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Dreams and Visions as Divine Revelation

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Sarah Horton

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DREAMS AND VISIONS AS DIVINE REVELATION

BY

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As a Christian, one might wonder, “What happens to those who have never heard the gospel?” Answers and speculations abound, espoused in theories like exclusivism, inclusivism, and post-mortem evangelism.¹ But what if these are not the only possible answers?

Although dreams and visions could potentially be the answer to a much broader category of questions than the one above, this is the discussion that gave birth to my thesis. I would posit that dreams and visions represent to the Christian community one valid means of receiving divine revelation.

WHAT ARE DREAMS AND VISIONS?

It is appropriate to discuss first the psychological aspect of dreams and visions. What do academics know about them? Is there a difference between the two phenomena? Why do people dream in the first place?

It would appear that comparatively little research has been conducted on dreams, and even less on visions. However, there does seem to be little known psychological difference between a dream and a vision, other than the time of day in which they occur. Meaning, typically we say that people dream at night while asleep, and that visions occur in the waking state. Even this distinction tends to be blurred, however, such as when “daydreaming” is brought into the discussion.

¹ Exclusivism is the belief that salvation is exclusive to those who have heard and positively responded to the gospel; inclusivism accepts the possibility that people who die having never the gospel may still be included in salvation; post mortem evangelism is the belief that God offers another opportunity for people to accept the gospel after death.

There has not been much said on the subject of seeing visions, but some mention of theories of dreaming may be appropriate here. There is little definitive knowledge about dreams considering their private, subjective, and unpredictable nature: only one person can experience a specific dream, and researchers can only have second-hand knowledge of one outside of their own experience. The matter becomes still more subjective when one considers the elusive nature of dreaming itself: many dreams are forgotten even before awakening, or fade away within hours.

Sigmund Freud saw dreams as consisting of two parts: the manifest dream and the latent thoughts behind it. He theorized that the dream portrays the fulfillment of subconscious desires that are not socially acceptable. In his view, the dream stems from the “psychological remnant” of one’s experiences or emotions from the previous day.²

Alfred Adler saw dreams as related to humanity’s unconscious desperation to overcome a sense of helplessness that is left over from the time of infancy. In his view, dreams anticipate or prepare for future events, or attempt to solve problems encountered in daily life. To Adler, the dream events themselves are not as significant as the feeling or mood they create: the mood lasts well into the next day, and affects one’s problem-solving abilities.³

Another theory is Cognitive Dream Theory, which proposes that the mind is an information processor: while awake, it processes external information, and while asleep it processes its own internal information. According to this theory, dreams do not hold hidden

² Harry Trosman, “Freud’s Dream Theory,” in *Encyclopedia of Sleep and Dreaming*, ed. Mary A. Carskadon (New York: Macmillan; Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada; and New York, Oxford, Singapore, Sydney: Maxwell Macmillan Intl, 1993), 251-254.

³ David Foulkes, “Adler’s Dream Theory,” *Encyclopedia of Sleep and Dreaming*, 6-7.

meanings; the theory is more concerned, therefore, with the process of dreaming than with dreams themselves.⁴

As to the function dreams perform, there are many theories.⁵ In the modern West, these theories include: protecting our sleep from disturbances, coping with upsetting events or providing courage to face a new day, expressing otherwise repressed parts of our personality, and filtering the day's experiences. Other cultures often attach a more spiritual meaning to dreams: the dream world is seen as being as real as the "real" world and can affect it in tangible ways. Dreams are the means by which the soul retraces the day or encounters new experiences; or they are omens or means of guidance from God or the gods or spirits. In any case, it is vitally important to take a dreamer's culture into consideration when attempting to interpret or do any kind of research on a dream.⁶

The question I want to ask is: Can we *as Christians* consider dreams and visions to be a legitimate, *biblical* means of divine communication *today*?

THE BIBLICAL PRECEDENT

Before the question of the continuing validity of dreams and visions as divine revelation can be explored, the biblical precedent must first be established. How were dreams and visions used in the Bible? To whom did they occur, for what purposes, and with what results? Does the Bible look on them positively or negatively, and does that opinion change between the Testaments?

⁴ Foulkes, "Cognitive Dream Theory," *Encyclopedia of Sleep and Dreaming*, 126-128.

⁵ Rosalind D. Cartwright, "Functions of Dreams," *Encyclopedia of Sleep and Dreaming*, 254-257.

