

**WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT DREAMS AND VISIONS**  
**Dreams and Visions**  
**Part 3**  
**Dr. George O. Wood**

Tonight we want to look again for the third time at the subject of “Dreams and visions.” I’ve used that term in a rather broad sense to mean all the opening of our subconscious life to the Lord. It includes all the realm of spiritual gifts. It moves past the realm of the logical, the sequential and the analytical into the realm of experience. I spent the first Sunday night talking to you of some reasons why we needed to go into this area. Last Sunday evening we looked specifically in teaching of the area in terms of literal dreams and visions.

We want to finish that theme we started last Sunday night. Tonight we again look at the categories of dreams and visions. Then beginning next Sunday night we’re going to go past that to begin to look at right brain-left brain functions and how they relate to spiritual gifts and touching God on that side of our life. That moves past just seeing things maybe in an orderly fashion. To see the Lord in terms of an experiential relationship with him.

Before I return to the categories of dreams and visions that are in the scripture I would like to spend some moments just in giving you some cautions so that we are always balanced when we look at that subject.

As I look at what the scripture teaches about dreams and visions I see essentially three areas of caution.

One is anyone who has a dream or purports to have a dream or a vision that contradicts God’s written revelation, that person has not been given that dream by the one true God. Deuteronomy 13:1-5 is one such reference. “If a prophet or one who foretells by dreams appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder and if the sign or wonder takes place and he says, ‘Let us follow other gods, gods you have not known, and let us worship them,’ you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you to find out if you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. It is the Lord your God you must follow and him you must revere. Keep his commandments and obey him. Serve him and hold fast to him. That prophet or dreamer must be put to death because he preached rebellion against the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. He has tried to turn you away from the way of the Lord, which he commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you.”

It’s fascinating to see over the course of religious history that indeed many dreamers have appeared who purported to have visions from God all the way from meeting with angels and getting written revelations to within the historical background within the Pentecostal movement itself one of the major fractures that occurred in the modern Pentecostal movement in the early 1920s was at a camp meeting in California. Many miracles were happening in that camp meeting around 1919-1920. One man was so inspired that he spent the night in prayer. Along toward morning he had been given a glimpse of the power of the blessed name of Jesus. Leaping to his feet he ran through the camp shouting to all the early risers. He told them what God had shown him about the name of Jesus. The revelation made a profound impact upon the campers and all rejoiced. They began to search the scriptures for those phrases concerning the name of Jesus. Out of that vision came what is called the Jesus Only movement which was a movement

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which rejected the doctrine of the trinity that God is one and yet has revealed himself eternally as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

It's interesting to see how that issue was debated later in the mid 1920s in general counsels of the Assemblies of God. The whole Assemblies of God as well as other Pentecostal fellowships were being carried away into that vision and that revelation of Jesus which denied the doctrine of the trinity which had been taught by the apostles and continued as the mainspring of church doctrine for centuries. From apostolic times until now.

Even the general superintendent of the assemblies of God was carried away and renounced Trinitarianism and wrote an article in the Pentecostal Evangelist espousing the Jesus only position. However the article was never published because the 24-year-old secretary took the article, re-edited it and made it out to be a Trinitarian espousal. Out of that came a call from the general counsel where from the scripture this issue was debated. And of course all issues like that must be settled on the basis of scripture not on the basis of vision. The meeting came to a head when at one point spontaneously by a movement of the Holy Spirit someone began to sing "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God almighty!" and everybody – Jesus Only and Trinitarian people joined in. Until they neared the end of the first verse the Jesus Only people realized they had been trapped unknowingly by the person starting the hymn. But the hymn ended "God in three persons, blessed trinity." They left the meeting and that resulted in an historical cleavage to this day.

We must recognize the supremacy of written revelation over that of dreams and visions. And all dreams and visions must therefore be judged by the scripture.

