

Dreams & Other Prophetic

God is sovereign in the affairs of the world. He knows the number of hairs on our heads (Matt 10:30) and He has named the stars, the ones we can see and the ones we can't (Isa 40:26). No event in the universe escapes His notice or proceeds without His permission (Col 1:17). The question of dreams is not their existence but their significance.

Dreams can be extraordinary (supernatural) and they can be ordinary (natural) and probably sometimes in between (mix). And what is discovered about dreams can be generalized to other types of revelation (1Sam 28:6) – visions, trances etc. All modes of God's communication share most if not all of the following characteristics.

Solomon writes, "a dream comes when there are many cares ... (Ecc 5:3 NIV)" literally 'tasks', "... all that is done under heaven. It is a grievous **task** which God has given to the sons of men ..." (Ecc 1:13). These cares are part of the machinery of life and can result in dreams. Solomon continues, "For in many dreams and in many words there is 'emptiness'. Rather, fear God" (Ecc 5:7). The NASB translates the Hebrew word **hebel**, as emptiness. But it is translated elsewhere as, delusion(2), fleeting(2), fraud(1), futility(13), idols(7), vapor(1), and worthless(2) to name a few of the word's translations.

Some dreams appear to have no important content and can be connected to "cares" with no express significance beyond being aware of them. When this happens, dreams are like the hairs on our head: known but not noteworthy. This is as close to a definition for a "pizza" dream as scripture gets. Not all dreams are incomprehensible in that sense but God has allowed some dreams to be vacuous or as the NSAB translates, "empty" or the outgrowth of "cares" or worse as "hebel" translation indicates. How does one tell the difference between a "hebel" and true revelatory experience?

In Solomon's example, the dreamer or man with many words was trying to dodge his "promise" or "vow" to God (Ecc 5:1ff). There were explicit commandments and instructions around "taking a vow" (Num 30:2). Better to not vow at all than vowing and not delivering. Solomon expresses the significance of God's word over other purported revelations. This is

fundamental to understanding all supernatural revelation. God would not give a dream that would nullify one of His commandments (scriptures) and He won't accept any other revelation as an excuse to deviate. Jesus, fulfills and never nullifies God's words.

Moses develops this question more deeply. He told the people of God, "If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, ² and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,' ³ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul (Deu 13:1-3)."

Notice that the prophet and dreamer are cast in the same light. They have some measure of revelation that purports to be from God even supported by a sign – which in the last days even Satan's servants will provide (Rev 13:13). Dreams, regardless of how they are unpacked must square with scripture – the words God has already given, not just His commandments but all scripture (2 Tim 3:16), or the dream or revelation should be rejected. It is "hebel" even though backed by a true sign. And God is willing to test this process. God truly wants to know how much we value Him and His written words. Has God stopped speaking now that we have His written words? No. He has given us a framework in which to sort through the events of life, discerning what is from Him and what is "hebel".

Moses believed he would help his people enslaved in Egypt but he was forty years early in God's time table. One day he was pasturing the flock in the wilderness and saw the burning bush. ³ So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up" (Exo 3:3). God caught his attention. God intends dreams and other revelatory events to have this dimension as well. Is there something in a dream that causes you to take a further look? It catches your attention. You are invited to turn aside and see. It may turn out to be hebel but you start down the road of a "careful look".

During the wilderness wanderings, Moses' leadership was challenged by Aaron and Miriam. God addressed this challenge and in the process gave additional insight surrounding dreams. ⁶ He said, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, shall

make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. ⁷ "Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household; ⁸ With him I speak mouth to mouth, Even openly, and not in dark sayings, And he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses? (Num 12:6-8)".

Audible clear speech from God (Aaron and Miriam were listening) – providing it agrees with scripture, should always be given priority over dreams and visions unless the dream or vision itself has clear speech from God (Jer 31:26; Acts 9:10-11). Dark sayings or what the New Testament calls parables require interpretation and these will always lack some measure of clarity. As Paul notes, ⁹ "For we know in part and we prophesy in part" (1Co 13:9). We aren't given the full story and humility is wise (Dan 10:12-14). Keep investigating and asking clarifying questions.

Why would God speak "mouth to mouth" to Moses and not do this for everyone? Isn't clarity paramount to the Lord? God gives the clue. Moses is faithful and although it isn't mentioned directly, God is saying something about the faithfulness of Aaron and Miriam. They considered themselves to be faithful like Moses and worthy of more consideration. God's view differed (John 2:25).

