



# FEED MY SHEEP

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## Understanding Your Dreams

*The Story of Joseph, Part 10*

There are perhaps half a dozen *purposes* for divinely inspired dreams: for warning, for comfort, for guidance, for intimacy and communion with the Father, and others. Here is a description of how God sends us dreams of warning, in this case, to keep us from doing evil.

**Job 33: 14 For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. 15 In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; 16 Then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, [discipline, correction] 17 That he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man. 18 He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword.**

Warning dreams are of two types: first, things that are decreed by God and nothing can be done to change it. This is the type of dreams that Pharaoh had. The coming prosperity and following famine were set in stone. God did not offer Joseph or the Egyptians the opportunity to “pray it away,” as it were. The second type of warning dream warns us of *potential* events which can be prevented by prayer or repentance. For example, you will recall that Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had a rather frightening dream which Daniel interpreted for him.

**Daniel 4:24 This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the most High, which is come upon my lord the king: 25 That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. 26 And whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the tree roots; thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee, after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule.**

Now, after telling King Nebby the bad news, Daniel apparently gives him a way out.

**27 Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity.**

King Nebby was given one year to repent. He did not and therefore the judgment fell as predicted. Now some of you may be wondering how this fits in with predestination and our allegedly free will. For example, if God has predestinated a Plan from all eternity, and every detail of everybody’s life is foreordained—which I believe it is—then how can God give anyone the option of changing things by prayer or repentance? Well, it’s pretty simple, really. Take Nebby here. From his perspective, he had the free will to choose whether or not to repent. You couldn’t persuade *him* that he did *not* have free will.

But is it possible that in God’s predestinating, that God foreknew and plans exactly what Nebby is going to choose? Of course! But the key is: King Nebuchadnezzar does not know what God has foreordained for him and thus, *from Nebby’s own perspective*, it is a free will choice...Which is why I say: for all practical purposes, we have free will; but in truth and for theological purposes, we do not. God knew and planned all along that Nebby would refuse to repent. And so, the fact that people are given warning dreams or prophecies with the opportunity to repent and avoid the judgment does not mean that God had to change His Plan at all.

Another example comes to mind. This doesn’t concern dreams per se, but it will illustrate the flip side of the coin. It is an example of when people were warned of pending judgment and they *did* repent. And they were not even God’s Chosen People; they were the people of Nineveh in Assyria. Jonah preached that unless they repented in forty days, the city would be overthrown. In this case, they did repent, and thus the predicted judgment did *not* come to pass. But does that mean that God had to change His Plan? Not at all! God foreknew and foreordained that by the preaching of Jonah the people would repent. God is not up in heaven watching and wondering which way the people will choose. He knows the end from the beginning and He never has to reach for a back-up plan.

John Wimber was the founder of the Vineyard Fellowships. There is an important point Jack Deere makes: “It has been my experience that most of the negative dreams we have are those which warn us of sins or calamities that can be averted by prayer or repentance. In 1988, many prophet-

ic people were having dreams of John Wimber's death. In their dreams they would see things like a coffin with a date above it. Almost all of these prophetic people thought that God was revealing to them the time of John's death. Actually, these were warning dreams meant to encourage people to pray that God would heal John's heart condition and extend his life. John did not die when the dreams said he would. Instead, his heart condition was turned around by careful attention to his diet and regular exercise." [Now here is the key point:] "These people weren't false prophets, nor were their dreams false dreams. The dreams were merely warning dreams misunderstood by those who had them."

A second purpose for divine dreams is to comfort or encourage us. This is probably one of the most common types of divine dreams. It seemed that almost everywhere Paul went and preached Christ, it caused certain of the Jews to become very upset. In the city of Derbe, they were so incensed that they stoned him and left him for dead. Now Paul is in Corinth and he is apparently suffering from some anxiety that the rock party might be repeated here with himself on center stage. But Father sent him a dream of comfort and encouragement.

**Acts 18:9 Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: 10 For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.**

Then there are dreams whose purpose is for our guidance. We have an example of that in ...