⁶ Waud H. Kracke, "Cultural Aspects of Dreaming," *Encyclopedia of Sleep and Dreaming*, 151-155.

These questions are all relevant to Christians who want to know what role dreams and visions play in their religion.⁷

Whatever the distinguishing factors may be between dreams and visions, it is helpful to note that the Bible makes little distinction between them.⁸ If they are not synonymous, then they are at least parallel concepts from the biblical perspective. Daniel 7:1 illustrates this well: “Daniel had a *dream*, and *visions* passed through his mind” (italics mine). Another good example is Acts 2:17, part of a quotation from Joel 2:

In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and your daughters will prophesy,
Your young men will *see visions*,
Your old men will *dream dreams*.

NIV, italics mine

Old Testament Period

In the times and cultures surrounding the Old Testament, dreams were seen as a major way through which gods communicated with their people. Although people could attempt to discern the will of the gods through methods of divination, such as reading the entrails of a sacrificed animal,⁹ dreams were a type of “inspired divination.” This means that they were a type of divination initiated by the gods themselves. Even so, some people sought to experience a

⁷ For a list and brief description of the dreams and visions that occur in the Bible, see appendix A.

⁸ Bart J. Koet, “It Started with a Dream: Paul’s Dream (Acts 16, 9-10) and Aeneas as a Biblical Example of Dreams as Intercultural Legitimation Strategy,” *Dreaming* 18, 269.

⁹ This method, however, was forbidden to the Israelites.

revelation-dream by sleeping in a temple. If successful, the god would appear to the sleeper in a dream. This is called an incubation dream, and is sometimes associated with the experiences of Samuel (1 Sam 3) and of Jacob (Gen 28).¹⁰

Also in Ancient Near Eastern culture, dreams were often used to appoint or affirm the reign of a king, signifying his election by the gods. But even everyday, “normal” dreams by everyday, normal people were considered communication from the gods. These dreams were often translated into meaning for everyday life, so that if the dream symbols meant “this,” then the dreamer would alter the course of the day by doing “that.” To everyday people, dreams concerned “life, property, family, health, and success.”¹¹

Many scholars see the Old Testament as considering dreams to be suspect or inferior to other means of divine communication, such as visions.¹² Furthermore, Walton, citing the stories of Joseph and Daniel, infers that dreams were not to be trusted unless “God’s direct involvement in the interpretation can be affirmed.”¹³ This is because the Old Testament repeated warns against false dreams and those who purposefully misinterpret them.

True though this may be, dreams do occur surprisingly often in the Old Testament for something that is supposedly seen in a negative light. In fact, every dream narrative recounted in the Bible is positive, or has some positive purpose. There are no accounts of people receiving false dreams or of someone purposefully misinterpreting a dream. On the contrary, Numbers

¹⁰ For this and more information on ancient Near Eastern thought, see John Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006). For more on ancient dream theories, see Wilse B. Webb, “Dream Theories of the Ancient World,” *Encyclopedia of Sleep and Dreaming*, 192-194.

¹¹ Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*.

¹² Note, for example, that while none of the classical prophets received their messages through dreams, several did experience visions. See Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*.

¹³ *Ibid.*

12:6 identifies dreams as one way God speaks to prophets. Job 33:15 describes dreams as tools God uses to warn people, reveal their sin and pride, preserve them, and chasten them. Furthermore, in Joel 2, old men dreaming dreams is a sign that the Spirit has been poured out. So, while it is true that many Old Testament passages urge caution when dealing with dreamers, and treat them harshly, these passages (specifically in Deuteronomy and Jeremiah) refer to “false dreams” and the false prophets who dream them. Dreams in general are not to be immediately discounted or scorned, but examined closely for truth, in light of God’s Word (cf. Jer 23:28).

God used both dreams and visions to speak to many of his people, as well as many foreigners—even pagan worshipers, such as Abimelech (Gen 20) and Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2, 4). In fact, when it came to “outsiders, uninitiated, or those who had no access to prophets,” dreams were often a first choice for divine communication.¹⁴

In God’s first communication with Abraham (then Abram), he appeared in a vision to establish the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 15); later, he reaffirmed it through a dream to Jacob (Gen 28). Among the prophets, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, and Zechariah all received their prophetic messages through visions.

