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## How Does God Speak to Us Here and Now? (Part I)

**Acts 2:17:** (NASB) *And it shall be in the last days, God says, that I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, And your young men shall see visions, And your old men shall dream dreams.*



It is a pretty simple equation: You love God, you pray to Him, obey Him, serve Him and in return we as humans look for some kind of indication of His love and acceptance. We want and need to hear from God in some way or other. So, how does He speak to us today in the 21st century? Is it through our dreams? Do we have visions? Is it through experiences? How about communicating through other people? Does God speak to us through His ancient word, the Bible? All of the above? Some of the above? Stay with us!

**First, let's see how God has spoken in the distant past:** Genesis 3:8-11: This is a simple example of direct communication *without barriers* - the created was in natural communication with the Creator.

**Sin enters and the rules change:** Genesis 6:13-14,22: Here we see direct communication by *selection* - and only with those (Noah) who were striving to do His will.

**Visions accompanied the direct communication:** Genesis 15:1-4: Another layer was created - visions for the seeker. This would be a dramatic experience to make a point. In summary, the voice of God in the Old Testament was reserved for those who were chosen ones seeking His will, like Adam, Noah and Moses. It was not a common occurrence.

**Dreams were used:** Genesis 28:12-13: Dreams, especially in the context of the Old Testament, were given to both followers of God and others to specifically reveal God's character, prophecies and power.

**God spoke through dreams! How many biblical Christians did God speak to through dreams?**

**The Old Testament is full of many dreams given to many people for many reasons - one example:** Genesis 37:5,7-8: The interpretation of dreams was a widely accepted method of seeing future events.

As a Christian following biblical principles, Old Testament included, we need to follow through the filter of the New Testament including Jesus' words, the Apostles' applications of those words and what they all taught. So, this program will look further at the New Testament as well.

Did dreams continue to play a significant role for God's voice in the New Testament? We are going to review every person we know of who had dreams from God in the New Testament.

*Who in the New Testament had the most dreams from God?*

**Joseph:** Matthew 1:18-20: God spoke to a *Jewish man* through an angel in a dream for direction. Joseph would be responsible for raising Jesus as a child.

**The three wise men:** Matthew 2:11-12: God spoke to *foreigners* through a dream for the purpose of protection.

**Joseph again!** Matthew 2:13: God spoke to a *Jewish man* through an angel in a dream giving him specific instruction and protection.

**Joseph again!** Matthew 2:19-21: God spoke to a *Jewish man* through an angel in a dream giving him specific instruction and protection.

Joseph was shown what to do and how to do it in these specific dreams. But he was not a Christian. Still nothing about dreams given to Christians...

**Joseph again!** Matthew 2:22-23: God spoke to a *Jewish man* through an angel in a dream to give specific instruction and protection.

*Who in the New Testament had the most dreams from God? JOSEPH!*

Why Joseph and why so many times?

- This is pre-Christian communication. God was still using a common Old Testament tool for communication.
- Dreams are personal - Joseph would have really paid attention.



- The protection of the Messiah was at stake!

**One last New Testament Dream, and yes, it is the only other recorded New Testament dream:** Matthew 27:17-19: Pilate's wife had a dream. Was it from God? We do not know and Pilate obviously did not listen. It still was not a Christian having the dream.

So, are dreams an expected method of communication from God to Christianity? If the New Testament is our template, then no! The *only* New Testament dreams recorded were to Jews and foreigners.

God does speak to us through the experiences of our lives. We have to find His direction by what happens around us. If you are truly a Christian, you have to believe your life is being directed. So, we have to pay attention to the road signs. What are we given if we are not given dreams? Unequivocally we have the word of God.

Dreams were obviously important in the Old Testament - why are they obsolete in the New Testament for Christians?

**The New Testament has the benefit of the written Old Testament:** 2 Peter 1:18-20: ...As well as the benefit of the words of Jesus and the Apostles: 2 Peter 3:15-16: Peter is instructing us that the writings of the Apostle Paul are to be included with (and carry the weight of) the rest of the Scriptures. This is the way God communicates with us today - through the Scriptures. Dreams are not needed.

### Visions in the New Testament

These first two examples were actually visitations by angels and not visions, but they were interpreted as visions: Luke 1:18-22 Luke 24:22-23:

**Observation:** Actual angelic visitations were often looked upon as visions because they were so unusual. The reason for these visits was to inform of great life-changing events.

Hebrews 1:1,2: God previously spoke through the prophets but today we also have the words of Jesus. We can find clear direction in the Bible with the help of the Holy Spirit.

**Other visions: Ananias and Saul** Acts 9:10-13: Why the visions? This was a really big event! Ananias needed to understand that Saul, the persecutor, was called to Jesus. Saul needed the reassurance that he would be shown the way to be the Twelfth Apostle!

