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GOD'S 7-FOLD PURPOSE FOR DREAMS AND VISIONS

Did you know that more than 30 percent of the Bible is compiled from dreams and visions? From Genesis to Revelation, God revealed His plans for His children through various dreams and visions. God still speaks to us today, if we but listen.

Genesis records God calling Joseph to ministry at age 17 through two back-to-back dreams (Gen. 37:4-9). God later used him to interpret Pharaoh's dreams of Egypt's coming famine (Gen. 41:1-36). Pharaoh then promoted Joseph from the prison house to the palace, and made him prime minister over all the land at age 30. God used Joseph to deliver an entire nation (plus his own family) from a seven-year famine through accurate acknowledgement, interpretation, and application of two dreams God gave to a heathen king! Does God still speak this way today? Let's look at the Scriptures and some contemporary examples.

"For I am the Lord, I change not" (Mal. 3:6, KJV). "What has been before will be again...there is nothing new under the sun" (Eccl. 1:9, NIV). "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb. 13:8, KJV). "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams." (Acts 2:17, NIV). The Bible clearly tells us that God speaks through the language of dreams and visions today. Scripture is full of examples. Church history records numerous examples. Many men and women of God altered history by obeying the dreams and visions He gave them. They include missionaries like Dr. Livingstone who carried the Gospel to an unevangelized land, Corrie Ten Boom who saved the lives of many Jews by hiding them in her home during the Holocaust, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who "had a dream" that changed a nation. If God still speaks in dreams and visions today, why are we not experiencing them? Scripture provides the answer. "Although God speaks again and again, no one pays attention to what he says. At night when people are asleep, God speaks in dreams and visions..." (Job 33:14-15 TEV). Another translation renders it this way, "For God does speak—now one way, now another—though man may not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men as they slumber in their beds...God does all these things to a man twice, even three times— to turn his soul from the pit, that the light of life may shine on him" (Job 33:14-15,29 NIV). The question then is not "if" God is speaking this way today, but "are we listening" when he does speak through the language of dreams and visions of the night. "...for not everyone has faith"

(2Th. 3:2, NIV). “You can never please God without faith, without depending on him. Anyone who wants to come to God must believe that there is a God and that he rewards those who sincerely look for him” (Heb. 11:6, LVB). “For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.” (Heb. 4:2, NKJV).

A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE

In 1820, God brought a child into the world who would later be known as “The Moses of her people.” Her name was Harriet Tubman, also known as “The Conductor of the Underground Railroad.” Harriet was born a slave on a Maryland plantation and later escaped to freedom on the Underground Railroad. God spoke to her in numerous dreams and visions, giving her specific instructions throughout her 92 years. He instructed her how to set other slaves free. God showed Harriet rivers, swamps, and passages through forests in advance. He also showed her how to lead slaves in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York safely to Canada during the pre-abolition days of slavery in the United States. Her life records numerous life-threatening trips that inspire faith. She led more than 300 black men, women, and children past the swamps, forests, rivers, and secret hiding places that marked the dangerous escape route to the North. Like Joseph in the Old Testament, who was used to help save his brothers and family, the Lord’s dreams guided Harriet Tubman to return to the Maryland plantation and deliver her three brothers from slavery. This dear servant of God could neither read nor write, yet she was never caught, and she never lost a single passenger as conductor of the railroad. Like Joseph and Mary obeying the dreams God gave them to protect the baby Jesus, Harriet’s life and ministry protecting and delivering others was also marked by God speaking, guiding, and directing her through dreams of the night. God shows no partiality (see Acts 10:34). He seeks a willing vessel with a fully committed heart through whom He can speak today (see 2Chr. 16:9).

WHY DOES GOD SPEAK THROUGH DREAMS AND VISIONS?

God’s purposes in speaking through the language of dreams and visions to mankind are numerous. Scripture records several; we will examine seven of them with Scriptural examples.