New Testament

In the New Testament, the number of occurrences of dreams and visions drop dramatically; however, they do still occur. The book of Matthew records how God sent dreams to Joseph, the Magi, and Pilate’s wife. The book of Acts recounts stories in which Paul and Peter both receive visions, as well as Ananias and the Gentile Cornelius. The last mention of a vision in the Bible occurs in Revelation 9, where John implies that he received the whole revelation through a

¹⁴ John Walton and Andrew Hill, *The Old Testament Today* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

vision. So we see that again God sends dreams and visions both to his people the Jews/Christians, as well as to people outside the faith.

The Matthean dreams, not surprisingly, all closely concern the story of Jesus. In the first two chapters, the dreams are sent to protect the birth and early life of Jesus from the interference of humans: first, to ensure that Joseph marries Mary, then to warn the Magi and Joseph to avoid Herod, who wanted to kill the baby Jesus, and finally to alert Joseph that it is time to return home but that he should go the long way in order to avoid Herod's son, who might harbor lingering fear of the "King of the Jews." The last dream account in Matthew is perhaps the most interesting, for it is received by Pilate's wife during the trial of Jesus, just before his crucifixion. There is no description of the dream, but its result is for Pilate's wife to plead with Pilate to leave the innocent Jesus alone. Of course, her entreaties are to no effect.

In Acts, it is Saul's vision of Christ that results in his conversion and consequent name change to Paul; Ananias receives a vision telling him to affirm Paul's conversion. Cornelius and Peter each have complimentary visions which lead them together and result in Cornelius' conversion. Paul's vision of the Macedonian man spurs him on to expand his ministry to the Gentiles; another vision he receives encourages him to preach without fear.

The decline in the number of occurrences of dreams and visions in the New Testament may perhaps be attributed to the fact that the New Testament itself is considerably shorter than the Old Testament. Furthermore, much of the New Testament consists of letters, and is more concerned with what to do *with* the truth than with how one *receives* it. Notable exceptions to this rule are the Gospels, Acts, and Revelation, which are where all accounts of New Testament dreams and visions appear.

Conclusions

In the Bible, dreams and visions have a major effect on those who experience them. For example, the dreams of Abraham and Jacob essentially initiated the precursor of a new religion. Dreams and visions were often a sufficient reason for biblical characters to change their planned course of action or to be encouraged in enacting it.

However, that is not the only effect of dreams and visions. In the Bible and even in extrabiblical, historical situations, dreams and visions affect entire groups of people. Paul's dream of the Macedonian man in Acts 16 is a prime example of this widespread effect. In the context of Paul's ministry, his preferred method of persuading the Jews of Jesus' lordship is to show that he is the fulfillment of their main source of authority, the Torah. Acts 16 marks the beginning of Paul's ministry to the Gentiles, however, and now he requires methods that will be significant to them. God seems to anticipate this need, as his response is to send Paul a dream. It is this dream that inspires Paul to preach in Macedonia.

However, it is that same dream that legitimizes his ministry there. Dreams were something that the Greeks understood and respected as divine communication; the fact that Paul's dream occurred in Troy, the pride of Hellenistic thought and a symbol of profound nationalism, further spoke to Paul's audience. Paul was not just describing a dream; he was setting up the word of Jesus over the words of Greek heroes like Homer, Virgil, Achilles, Xerxes, and Alexander. Paul's dream of the Macedonian man not only opened a new sector to Paul's ministry; it played the part of "religious propaganda," acting to legitimize Paul's teaching in the minds of those to whom he ministered.¹⁵

¹⁵ Koet, 269.

The Bible is not the only place we see this principle at work. Biblical scholar Bart Koet cites sociologist Max Weber as asserting that the biographies of leading men often (and women occasionally) describe dreams as divine sanction of a mission. Specifically we see this is the case with several Roman emperors, such as Constantine, and in classic literature like the accounts of Agamemnon in *Ilias*, Xerxes in Herodotus, and other important literary figures, including generals, kings, prophets, and poets.¹⁶ The experiences of Alexander the Great and Jaddua the high priest can also be added to the list; their dream accounts provided legitimation for their alliance and for Alexander's conquest of Asia.¹⁷

In light of this information, it is possible to focus on the word "propaganda" used above and thereby conclude that dream narratives like these are invented by the so-called dreamers for the sake of manipulating people and forwarding the dreamers' agenda. Undoubtedly that has happened, and indeed the Bible's warnings against such false dreamers have already been noted. However, it is more important to understand that dreams themselves are relatively insignificant in light of the power they hold to affect people. That is, it is less important to know if Paul's dream or Constantine's vision really occurred than it is to see the affect they had on their audiences and subsequently on history itself. As Koet says, "The medium . . . is here the message."

