

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Christian Living
Study Guide

GOD AND THE SPIRITUAL REALM

LESSON 5: DREAMS AND VISIONS

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Disciple Essentials module titled God and the Spiritual Realm. This series of lessons examines the reality of the spiritual world – one in which there are forces of both good and evil. This module deals with the origin of evil, the end punishment of Satan, the reality of spiritual warfare and strongholds in our everyday lives, the armor that God has provided us with, God’s great battle plan against Satan, God’s ultimate control over all things and the supernatural ways in which God occasionally communicates with his people through dreams, visions and angelic beings.

The Student’s Guide is intended for an individual to look deeper into a specific lesson on their own. The lessons can be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials, such as the video and audio productions found on www.discipleshipessentials.org.

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GOD AND THE SPIRITUAL REALM

LESSON 5: DREAMS AND VISIONS

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

The purpose of this lesson is to understand how God uses dreams and visions to communicate truth to His people, and how to discern whether a dream is spiritual in nature.

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

In every corner of the world people are reporting dreams and visions that are leading them to belief in Jesus Christ. We as Christians should rejoice in the miraculous ways that God saves people and brings them to faith. Where the Gospel is inaccessible, God will make a way for people to know Him. The Bible gives account of over 100 dreams or visions used for various reasons, and He may still use dreams today in places where people do not have the Word of God. This lesson looks at how one can discern if a dream is spiritual in nature, and have some insight into the meaning of the dream.

GETTING STARTED

1. Do you remember your dreams at night? What do you often dream about?

2. What are some examples of God speaking to people through dreams in the Bible? What characteristics do these experiences share?



STUDY

❖ **INTRODUCTION TO DREAMS AND VISIONS:** In today's world, where access to the Gospel is limited, and especially where the Church is persecuted, God is using dreams and visions to speak to His people. It might be natural to be sceptical of this, but we should not place limits on how God will save His people. God's Word tells us clearly that God sometimes chooses to reveal Himself in this way.

- What does the Bible tell us in Acts 2:17?

- What else should we know about God's intention to sometimes use dreams or visions to speak to His people? Read Numbers 12:6 and Psalms 16:7, and then write down what you learn.

From the above verses we can learn that if God wishes to communicate to someone, He may use dreams or visions to do so. However, this does not mean that every dream or vision is a message from God! In fact, some dreams can be false, or from demonic sources rather than from God.

- What does Jeremiah 23:25 and Jeremiah 23:32 tell us about false dreams?

- We must consider the difference between a dream, a vision, and a daydream. It is important our definitions are clear before we go on.
 - o **A Dream** occurs while sleeping. We remember it upon waking.
 - o **A Vision** occurs while we are awake. It may appear before us, or we may feel we are transported to some other place. We are not in our natural state during a vision and may not have control over our voice or actions.
 - o **A Daydream** occurs out of our own thoughts. We are in control of what we imagine. While we might imagine what God would say to us, this is not the same as having a dream or vision from God.



❖ **DREAMS AND VISIONS IN THE BIBLE:** In both the Old and New Testaments, we have many accounts of God speaking through dreams and visions for various purposes. Let’s look at a few examples of dreams in the Bible. For each category of dreams, one example is provided, and others are listed if you wish to study the idea further.

➤ Summarize the account of the dream provided for each type.

	Example
<p>Preparatory Dreams. These are God-given dreams which enable someone to have faith leading to salvation, or which confirm what they have heard in the Gospel as being truth. In these dreams Jesus may appear to someone and identify Himself.</p>	<p>Acts 9:3-9</p> <p>See also Acts 10:1-35</p>
<p>Empowering Dreams. These are God-given dreams in which God gives direction or encouragement. These are seen especially in times of great trial or persecution. God will make His will and presence known in this way.</p>	<p>Acts 18:9-11</p> <p>See also Judges 7:13-15 and Genesis 15:1</p>
<p>Prophetic Dreams. These are God-given dreams which contain a specific instruction or prophecy about the future. These dreams give the opportunity for the dreamer to change behaviour and avoid the wrath of God, or to obey God in order to accomplish His will.</p>	<p>Matthew 2:19-23</p> <p>See also Acts 9:10-18, Genesis 17:1-8 and Acts 16:9-10</p>

- In the Bible, God uses dreams and visions for the three purposes listed above. It should also be noted that in every case:
- The dreamer or bearer of the vision had no doubt that the dream or vision was from God.
 - The dreamer understood the meaning of the dream, or an interpretation was provided to him by someone else.
 - The dream is used for the good of God’s people, to advance the Gospel and/or for the strengthening of the Church.



- ❖ **WHAT SHOULD WE KNOW ABOUT DREAMS TODAY?** There are some important principles we should note from our study of dreams in God's Word. You may want to look up the verses that accompany these points to see where that idea is shown in the Bible.
 - **God Still Uses Dreams and Visions:** We know that God still uses dreams and visions today, and it is in keeping with the way God communicates with His people. This is especially true in times of persecution, tribulation or where there is little or no access to the Gospel (Joel 2:8, Acts 2:17).
 - **Dreams and Vision are not Ordinary:** That is to say, they are rare occurrences. We should not expect visions as part of our normal Christian experience. A person may only receive one vision in their lifetime. We must not seek or rely on dreams and visions to direct our life. God's Word and His Holy Spirit are sufficient (Psalm 105:4, Psalm 119:105).
 - **We Must Show Discernment:** Dreams can be counterfeit, and miraculous revelations can be faked. People can announce a dream and be lying. Demons may present themselves as angels and be false. We must always show discernment when interpreting the source of a dream (2 Corinthians 11:14, Ezekiel 13:7, 1 John 4:1-6).
 - **Vision and Dreams Should Never be Given Greater Authority than the Bible:** Dreams and visions from God will always agree completely with the Bible. The Bible contains all we need to know. A dream will not give new revelation about the will of God that is not contained in the Bible (1 Peter 1:25, Jeremiah 23:28, Proverbs 30:5-6, Matthew 24:24, Deuteronomy 13:1-3).
 - **Visions and Dreams do Not Replace the Work of God's People:** God uses people to confirm dreams, and God uses people to preach the Gospel. Dreams may be used by God to prepare a person to hear the Gospel or to confirm what they have heard. God uses His own people whenever possible to bring knowledge of the Gospel to others.
 - What is your understanding of the role of dreams and visions in the Church today? How would you explain their role to someone?