1). TO WARN US--God preserved the life of the baby Jesus by speaking to Joseph and Mary in a dream of the night. “And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way” (Mt. 2:12, KJV).

2). TO DIRECT US--God provided direction to Joseph and Mary through a second dream after they had obeyed the first. “And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him” (Mt. 2:13, KJV)

3). TO GIVE US CONFIRMATION/PEACE--God gave Joseph confirmation and peace to take Mary as his wife when he discovered she was pregnant. "His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins'" (Mt. 1:18-21, NIV).

4). TO CORRECT/REBUKE US--God corrected King Abimelech, rebuking him in a dream at night for taking Abraham's wife, Sarah, as one of his concubines. "But God came to Abimelech in a dream one night and said to him, 'You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman.' Now Abimelech had not gone near her, so he said, 'Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? Did he not say to me, "She is my sister," and didn't she also say, "He is my brother"? I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands.' Then God said to him in the dream, 'Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her. Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all yours will die'" (Gen. 20:3-7, NIV).

5). TO CALL US TO INTERCESSION--God used the Prophet Amos to intercede for the tribe of Jacob and His wrath against them diminished. This was accomplished in a series of three visions given to Amos. Twice God showed Amos what he was about to do against Jacob (Israel). Amos interceded, saying, "O Lord God, please forgive your people! Don't send them this plague! If you turn against Israel, what hope is there? For Israel is so small!" (Amos 7:2, 5, LVB). Both times God heard Amos' intercession in Israel's behalf. "So the Lord relented, and did not fulfill the vision. 'I won't do it'" (Amos 7:3, 6, LVB). "Do you think I like to see the wicked die? asks the Lord. Of course not! I only want him to turn from his wicked ways and live" (Eze. 18:23, LVB). Because God wants to save His people, He often reveals impending judgment through dreams and visions. Then we can intercede for others, diminishing or thwarting judgment for their sins. God also gives us advance warning of Satan's plans so we can counterattack through prayers of intercession, "...for we are not unaware of his schemes" (2Cor. 2:11, NIV).

6). TO PROPHECY TO OTHERS--God sometimes provides messages for others through the vehicle of dreams and visions. This, in its simplest terms, is the gift of prophecy. Prophecy is: "Hearing from God and speaking the message received to others." God said to the entire church congregation in the Book of Corinthians, "For you can all prophesy..." (1Cor. 14:31, NIV). The Book of Joel says, "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days" (Joel 2:28-29, NIV). All will receive it.

7). TO CALL US TO MINISTRY--God sometimes uses the vehicle of a dream or a vision to call an individual into the ministry. Joseph's experience followed this pattern (Gen. 37:5, 9). The Prophet Isaiah also experienced his calling by vision (Is. 6: 1-13). Saul of Tarsus met Jesus on the road to Damascus in an open vision, being "knocked to the ground and blinded for three days" (Acts 9:1-9). God then spoke to Ananias in a vision, confirming Saul's call to ministry, with directions to lay hands on Saul that he might be "healed and filled with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 9:9-19). Jesus called Nathanael to the ministry after having received a vision from the Father confirming the same (see Jn. 1:46-49). And Jesus himself experienced an open vision of the Holy Spirit. "And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him; and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased'" (Mt. 3:16-17, NRSV). In this manner, Jesus' call to ministry was confirmed before the people. God may call you, in a similar manner, today, in the 21st century. "For I am the Lord, I change not..." (Mal. 3:6, KJV)

DOES GOD SPEAK TO EVERYONE?

Does God speak to everyone in dreams and visions, or to just a select group? Scripture records God communicating through dreams and visions with many types of people; soldiers in the enemy army (Judg. 7:9-15), to the wife of a Governor (see Mt. 27:17-20), fruit pickers and herdsmen (see Amos 7:14-15), and heathen kings (see Dan. 4:4-5, 9-18) (Gen. 41:1-8). God's prophets in the Old Testament often received communications from God through this avenue (see Num. 12:6-8). In the New Testament, God promises to pour out His Spirit on "all flesh" in this manner (see Acts 2:17-18). In sum, the only thing that separates the person who is receiving and acting on revelation from Heaven in this manner is faith and obedience. "For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith" (Heb. 4:2, NIV).

