

# DIGGING DEEPER WEEK 2

## *Dreams and Dreamers*

I've had some crazy dreams. In one of my recurring dreams during my teen years, my brother was in a stream about to be washed away; and as I would reach for him, he would be swept downstream. Other times I have dreamed of things happening to my husband, children, or others I love only to wake up grateful that the crazy pictures in my sleep were not real.

Dreams invade our sleep, and people have varied opinions about them. Modern psychologists assert that dreams "let us play out painful or puzzling emotions or experiences in a safe place."<sup>1</sup> Others have come up with dream dictionaries that assert the meaning of symbols in our nighttime stories. Sometimes we refer to dreams as the fairytales that we remember upon waking up. Other times we think of our aspirations and secret hopes for the future as dreams.

Here are some questions that arise in my mind concerning dreams:

- **How did God use dreams in the Bible?**
- **Does God still speak to us through dreams today?**
- **Should I be chasing the dreams God has planted in my heart?**

Let's consider each question.

### **How Did God Use Dreams in the Bible?**

Disney's rendition of Joseph's story in film, which was released in 2000, had the subtitle "King of Dreams." His brothers cried, "Here comes that dreamer" in Genesis 37:19, mocking their sibling who dreamed of greatness. As we look through the Scriptures, we find God using dreams in several different ways. Through dreams, God warns, makes promises, gives directions, and reveals the future.

#### *Dreams of Warning*

The first instance of God using a dream to speak to people is found in Genesis 20:1-7, where God appeared to Abimelech (an unbeliever) to warn him that Abraham had lied to him about Sarah. She was Abraham's wife, not merely his sister as he had claimed. God also warned Jacob's uncle Laban in Genesis 31:24 to leave Jacob alone. Perhaps the most well-known reference to a dream of warning was to Pilate's wife concerning the innocence of Jesus in Matthew 27:19.

#### *Dreams of Promise*

God told Jacob at Bethel that He would give him the land where he slept. Jacob saw angels going up and down a stairway between heaven and earth. In Genesis 28:15, God promised Jacob in his dream, "What's more, I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go. One day I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have finished giving you everything I have promised you." Similarly, God appeared to Solomon in a dream, inviting him to make a request. When Solomon asked for wisdom, God promised to not only grant his request but also give him fame and riches (1 Kings 3:5-13).

### *Dreams of Direction*

When Jacob found himself oppressed by his uncle Laban, God came to him in a dream and told him it was time to leave (Genesis 31:10-13). In the New Testament, God used a dream to direct Joseph to take Mary as his wife even though she was pregnant (Matthew 1:20). When Peter had a vision in the New Testament of animals coming down on a sheet, God directed him to include Gentiles in the church (Acts 11:1-12).

### *Dreams of Future Events*

Joseph's dreams foretold the future, as did those of the cupbearer and baker. Pharaoh's dreams in the Joseph narrative also were of a prophetic nature in regard to the years of plenty and famine that were coming to Egypt. Daniel interpreted dreams for Nebuchadnezzar that revealed future kingdoms, signifying dreams of a prophetic nature (Daniel 5).

While God is not limited to only these purposes for dreams, from the biblical text we find that He employs the use of sleep messages mainly in giving warnings, promises, directions, and insight into future events. Of course, not every instance of dreams in Scripture originated from God. The prophet Jeremiah warned that some people say they have dreams from God when, in reality, they tell lies in God's name (Jeremiah 23:25-28). So how can we know if God still uses dreams? Are the dreams we experience messages from God or just emotions from our life spilling over into our unconscious world? This leads us to our second question.