A second caution about dreams and visions in that discerning the validity of dreams and visions is that in discerning the validity of dreams and visions a person's spiritual personality is subordinate to the message they communicate. That sounds rather technical. Just a fine differential from the first point. That is to say that there are persons who have magnetic personalities who can mesmerize an audience either in person or through writing. We might in the body have a tendency to want to adhere to the scripture, "Lay not your hand on God's anointed." We are careful lest we speak out against a person who has a mesmerizing ministry but whose style of ministry is either not in accordance with scripture or whose doctrine is not in accordance with scripture. I'm not talking about those areas where Christians can legitimately differ from one another and still remain saints. I'm talking about cardinal areas of doctrine. Jeremiah 29:8 says "Do not let the prophets or the diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams of peace and prosperity you encourage them to have." Zachariah 10:2 says "Diviners see visions but lie. They tell dreams that are false. They give comfort in vain." We're not to listen to a message simply because it comes with a charismatic kind of personality or because it agrees with our point of view. It is again to be tested by the scripture.

A third area and immediately I realize I'm treading into controversy, which is ok with me. A third area of caution is that some may use dreams and visions to manipulate the people of God to do something. Or manipulate the people of God in order to enhance their own standing in the Christian community. Such a pattern you will never find in biblical dreams and visions. You will never see the person who has the dream or the vision using that as an instrument of manipulation. If the dream or the vision is prophetic in character the person simply waits without trying to pull strings for the Lord to be at work and to fulfill it. They can rest in the

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validity of the dream or the vision because it comes from God and if God gave it, he'll sustain it. If it came from eating too much spaghetti or if we came to it ourselves then we can be insecure about it, I suppose.

Jeremiah 23:31-32 "Yes, declares the Lord. I am against the prophets who wag their tongues and yet declare the Lord declares. Indeed I am against those who prophesy false dreams,' declares the Lord. 'They tell them and lead my people astray with reckless lives. Yet I did not send or appoint them. They do not benefit these people in the least.'"

Paul in Colossians 2:18 "Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen. And his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions." Here is Paul dealing with the person who lays claim to spirituality on the basis of their dreams and visions. And purports themselves to be of special value and enhancement in the kingdom because they have had these. If you haven't had them you are of less value.

"Test for all biblical offices. Never one of having dreams and visions. Test for all biblical office and ministerial authority." That is ministering in the name of the Lord. The test is agreement with the Lord in doctrine and agreement with the Lord in lifestyle. If agreement is not there then the dream or the vision is of no value.

Visions which attempt to manipulate or secure funds for projects from the Lord are strange indeed when compared to the scripture record.

Categories of dreams and visions.

Last week we looked at daily house cleaning dreams and how dreams are review or preview of daily life. They're often a way of giving us insight into what is going on. The pressures we are facing. Another kind of dream in scripture is the interpretation of personal history like Abraham or Joseph who saw their family or their own personal life projected over a space of time to come. They saw in that the hand of the Lord in their lifetime.

Those first two categories of dreams are the least occurring kinds of dreams in the scripture. Psychologists would generally think of dreams as accessing the subconscious personality. But biblical dreams in the preponderant majority occur in those realms where we are accessing not the subconscious but where we are having access to the supernatural.

There are several different kinds then of dreams and visions in the scripture that fall under the broad heading of supernatural revelation. We looked at one of those subheadings last week. When someone receives a call to a life vocation. That call when it's received is always with a promise. God is going to do something in that person's life. Abraham had such a call. Jacob, Joseph, Samuel, Solomon, Isaiah, Paul. We indicated that when those kinds of dreams and visions occur to the people of God they are given that the persons to whom they come might have special strength and fortitude. Because an unusual calling is ahead of them. The reason why God is giving it to them is that in the tough days that are ahead they will need to draw upon the resources of that dream or vision to get strength and to assure themselves in the Lord that indeed they're on the right track and they're pursuing the goal in which the Lord envisioned for them. Such a person who has these kinds of calls generally have unusual suffering and are called

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to unusual level of endurance. I've always coveted that dream or vision but the Lord has saw fit to give me not that kind of experience although he's given me others I'm very satisfied with.

