

VISIONS AND DREAMS

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In Numbers 12:6, the Lord said, “*Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.*” Prophetic visions and dreams were one of the major ways that God revealed His word to the prophets, and were hence a great blessing. Proverbs 29:18 says, “*Where there is no vision, the people perish.*” When God finally gave up on wicked individuals like king Saul (1 Sam 28:6,15), or the nation of Israel as a whole (Isa 29:10; Lam 2:9; Ezek 7:26; Mic 3:6), He would withhold prophetic visions and dreams. During such times, false prophets would falsely *claim* revelation through visions and dreams (Deut 13:1-5; Isa 28:7; Jer 14:14; 23:14-32; 27:9; 29:8; Ezek 13:7,16; Zech 10:2; 13:4). Some men today continue to follow in the steps of these liars by falsely claiming to receive visions and dreams from God. The primary way that we know that all of these present-day claims are false is the fact that God’s word has already been completely revealed and there is no more divine revelation today (John 16:12-13; Acts 20:27; 1 Cor 13:8-10; Gal 1:6-9; 2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:3; Jude 3; Rev 22:18-19; Deut 4:2; Prov 30:6). But another major way that we know all present-day claims of divine revelation through visions and dreams are false is by the fact that the characteristics of these false visions and dreams are completely out of harmony with what happened in the Bible in true prophetic visions and dreams. As always, the knowledge of God’s word will protect us from error (Eph 4:14-18; 6:16).

God’s spoken word

Prophetic visions and dreams had very distinct characteristics. The most consistent and important characteristic of prophetic visions and dreams was that God *spoke* to the prophet in them. For example, the first recorded prophetic vision was seen by Abram, and in that vision God *spoke* to Abram (Gen 15). “The *word* of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, *saying*” (Gen 15:1). Next, God “*spoke* unto Israel in the visions of the night, and *said*, Jacob, Jacob” (Gen 46:2-4). God *spoke* to Samuel in a vision (1 Sam 3:1-18). God *spoke* to Nathan in a vision (2 Sam 7:4-17; 1 Chr 17:3-15; Psa 89:19-37). God *declared* His word to Isaiah in a vision (Isa 21:2; see also 2 Chr 32:32; Isa 1:1). God spoke His word in visions to many other prophets in the Old Testament, such as Iddo (2 Chr 9:29), Ezekiel (Ezek 1:1; 3:22-27; 7:13; 8:1-11:25; 40:1-48:35), Daniel (Dan 1:17; 7-10), and many others. In the New Testament, God *spoke* to Zechariah (Luke 1:11-22), Ananias (Acts 9:10-16), Cornelius (Acts 10:3-7,22; 11:13-14), Peter (Acts 10:9-20; 11:5-10), Paul (Acts 9:12; 16:9-10; 18:9-10; 22:17-21; 2 Cor 12:1,7; Gal 1:11-12), and John (Rev 9:17). Prophetic visions were always associated with the spoken word of God (Num 12:5-8; Jer 23:16; Ezek 12:22-28; 13:7; Hos 12:9-10; Hab 2:2-3). Though prophetic *dreams* often included something *shown* to the recipient (see below), God’s word was still either spoken in the dream itself (Gen 20:3-7; 28:12-15; 31:10-13,24; 1 Kgs 3:5-15; Matt 1:20-21; 2:12,13,19-20,22), or to a prophet afterwards (Gen 37:9; 40:5-22; 41:1-32; Judg 7:12-15; Dan 2:1-45;

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4:4-28). As with visions, prophetic dreams were always associated with the spoken word of God (Num 12:6; 1 Sam 28:6,15; Job 33:14-17; Jer 23:28,32). Those who falsely claim to receive prophetic visions and dreams today practically *never* claim to have heard God speak to them in the vision or dream, and any such claim would be false anyhow.

Things the prophets saw and did

At least some of the time, if not always, prophets who received visions from God fell into a trance (Acts 10:9-20; 11:5-10; 22:17-21). At least in the case of Balaam, the trance was with open eyes (Num 24:2-4,15-16). In prophetic visions and dreams, the recipient often was *shown* something. For example, God says that Isaiah (Isa 1:1), Ezekiel (Ezek 1:1-3:15/43:3; 3:22-27/8:4; 8:2-11:25; 40:1-48:35), and Daniel (Dan 7-10) *saw* visions, as the word “vision” would suggest. In visions, what they saw was often something literal in appearance and meaning (e.g. Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1-3; 8-11; 40-48), with the prophet Daniel being a notable exception (Dan 7-10). In Ezekiel chapter 8, Ezekiel “beheld” a being that looked like fire and bright amber, and then he “saw” Jerusalem and the abominations that the Israelites were committing there. The recipients of prophetic dreams also frequently saw something, but it was usually something figurative (Gen 28:12; 31:10; 37:5-7,9; 40:5-22; 41:1-7; Judg 7:12-15; Dan 2,4). Also, in prophetic visions, the recipient was sometimes transported to some other location, or even *felt* something or sometimes engaged in some kind of physical activity. For example, Ezekiel felt a hand take him by the hair of his head and lift him up between the earth and sky and then take him “in the visions of God” to Jerusalem (Ezek 8:3). In Jerusalem, Ezekiel dug in the wall of the temple to be able to see the idolatry committed within (Ezek 8:7-10). This was all done in a vision, while Ezekiel was literally and physically in Babylon (Ezek 11:24). But what the prophets experienced in their visions was entirely real to them. In fact, while it was taking place, it was completely indistinguishable from reality. Acts 12:3-11 shows this to be true. Peter had previously experienced at least one prophetic vision (Acts 10:9-20; 11:5-10), and probably several. In Acts 12:3-6, Peter was imprisoned by Herod and bound with two chains between a pair of soldiers. One night, an angel came and hit Peter on the side, lifted him up (as his chains fell off his hands) and told him to get up quickly and put his shoes and clothes on and follow him out of the prison (Acts 12:7-8). “And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision” (Acts 12:9). This was a *real* experience (Acts 12:10-11), yet at first Peter *thought* it was a prophetic *vision*. This shows how real the experiences in visions were to the prophets. Clearly, prophetic visions were unlike any kind of “daydream” or night dream that we have. They were also totally unlike anything that happens to the fakes and charlatans who claim to have prophetic visions today.