**Acts 16:9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.**

**10 And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering [concluding] that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.**

I have a friend who is one of those who believes that God speaks to us today *only* through the pages of the Bible. One day he and I were talking and he told me how he and his wife had put their house up for sale. They had two opportunities to buy; two houses that they both liked very much. And let's say—I'm fictionalizing the details here—let's just say one was on Minnesota Street and the other was on Mississippi Street.

He said they couldn't decide which one to go with and that they were praying hard about it and waiting for the Lord to answer. Now, I have to confess it's been some years since this event and I honestly cannot remember if I actually said this to my friend, or if I only thought real hard about saying it, and did not, in order to spare his feelings. So here is what I might have told him (and we'll call him by a fictitious name): "Bill," I said, "since you believe that God only speaks to you through his written Word, and you are praying for God to guide you on whether to buy the house on Minnesota Street or the one on Mississippi Street, do you expect to find that verse in Leviticus? Or maybe in Second Thessalonians?"

Do you see the point? Namely, that some of our needs are very specific and are not spelled out in the Bible. Perhaps God had already spoken the answer in a dream, but my friend missed it because he wasn't listening, simply because he did not believe that God spoke through dreams.

Another purpose for dreams of divine communication

can be simply to allow us to have a wonderful intimacy with our Father. In 1 Kings 3, King Solomon has an extended conversation with Yahweh, during the course of which, the Father asks Solomon what he would like to have, and Solomon answers: Let me have wisdom, Father. What an intimate communion that was!

Another purpose for divine dreams and visions is to reveal the future. Those can be either of a warning and preparatory nature, such as Pharaoh's dream; or long-range prophecy such as Daniel's visions of the beast empires, and, of course, John's visions in the book of Revelation.

Sometimes Father might send a dream with some specific instructions or command. In Genesis 31, He told Jacob in a dream that it was time to pack up the family and move back to Canaanland. In the New Testament, God commanded Joseph to go ahead and marry Mary, even though she was pregnant. Of course, shortly thereafter, God sent a dream combining both warning *and* command for Joseph to take Mary and Jesus and flee to Egypt to avoid the pending massacre by King Herod. Oh, and incidentally, does God speak to non-believers? Absolutely! Does He speak to them through dreams, too? Of course, He does. We had the examples of Pharaoh, the butler, the baker and Nebuchadnezzar, and there are many more examples throughout the Bible of God speaking to non-believers in dreams and through other means.

Let us now discuss the actual interpretation of dreams. What do you think might be a key component of accurate dream interpretation? Well, as a very first necessity, how about recording the dream? We can't interpret them if we can't remember them, can we? Back to Daniel, chapter 7.

**Daniel 7:1 In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed: then he wrote the dream, and told the sum of the matters.**

Daniel had to write down *his* dreams, too. I keep a pen and pad in the drawer of my nightstand. Even better, at one time, I used to keep one of those little mini-recorders in the nightstand. That way, you don't even need to turn on the light. As you know, the more activity you do, the quicker the details of the dream slip away. Obviously, not all our dreams are divine communication. Some dreams are what I call pizza-and-ice-cream dreams. They are caused by gastronomic disturbances. In other words, we ate too much or we ate too late in the evening. I believe that other dreams are simply the subconscious mind's method for cleaning up the hard drive, as it were. It's the mind's way of dealing with the memories of the day's activities, which would include all the *emotions* we felt.

I had a particularly emotionally distressing day about a week ago, and that night I must have been awakened five or six times by nightmares; but in analyzing them, I could see that it was just the outworking of the emotional stress. I believe I am fortunate in that I seldom seem to be troubled by dreams. Most of the time, I have no memory of dreams at all, and that is fine with me. Since I do believe in divine communication through dreams, I feel certain that if God wants to communicate to me through a dream, he will make sure that I wake up.

I think that if God does wake you up in the middle of the night after a vivid dream, there is a good chance it's a message from Him. But we have to do our part. God will

wake you up, but your job is do what it takes to get the dream recorded. I have to confess that many years ago, long before I kept a notepad or mini-recorder by my bed, I had a very vivid dream in the middle of the night and I woke up. As I lay there analyzing it, I just marveled because I could *clearly* interpret the symbols and I *knew* this was a message from Father. After about ten minutes of analysis, I said to myself “Wow, that is neat! Thank you, Father!” There’s no way I will forget that dream in the morning, so I won’t bother to get up and write it down. I couldn’t possibly forget *that*. But guess what? That’s right. When morning came, I remembered that I had had this dream with an important message from Father, but I could not remember one iota about what the message was about. So much for the first step: recording your dream.

