

## International Conversation Café

Bible Topic: Dreams and Visions

There are several instances of people in the Bible having dreams. Sometimes they were mysterious, with only certain individuals having the ability to interpret them. Sometimes dreams were very clear, either as a warning or instruction.

Here are three examples of people that received a message from God through a dream. Joseph, B.C. 1915-1805, was one of Jacob's twelve sons who was given the ability to interpret dreams. By interpreting a dream that the king of Egypt had, Joseph was able to prevent people from starving to death during a famine. Daniel, who lived much later, interpreted the dreams and signs that God gave to several kings who ruled over Babylon during Israel's exile there. He also had his own dreams that indicated what future nations would rule over the area. His dreams were full of imagery that make it difficult for the modern reader to understand. In a much earlier era, another man, Elihu, explained to Job that God uses dreams to warn those who are doing sins to turn away from evildoing, Job 33:15

*Do you think that God still uses dreams to communicate with people today?*

*Do you think that all dreams are from God?*

*Have you ever had a time where you thought perhaps God was trying to tell you something through a dream?*

In the first book of the Old Testament, Genesis, we read about Joseph. Joseph was one of two sons that Jacob had through his 'favorite' wife, so even though he was one of the youngest, he was favored by his father. He had dreams of his brothers bowing down to him, which when he told his brothers, they became angry. Eventually, his dream came true in a very unexpected way.

Because Joseph's brothers were jealous and angry, they threatened to kill him, but instead sold him into slavery to a caravan headed to Egypt. There, he served as an officer of the king, and God gave him success. When the officer's wife tried to seduce him, and he refused she accused him of forcing himself on her. Joseph was thrown in prison for a crime he didn't commit, but he didn't lose hope or become bitter. God helped him to serve the captain of the prison guard so capably that everything in the prison was put in Joseph's care.

While Joseph was in prison, Pharaoh became angry at two of his officers, the chief baker, and the chief cupbearer and threw them in prison. While in prison each man had dreams. Joseph interpreted the dreams correctly, saying that the baker would be executed, and the cupbearer would be given his job back which is exactly what happened. Later when Pharaoh had two nightmares that concerned him the cupbearer remembered that Joseph had interpreted his dream and recommended Joseph to Pharaoh. Pharaoh summoned Joseph for help. Joseph correctly interpreted Pharaoh's dreams which predicted a bountiful harvest for seven years, followed by a terrible famine for seven years. Pharaoh recognized Joseph's wisdom and made Joseph his second-in-command over Egypt. Joseph planned ahead and stored grain for the famine. He ended up saving thousands, maybe even millions of lives. Joseph's family came to buy grain during the famine, and although they didn't recognize him at first, they eventually were reunited. At this time, Joseph's dream came true and his brothers bowed down to him.

*Retell the story in your own words.  
Does anything surprise you about this story?*

Visions are different from dreams in that they tend to happen when someone is awake. There are also many times in the Bible where someone reports having a vision. One famous vision is when the prophet Isaiah sees God sitting on His throne in heaven.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above Him were seraphim (angels), each with six wings: with two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory." At the sound of their voices, the doorposts and thresholds shook, and the temple was filled with smoke. ~Isaiah 6:1-4

*How would you respond if you saw God in a vision?  
Are there any stories of visions that you are familiar with?*

Maybe one of the most famous visions in the Bible is the book of Revelation. The entire letter that John wrote in around 95 A.D. is a series of visions that are about a future and end time where God will judge the world and establish justice. John gives a very descriptive account of what a new earth will be like.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. ~Revelation 21:3-4

*Restate this verse in your own words.  
When you think about heaven, what would be an important part of it?  
In the illuminated manuscript on the right, the Bible illustrators drew how they imagined John's vision. How would you illustrate it?*

Though sometimes God spoke and speaks to people in dreams or visions more often he speaks to people through his words, such as in the Bible.

*Would you like to have a dream or vision?  
How do you feel about reading or understanding God's words to you through the Bible?*



Cloisters Apocalypse MS 68.174 John Led to the New Jerusalem. 1330, Normandy, France