A second kind of supernatural revelation – now we break into new territory – a second category of dreams and visions in the arena we are having access to the supernatural might be called predictive dreams or visions that are predictive without having prophetic teaching. That is they just simply say something is going to happen. There's no big deal to be read into it other than something's going to happen and there's a forewarning.

There are three such kinds of dreams in the scripture. Joseph has the opportunity to interpret the dream of the cupbearer and the baker who were employed by Pharaoh. Each has a dream related to their personal history. The cupbearer will be restored to the king from his prison cell. But the baker would be executed.

A second dream is Pharaoh's dream – still in Joseph's time. He had the dream of 7 fat cows followed by 7 lean cows and 7 healthy heads of grain followed by 7 thin and scorched ones. Again it was Joseph who told him the meaning of that dream.

A third predictive dream is in Judges 7:13-14. A very fascinating incident which gives a man of God real strength. Gideon has gone as a spy into the camp of the Midianites. It's night. He reconnoiters through the darkness and comes up to the edge of the encampment. He hears two Midianites having a conversation with one another. One is saying to the other, I dreamed of a barley loaf tumbling into the camp and striking the tent with such force that it collapsed. He read significance into this dream that Gideon with his band was going to take them captive. This dream inspired Gideon to go back and get his band of 300 and indeed take them.

With these 3 dreams I think we can make some applications or some observations. First, there are not many dreams in this category. Therefore it's not common for this to happen in the scripture.

Another kind of interesting thing is that all three dream types occur to persons who are not members of the covenant community of God – the baker and the cupbearer are not descendants of Abraham. Pharaoh was certainly a pagan. The Midianites were pagans. All the dreams are dreamed by persons who do not really know God or who are in relationship with God. That is perhaps why they are predictive without being prophetic.

There's a difference between prediction and prophecy. Prediction simply tells you what's going to happen. But prophecy tells you why. Prediction is simply concerned with some event that's coming up on the future. Prophecy is concerned to relate that future event to a present concern. If the prophets for example said God is going to take his people captive and the Babylonians are going to come, it was not given to kind of give them information just for a later day. It was in light of that, do something now. Repent. Maybe God will stay his hand. That's the whole message of the book of Jonah. Jonah was very put out over the fact that after he had prophesied all these things to happen and then they didn't come to pass. But the reason for the prophecy was to apply to the present. So none covenant community dreams are simply predictive and do not tend to be interpretive from the scriptural evidence.

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On the other hand there are some striking contemporary examples of predictive dreams and visions that didn't necessarily come with prophetic teaching but warn the people.

That's the character of the predictive dreams within the scripture – they have the nature to have God's people.

A third kind of supernatural dream is what we might simply call prophetic revelation. Dreams or visions that not only have predictive content but they have moral and spiritual content and application to the present moment. Balaam – the now he's with God, now he's not prophet – has such a revelation when he is hired to bring a curse upon God's people. He cries out in Numbers 24 "The oracle of one who hears the words of God, who sees a vision from the almighty falls prostrate and whose eyes are open. Then he went on to see the blessing of the Lord upon Jacob's tents.

Nebuchadnezzar had such a revelation. Although a pagan king saw the image that was made of four different parts and ultimately a stone not made of hands was cut from the mountain, the kingdom of God and broke down the kingdoms of man. It was a prophetic revelation in vision form.

The whole last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation is a series of prophetic revelations about which we should not attempt to read as though they were some prophetic crossword puzzle. But they were symbolic revelations given of course for a future later application but with present spiritual meaning to a suffering church. Characteristics of this form of dreaming is the persons in the scripture are deeply rooted in the character and the understanding of God.

Hosea 12:10 says "I spoke to the prophets and gave them many visions and told parables through them."

