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Visions and Dreams

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Visions and Dreams

Throughout the history of the people of Israel, there were occasions when God spoke in visions and dreams as documented in the Scriptures.

God appeared to Abraham in a vision and repeated his promise to make him great (Genesis 15:1).

Prophets like Daniel, Ezekiel, Hosea, Nahum and others recorded in their writing that they received instructions, warnings, exhortation, and other oracles from the Lord in visions.

In the New Testament, the Lord appeared to Paul in a vision to encourage him (Acts 10:17). It was the vision of a Macedonian man that directed Paul and his missionary company to Macedonia (Acts 16:10).

The Lord spoke to Ananias in a vision and instructed him to go see Paul (Acts 9:10). At the same time, Paul was also visited by the Lord in a vision concerning Ananias so that Paul might expect Ananias (Acts 9:12). The Lord brought them together through visions. In the similar way, Cornelius and Peter met because God gave them instructions in separate visions (Acts 10:3; 10:17).

God also spoke to people in dreams.

In the Old Testament, the angel of the Lord appeared to Jacob in a dream (Genesis 31:11). Joseph had a dream which foretold his future (Genesis 37:5-11). In Gibeon, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream and exchanged a conversation with him.

It is interesting to realize that God spoke through dreams not only to the people of Israel but also to the peoples of other nations. In the life of Joseph, for example, you read that the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt both had a dream in the prison where Joseph was also kept (Genesis 40:5). Later, Pharaoh also received a message from God in a dream, which Joseph was able to interpret (Genesis 41:15). Joseph explained to Pharaoh that God revealed to the king what the Lord was about to do.

In the New Testament, perhaps, the most well-known are four dreams Joseph had concerning Jesus. God gave him insights in his difficult and uncertain situations.

The first insight through a dream was concerning his marriage with Mary.

“When he had contemplated this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit...

“When Joseph awoke from sleep he did what the angel of the Lord told him. He took his wife.” – Matthew 1:20, 24

Then he had another dream when King Herod sought the life of Jesus.

“After they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to look for the child to kill him.” – Matthew 1:13

Without an insight from God in this dream, Joseph would not have known to flee from Herod and endangered the life of Jesus.

Later, Joseph was instructed in two dreams to return from Egypt. In a dream, Joseph learned Herod’s death and that they were safe to return to Israel.

“After Herod had died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt saying, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead... But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. After being warned in a dream, he went to the regions of Galilee.” – Matthew 2:19-20, 22

Because of God’s warning in another dream, Joseph settled his family in Nazareth. This fulfilled a prophecy concerning Jesus that he would be called a Nazarene. God’s insight to Joseph, in this case, accomplished the words which he had spoken long ago.