Moses' assignment required this level and depth of communication and from God's perspective, Moses' heart was key. Joshua tidied up the scriptures that Moses' composed and provided this comment on Moses. ³ "Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth (Num 12:3)." Character and assignment matters in the quality and clarity of revelation. Assignments are sovereignly given. The heart is cultivated. Assignment and heart are tied together (1Sam 13:14). And in David's case the assignment and fulfilment of the revelation didn't happen on the same day. There was a significant delay. Dreams have this quality as well – parable or dark saying given, uncertainty, delay (test), followed sometime later with a measure of clarity. And if the heart grows dull (Heb 2:1) the presence and clarity of revelation goes down as well (Amos 8:11). To him who has, more will be given. To him who does not have, even what he has will be taken (Mark 4:25).

Moses received clear audible speech for his assignment. God's communication approach appears to be related to the given assignment. Agabus (Acts 11:28), for instance, had a word and it was taken as a church directive. Later Agabus, perhaps the same man, had a word for Paul (Acts 21:10) that didn't change Paul's course. There is no mention of how God communicated but the scope of the message and the application were tailored for that moment. Some dreams can direct. Some can inform. Beyond these two events, Agabus is otherwise unknown to us. He was a regular guy.

Does God still speak "face to face"? There is nothing in scripture to suggest that He doesn't and there is plenty of anecdotal evidence to suggest that He does. God is very relational and continues to communicate today. Assuming it is God speaking, He won't contradict Himself and He no longer creates scripture (Gal 1:7-8; Rev 22:18). There are many people that suggest He has given new revelation and whole religions have sadly been created as a result – Islam, Mormonism and Jehovah Witness to name a few. And new ones come along all the time. "Out with the old and in with the new the dreamer declares." Of course the new is sustained and controlled by the dreamer! This phenomenon will increase as the end of the age heats up.

If God so chooses, He can release an interpretation to a dream rather than speak "face to face" as He did to Moses. The king of Babylon received a dream and he wanted his diviners to not only interpret the dream but to tell him the dream. They could not. They told the king that his request was unreasonable. But the king perceived their duplicity and ordered their execution. The captain of the guard came to Daniel who was on his execution list. Daniel asked the king for time to hear from God. Daniel gathered his friends and prayed and God provided the actual dream as well as its interpretation. ²⁷ Daniel answered before the king and said, "As for the mystery about which the king has inquired, neither wise men, conjurers, magicians *nor* diviners are able to declare *it* to the king. ²⁸ "However, there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the latter days. This was your dream and the visions in your mind *while* on your bed. (Dan 2:27-28)."

All believers have spiritual inclinations but those that are truly significant are independently confirmed as was the case with Daniel. God certified the revelation and the

agent (Daniel) who brought the insight. This is rare but does occur when the revelation is significant. God provides “signs and wonders”. The opposite is true too. If an individual claims a profound revelation but there is no certification from heaven, the significance of the revelation is probably less than what is perceived.

Some dreams, as the word “hebel” suggest aren’t simply the cares of life or revelation from heaven. There can be a sinister component. Paul indicates that some content comes from the flesh. “Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, ³taking his stand on *visions* he has seen, inflated without cause by his **fleshly** mind (Col 2:18).” The term “visions” is supplied by the translator. He could just as easily have used the term “dream” (Gen 30:10). Seeing (horao) is the key term in the passage. The object of the seeing (visions or dream or other spiritual sight (Acts 8:23)) is implied. And not all seeing is good.

Zechariah describes diviners. “For the teraphim speak iniquity, And the diviners see **lying visions** And tell **false dreams**; They comfort in vain. Therefore *the people* wander like sheep, They are afflicted, because there is no shepherd (Zec 10:2).” Jeremiah has similar words for the prophets of his day. “²⁵ "I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy falsely in My name, saying, 'I had a dream, I had a dream!' ²⁶ "How long? Is there *anything* in the hearts of the prophets who **prophesy falsehood**, even *these* prophets of the deception of their own **heart**, ²⁷ who intend to make My people forget My name by their dreams which they relate to one another, just as their fathers forgot My name because of Baal? (Jer 23:25-27).

It is hard to determine if these religious figures were completely given over to the flesh (arrogantly believing they had the word of the Lord because of their role) actively deceitful (trying to pervert) or simply deceived in heart (demonic?) and so unknowingly presented a revelation which was indeed false. Perhaps this is only a subtle distinction. Jude describes some folks in church - “hidden reefs in your love feasts”. “⁸ Yet in the same way these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties (Jud 1:8).”

The flesh can somehow get into the dream content. Men living in the flesh are likely to have “fleshly” dreams or visions or other spiritual experiences. Creating false religions or

pseudo Christian movements as a result of “perceived heavenly revelation” seems like an obvious error. Yet all saints struggle with their flesh to some measure. So it would seem that the flesh may sneak in undetected to pervert a revelation. The character (fruit) of the one having the dream matters. Dreamers should be watching for the flesh. Are there other more sinister elements in dreaming? Yes.

