

## Dreams and Visions in Scripture

### *God's Communication and the Call to Discernment*

#### A Bible-Centric Study

#### Introduction

God has sovereignly used dreams and visions throughout redemptive history as one way of communicating with His people. While they are not the primary means of revelation today, they have served specific purposes in guidance, warning, encouragement, and revealing God's plans.

*“And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.”* — Acts 2:17 (ESV)

Biblical Language: Dreams, Visions, and “Visions of the Night”

Scripture uses several related but distinct terms:

#### **Dream**

Hebrew: חָלוֹם (chalom) — experiences during sleep.

Greek: ὄναρ (onar).

#### **Vision**

Hebrew: חֲזוֹן (chazon), מַרְאֵה (mar'ah), or חִזְיוֹן (chizzayon).

Greek: ὄραμα (horama) and ὄπτασία (optasia).

**“Visions of the night”** — Revelatory experiences during nighttime hours (Job 33:15; Genesis 46:2; Daniel 2:19; 7:1).

#### **“Seeing God at night” and divine visitation during sleep**

When Scripture describes God visiting or communicating at night, it points to limited but real divine encounters — often through dreams or night visions.

#### **Psalm 17:3 (ESV)**

*“You have tried my heart, you have visited me by night, you have tested me, and you will find nothing...”*

Hebrew: חָקַדְתָּ לַיְלָה פִּקְדוֹתַי (paqadta laylah). God actively examined or visited David during the night — consistent with dreams and visions of the night. As a prophet (Acts 2:30), this reflects intimate divine revelation while he slept.

#### **Psalm 17:15 (ESV)**

*“As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness.”*

Hebrew: פָּנִים (panim) and תְּמוּנָה (temunah). David expresses hope of seeing God's face upon waking — pointing to the ultimate vision of God.

#### The Biblical Distinction in Revelation

#### **Numbers 12:6-8 (ESV)**

*“If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses... With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles...”*

Most revelation came through חֲזוֹן (chazon) or חָלוֹם (chalom). Moses had uniquely direct communication (פֶּה אֶל פֶּה) — peh el peh).

#### Examples of Dreams and Visions (Including Night Visions)

#### **Old Testament**

- Jacob's ladder and night encounters (Genesis 28:12; 46:2)

- Joseph the patriarch’s symbolic chalom dreams
- Daniel’s dreams and night visions
- David’s night visitation and hope of seeing God’s face (Psalm 17:3, 15)

**New Testament**

- Joseph, husband of Mary — clear angelic messages in onar dreams (Matthew 1:20; 2:13, 19)
- Peter’s symbolic horama vision (Acts 10)
- Paul’s night vision (Acts 16:9)

**Dreams Involving Angels** — Mediated through dreams (chalom / onar) or night visions.

Prophecy, Revelation, and Order in the Church (1 Corinthians 14)

1 Corinthians 14 shows how revelation (including from dreams or night experiences) must edify the church, be tested (“let the others weigh what is said” — v. 29), and operate in order.

Discernment: Testing Dreams, Visions, and Revelation

**Colossians 2:18 (ESV)**

*“Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind...”*

False teachers used visions and angel teachings to create pride. This fails to hold fast to Christ.

**Other Key Discernment Passages**

- Deuteronomy 13:1-5
- 1 John 4:1
- 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22
- 2 Corinthians 11:14
- Matthew 7:15-20

**Practical Tests**

1. Does it align with all of Scripture?
2. Does it exalt Jesus Christ?
3. Does it produce humility and love, or pride and division?
4. Is it confirmed by godly counsel and the fruit of the Spirit?
5. Does it build up the church (1 Corinthians 14)?

The Meaning of “Face to Face” and Direct Vision of God

**Moses’ Unique Experience**

“Face to face” = Hebrew פָּנִים אֶל פָּנִים (panim el panim). Direct, intimate communication. Unique among Old Testament prophets but still limited (Exodus 33:20).

**Jesus’ Unique and Direct Knowledge of the Father**

Jesus, as the eternal Son of God, has a unique, direct, and unmediated relationship with the Father that goes beyond even Moses’ experience.

**John 1:18 (ESV)**

*“No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”*

Jesus alone has seen the Father in the fullest sense because He is God the Son.

**John 6:46 (ESV)**

*“Not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father.”*

Only Jesus has seen the Father directly and fully.

**Matthew 11:27 (ESV)**

*“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”*

There is a unique, reciprocal, and perfect knowledge between the Father and the Son. Jesus reveals the Father because He alone truly knows Him.

Jesus’ knowledge of the Father is eternal and ontological (He is God), not merely a granted vision like Moses received. This is why He could say, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

**Future Hope for All Believers**

**1 Corinthians 13:12 (ESV)**

*“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”*

Greek: πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον (prosōpon pros prosōpon). In eternity, all believers will have perfect, unhindered communion with God — greater than Moses, and made possible through Jesus.

The Supremacy of Christ and the Written Word

*“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...”*

— Hebrews 1:1-2 (ESV)

All dreams, visions, and prophetic revelations must remain subordinate to Christ and the Scriptures.

For Believers Today

God is sovereign and may still grant dreams or night visitations. However, they are not the normal means of guidance. The healthy Christian life centres on Scripture, prayer, the Spirit’s illumination, and the gathered church where any revelation is tested (1 Corinthians 14).

Conclusion: The Blessed Hope

One day we will behold God’s face and be fully satisfied with His likeness (Psalm 17:15). We will see Him face to face in perfect clarity (1 Corinthians 13:12). Jesus alone has seen the Father fully in this age, and through Him we will one day know God perfectly.

Reflection Questions

6. How do Psalm 17:3 and Psalm 17:15 work together?
7. What makes Jesus’ knowledge of the Father unique compared to Moses?
8. How does 1 Corinthians 14 guide how revelation should be handled in the church?
9. How does the promise of seeing God “face to face” one day encourage you?

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