Another characteristic of this form of dream is that the application of the message is anchored in the present. And another characteristic is that these kinds of prophetic revelations like to Nebuchadnezzar and John in the book of revelation are remarkably free of time-date sorts of things. That's why the calendarizers, the chronologizers always get into problems. They're trying to look at these kinds of revelations and look at the headlines of the newspaper. The problem with these kinds of revelations is they're remarkably time-date free. They are capable of having an overlay of fulfillment. That's why many times people looking at a particular one seem to see all the pictures coming together when actually they are overlays so to speak of conditions that come together. But it's not yet the time. Again it is only suggestive of what God is going to ultimately do. It's a tip-off to something later that is to happen.

A fourth kind of dream or vision which acts as the supernatural and where scripture concentrates its greatest amount of material are in dreams of visions that I would call either directional in nature or warning in nature or both – directional and warning. They tell people to do something or not to do something. It's incredible to see time after time the amount of evidence that the scripture relates to us in terms of these kinds of dreams and visions that access the supernatural that are warnings to individual people or to whole groups of people. Or give directions.

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Let me run through a sequence of these. Genesis 20:1-7, Abimelech is warned in a dream that he better not mess around with Sarah, Abraham's wife for she wasn't really Abraham's sister, that she was his wife. And the warned spared Abimelech and got Abraham in a whole lot of trouble.

Jacob in Genesis 31 was given a dream that he should leave Laban and he did. Laban on the other hand in Genesis 31 was given a dream that when Jacob left he shouldn't say anything good or bad about him but should let him go.

Jacob in Genesis 46 dreamed that it was going to be all right for him to go to Egypt, that his family would be safe there and kept there. So he went. He was an old man and wasn't sure he wanted to leave his homeland and go there. The dream confirmed the direction to him.

In the New Testament there are 6 dreams all of them of a directional or warning character. Four of them occurred to Joseph the husband of Mary. Notice in Matthew how frequently they occur.

In a dream Joseph was told to marry Mary. Matthew 1:20. He was going to put her away. The dream said "Marry Mary," so he did.

A second dream when the child was born was, "Flee to Egypt." Matthew 2:13. So he fled and the family was spared and the child was spared. And Herod raged.

He received a third dream and that was the dream to leave Egypt. When Herod was dead, Matthew 2:19-20, he dreamed he should leave Egypt so he left.

In Matthew 2:22 when he came back to Palestine he was coming up through Judea as would have been the custom and a dream again warned him that he was to avoid Judea and therefore he went back to his own home, to Nazareth.

Four times. That was the only way we ever read that Joseph was led by the Lord. He was led through his dreams. I've wondered as I've looked at that if that doesn't give us a special tip off as to why it was out of all the people that could have been chosen from David's line, Joseph would have been the one chosen. I wonder if part of it wasn't because on the qualification side to be the parent father model for Jesus if on that side Joseph wasn't showing that in his subconscious life on his non rational side, on his intuitive side, on his spiritual side, he was deeply open to God and to the voice of God. It would be that kind of model that Jesus growing up in that home in Nazareth would need to see a man who not only in his conscious life but who in his dreams and visions, life, in that deeper or fuller part of him, was really assessable to the revelation of God and was in tune with God in his experience.

I state that as a question. I wonder if that's not the case why God chose him. It's one of the questions I want to ask the Lord in heaven.

Many times men are not open in their subconscious life to God. We tend to be straight line thinkers and leave it up to the women to be more spiritual and to have those kind of experiences which probe emotional depths. And have revelatory insights and dreams and visions. Sometimes we get a little as touched in a meeting when the gifts of the spirit are flowing they tend to happen more it seems with women than with men. I think one of the fundamental reasons is that men often set back and don't really enter in that arena of having a subconscious,

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intuitive emotional, non rational experience with God. Which some of the great men of scripture had. Joseph being among them.

There are two other dreams of warning in the New Testament. The wise men in 2:12 dream that they are to avoid Herod. And there's one woman in the New Testament who has a dream. That is directional and warning in character. It's Pilate's wife, Matthew 27:19. She tells Pilate she's dreamed much about Jesus that night and he's to have nothing to do with him.