Step two is the interpreting the symbolism. Let me say this at the outset. I don’t place much stock in the average dream interpretation book. I don’t want Sigmund Freud or Linda Goodman (which is not her real name, by the way)—I don’t want them determining the meanings of my dreams. I believe that God can and will give you by His Holy Spirit the means to understand your own dreams. Jack Deere states that it seems like God gives people who dream regularly their own “dream vocabulary.” For example, that a baby represents immaturity. Furthermore, don’t think that seeing yourself or a loved one dying in a dream necessarily has a literal meaning. It may mean dying to self, the death of pride or greed or some other vice in your life. Deere does believe there are some symbols which might be universal; such as that clean, moving water symbolizes the Holy Spirit. Another possibly universal Christian dream symbol is that many people experience an encounter with a *faceless* man in a dream. He also might represent the Holy Spirit, whose primary task is to point us to Jesus.

All the rules for interpreting symbols in the Bible are also valid for interpreting dreams. And why is that? Because they are from the same Source. Otherwise, there would be confusion when comparing the two, and God is not the author of confusion. We’ll come back to the comparison idea in a minute. Deere points out that symbolism in dreams often reveals God’s viewpoint. For example, Nebuchadnezzar saw the succession of world empires as a beautiful statue with himself as the head of gold; but Daniel saw the same world empires portrayed as a series of vicious beasts.

Insofar as dream interpretation goes, we are not going to provide anything more than general rules here, for the reasons stated previously, which bear repeating: Number one: that God, through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, is the Source of the true interpretation of dreams. And number two: that God will provide each of us with our own “dream vocabulary,” if necessary. Ask and ye shall receive. Do you want to know if it is a *divine* dream? Just ask Him. If it’s not, forget it. And if it is, just ask Him to provide you with the intuition and spiritual insight to understand the symbols. I have had at least two dreams which I considered prophetic. I can see that one is in the process of being fulfilled and the second one... well, nothing has happened yet, and I had no timetable on either of them.

Don’t ask me to share the details on who or what it was about, because—and that is another very important point.... Just because you are given what may be a prophetic dream

does not mean that you have carte blanche to blab it all over town or even to other persons in the dream. It may be just for your insight and guidance. Be very discerning about with whom you share your dreams. It may be none of their business. I do wish to share one experience with you that I had. And this was not a dream. It was an actual vision. It occurred in that time between sleep and awakening. It began when I was in that fuzzy period, but then I fully awakened and I knew it was not a dream, but a vision.

My mother died of cancer at age 44 in 1967. This vision occurred in 1999, I think it was. My father was still alive. Anyhow, early one morning, I saw this beautiful woman at the foot of my bed. She appeared to be about 30 years old. My wife was asleep in bed beside me. I knew intuitively that this was a vision of my mother even though she had never appeared so beautiful in life when I knew her.

She was clothed in white raiment. I know that sounds biblical and I use that term deliberately because it wasn’t a dress. It wasn’t a skirt and blouse. It was like women would wear in the days of Jesus and the apostles. Not only did she have this brilliant white raiment, but she had this golden aura all around her. I was transfixed as I lay there. I lifted my head to get a better view. I couldn’t tell for sure, of course, but she also appeared to be floating—her feet not touching the floor. As I was awestruck by this sight, she then confirmed my intuition about her identity when she began to speak. And she only spoke these few words. She said:

“Your father and I are going to be spending our anniversary in Montana.”

And then she vanished. Now let me say first of all, that I do not believe that my mother really appeared to me. In my present understanding of the Bible, I believe the dead are dead. And they will remain so until the resurrection.

I count this vision experience as similar to when the prophet Samuel allegedly appeared to the witch of Endor. It was not really the once-dead-but-now-alive prophet Samuel who appeared. It was a vision of Samuel prepared by the Father to serve the purpose for which it was intended. I saw a *vision* of my mother, not my actual, conscious living mother. However, with what I have been learning about multiple time dimensions recently, I leave open the door for the possibility that Father could have taken her from her immortal state in the future, and sent her back in time to convey that message to me. In any event, her bones are still in her grave in a cemetery in Ohio. But now to the message of the vision itself.