**Cornelius and Peter:** Acts 10:3-11: Why the visions? This was one of the biggest events in human history - the Gospel would now be open to Gentiles!

**Observations:**

- Visions were absolutely used in the context of Christianity.
- Visions were a tool to prepare specific individuals for specific and dramatic changes.

**Are personal visions a biblical method for God to communicate with us here and now?**

**Peter thought he had a vision but it was an angelic intervention:** Acts 12:6-9

**Three more visions given to the Apostle Paul:** Acts 16:8-10: Why was Paul given this vision? Paul needed specific instruction as to where to bring the Gospel. He had to go!

Acts 18:8-11: Why was Paul given this vision? Paul needed specific instruction as to where to continue with the Gospel. He had to stay! Paul was a very unique Christian.

Because the *vision* in Acts 18:9 was at night, does that mean it was a dream?

What is the difference? A dream originates from within one's mind whereas a vision originates from outside. In both cases, God can certainly be the moving force - as can other spirit forces.

2 Corinthians 12:1-2: Why the vision? Paul was given many special gifts to teach, direct and encourage him in order to fulfill the immense work that was put upon his shoulders as the Apostle to the Gentiles. Remember, the Apostle Paul did not walk with Jesus.



### Observations:

- Visions were absolutely used in the context of Christianity.
- Visions were a tool to prepare specific individuals for specific and dramatic changes.
- Visions were apostolic tools of specific instruction to aid in the spreading of the Gospel.

We just reviewed visions in the New Testament. Here is a quick review of dreams in the New Testament:

- The *only* New Testament dreams recorded are to Jews and foreigners.
- The New Testament had the benefit of the written Old Testament...
- ...as well as the benefit of the words of Jesus and the Apostles.

The need for dreams is no longer there because we now have the written word.

**What about the theme text? It talks about dreams and visions!**

**Let's look at the context of the theme text:** Acts 2:14-17: The Apostle Peter - at Pentecost - is quoting the Old Testament prophet, Joel. The Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost - a very dramatic event. Peter explains that what was happening had to do with what the prophet Joel had said. This is a direct Old Testament link to what was happening then.

The way Peter begins describing what Joel said as, *And it shall be in the last days...* But interestingly, that is not exactly what Joel said. Did Peter misquote him?

**Here is the context of the original prophecy:** Joel 2:21-24: (KJV) <sup>21</sup>*Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things.* <sup>22</sup>*Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength.* <sup>23</sup>*Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month.* <sup>24</sup>*And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.*

*Fear not, O land:* Joel was a prophet to Israel. The Scripture is all about Israel in a blessed and fruitful state - but when? That did not happen in Peter's time. (We also know it is about Israel because of the reference to the fig tree, which is a biblical symbol for Israel.)

So, Peter is quoting the prophecy of Joel and applying some part of the prophecy to Peter's time. It cannot be the whole prophecy, because parts of it did not happen then.

**Joel continues...**Joel 2:27: (KJV) *...And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed.*

Does Israel unequivocally know the Lord is their God right now? No, not yet. Joel describes for us a blessing of the land, His people not being ashamed and they would know the Lord God is their God. He is describing a very specific time frame for this prophecy to unfold in the future. This predicts Israel fully restored - this has not yet happened. Why did the Apostle Peter quote this?

Joel 2:28: (KJV) *And it shall come to pass afterward, (after Israel is blessed, recognizes God and is fully restored) that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions:*

Israel is finally delivered during the time of trouble:

Matthew 24:21: (NIV) *For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now--and never to be equaled again.*

The Apostle Peter does not quote the part *And it shall come to pass afterward* - he rewords it to say *It shall be in the last days*.

It is in the context of Israel that these visions and dreams happen, not in the context of Christianity. This spirit pouring is to the children of Israel after full restoration - the true *last days* as Peter labeled them! Why then is he quoting this prophecy?

Joel 2:29: (KJV) *And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.*



**Peter's rendition in Acts 2:18 reads:**

*<sup>18</sup>Even on My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit and they shall prophesy.*

We believe the time frame of *in those days* is before the afterwards. It is as if the prophecy is written out of order.

**Again, Peter's rendition reads: Acts 2:18: *Even on My bondslaves, (now a different group of people - the true church - the true followers of Christ) both men and women, I will in those days (in the time leading up to the end days) pour forth of My spirit and they shall prophesy.***

The Apostle Peter is saying, "The Spirit has been poured upon us now because we are in the beginning stages of the development of the true church which will eventually bless all the nations of the earth through Israel."

The visions and dreams part of that prophecy is focused on Israel - not on Christian followers. The pouring out of the Spirit and the prophesying was given to the followers of Christ.

Dreams and visions are important in scriptural discussion, but we have to understand where and when they belong.

*So, how does God speak to us here and now?  
For Jonathan and Rick (and Kathy) and Christian Questions...  
Think about it...!*