ARE ALL DREAMS FROM GOD?

Scripture clearly establishes that God speaks to His children today through dreams and visions. But are all dreams and visions from God? Clearly not. Dreams and visions have three sources: God, Satan and our own fleshly desires. God commands us to "test the spirits" (1Jn. 4:1-6), "judge prophecies" (1Cor. 14:29-33) and distinguish "the precious from the vile" (Jer. 15:19). At the same time all of us are encouraged to prophesy (hear from God and communicate His messages to others) (1Cor. 14:1, 31), we are taught to become educated in God's spiritual gifts (1Cor. 12:1; 2Tim. 2:15), and to "earnestly desire the greater gifts" (1Cor. 12:31). We are commanded, "Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil" (1Th. 5:19-22, NIV). In other words, we are to spiritually eat the chicken and spit out the bones.

GROWING FROM FAITH TO FAITH

Often we grow from faith to faith, glory to glory, and grace to grace in our walk with God in Christ Jesus. Paul admonished us in the Book of Hebrews to grow from “drinking the milk of the Word to eating strong meat” (see Heb. 5:13-14, KJV). Another translation reads, “You are like babies who can drink only milk, not old enough for solid food. And when a person is still living on milk it shows he isn't very far along in the Christian life, and doesn't know much about the difference between right and wrong. He is still a baby-Christian! You will never be able to eat solid spiritual food and understand the deeper things of God's Word until you become better Christians and learn right from wrong by practicing doing right” (LVB). One of the fastest ways I've found to grow in the Lord is through intimate fellowship with Jesus in prayer and Bible study. This also includes learning to hear his voice (Jn. 10:27). One way God speaks to us is through dreams and visions (Acts 2:17). This enables us to effectively communicate God's word and His heart to others that they might be saved, healed, delivered, and built up in Christ.

GOD IS SPEAKING TO YOU

God is speaking to you! Have you been listening, or are you like those the Book of Job talks about? “Although God speaks again and again, no one pays attention to what he says. At night when people are asleep, God speaks in dreams and visions” (Job 33:14-15, TEV). This passage goes on to say, “God does all these things to a man—twice, even three times...” (vs. 29, NIV). God speaks to believers, young and old, and non-believers from all walks of life. For example, during the last decade, hundreds of Muslims have reported experiencing a dream of Jesus appearing to them in the middle of the night. With his arms outstretched and looking at them with indescribable love in his eyes, He says, “I am the way, the truth and the life, no man goes to the father except by me.” When they awake from the dream, they find their way to the missionary station and ask to gain understanding of the dream. Then, the missionary opens the Bible to John 14:6, where Jesus is recorded saying, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No man goes to the Father except by me.” The Gospel is then shared and the Muslim becomes a Christian, often returning to his home and leading his entire family to Christ (Acts 16:31). God is bringing the Gospel to the unsaved in dreams of the night, calling them to faith in Jesus Christ. God is pouring out of his Spirit through dreams and visions on all flesh: to believers for direction, correction, confirmation, peace, intercession, warning, prophesying to others and calls to ministry; to non-believers to draw them to salvation through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

WHAT TO DO WHEN GOD GIVES YOU A DREAM

First, we should earnestly expect God to speak to us in dreams and visions just as He promises (see Acts 2:17-18, Job 33:14-18, Joel 2:28-29, 1Cor. 14:31). If necessary, repent for discounting or speaking against the possibility of God communicating to others in this manner. Second, obey God's instruction to the prophet Habakkuk, to “write the vision down on paper” (see Hab. 2:2-3). I like to keep a pen and paper by my bed. Sometimes days go by and no dream or vision comes from the Lord. Then, when I least expect it, a vivid dream comes from the Holy