Since it was about 5 or 5:30 in the morning when the vision occurred I got up, shaved, and hopped in the shower, all the time wondering what the meaning of it was. I asked Father to reveal the meaning to me. As I was showering, the thought popped into my mind: Montana for their wedding anniversary? They had never traveled out west or even past Missouri, as far as I knew. Why would she say they are going to Montana? Then I remembered the motto on the license plates. Montana is “big sky country.”

And *instantly* I knew the meaning: Dad was going to join mom in the big sky country. Dad was going to pass away. Their anniversary was September 4<sup>th</sup>, and so I thought he would die on that date. Keep in mind, that I had no knowledge that he had any terminal illness, no known health problems, except he had had bypass surgery about

seven years prior. But he did not die on September 4<sup>th</sup>. He died on September 10, 2000. And I have often wondered if that was a false vision, something demonic, because it was wrong on the date.

It was only later that it dawned on me that it was not a false vision. All she had said was that they were going to be spending their anniversary in Montana. And when you travel across country to celebrate your anniversary, it could easily, and usually does, entail at least a week or so. So the 10<sup>th</sup> of September falls within a one week time frame. I believe God gave me that vision as both a warning and preparation for the event, as well as for comfort and encouragement that it was all in His hands.

Now as we close, just a few words on the potential for abuse and misuse of dreams. We already cautioned that we should use discernment in choosing whether and with whom to share any particular dream. In some cases, it may be necessary to get counsel on the meaning of a dream, if you just cannot make any sense of it yourself after a time. But choose your counselor very carefully. And be sure to take *this* to heart. I am definitely NOT encouraging you to call me to help you with your dreams. I do not think that I am especially gifted in that area. I believe there are some people who are, but I am not one of them.

Remember though, in most cases, I believe God will give you the tools through His Holy Spirit to interpret it for yourself. A very important point to remember in all extra-biblical communication is that the written Word of God is our standard of truth. So an abuse of dreams would be thinking that God is telling you to kill your mother-in-law. But when you compare the command in the dream with the written Word of God, which one takes precedence? Obviously, the written word of God. God will not instruct you through a dream to do something which contradicts His written Word. If you have such a dream, you can be sure it is not from your heavenly Father.

Another misuse of dreams—and this goes hand in hand with the discernment admonishment—is that dreams are not given to us to puff us up or to give us control over other people. Jack Deere writes:

“Sometimes dreams are meant to teach us how to pray about a situation or how to pray for certain people. The fact that we have had a dream does not mean we have permission to share it with others, even though they may have appeared in the dream. Other times God may give us a dream that indicates he is going to do something wonderful for us. This makes us feel special, and we may want to tell other people about the dream so that they too can see how special we are to God. In reality, God may have given us the dream because we are about to go through an excruciatingly difficult time, and we will need all the encouragement we can get from him in order to make it through this time. By telling the dream to others, we may be giving in to pride and increasing the difficulty of the trial.

“That was what happened to Joseph. He had two dreams that indicated God was going to promote him to a high level of leadership. Then he unwisely told the dream to his brothers...and the dream actually increased the pain in his life. God worked it all out in the end for everyone’s benefit, but Joseph was still unwise to tell the dream.”

To be clear for the record, I did not share my vision to make you think that I am anybody special. I am not. I share

it with you because I believe *every* Christian who believes God can speak to us through dreams and visions will have their *own* divine dream messages.

I hope this writing has given you some assurance in this area of dreams and that you will now know that you can always ask Father’s guidance to discern first, whether a dream is meaningful, and secondly, if it is, that He will provide the understanding for it. Dreams certainly played a pivotal role in the life of Joseph and next month we will continue with his life story.

*Feed My Sheep* is a part of the teaching ministry of Dr. James W. Bruggeman and it is sent out freely. However, we reserve the right to discontinue sending it at any time to any one. The donations and tithes of those who are blest, taught and fed by this publication make it possible for us to continue in ministry. Gifts can be sent to PO Box 5695, Asheville, NC 28813. Thank you.