- ❖ **DISCERNING THE MEANING AND ORIGIN OF DREAMS:** It is important for us to examine how we can know if a dream is from God or if it is false. There are certain qualities of a dream that is given to us by God that a false dream does not provide. The chart that follows will give you some ideas.



A Dream from God	A Demonic Dream
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Will be clear or vivid -Is remembered upon waking -May feel different -May contain an instruction to follow -May contain images of Jesus, angels, heaven or hell -Builds faith -Strengthens the Church -Reinforces God's Word -Reveals the Identity of Jesus Christ as Messiah -Promotes obedience and purity in our lives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Disturbs faith or causes doubt -Contends against the identity of Jesus Christ -Instructs behaviour contrary to the Word of God -Promotes fear or hopelessness -Promotes self and human endeavours, not God's glory

- Using what you have learned so far in this lesson, how could you discern whether a dream was from God, was from a demon, or was a regular ordinary dream?

❖ **IF YOU DREAM:** If you have been given a dream, or someone you know experiences one, consider it a blessing, a special event, and a responsibility. It might be appropriate to tell the story of the vision or dream you were given. Your testimony concerning your dream will help to build your faith and glorify God.

- If you have a dream you feel is spiritual in nature, and the meaning is not clear because of symbols it contains, pray for discernment and a revelation of the meaning of the dream. A trusted Christian friend or leader may be able to interpret it for you.
- If you receive instructions in a dream that are in line with the Word of God (for example, to go to a certain place and share the Gospel with someone) rejoice that you are being used by God. Obey without hesitation. If the meaning of the dream is unclear to you, pray for clarification before you act.
- We are not told in the Bible to pray for dreams, visions or special revelations. We are told that the Word of God is sufficient for any answer we need from God. The Holy Spirit can work within us in many ways. We should not ask or expect dreams as evidence of God's truth. We are required to have faith.

❖ **TRUE ACCOUNTS OF DREAMS:** Following this lesson are two true accounts of a dream given to a man by God. Read them and then identify the features of that dream discussed in this lesson, and also what the results of the dreams were that brought glory to God:



IN SUMMARY

- ❖ God sometimes uses dreams and visions to communicate with His people especially where there is limited access to God's Word.
- ❖ In God's Word we have many accounts of God using dreams and visions to communicate truth, and to prepare people to receive the Gospel.
- ❖ Dreams can be preparatory, empowering or prophetic in nature.
- ❖ We should know that God still uses dreams and visions, but that they are not ordinary occurrences. We must show discernment when they occur, and a dream should never be given more authority than the Bible itself.
- ❖ A dream from God will build our faith, reveal the identity of Jesus as the Messiah and reinforces the truth of God's word. A demonic dream will disturb faith or cause doubt. It contends the identity of Jesus Christ and promotes fear and hopelessness.
- ❖ We are not told to pray for dreams, visions or special revelations. If we do receive a dream, we should consider any instructions in light of what the Bible says to us. We should pray for discernment in understanding the meaning of the dream and it will be provided to us.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What would you say to someone who felt they had had a dream from God? How would you counsel them?

2. Why do you think God uses dreams as only a special means of revelation, not a regular ever day occurrence?



DREAMS AND VISION TESTIMONIES

TESTIMONY 1

I had sought out spiritual counsel from many sources. The religion of my countrymen did not satisfy me or bring me peace. I wrote to a Christian radio station with questions, but was not able to follow their advice in my life. In 1993 I had a dream. I was walking in a valley, carrying a large cross. When I came to the mountain, I saw a large cross on top of it. When I looked around to the cross I had been carrying, it was no longer there. I realized that the cross on the mountain was the one I had been carrying. I knew that this was a message from God to me. I began listening to Christian radio broadcasts again, and reread the letter they had sent me years ago. I shared the letter with a friend of mine who introduced me to a Christian man who taught me many things and confirmed that my dream was showing me that Jesus wanted to forgive my sin and have me follow Him. I was secretly baptized in 1997. I began to share the Gospel with a few friends and my life has recently been threatened because of my Christian witness. I know now that I will do whatever God wants, and that I belong to the Saviour. The dream I had confirmed to me that Jesus was the truth I needed to follow.

TESTIMONY 2

I had not considered the Christian faith before, but lived my own life the best I knew how. I was as religious as those around me and my family were. I never thought much about God. One night, I had a powerful dream in which I saw a figure in a white robe calling to me. He had a kind face, and at first I did not know who this man was. In my dream, Jesus told me to visit a Christian woman I knew and that she would teach me. When I awoke, I could not forget my dream and went as quickly as I could to my friend. I told her about the dream, and she told me that the man who appeared to me was Jesus Christ. He was asking me to follow Him, and she told me how God loves me. I met often with my friend who taught me about Jesus and the Bible, and am now convinced that Jesus appeared to me in a dream. I am a Christian now, and serve God.