

What Does The Bible Say About Dreams And Visions?

Should any importance be attached to dreams? What do we make of the claims of visionaries that abound in the world today? How can one tell a true vision from a false one? These questions are crucial in view of the fact that many people who claim to see visions and dream dreams today are merely exploiting the ignorance and fears of the people for their own selfish gain.

Recently, Nigeria's President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo openly indicted the Primate of Evangelical Church of Yahweh, Theophilus Olabayo, who said he foresaw doom for the country should the president seek re-election in 2003. The president warned Nigerians to beware of false prophets and spiritualists whom he said "played on people's intelligence with their visions." (*The Comet* July 17, 2001) The outburst of the president is no doubt a reflection of a growing frustration among many with the antics of prophets and seers that infest the world today.

Subject of Curiosity

According to scholars, dreams have been the subject of much curious speculation in all ages. Many cultures were preoccupied with dreams, viewing them as supernatural messages. The Egyptians and Mesopotamians had books detailing interpretations of various dreams. Royal advisers were expected to interpret the dreams of rulers. (Daniel 2; Genesis 41: 8) The Greek philosopher, Aristotle, taught that dreams were a replay (during sleep) of impressions made on the senses during waking hours, a view which the *Cyclopaedia Of Biblical Theology And Ecclesiastical Literature* says "nearly approaches that of modern mental science, which teaches that dreams are ordinarily the re-embodiment of thoughts which have before, in some shape or other occupied our minds."- Pages 885-886.

Dreams are a series of thoughts, images and sensations passing through one's mind when asleep. There are several accounts of dreams (from God) in the Holy Bible. (Genesis 37: 6-36; Daniel 2: 1-43; Matthew 1:20; 2:12,13,19) Dreams are sometimes referred to in the Holy Bible as visions of the night. (See Job 20:8; 4:13; 33:15; Daniel 7:13) The word *vision* is used (more) for messages received while awake. While staying among the captives by the river Chebar the Prophet Ezekiel wrote that "the heavens were opened", and he saw visions of God. (Ezekiel 1:1) St. Peter saw a vision while praying and St Paul's vision on the road to Damascus is common knowledge. – Acts 10:9-17; 11:5; 9:1-8; Acts 26:12-19.

One of the visions that made the greatest impression on St. Peter was that of the transfiguration in which along with James and John, St Peter saw a vision of Jesus Christ glorified with Moses and Elijah standing by him. – Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-13; 2 Peter 1:16-18

There is no doubt therefore that dreams and visions were media through which God spoke to His people. When Aaron and Miriam challenged the leadership of Moses God declared: "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." – Numbers 12:6

However, the Holy Bible record counsels that dreams should be viewed with great caution, and in many cases, not be taken seriously as they are most of the time not from God as they are largely

reflections of the thoughts that occupied the person's mind while awake. Hence the declaration by the prophet Solomon: "For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words." He further states: "For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God. (Ecclesiastes 5: 3,7) The point being made is that worshippers of God should always do the will of God and entrust things to Him and not rely on dreams which are full of "divers vanities" Scripture says: "Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and He shall sustain thee: He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved" (Psalm 55:22). What is more St. Paul exhorted: "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." – Philippians 4:6-7; See also 1 Peter 5:6,7.

The devil also makes people to dream or to have what are called nightmares. Such people see frightening sights, which make them to scream. They may feel themselves being beaten in the dream even as invisible forces are beating the person in real life. Some men or women are sexually assaulted in this way through dreams. Some dreams are in fact hallucinations induced by mild psychiatric disorders and other illnesses such as malaria fever. People in such a state should exercise strong faith in God, pray fervently to God for deliverance while seeking medical attention. See Matthew 17:14-21; James 5:13-15.

False Prophets

Satan and his demons also appear to so-called prophets and seers today in dreams. (2 Corinthians 11:13-15) Such people make a lot of noise about dreams and visions whereas they are bereft of the truth, not being inspired by God. However, some of those who claim to have dreamed had in fact seen nothing. They only make false claims to deceive people. God used the prophet Ezekiel to declare: "Thus saith the Lord GOD; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! They have seen vanity and lying divination, saying, The LORD saith: and the LORD hath not sent them: and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word. Have ye not seen a vain vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination whereas ye say, The LORD saith it; albeit I have not spoken? Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because ye have spoken vanity, and seen lies, therefore, behold, I am against you, saith the Lord GOD. And mine hand shall be upon the prophets that see vanity, and that divine lies: they shall not be in the assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel; and ye shall know that I am the Lord GOD." – Ezekiel 13: 3,6-9. See also Jeremiah 23: 25-27,32; Jeremiah 14: 13-14.