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Tae Hun Kim, "The Dream of Alexander in Josephus," *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, 34: 425-442.

DREAMS AND VISIONS TODAY?

Arguments Against: Cessation

It seems necessary to here lay out the arguments against the continuing validity of dreams and visions as signs from God. It seems that most scholars who adhere to this view do so based on several assumptions: first, that dreams and visions are to be classified with the apostolic, miraculous gifts described in the New Testament, including prophecy, miraculous healing, speaking in tongues, etc. This is not a far-fetched connection to make, since oftentimes in the Bible, dreams and visions are the medium of prophecies. This type of spiritual gift, proponents argue, has ceased to function in the same capacity that it did in the times of the New Testament. This is because the original apostles played a unique role in the development of the Church and therefore were blessed with unique gifts.¹⁸

Second, one's opinion concerning dreams and visions seems to be closely connected to one's eschatological views, namely, those views which concern the end times. For example, some scholars read the reference in Acts 2/Joel 2 to the Spirit's being poured out on "all people" as referring to the millennial age, which is the only period in history when everyone will be Christians and thus eligible for the outpouring of the Spirit.¹⁹ This view and others like it are firmly rooted in the eschatological viewpoint termed premillennial dispensationalism, which generally takes a quite literal reading of the book of Revelation, including a literal seven-year

¹⁸ Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "A Cessationist View," in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?* ed. Wayne A. Gruden, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 23-64. There is little discussion among credible Bible scholars specifically about dreams and visions; if we classify them, therefore, with the apostolic or miraculous gifts, Gaffin's article will prove a more than sufficient source for the exposition of a cessationist view.

¹⁹ Cooper P. Adams III, "Does God Speak to Men Today in Dreams and Visions?" bible-truth.org (March 18, 2010). Online: <http://www.bible-truth.org/VISIONS.html>. See also Arthur Belanger, "Dreams and Visions," www.invitationtochrist.org (March 18, 2010). Online: http://www.invitationtochrist.org/god_speaks_dreams_and_visions.htm. Some of these arguments may, to the trained academic, seem somewhat unsound exegetically. It seems to me that they are, however, relatively widespread views, and as such they are worth considering.

Tribulation to be followed by a literal 1000-year millennium, during which Christ will reign on the earth.

Another oft-cited reason for skepticism regarding dreams and visions stems from a concern for maintaining the absolute authority of scripture. This is an apprehension well-worth considering. Most evangelicals consider the current biblical canon to be closed, authoritative, and complete in and of itself; thus, any added revelation is not only questionable but heretical. A hesitancy to acknowledge the validity of dreams and visions is understandable, even commendable, if the acceptance of them might be adding to the revelation of God which he has already given us in the form of the Bible.

Arguments For: Continuation

First, clarification is needed. This essay does not mean to suggest that the apostolic gifts are in use today to the same extent that they were in the period of the early church, or that dreams and visions are a standard method of divine communication, the absence of which indicates a lack of communication with God. Nor does it intend to imply that the Bible is anything less than completely authoritative. However, it does mean to assert that where unorthodox means of divine communication are required, God does not hesitate to utilize them—and that there is nothing in the Bible that opposes this statement.

John Walton, a scholar of Ancient Near Eastern culture, said that God speaks to people in ways with which they are familiar. I believe that he was correct. The Bible, as he says, was written *for* everyone, but not *to* everyone: it was written *to* the Israelites, in their time, in their language, with their linguistic *and cultural* idioms. God spoke to the Israelites through dreams

and visions because he knew that, culturally, it would be a good way to get their attention and gain their loyalty and worship not only as *a* God, but as the one *true* God.

The emphasis of the Western world on modernity, science, and empirical data makes her citizens inherently suspicious of anything subjective. Dreams and visions, as phenomena that scientists cannot explain and that no one can “prove” as real, fall indisputably into that category. Every self-respecting Westerner knows that dreams are caused by the mysterious psychological workings of the brain while it rests, rehashes the day, or attempts to deal with the problems facing the dreamer. A vision may provoke more consternation, but in the end may be classified as a hallucination and possibly a sign of mental illness. Why then would God speak to someone in a way to which they will not listen, with which they are neither comfortable nor familiar?

In the Eastern hemisphere, however, where faith is more mystical and less concrete, people believe in dreams. Many see visions. It is there where major life decisions are still made based on dreams or visions. And it is those people who are converting to Christianity because of them.

