

How God Speaks While You Sleep

During times of discouragement, if answers to prayer are long in coming or not what we had expected, we can begin to lose hope and even doubt that God will answer our prayers. To help us through, God sometimes encourages us by dreams or visions.

He did this for me and my husband shortly after I gave birth to a son with a facial birth defect. A woman who lived 45 miles from our home had a vision of a baby with socks on his hands and feet. She began to pray for the baby even though she did not understand the vision.

Later that week we were dedicating our son to the Lord during a Friday night service. Our son's birth defect was so sensitive that we had to keep socks on his hands to keep him from harming himself. When our son was held up during the dedication, the woman, who was visiting that night, recognized that he was the baby in her vision.

God used the vision to inspire this woman to organize prayer for my son during his early days of infancy and corrective surgery. The vision and prayers blessed us with fresh encouragement and hope during a very traumatic season in our lives.

However, our experience was not an unusual one. There are many examples in the Scriptures of God's bringing comfort and hope through visions and dreams.

Prophetic Promises

Abraham was a wealthy man to whom God gave great promises. He owned cattle, silver and gold, but he had no son to inherit his wealth, for his wife was barren. The Lord appeared to Abraham in a vision and promised him an heir (Gen. 15:4).

God also said that his descendants would be as many as the stars in the sky. Abraham believed God, and the Lord credited it to him as righteousness (vv. 5-6).

After God spoke to him, Abraham fell into a deep sleep, and God gave him a prophetic promise through a dream. The Lord showed him his descendants would be enslaved in cruel bondage in Egypt for 400 years. Then the Lord would deliver them, and they would come out of Egypt with great possessions and return to the land He had promised to Abraham (vv. 12-16).

The birth and destiny of an entire nation was revealed in this dream. Abraham had longed for an heir, and God gave him a promise far beyond his expectations.

Jacob, Abraham's grandson, received great promises from God, also, not only for himself but also for his descendants. When he was a young man, Jacob had stolen his elder brother Esau's birthright and obtained the blessings normally given to the firstborn. Esau sought to kill Jacob for his deceit, so Jacob's mother, Rebekah, sent him away to seek a wife in the land of her brother Laban (Gen. 28).

On the way, Jacob stopped for the night, and as he slept, he dreamed: "And behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

"And behold, the Lord stood above it and said: 'I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants'" (vv. 12-13).

The Lord assured Jacob that He would be with him wherever he went and that He would bring Jacob back to the land He had promised to him (v. 15).

Two wives and 11 sons later, God spoke to Jacob again in a dream (Gen.

31:10-13). Jacob had been working for his father-in-law, Laban, who continually cheated him. In the dream, God revealed a plan for dividing the cattle of Laban's flocks fairly and giving Jacob his rightful portion.

This is the first recorded instance of God's imparting sound business strategy through a dream. God also used this dream to tell Jacob to take his wives, his children and his flocks and return to the land of his father.

The Lord let Laban deal deceitfully with Jacob. God was purging Jacob. It was a long, arduous process, but through this process the promise was fulfilled and Jacob became Israel, meaning "prince with God" (Gen. 32:28).

Dreams often challenge us to change just as Jacob was challenged to change. God had not addressed Jacob's character flaws in his dreams, but that did not mean that God approved of all that happened in Jacob's life.

Similarly, when we receive a word from the Lord, whether through a prophecy, a dream or a vision, we must know that the outcome will depend on our obedient cooperation with God's maturing and purging work in our lives.

Joseph was a young man of 17 when he had two dreams that seemed to bring him nothing but trouble. He was Jacob's favorite son, which made his 10 older brothers intensely jealous.

The strife in Jacob's household was exacerbated when young Joseph had two dreams—one in which his brother's sheaves bowed down to his sheaf, and the other in which the sun, the moon and 11 stars bowed down to him. Joseph shared these dreams with his brothers and, perhaps understandably, his brothers hated him all the more. Even his father rebuked him, although he also kept in mind what Joseph had said (Gen. 37:5-11).