The fact that one claims to have dreamt or seen visions of God does not make such a one a messenger of God. The mark of the true servant of God is the truth, which he preaches, and not claims of dreams and visions, which are the stock-in-trade of devil's agents in these last days. (John 8:31,32,36; Psalm 145:18; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15) It was for this reason God Almighty imposed the death penalty on anyone who claimed to have had prophetic dreams which importended to turn the people from true worship, even if such prophecies came to pass. – Deuteronomy 13:1,2,5.

In several cases the dreams these false prophets claim to have seen do not go beyond who one should marry and warnings about accidents or evils that purportedly lie ahead or promises of quick riches for which they ask their victims to buy candles, each stick costing large amounts of money. These so-called prophets are known to consult the dictionary of dreams, as well as magical books. They tell people frightening tales that will induce them to part with their money. Some do mere guesswork. Many who had been deceived by these "prophets" have been known

to enter into debts as they tell people that they were borrowing the money for business whereas the reverse is the case. And when the expected wealth fails to materialize, such people find themselves in deep financial crisis. People of God must avoid these so-called prophets and seers who are practising sheer sorcery or divination which are of the devil. -Deuteronomy 18:10-12; Jeremiah 14:14; 23:16,17; Acts 13: 6-13

God Almighty warned prophets and diviners who claim that "God had said" whereas they had seen nothing in these words: "For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Let not your prophets and your diviners, that be in the midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed. For they prophesy falsely unto you in my name: I have not sent them, saith the Lord." Jeremiah 29: 8 See also 2 Corinthians 11:13-15

The Bible shows that these seers and false prophets will in course of time be exposed by God. Their lies will be made manifest to all men of goodwill such that they will be ashamed to even reveal their identity as it is written: "And it shall come to pass, that when any shall yet prophesy, then his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, Thou shalt not live; for thou speakest lies in the name of the LORD: and his father and his mother that begat him shall thrust him through when he prophesieth. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the prophets shall be ashamed every one of his vision, when he hath prophesied; neither shall they wear a rough garment to deceive: But he shall say, I am no prophet, I am an husbandman; for man taught me to keep cattle from my youth." – Zechariah 13:3-6

Visions of God

Today, cases of dreams and visions from God are few and far between. Those who dream and who see visions of God in these last days are limited particularly to the remnant of the saints who the prophecy of Joel describes as "young men and old men", meaning those who are strong in the Lord, regardless of age. (Joel 2: 28,29) Such ones are taught by God in spirit to understand His mysteries or secrets and to preach it to the world for the salvation of all people of goodwill. (1 John 2:27) God declared through the prophet Amos: "SURELY THE LORD GOD WILL DO NOTHING, BUT HE REVEALETH HIS SECRET UNTO HIS SERVANTS THE PROPHETS." (Amos 3:7) Any one who is not anointed, that is, called and commissioned by God to see and understand spiritual things, can never interpret correctly the Holy Scriptures. To this end the Prophet Isaiah wrote: "And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed: And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned." (Isaiah 29: 11,12) It is a great privilege for any people to have a true servant of God to show them the way of salvation. Solomon the prophet declared: "Where there is no vision, the people perish..." -Proverbs 29:18. Please see also Job 33: 23-26 It is significant to note that the New Testament does not give dreams as much salience as the Old. According to the *Cyclopaedia of Biblical Theology* "... where dreams are recorded as means of God's revelation to his chosen servants, they are almost always referred to the periods of their earliest and most imperfect knowledge of him." We cannot agree more. Christians "walk by faith and not by sight" – 2 Corinthians 5:7

Generally when one pays much attention to dreams, the devil takes advantage of him so that his brain becomes a hatchery or mint for many dubious and frightening dreams thereby putting such one into unnecessary stress. The truth, which the Holy Bible reveals, is that a majority of dreams are mere creations of the mind or of the devil and are of no value whatsoever. It is therefore unprofitable, even dangerous to trust in dreams. Christians should rise above being

enslaved to dreams, which engender fears and worries contrary to the Christian character.
-Galatians 5:22,23; Matthew 6:29-31; Galatians 4:9-10; 2 Timothy 1:7