Job, a blameless, God-fearing man (Job 1:8), desperately tries to understand what is happening to him. He does not know the story line until it is over and God reveals the players and Job writes his account. During his struggle, Job cries out, “¹⁴ Then You frighten me with dreams And terrify me by visions” (Job 7:14). He is in Satan’s hands at the time. Satan can’t destroy him but is relatively free to make his life miserable. God does not assist Satan. God’s protection or blessing is restrained for the season of the test. The terrifying dreams and vision come from **Satan**. We are not told how this grand “test” that Job goes through plays out over the rest of saintly history. In Job’s case, Satan was restrained but still able to inflict terror through dreams. Satan had access to dreaming in some measure (Matt 27:19?).

Apparently a dream is not only a “dark saying” requiring interpretation and understanding. It can be infiltrated by the flesh and devil and can defile with no one to correct (authority). Dreams appear to be risky indeed!

Apparently, God was not troubled in giving dreams or uttering “dark sayings”. He viewed the risks differently than we do. The downside of dreams or “dark sayings” didn’t seem to bother Jesus either. In the NT, Jesus spoke in parables (dark sayings) all the time. Sometimes He gave the interpretation and other times He did not. What did the apostles’ do on those “other times”? That question is not directly asked or answered! The heart turns out to be more significant than we think. Jesus gave parables because of the hardness of his listener’s hearts (Isa 6:10; Matt 13:10-15). The idea was to filter people based on heart. Those whose hearts were hard turned away and were given over to their inflated, fleshly visions. The longing and true heart humbly kept pursuing the Lord.

Peter, like Moses, had the right heart and was able to navigate the dark saying of Jesus. “⁵³ So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man

and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves...⁶¹ But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, "Does this cause you to stumble? ...⁶⁴ "But there are some of you who do not believe." ...⁶⁶ *As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.* ⁶⁷ So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life (Joh 6:53, 61-68)." Many of the "words of Jesus" were dark sayings or parables. Jesus wasn't fazed. He would use this filter to examine hearts – including the hearts of His apostles.

There is nothing in scripture to suggest that He has changed His approach. He would communicate to His friends (John 15:15) and draw them into conversation (Mark 8:29) but continue to use dreams and other "dark sayings" that troubled or puzzled His servants. Lack of clarity still offends today and Jesus will continue to use this to test the hearts of those who know Him (Jer 17:9-10). Having perfect clarity should equally concern us! It isn't the way of Jesus. Revelation normally lacks a measure of clarity and requires trust, faith and pursuit. Yet Jesus requires us to be alert and watch for Him regardless of the time of day or night (Luke 12:37). He was referring to His return but applying this principle to God's conversations seems appropriate. God wants to speak and He wants us to be watching for it regardless of convenience.

The nature of a watchman, one who takes notice i.e. is watching, is a great illustration for the dreamer or person with revelation. The watchman has two basic roles. God calls Ezekiel a watchman and gives him his marching orders. He must warn people when God tells him to (Eze 3:17). And it is the watchman in Isa 62:6-7 that reminds God "night and day" of His promise to make Jerusalem a praise in all the earth. In the first instance, the watchman is a prophet or one who reveals and in the second he is an intercessor. Two roles and one figure.

Dreaming is one of the mediums God uses to fuel up both roles of the watchman. He gives dreams that warn (correct Gen 20:3-8) and encourage (Gen 28:17). He gives dreams that inform and require prayer to avoid an outcome (Amos 7:2) or to bring an outcome (Gen 28:11). He communicates. The humble, longing heart will navigate and find its way to Jesus' heart in spite of the dark saying and gain understanding and have a hand in salvation history. When we

reach the eternal city and everything is revealed, we may well discover that God used dreams to reveal our hearts, to fuel up intercession and minister to others.

Interestingly, watching for revelation that can be shared and praying “through it” is how we operate with God’s written word. Paul writes the Corinthians, “¹⁴ But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised (1Co 2:14).” Anyone can read the bible but revelation is ultimately “spiritual”.

Mishandling the scriptures – God’s primary tool of communication, has always been a concern (John 5:39-40; 2Tim 2:15). Jesus would draw the faithful who diligently sought Him (Heb 11:6, Mark 4:11) and He would give them understanding (James 1:5). The Father had successfully navigated the age with dreams and visions and Jesus would continue to do so (Acts 16:9; Rev 1:12 *horao*). Dreams have a risk but also a benefit. The key to identifying “hebel” dreams or “hebel” revelation, interpretation or application turns out to be very similar to the time honored approach to understanding the scriptures. God highlights the scriptures for those who are watching (Dan 9:2).