This thesis does not attempt to prove that, exegetically, the Bible approves the continued reception of dreams and visions as messages from God. Instead, it will make an *experiential* argument: people do experience dreams and visions from God, and therefore they must be biblically valid.

THE BOTTOM LINE: EXPERIENCING DREAMS AND VISIONS

Many Christian books, such as *Girl Meets God: On the Path to a Spiritual Life* (Lauren F. Winner, 2002), *I Dared to Call Him Father* (Bilquis Sheikh, 1978), *Secret Believers* (Brother Andrew and Al Janssen, 2007), *The Torn Veil* (Gulshan Esther, as told to Thelma Sanger, 1994),

and The Camel (Kevin Greeson, 2007), tell stories about people who converted to Christianity because of at least one dream or vision they had. Girl Meets God is about a young woman who grew up Jewish but converted to Christianity after dreaming that Jesus rescued her from kidnappers. The next three are books that tell the stories of individual former Muslims who, as a result of their dreams and visions, sought Christian counsel and eventually decided to become followers of Jesus. They did this in opposition to family, friends, and culture, in the face of ostracism and physical persecution. They spoke of their faith, led others to the same faith, and some even died for it. They risked everything for Jesus because of the dreams and visions he sent them.

The Camel Method is the story of Muslim conversion in general. The author claims to use dreams and visions as a major evangelistic tool: he simply asks people if they have had a dream or vision of “the Prophet in white.” The odds are that they or someone they know have experienced such a thing, and the missionary immediately has a bridge into the Christian faith. He names several people across the Muslim world who have converted to Christianity through such means.

However, some may question the veracity and objectivity of these stories. They were written with an agenda in mind, and in American thought this often compromises their trustworthiness. It is perhaps beside the point to note that no story can be told without bias. Nevertheless, one thing that fewer critics will question is a person’s own experience.

Brooke tells a story from her summer in Africa. She and her team were in intense prayer for Islam, that Muslims would experience dreams and visions that would cause them to search for truth in Christianity. Soon a man approached them with just that intent: he had had several

dreams, and was desperate to know their meaning. The missionaries he contacted were able to lead him through the dreams to Christ. The man's name: Islam.

Pastor Stan Parris of Second Baptist Church in Arkadelphia, Arkansas, formerly counted himself among those who discredited the continuing validity of dreams and visions. What changed his mind? His mission work with Muslims. He can tell several stories about Muslims coming to faith in Jesus through dreams and visions. He has collected the tales from missionaries who had discipled these dreamers, as well as from dreamers themselves.²⁰

Lauren tells the story of her friend in Niger. As a young boy he was intrigued upon hearing the name of Jesus mentioned by missionaries. The missionaries were banned from his father's house and forbidden to mention the name of Jesus in his presence, but the seed was planted. Though having no idea what the name Jesus means, the boy had a dream that night. As soon as he was able, he sought out the missionaries and received from them the gospel story. When he returned home, he told his family and was immediately banned from his father's house. Through his mother's influence, he was allowed back into the house, and has lived there as a servant ever since. He has never stopped telling his story, or working for the salvation of his family and fellow villagers.

Megan was already a Christian when she had a life-changing dream. Her dream directed her to begin her ministry to the Muslim world, where, ironically, she met a Muslim woman whose life would also be changed by a dream. This woman, now one of Megan's dearest friends, has also become a follower of Jesus through the dreams and visions he sent her.

These stories may strike citizens of the Western world as being far from home. The reality and the significance of these stories are not easily impressed upon us. If God uses dreams and visions in such a huge way, why don't *we* experience them? Two responses are appropriate.

²⁰ Stan Parris. Interviewed by author. Arkadelphia, AR. March 2010.

First, in this researcher's experience, most Westerners do not place a whole lot of significance on the dreams they dream on a nightly basis. If they have a strange dream, they are more likely to attribute it to bad food than to God. The only effect a dream usually has on a Western dreamer is the mood it creates in the morning: a nightmare might leave the dreamer afraid or on edge, while a pleasant or funny dream more often produces happier feelings the next day. However, even these feelings eventually diminish, and the dream with them. Therefore, if God were to speak in this way, Westerners are not likely to be quick to believe they are receiving a message from him. It seems to make sense then that God would not choose to make this his major means of communication with them.