On the sphere of visions.... Visions are different from dreams in that dreams occur in a nighttime state where through sleep we are given picture sequences. Visions occur in a state of awakesness where one again sees events happening. Often with closed eyes or often in a condition of reverie or waiting before the Lord.

There are some key moments of New Testament vision which give direction or warning without which we would really not have the church as we know it. These are such foundational critical juncture moments. Ananias at Damascus is given a very clear vision, Acts 9:10 that he is to go to the house of one called Judas who lives on Straight Street in Damascus and there he will find Saul praying. Without that kind of vision, Ananias would not have been a volunteer to go and link up with Saul of Tarsus.

Acts 10 we commented on the first week, it is the visions – simultaneously of Peter and Cornelius – that bring the inclusion of the Gentiles into the faith and anyone who has seriously studied the New Testament knows that the critical, historical question in the New Testament was would the church escape the boundaries of its Jewish ethnicity and would it become a body that was open to the whole world regardless of cultural regulations. Or would it state within those tight confines of “Fiddler on the Roof” – tradition, tradition. It took an immense work of the Holy Spirit to bust the church out of its cultural concrete, out of its narrow walls, out of its little perspective to see that God loved the whole world and would bring persons to himself irrespective of keeping regulations in regard to the eating of food and the forbidding of some food, and irregardless of circumcision and other important laws which were regarded by the Jewish community. So it was through a vision that God busted through to Peter and to Cornelius to reroute and redirect the history of the church. Monumental event.

Paul is continually led in the area of visions that carry directions or warnings. Galatians 2:2 while we know that at his conversion he had a vision that prophesied to him his life direction. His first visit to Jerusalem where he laid down his gospel before the Apostles was one that came to him, the idea of the trip came to him by revelation. In the second missionary journey, to me Acts 16 is one of the neatest, most dramatic, most insightful experience in all scripture to watch how an apostle works in doing the will of the Lord. Paul begins the second missionary journey by having an argument with his beloved co-worker Barnabus. They go separate directions. Paul finds new companion. He revisits the churches he founded on the first missionary journey and he picks up in one of those churches a young man by the name of Timothy. He heads out of Antioch of Presidia now central Turkey going west and he is with both Silas and this new man Timothy. As he is going along the Holy Spirit does not allow him to go to Asia, which was directly west of Ephesus. So then he heads north. He's walking hundreds of miles understand. He heads north and the Spirit says you can't go to Bithnia which is on the northern Turkey the under belly of the Caspian Sea south of Russia.

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I think about 3 or 4 weeks walking along with Paul, Timothy must have had a point somewhere along the line where he said, "Would it be too much where we're going on this missionary tour?" I can see Paul saying, "I don't know where we're going. But I know where we're not going." He didn't know where he was going. So he did the best thing he could do without a dream or revelation, a clear direction of any kind, he kept walking in whatever area God wasn't saying no. I think that's a direction I've always taken in regard to the will of God in my own life. If God isn't saying no, I will operate my life by the green light will of God. I'll keep going until he slams the door unless he gives me a revelation that tells me to do something else. I've not made it a habit of my life to wake up in the morning and say God I'm not going to do anything today until you speak to me by a dream or a vision. Show me what to do.

Finally Paul got as far as he could go and the next step he could take would be into the sea. He was on the coast of the Adriatic and there was no further he could go. At that moment a vision came to him. When he ran out of his own personal energy and ability, at that key moment the vision which has been the source not only of Paul's missionary call but a call to the church from every time since then – to launch out into new territory, to see a new field. In my lifetime I've been in churches where God enlivened the concept of that call to show visions to people's lives to go to Africa and India, to Europe and the East and the near East. To give their life in devoted service to the Lord because that vision was of a man that said, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." On the basis of that spiritual revelatory vision, Paul responded to a call and went. And the world was changed as a result. Without that vision we have none of Paul's 13 letters. All 13 of his letters are written after that vision. The major focus of his missionary work takes place after that vision. It was a hinge moment, a key moment in the church.