The Psalmist asked, “⁹ How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping *it* according to Your word. ¹⁰ With all my heart I have sought You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments. ¹¹ Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You. ¹² Blessed are You, O LORD; Teach me Your statutes” (Psa 119:9-12). This heartfelt examination of God’s words continued into the New Testament.

Luke provided this commentary on the Berean seekers “¹¹ Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily *to see* whether these things were so (Act 17:11).” One can almost hear them ask the following questions concerning Paul’s revelation of Jesus.

Who was the audience? What are the objects or people in the story? What words and terms are used? (Remember, what we have today in the bible is a translation of the original languages used. The translation are normally clear enough, but a translation will never replace the original.) Is it narrative, poetry, story or some other construct? What about the grammar?

(Jesus is alive – present tense, continuing into the future.) What is the context of the story or passage? Is there cultural wrapping paper (normally yes)? What happened before and after the story - context? Is this story reminiscent of other bible stories or accounts? Is it repeated for emphasis? What would the intended audience understand? What was the central point(s) from the listener's perspective? Was it literal or spiritual or both? Can the content be brought forward into the current period? Can it be applied more broadly to other believers? Does it agree with what has already been written? What do the current religious leaders think – again from the Berean perspective? All these questions can be summarized down to three. What does the passage say – the words used (analysis)? What does the passage mean to the original listener (interpretation)? What does it mean to me when I bring it forward to the modern period (application)?

The process to understand God's words, particularly parables or dark sayings is largely the same process for understanding any dream! The audience today is the dreamer. The elements of the story are from the dreamer's perspective. There are symbols, events and people. Symbols generally represent themselves and contribute to the story. There is a life context. It may have stated biblical elements. It may be a dream for the dreamer or it may apply to others or both. There will be cultural wrapping paper. (There are many books on dreaming that catalog modern symbols and suggest meaning within a given cultural context.) It may be literal or figurative or both. It may be for now or later or both. But it can't negate what has been written in the scriptures. And it will take humility and heart to navigate. The humble heart won't quit. Wrestling with dreams is no different.

The fellowship of believers can help (1Cor 14:29) evaluate the method and results of dream interpretation and application. Because a dream isn't scripture it is neither inspired nor authoritative. But Jesus promised, "27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; (Joh 10:27)." This is preeminently so in the scriptures but true as well in the general discourse of life. Application or obedience requires wisdom and confirmation. The general rule of thumb on application should be as follows: the greater the risk for injury or loss, the greater the need for confirmation (Jdg 6:31-29).

If the dream grows out of the ordinary affairs of life it may help the dreamer to see what is on their mind or it may be “empty” of spiritual content and can be ignored. If it has “fleshly” elements, all or some of the offending piece can be filtered out. (The scriptures have a lot to say about the operation of the flesh. Repentance is an appropriate response to the “flesh”.)

If it is an attack of the enemy, either subtle or otherwise, it can be discarded. (The scriptures have a lot to say about Satan, his kingdom and methods. Resist him.) If it is a dark saying that appears to have spiritual content, write it down (Hab 2:2). It should be evaluated and can be passed to others for confirmation – especially if the risk associated with believing something or doing something is great. If the evaluation is unclear, leave the dream on the “shelf” for later reevaluation and consideration. The apostle John didn’t understand the full measure of revelation he received. He had to ask questions (Rev 7:14). He took notes (Rev 10:4). The book of Revelation comes to us as a finished product but John may have had to write and re-write under the Spirit’s direction before he was done.

Jesus is the one who draws us and He will take the lead in keeping the dream alive. The process for interpreting a dream will be the same for examining visions or any other internal spiritual conversation (our internal voice). If it is truly a spiritual dream or revelation, the work to gain understanding is worth it. And we should be watching for the master!

Creating a biblical approach to understanding dreams will have special significance at the end of the age. There are two great realities that believers need to consider. First, Peter cried out, “AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,’ God says, ‘THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS (Act 2:17).” Dreams and other supernatural events will be plentiful in the last days. God wants to use this medium. We should be ready.

Second, in Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians, he gives a last days warning. In one sense it has been the last days since the death of Christ but there is a “last” of the last days coming and it is to this that Paul refers (2 Thess 2:9-10). There will be great deception in the land and a love for the truth will be paramount in salvation. False signs and wonders will be

prevalent. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6) and the final authoritative revelation of Jesus is found in the Scriptures (Heb 1:1-4) and anything from God must stack up to what He has already written (2 Tim 3:16). The fellowship of those devoted to the apostle's teaching (Acts 2:42) will be critical in this hour. We should be ready.