Second, Western students *are* claiming to be experiencing dreams and visions. Right here on the campus of Ouachita Baptist University are students who not only believe that God still does communicate in that way, but who also believe that God may have spoken to them in such a manner. A survey was conducted on campus to assess this very matter. Please see the following table for a brief summary of its most significant results.

Table: Results of Campus Survey "Experiencing God"

Part 1: Dreams and Visions as Divine Revelation (N = 61)

Statement	Number Agree	Percent Agree (%)
Dreams and visions continue to be a valid means of divine communication.	53	87
I have personally received a dream or vision which I believe was from God.	30	49

Part 2: Personal Dreams and Visions (N = 30)

Statement	Number Agree	Percent Agree (%)
The dream or vision caused me to change my behavior in some way.	12	40
I have had at least one dream/vision that turned out to be premonitory.	19	63

All sixty-one participants were asked relevant demographic questions such as their religion, denomination/branch, and home country. The overwhelming majority classified themselves as American Christians; a majority also self-identified themselves as some form of Baptist, with a close minority of non-denominational Christians. The total sample also answered questions concerning divine revelation in general—as the table illustrates, 87% of the students agreed that dreams and visions continue to be a valid means of divine communication. This section of the survey culminated with the following agree/disagree statement: “I have had a dream and/or vision that I believe was a message from God.” Thirty of the students (49%) agreed with that statement, and were asked to complete a second section of the survey, the results of which are also depicted in the above table.

Eight students agreed to answer a series of open-ended questions further describing their experiences. Six answered that the experience they had was a dream, while two believed they may have had a vision. When asked what defined it as such, however, there was little correlation between the answers—indicating perhaps a lack of clarity in defining the difference between a dream and a vision.

One common theme throughout these experiences is that they often depicted people of the dreamer’s acquaintance. Five of the experiences fit this description directly, but the rest of them all concerned people as well. One involved a symbol that stood for a group of people, and another portrayed an uncountable number of people who may have stood for “the spiritually dead” in general. The other dream concerned the dreamer only.

Another common theme was that the experiences tended to affect relationships. One dream “included a boy I would later date;” one led the dreamer to confront those who had hurt the dreamer in the past; one dream motivated the dreamer to forgive someone else, and another

to break up with a boyfriend. Experiences that did not concern relationships tended to involve the dreamer's lifestyle or "calling:" several experiences confirmed a "call to missions," although most of the callings were more temporary or situation-specific rather than a call to career mission work.

The reader can thus see that dreams and visions are somewhat frequently seen as messages from the divine, not only in foreign cultures and mystical religions, but also here at "home" in the Christian West.

CONCLUSION

Although dreams and visions are difficult to measure scientifically, they have always played an important role in religious thought, and continue to do so. This is true not just in the Bible, but for religious people of all times and places—where dreams and visions are often portrayed as a means of divine communication, and used as a means of divine legitimation of action.

Dreams and visions are often viewed with skepticism in the modern West. Many Christians have concocted arguments which allow them to neatly sidestep the matter, discounting the experience of dreams and visions as no longer biblical—or as *not yet* biblical, in some cases. Yet it is important to remember that any time a person reads the Bible, he interprets it according to his culture and experiences and preconceptions. There is no such thing as an objective reading of the Bible. We must, therefore, critique our interpretations of the Bible by the measure of how God is speaking today. What God said 2,000 years ago will not contradict what he says today. So, while as Christians we must judge our interpretations of our experiences by the authoritative standards of the Bible, we must also critique our interpretations of the scriptures by the reality of

our experiences. When we correctly interpret both the Bible and our lives, the two interpretations should be parallel, not juxtaposed.²¹

It is easy to read the Bible and say that dreams and visions, along with other apostolic gifts, were phased out in the early days of the church. It is another thing to look Christians in the eye and tell them that their conversion experience, the basis for the persecution they endure, the foundation for the beginning of their radically transformed life, and the reason for which they are being martyred, is not “biblically valid.”

So, whether a person believes in the biblical validity of dreams and visions or not, dreams and visions *are* happening, and they *are* having an impact on the Christian world. Dreams and visions *do* represent to the Christian community one valid means of receiving divine revelation. Will Christians continue to rely on their preconceptions and misconceptions of the Bible in the face of life-transforming experience? Or will they be able to recognize the mysterious and confounding ways through which God chooses to reveal himself?

