

The dreams of Jacob by Wolfgang Schweizer

I awoke in the middle of the night realising that I had had the same dream once again. It was quite short and simple and in it I believe I was hearing the voice of God. He simply said, 'Tell your milkman that I the Lord God love him.' I had tried to dismiss the dream as a piece of fanciful thinking but it had persisted and it came with a sense of authority and calling. The trouble was that our milkman delivered his milk at the unearthly hour of five o'clock in the morning as we lived quite close to the dairy. And so very reluctantly and feeling not a little foolish I got up early to await his arrival at my doorstep.

When he eventually reached my house, I opened the front door not knowing how this was going to go. In that moment we recognised each other. His name was Frank and we had been at secondary school together many years ago. After some

preliminary chat I got around to my task and told him as calmly as I could that I had had a dream in which I believed that God had wanted me to tell him that the Lord God loved him. Frank stood there gazing in astonishment when he suddenly said 'Damn it!' He explained to me that his wife had recently been converted in an evangelistic crusade and that she had pestered him to become a Christian also. He told me that he thought he had silenced his wife by telling her 'If your God exists, I want Him to tell me Himself.' And now here I was being that very messenger. He subsequently surrendered his life to Christ in the months ahead.

In all honesty, despite the fact that I had been studying dreams and visions in the Bible for some time before this event, I was shaken and challenged to discover that God still

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Russ Parker (pictured) did what God asked and the consequences were life changing confirming his lifelong ministry to teach people to be open to the importance of dreams and to the revelations they may bring



speaks through our dreams today. It was to affirm what has become a lifelong part of my ministry, namely to teach and train people to respect their dreams and be open to the revelations that they may bring.

Dreams: a gift of our humanity

It is important that we accept that dreams are a part of being human and not just a post-box to which God delivers messages now and then. Our God is a dreamer and as we are made in His image, it is no surprise that we are dreamers too. We are largely responsible for what is in our dreams and they normally contain our reflections on what has been affecting us both recently and in our past. The strongest form of these dreams are our nightmares in which we relive an unfinished piece of our lives which we are unable or unwilling to face and deal with. One outstanding example from

Scripture is the disturbing dream of Pilate's wife who interrupts her husband at work telling him not to have any adverse dealings with Jesus as she had been challenged in a dream about him. (Matthew 27:19) Consequently, when working with a dream we do need to discern if it is something that is mine and still needs exploring as resolving its message will help me to grow in wholeness. However, we also need to accept that because dreams are a part of being normal, then God will speak through them as well as ourselves.

Dreams and Visions: God's resource for ministry

There are over 130 references to dreams and approximately 100 references to visions in the Bible. Admittedly, the bulk of these references are in the Old Testament but let us not forget that the New Testament opens up with a series of important dreams which not only secured the name of the Messiah as Jesus, but also gave warnings to wise men to protect his whereabouts when but a baby and persuaded Joseph to marry the pregnant Mary and become such a good role model for the boy Jesus. Reflect also how the last book of the Bible is the unfolding of a series of visions to John which inspired his faith when confined to a prisoner's labour camp.

One of the most important dreams which had huge evangelistic outcomes was the dream vision which Paul had when he was on his way home from a missionary trip. The Scriptures say 'During the night (whilst he was sleeping and dreaming) Paul had a vision: there stood a man from Macedonia pleading with him and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' (Acts 16: 9) In obeying God's challenge the Gospel of Christ came to the mainland of Europe for the first time.

The Difference between dreams and visions

It is important we discern the difference between the dreams we write when asleep and the visions that God brings to challenge us to action. Here are a few simple principles which may help us to learn the difference and respond accordingly:

1. We write our dreams under the influence of whatever is of significance to us. God gives visions which may not necessarily connect with our personal life situations.
2. We normally dream when asleep. God gives visions whether we are awake or asleep.
3. Our dreams may provoke us to an action which is about exploring our personal issues. Visions come with God's authority because they carry God's anointing for purpose and our response tends to be surrender to the will of God.
4. Our dreams can be easily dismissed and forgotten. Visions from God demand a response because you cannot separate God's presence from His word of authority over us. Such visions produce the response of awe and worship.
5. We can dismiss our dreams. Visions carry an inbuilt 'go and tell' effect. The vision message is not for personal reflection or debate but is designed to empower us into God's service in some way.