## **Does God Still Speak Through Dreams Today?**

Opinions vary among scholars concerning this question. Some say dreams aren't His normal mode of communication anymore: "With the completion of the Bible, God does not have to use dreams and visions as much as He did before. That is not to say that He cannot or does not; God can communicate with us however He chooses. But when we have a decision to make, our first stop should always be the Bible, not a dream."<sup>2</sup> Others believe God might use a dream as a starting point: "Missionaries have told us about people they've met whose first interest in Christ and the Bible came through dreams, but it was the Word of God that finally brought them to the Savior. Certainly God is sovereign and can use dreams to accomplish His will if no other means are available, but His normal way to communicate is through the Spirit teaching the Word (John 14:25; 16:12-15)."<sup>3</sup>

Ultimately, God is Sovereign. He can speak through donkeys (Numbers 22:28), command the wind and waves (Matthew 8:26-27), and do whatever He wants. He has no limits, for nothing is too hard for Him (Luke 1:37). He tells us that in the last days He will certainly use dreams to speak—at least to the old men!

*"In the last days," God says,*

*"I will pour out my Spirit upon all people.*

*Your sons and daughters will prophesy.*

*Your young men will see visions,*

*and your old men will dream dreams." (Acts 2:17; see also Joel 2:28)*

I believe we would agree that God can do whatever He chooses, including using dreams. Whether He chooses to warn, promise, give direction, or reveal the future in dreams or through other means, nothing limits Him. However, even in Bible times God used dreams only occasionally. So although He can speak in dreams, we always should seek Him through His Word and prayer. Those individuals in the Bible who experienced the dreams of God seemed to know for certain they were from Him. Until God interrupts our slumber with direct communication that we know for sure is from Him, we should continue to pursue Him in prayer and the study of His Word.

## How do I know if a dream is truly from God or just my own desire?

Many of the biblical dreamers seemed to have an assurance that the dream they had was from God. We often wonder whether our dreams are the result of stress, our own desires, or truly coming from God. While no magic dream formula exists, we do have God's Word and His Spirit. We also have the benefit of godly mentors we can ask to help us discern and evaluate God's leading in our lives. If we aren't sure whether a dream is from God, we can ask Him to confirm it through His Word, His people, our circumstances, and the inner assurance of His Spirit giving us peace to move forward in faith.

## Should I Be Chasing the Dreams God Has Planted in My Heart?

The dreams God plants in our hearts might not have come in the middle of the night, but they are the God-given hopes that are deep inside of us. Perhaps we dream that someday we will get a particular educational degree, become a mother, make a scientific discovery, write a novel, or accomplish some other great feat. Do you have a dream that simmers inside of you? I've known women to do some incredible things as they seek Jesus and work hard. Don't jump ahead of God, but don't lag behind Him either. Don't chase your dreams; chase God, and let Him fulfill His God-sized dreams in you. They are bigger than anything you could ever accomplish on your own. I've seen God's dreams coming true when a woman

- **loves a man even on the days he drives her crazy.**
- **cares for children who never say thank you.**
- **gets a job she never thought she would land.**
- **writes a book that rolled around in her head for years.**
- **forgives someone who hurt her deeply.**

While our world might encourage us to run others over in pursuit of our dreams, God tells us to run after Him instead. The road might be confusing as it was for Joseph. We might find ourselves headed down a difficult path, or perhaps we will be separated from people we love. Others might try to kill to our dreams and unknowingly advance them instead, as Joseph's brothers did.

As we pursue Jesus with a whole heart, He works out His dreams for us. He makes us heart-strong through the process as He warns, promises, directs, and shows us the future in His perfect timing. What excuses do you need to lay aside to go after God today so that He can fulfill His dreams in your life?

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1. Margarita Tartakovsky, "How to Analyze Your Dreams (And Why It's Important)," *PsychCentral*, accessed March 19, 2015, <http://psychcentral.com/lib/how-to-analyze-your-dreams-and-why-its-important/0005975> .
  2. "How Did God Use Dreams and Visions in the Bible?" *Got Questions?* accessed March 19, 2015, <http://www.gotquestions.org/dreams-visions-Bible.html>.
  3. Warren Wiersbe, *Be Authentic: Exhibiting Real Faith in the Real World Genesis 25–50* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1997), 96.