²¹ Once again, I am not trying to diminish the authority of scripture. This is my point of reference: If I believe that the Bible says that God does not speak through dreams and visions, but I later experience a dream or vision from God, then my interpretation of the Bible must have been incorrect, because God does not contradict himself. This, of course, operates under the assumption that the dream/vision was actually from God and not from another source; this thesis can only address that matter in part, as it does below.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Dream and Visions in the Bible

Reference		Dreams	Visions
Genesis	15		Vision to Abram initiates the covenant
	20	God warns Abimelech concerning Sarai	
	28	Jacob and stairway to heaven, God renews covenant	
	31	Jacob recounts how God gave him instructions for prosperity; God warns Laban not to speak to Jacob	
	37	Joseph dreams of wheat sheaves and celestial bodies bowing to him	
	40, 41	Pharaoh, his cupbearer, and his baker each have dreams, which Joseph interprets	
	46		God tells Jacob to go to Egypt, where Joseph is
Numbers	12:6	God speaks to prophets in dreams	God reveals himself to prophets in visions (contrasted with Moses, who sees God face to face)
	24:4, 16		Balaam blesses Israel because he "sees a vision (angel) from the Almighty"
Deuteronomy	13	Dreams are subordinate to God's law; dreamers who use their dreams to encourage apostasy must be executed, even if their dream comes true	
Judges	7	A man reports to Gideon his dream of victory over Midian	
1 Samuel	3:15		Samuel calls God's message to Eli a "vision"
	28:6	God refuses to answer Saul's inquiry by dreams (or other	

Reference		Dreams	Visions
		methods)	
1 Kings	3	God appears to Solomon and offers to grant him a wish	
2 Chronicles	32:32		Mentions the “vision of Isaiah”
Ecclesiastes	5	Dreams are meaningless in the face of God’s awesomeness	
Job	4	A spirit speaks to Eliphaz while he is dreaming “disquieting dreams”	
	7:14	Dreams frighten Job	Visions terrify Job
	33:15	God can speak through dreams: use to warn, show sin/pride, preserve, chasten	
Isaiah	1, 21, 22, 29		Isaiah prophecies through “this vision”
Jeremiah	23	Warnings of false dreams; dreams are subordinate to “My Word”	
	27	God warns against dream interpreters who tell lies	
	29	God warns against false dreams and the prophets who dream them, for he did not send them	
Ezekiel	1		Chariot vision
	8(:3)		Temple vision
	12		Every unfulfilled vision will be fulfilled, there will be no more false visions
	40-43		New Temple vision, filled by the glory of God
Daniel	1:17	Daniel is described by narrator as one who understands dreams	Daniel is described by narrator as one who understands visions
	2	Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of a statue	It is interpreted by Daniel’s vision
	5:12	Daniel is described by the queen as one who can interpret dreams	
	4	Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of a tree	
	7	Daniel dreams of four beasts	He called it a “vision at night”
	8		Vision of ram and goat
Hosea	12:10		Recollection of God’s early communication with Israel
Obadiah	1		Prophetic vision
Micah	1		Prophetic vision (he “saw”)
Nahum	1		“The book of the vision of Nahum”
Zechariah	1:8	“At night:” a dream?	“Saw:” a vision?

Reference		Dreams	Visions
	13:4		Every false prophet will be “ashamed of his vision”
Joel	2:28	Prophecy: old men will “dream dreams” at the outpouring of the Spirit	Also, young men will “see visions”
Matthew	1	God instructs Joseph to marry Mary	
	2	God warns the Magi and Joseph to avoid Herod; he tells Joseph when to return home and to avoid Herod’s son	
	27	During the trial of Jesus, Pilate’s wife has a dream asserting Jesus’ innocence	
Acts	2	Quotes Joel 2	Quotes Joel 2
	9		Saul’s vision of Jesus; Ananias’ vision
	10		Cornelius’ vision of Peter; Peter’s vision of unclean animals
	12		Peter being freed from prison was specified <i>not</i> a vision
	16	Occurs “in the night”	Paul’s vision of the Macedonian man
	18		God tells Paul to speak without fear
	26		Paul defends his preaching on the basis of his vision of Jesus (ch 9)
Revelation	9:17		John implies that the whole revelation to him was given through a vision

*chart compiled through a personal study of Scripture, with the use of concordances

Appendix B: For Further Reading

Antrobus, John. "Characteristics of Dreams." In *Encyclopedia of Sleep and Dreaming*, ed. Mary A. Carskadon, 98-101. New York: Macmillan; Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada; and New York, Oxford, Singapore, Sydney: Maxwell Macmillan Intl, 1993.