He has another vision in Acts 18:9 when he's at Corinth and he's afraid. He has a vision in the night of the Lord standing by him and saying, "There are many people that I have in this city." What a comfort to realize that a town that was filled with all kinds of unbelievable vices and people that we might have the tendency to write off as hopeless and unredeemable, God would give him a new mental picture and show him that within that city there were many people of his that would be won.

In terms of dreams that are directional or directional and warning or warning in nature generally these dreams and visions occurred in a time when there is a danger to God's people or to God's work. Or when God is seeking to extend his work into new territories or new people or when the time is very volatile and dangerous. It is the personal turbulence of that like in which these dreams are often born. The great majority of the dreams of scripture which are directional and warning in nature come in a time of tremendous turbulence, personal turbulence, political turbulence, turbulence for the gospel, turbulence for God's work. Many times they do extend God's work to new territory and to new people. They may be of a nature to spare God's people from danger.

I want to close with a lengthy quote. I apologize for the length but I think it summarizes it better than anything I've come across. I was quite surprised at the source. The writer is Moyer, Great Leaders of the Christian Church. He gives 4-6 page biographies of leading Christians from the apostolic age to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It's a remarkable little book and gives you a lot of insight into people. From my vantage point of speaking on this subject the intriguing thing is the book is published by Moody Press. Anyone who knows anything about evangelical history Moody Press does not exactly represent the charismatic wing of the church. Remarkable that this should find

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it's way into a book he wrote 30 years ago. He comes to a chapter in which he is giving the biography of great Christian mystics. "Christian mysticism is that element of a man's Christian life that is more closely related to his experience than to his theology. It touches him in the realm of his emotional life. More than in the realm of his thought or belief. When man seeks to enter into deeper fellowship with God it is because of his inner experiential love for God and a sensing of his blessed divine presence rather than because of a sense of moral obligation or calculating purpose to believe in him. However a habitual emotional experience without the controlling power of the will or an inner glow of spiritual enthusiasm without an intelligent faith is a defective Christian experience. Also a strong faith or a determined will to believe without the warm inner fellowship of the spirit is a defective one-sided experience. The two must compliment each other in order to produce a well-rounded perfect Christian life. A vein of true mysticism in the Christian's life has always been necessarily a part of the deeper Christian experience. It was clearly manifest in the life of Christ and his disciples. It was at the center of the life of the early church. It continued without break down through the medieval church down to the time of the reformers. The reformers themselves reflected the impact of mysticism in their lives and teaching. It was the mysticism in the life of every true reformer that led to his vision of God, to his true conversion, to the strange warming of his heart, to his passion for Christ or indeed to his becoming a reformer. It was the mystical element that led to the great love for and the appreciation of the Bible as the word of God. And to putting it into the heart and hands of men as their ultimate source of authority. It was the mystic element that led to the production and wide use of devotional literature that led to the evangelical preaching and teaching which replaced undue emphasis on form and ceremony and that led to the promotion of true piety within the church. But what is mysticism. One writer in attempting a definition says "That on which the great mystics lay stress is the release of the soul from finite bonds and it's conduct to inner communion with God."

Another writer apply says "The mystics emphasize contemplation, emotions, direct vision and religious intuition as immediate avenues of approach to God. Mystic religion was less a matter of intellect than of heart and feeling. It was not so much a knowledge of God as a life of communion with him through self-denial. The mystic desired to be lost in God."

Our Father, with that we bring this evening to its close. We ponder anew the meaning of Moses who after having been given unparalleled revelation from you, "I am who I am" which revealed to him your laws and your statues, which revealed to him the purposes you had for your people, nevertheless wanted above all other things to see you face to face. Knowing about you can never be compared to knowing you. In our heart of hearts, in our inward being we pray to be lost in you. And to know you in that side of our being which you have created where in the spirit and through the spirit we have access to you in worship, in dreams and vision and in spiritual gifts. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.