6. A final test of visions is to note if the message or task contained within it, if performed, conforms to God's revealed character and holiness. This is underlined in Deuteronomy 13 where the test of prophecy is applied to dream messages from God.

The Ministry of Dreams and Visions

We do not have enough space in this article to examine every way in which God used dreams and visions in the Bible and so the following are some of its broad streams of ministry.

Dreams and Spiritual Renewal

'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh . . . and your young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams.' (Joel 2: 28, Acts 2:17)

On the day of Pentecost the Apostle Peter explains the phenomenon of power in terms of fulfilled prophecy and two of the manifestations of this day of God's power are the restoration of dreams and visions as one of the ways in which God will reveal Himself to people and guide them in his purposes. It helps to ground us in the reality



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Wolfgang Konrad Schweizer painted our title picture on page 4 and 'The Cathedral' above. He was born in Germany and advanced his oil painting techniques during his chemistry studies at Freiburg University.

Over the years he developed his own abstract style in acrylics and watercolours. In 2007, Wolfgang Schweizer moved to the United States. He is a member of the Organization for Independent Artists of New York.

that renewal is not just about doing mighty things for God but letting the Spirit take us deeper into knowing him and worshipping him. It is also worth pointing out that the Greek word for old men is the same as that for elder and so this is not about people past their prime gazing into faded memories but about those who are at their spiritual peak who are ready to hear from God and do what he says.

Dreams and Prophetic gifting

'If there is a prophet amongst you, I the Lord will speak to him in a dream.' (Numbers 12:6)

So many of the Old Testament prophecies begin with the expression, 'the word of the Lord came to . . .' This underlines the fact that prophecies are not the passing on of our opinions but the giving of God's revealed word whether it comes through dreams or visions. It was through a dream that Nathan was given God's word that exposed David's sin of adultery and premeditated murder of a loyal staff officer (2 Samuel 7: 4ff). It was through a vision that the unknown Ananias prophesied over Paul and helped him to find healing and commissioning for Christ (Acts 9: 10-19).

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And it was through his own dream that Paul was given the word that all those aboard the beleaguered boat would be saved from drowning. (Acts 27: 21-26) Any cursory glance at these Biblical stories will confirm that they all conform to the designated purpose of prophecy which is to encourage, exhort and to build up in faith. (1 Corinthians 14: 3)

Dreams and Godly Wisdom

There are three outstanding statesmen in the Bible and they all achieved their rank because they listened to God for the interpretations of dreams and so gained wisdom for other peoples' circumstances. They are Joseph who interpreted Pharaoh's disturbing dreams, Solomon who was given wisdom as he talked with God in his sleep and Daniel who survived one plot after another to be God's wise representative in a pagan society. They all demonstrated wisdom beyond their means and the foundation for acquiring it was their ability to listen to God speak in their dreams and visions. Surely we need Christian statesmen today who will be raised up of God to speak to and for nations.

Conclusion

Dreams are a precious resource for us to connect not only with ourselves better but with the God of signs and wonders. Let us not neglect this gift but rather pray 'Come Holy Spirit of the Lord and renew your people once again through dreams and visions.' **R**

about the writer

The Revd Dr Russ Parker is the Director of the Acorn Christian Healing Foundation. His books include *Healing Dreams* (Triangle), *Dream Stories* (BRF) and *Dreams and Spirituality* (Grove Books). He can be visited on www.acornchristian.org

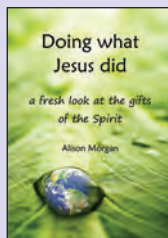


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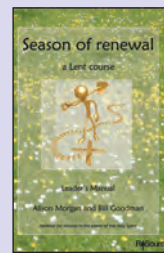


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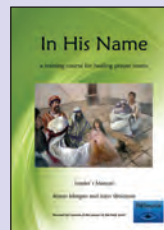


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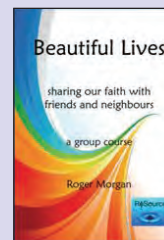
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