Perhaps Joseph was unwise to share these dreams with his jealous siblings. I believe he shared them not because he was prideful but because he had more zeal than wisdom. Whatever the reason, the outcome was that his outraged brothers sold him into slavery.

Joseph's story shows us the importance of praying carefully before we share our dreams. Much unnecessary turmoil can be avoided if we act wisely. Paul prayed that God would give the Christians at Ephesus wisdom in addition to revelation (Eph. 1:17). Revelation without wisdom can cause great heartache and pain; both must be utilized in proper balance to accomplish God's ultimate purposes.

After many years in slavery and prison, Joseph became prime minister of Egypt and helped the country survive seven years of famine. When his brothers came to Egypt for provisions, they bowed before him just as the dreams had foretold.

The dreams gave Joseph hope, guidance and encouragement during difficult times and kept him from forsaking the God of his fathers. God had a destiny for Joseph that would be fulfilled only after many years of holding fast to Him in a strange land and under trying circumstances.

Joseph's faithfulness to God was the key to his success. God in turn remained faithful to Joseph and, in His time, fulfilled His word and brought these dreams to pass, saving not only Joseph and his family but the future nation of Israel as well.

Dreams and visions may reveal your future ministry and destiny, but they rarely reveal the process God will use to bring about their fulfillment.

Assurance and Healing

We were building a new home, and anxiety about the cost of the tile roof was stretching my faith. Then one night I dreamed

that we were putting a very strange roof on our house—a roof made from dried, preserved tarantula spiders!

In my dream, everyone was excited about our new roof, but I couldn't see what was so exciting about these strange tiles. Then I visited the homes of people I knew and found them raising baby tarantulas with great joy and excitement.

I awoke perplexed. I looked up *tarantula* in the encyclopedia. It said that in the Middle Ages people believed that anyone bitten by the tarantula spider became ill with tarantism—an imaginary disease that gave the victim a strong desire to dance! In reality, the bite of a tarantula is not harmful to humans.

The dance, the disease and the spider were named after a town in Italy called Taranto—which called to mind the Canadian city of Toronto, where there had been highly publicized outpourings of joy among God's people.

The Lord used my dream to tell me that He was going to cover our home with rejoicing—symbolized, strangely enough, by a tarantula. In the Middle Ages, people feared the spider's bite without cause in the same way I had feared not having the provision for the roof. God was assuring me that my worries were unfounded because He would provide joy and abundance.

The dream showed me that His joy would be poured out in every home in our congregation, producing a boldness to go forth in His name and destroy the strongholds of the enemy. I was overcome with joy and laughter and filled with faith. Who would guess that a tarantula could cause rejoicing?

Just as dreams can bring assurance, they can reveal unresolved matters in our hearts. When we dream about suppressed issues, we become aware of them so we can deal with them and be made whole. Often when we have built walls around areas of emotional pain to shield us from the hurt, God uses dreams to bypass those walls and go directly to the source of the pain.

On a conscious level, we may feel that we have dealt with those past wounds, but our subconscious minds recognize areas that still need healing. By bringing such matters to mind, God makes us aware and begins the healing process.

A man who had lost several family members in a short period of time came to me because he was troubled by dreams of his loved ones. Consciously, he felt that he had accepted their deaths, but still he dreamed about them.

I asked if he had grieved over his losses or if he felt that he had to be strong for others who were grieving. He replied that he had never let himself grieve. I prayed with him, asking the Lord to help him process his grief. From that night forward the dreams ceased.

This man's conscious mind had not let him feel his grief, but his subconscious mind would not let him forget it. God spoke to his need through his dreams and prompted him to seek the Lord for emotional healing.

From these examples we see that God often identifies a need in our lives, then gives us a message related to that need. The need may not be met immediately; however, promises revealed in dreams and visions give us the determination we need to press through difficult circumstances until promises are fulfilled.

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