God intends to make dreaming common even while deception will be rampant. For a dream to have value, dreamers will need to be grounded in the scriptures, of known character (longing heart), committed to truth as God sees it, skilled in bible study, humble and accountable (open to others) within a fellowship. This discipline will help the believer consume all revelation correctly – the scriptures, dreams, visions, prophetic and our “still small internal voice” while equally identifying and rejecting the flesh and deception that happen in all these areas.

If this is functioning, dreaming will be helpful. If it isn't, deception is likely to occur across all the media that God uses and God has given this warning. ¹¹ For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, ¹² in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness (2Th 2:11-12).”

Application

Wisdom – skill in living (application)

- Cultivate holiness (Lev 11:44); be humble (1Pet 5:6). Prepare to hear (John 10:27). Be alert.
- Know the scriptures; God uses this vocabulary in dreams and the scriptures are “the” plumb line for truth (1Tim 3:16)
 - If you hear the audible voice of God (from heaven (Matt 3:17); dream or vision) and it really is God, then “Thus says the Lord” is quite appropriate. But choose humility. With dark sayings or internal conversation, “I think the Lord may be saying ...” is better.
 - Beware of a closed system or heart. “The Lord told me.” No other input needed. Others can’t comment except to affirm. This is not wise.
- Dreams are the stuff of life
 - Not everything is a sign and wonder (Ecc 5:3)
 - Not everything is a conspiracy or potential attack (Isa 8:12)
 - Knowing the “cares” of life may be helpful or simply the “empty” that can be passed over.
- Be alert when God moves from the ordinary to the spiritual; be willing to turn aside and see the burning bush (Ex 3:2-3). Be inquisitive.
- He is a good communicator and will call again if you miss it (1Sam 3:4-9)
 - Repetitive dreams often indicate emphasis (Gen 41:32)
- Be willing to interact in prayer over what you see (Amos 7:8). God may be informing His watchman and waiting to hear intercession.
- The feelings of a dream may be as important as the content (Jer 31:26)
- Assume a dream tells a story. Be careful to avoid allegorizing a dream – where every symbol points to some other reality other than itself and has layers of hidden meaning. This can be an invitation to make a dream mean anything the dreamer wants. Look for a main point or perhaps a couple of sub points.
- Normally dreams are related to assignment or sphere of influence.

- Assess the risk of injury and seek confirmation based on the gravity of the dream before taking action. Heavenly, independent confirmation concerning grave actions, should be sought (Gideon, Judgs 6:17)
- God doesn't confirm everything with an independent heavenly sign and wonder. And the lack of heavenly confirmation can't be used as an excuse or cover for inaction (Ecc 5:1). If scripture affirms an action, then that is sufficient. No other revelation is required.

Research

Dream* search NASB (New American Standard Bible).

88 verses, 6 forms, 111 hits in the NASB. Eight NT verses.

<1797> ἐνυπνιάζομαι *enupniazomai*

Meaning: to dream

22 verses (two NT) and 20 OT (using the LXX); verb

[GING] ὄναρ

ὄναρ, τὸ (found only in nom. and acc. sing.) *dream* κατ' ὄναρ *in a dream* Mt 1:20; 2:12f, 19, 22; 27:19.*

[Cf. *oneiric.*] [pg 139]

6 verses NT

Hol2549 חֲלוֹם

חֲלוֹם: cs. = , sf. חֲלוֹמוֹ, חֲלוֹמוֹת; pl. חֲלוֹמוֹת, sf. חֲלוֹמוֹתָי: **dream**:

55 verses 65 hits (OT)

Hol2572 חָלַם

חָלַם: qal: pf חָלַם, חָלַמְתָּ, חָלַמְתָּי, חָלַמְתָּו, חָלַמְתָּוּ; impf. יִחְלֹם, יִחְלֹמוּ, יִחְלֹמוּן, יִחְלֹמוּן; pt. חָלַם(ו),

חָלַמְתָּ: — 1. **become powerful** (animals) Jb 39₄ †; — 2. **dream** (sexual, then general) a) Gn 28₁₂; cogn.

acc. ḥālam ḥ lôm «ḥ lôm; b) **dreamer** as a class (alongside nābî' &c.) Dt 13₂

26 verses 16 forms

[GING] ἐνύπνιον

ἐνύπνιον, ον, τὸ *a dream* Ac 2:17.* [pg 67]

90 verses, 9 forms, 108 hits; (OT LXX)