Spirit and wakes me from my sleep. It may include a warning, direction, correction or rebuke from God, calling me to straighten out my own life. On one occasion, I remember seeing myself in a dream, talking and acting foolishly. Waking from the dream I immediately rebuked the devil, and quoted the verse that refers to Satan as the accuser of the Brethren (Rev. 12:11), casting him down. As it turned out, it wasn't the devil who gave me the dream, but the Lord. God, in his infinite mercy, showed me a film clip of how I'd been acting. Everyone was aware of my conduct but me! (I later learned this after talking to a friend and sharing my dream. He was willing to tell me the truth). I repented and God changed me. Dreams of correction are wonderful, and can often accomplish more in us with a scene or two from Heaven's perspective than a hundred sermons from God's ministers.

God will also speak this way, calling us to intercession, to diminish or thwart judgment or Satan's plans for us or one of our loved ones. God may also speak a word of warning for others in our dreams at night. On several occasions before I was arrested, my mother called me after experiencing a dream or vision. She was a Christian and I was not. God spoke words of warning to me through her. These warnings, concerning things my Mother knew nothing about, proved accurate. They were confirmed in detail, describing a person physically, the automobile they drove, or the unique jewelry they wore. I avoided these people, who were arrested (and they got others arrested); some even died! Finally, God graced me with a dream of my own, while I was still deep in sin. It was a dream of my own arrest along with three other people at an airfield in West Palm Beach, Florida. We were caught stealing a jet! He showed me the color and model of the jet, the tarmac, the people involved, the face of the lead agent, the courtroom, the magistrate judge (down to the style of watch she was wearing), and the charges against me. I woke up with a start! I shared the dream with my best friend (and soon-to-be co-defendant). He pondered the dream and then said "AAAH, what's in a dream?" We laughed together and put it out of our minds. Twenty-four hours later, we were arrested, and everything came to pass down to the tiniest detail as shown in the dream. Judgment had come, but not without a warning from Heaven. I ignored the warning. I didn't listen to God's voice speaking to me personally through a dream in the night. "Come here and listen to me! I'll pour out the spirit of wisdom upon you, and make you wise. I have called you so often but still you won't come. I have pleaded, but all in vain. For you have spurned my counsel and reproof. Some day you'll be in trouble, and I'll laugh! Mock me, will you?--I'll mock you! When a storm of terror surrounds you, and when you are engulfed by anguish and distress, then I will not answer your cry for help. It will be too late though you search for me ever so anxiously" (Prov. 1:23-27, LVB). A twenty-two year, non-paroleable sentence was the consequence for my ongoing refusal to repent and turn back to God. I never heeded the numerous warnings that God's servants received through dreams and visions. God finally did bring me to Salvation through prisoners sharing the Good News of Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross for my sins. Since that wonderful day in a Leavenworth Penitentiary cell, God has graced me with a number of dreams and visions. Some were for my own correction and growth and some were warnings to others who were headed down the wrong path. Sometimes these warnings are heeded; God draws sinners to repentance, and thwarts the evil Satan had planned for them. At other times, the warnings are rejected, resulting in horrible circumstances that

could have been easily avoided. Eventually, these unheeded warnings work together for good as the individual, like me, comes to Christ and God begins to restore them in every area of their lives. Do you desire to receive direction from the Holy Spirit through dreams and visions? If so, let's pray together now.

PRAYER

Father, I see in Your Word that You have always communicated with Your children through dreams and visions. Teach me, I pray, to hear Your voice through this language of the night that is recorded throughout the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Grant me an obedient spirit to write down what You speak in the night and to seek You for interpretation by the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures. Make me like others throughout history who have heard and obeyed Your voice and were mightily used of You to experience liberty and growth in Jesus Christ. Tonight, by faith, I place a pen and paper by my bed. I look forward to hearing You speak in the middle of the night so I can write down what You may choose to reveal to enable me to have a better walk with my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.