An examination of common characteristics of dreams as contrasted with waking life.

Bloom, Harold. *Omens of Millennium: The Gnosis of Angels, Dreams, and Resurrection*. Riverhead: New York, 1996.

An examination of America's "New Age obsessions" such as angels, prophetic dreams, and near-death experiences. Traces their roots and examines their effects.

Cartwright, Rosalind D. "Interpretation of Dreams." In *Encyclopedia of Sleep and Dreaming*, ed. Mary A. Carskadon, 316-318. New York: Macmillan; Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada; and New York, Oxford, Singapore, Sydney: Maxwell Macmillan Intl, 1993.

Examines several theories (including Freud) about the interpretation of dreams, and the difficulties such an attempt encounters.

Dreisbach, Christopher. "Dreams and Revelations: A Critical Look at Kelsey." *Dreaming* 18 (2008): 257-266.

An examination and analysis of Kelsey's argument for the importance of dreams. Critiques Kelsey's logical argument that rests on a foundation of faith.

Edgar, Iain R. "The Inspirational Night Dream in the Motivation and Justification of Jihad." *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 11 (2007): 59-76.

Examines the role dreams play in the Muslim mind, the reason for their importance, and their effects played out through terrorism.

Gnuse, Robert. "Dreams and Their Theological Significance in the Biblical Tradition."

An examination and analysis of God's revelation through dreams and other methods in the Old and New Testaments, as well as their theological implications.

James, William. "The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature." In *Writings, 1902-1910*. Library of America, 1987.

James produces an in-depth anthropological look into the nature of religion, including concepts of the unseen, of the health of mind and soul, of conversion and saintliness, and of mysticism. The latter was the section most relevant to this thesis.

Kettelkamp, Larry. *Dreams*. New York: William Morrow, 1968.

A children's look into the nature of dreams. Includes ancient beliefs, modern research, and help with recording one's own dreams.

Kracke, Waud H. "Cultural Aspects of Dreaming." In *Encyclopedia of Sleep and Dreaming*, ed. Mary A. Carskadon, 151-155. New York: Macmillan; Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada; and New York, Oxford, Singapore, Sydney: Maxwell Macmillan Intl, 1993.

A look into the way one's culture shapes one's understanding of dreams.

Lavie, Peretz. "Religion and Dreaming." In *Encyclopedia of Sleep and Dreaming*, ed. Mary A. Carskadon, 496-497. New York: Macmillan; Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada; and New York, Oxford, Singapore, Sydney: Maxwell Macmillan Intl, 1993.

A look into the way religion shapes one's understanding of dreams—or vice versa.

Love, Richard D. "Dreams and Visions." In *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000.

An examination of the use of dreams and visions in the Bible and their implication for missions today.

Marlow, Louise. Editor. *Dreaming Across Boundaries: The Interpretation of Dreams in Islamic Lands*. Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University, 2008.

A collection of articles concerning the history, occurrence, and significance of dreaming in Islamic cultures.

Richardson, Don. *Eternity in Their Hearts*. Ventura, CA: Regal, 1984.

A book investigating God's missionary efforts without the use of missionaries. Dreams and legends are some of his tools for reaching the unreached.

Ryken, Leland, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, ed. "Dreams, Visions." In *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998.

An examination of the use of dreams and visions in the Bible and their relation to the human condition and to spiritual health.

Sanford, John A. "Dreams and Visions in the Bible." In *Psychological Insight into the Bible: Texts and Readings*, ed. Wayne G. Rollins and D. Andrew Kille, 194-198. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

An argument for continued and renewed interest into the world of dreams based on biblical examples. The importance rests on his assertion that dreams and "real life" offer different perspectives on the same reality.

Van de Castle, Robert L. "Content of Dreams." In *Encyclopedia of Sleep and Dreaming*, ed. Mary A. Carskadon, 136-139. New York: Macmillan; Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada; and New York, Oxford, Singapore, Sydney: Maxwell Macmillan Intl, 1993.

An attempt to identify common content of dreams, as well as to examine gender differences between said content.

Winter, Ralph D., and Steven C. Hawthorne. Editors. *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1981, 1992, 1999.

A collection of articles examining the Christian mission movement several perspectives. Includes pioneers of the movement, as well as its expected future and strategies of world evangelism, development, church planting, and world Christian discipleship.