Lord high and lifted up. When King Uzziah has died and Uzziah had been king 52 years. What is going to happen in the transition? What's going to happen to the country? What is going to happen with international relationships, domestic relationships, people problems, problems relating to God and the like – overwhelming enormity.

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Saul had his vision on the Damascus road while he was in a state of turmoil and hatred against Jesus and against his church.

Turbulence and unrest characterize this type of call.

Bottom line: Be open on that intuitional and experiential side of our life to God. To immediate contact with him. To not simply knowing about God but knowing God himself.

There is no experience, experientially, visually in all existence that can be compared to seeing you. All the books of theology have not prepared us. All the witness of scripture has simply been a hint of glory that awaits us, that burst upon our life. Your glory waits to be revealed to the sons and daughters of men. You are far more glorious than all our language could ever express. Praise to you is to be given for attributes that are beyond our mind to comprehend. While we praise you for your loving kindness for your holiness, for your faithfulness, for your integrity, for your omnipotence, your omniscience we have only a thimble full of what those words really mean. We ask Lord that in that part of our life that goes beyond the linguistic, goes beyond the ability to think in words and sentences, in that part of our life where we are visual, where we feel, where we have intuition we pray that you would reveal yourself to us in that dimension of our existence. May you bring both the elements of our personality together, that scripture which speaks to us of truth which is to be believed upon in the world, a faith that is delivered to the saints once for all, a set of understandings which are doctrinal in nature and which must be believed if salvation is to be experienced, that we would be fully informed and shaped by that as well as knowing you in the depths. And sensing within our hearts that deep calls unto deep. We want to return praise and adoration and glory to your name. In the name of the Lord. Amen.