



May 19–20, 2012
Genesis 40–41
“In Your Dreams”
Pastor Gary Hamrick

Joseph spent approximately 10 to 12 years in prison for a crime he didn't commit, and considering the fact that he was about 20 years old when he was sent to prison, he was in jail during the prime of his life. Joseph, in spite of the circumstances he finds himself in, did not complain, become angry or bitter with God; he simply trusted the providential hand of God. Because of his complete trust in the Lord, Joseph was able to recognize that things were going on behind the scenes that the Lord was using for his good and the Lord's glory.¹

We read about God's behind the scenes work in Joseph's life in [Genesis 40–41](#), when God used a series of four dreams to get Joseph out of prison. Others had two dreams that God helped Joseph interpret, and Pharaoh had the last two dreams. Once Joseph gave the interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams, Pharaoh promoted him to the position of being the second most powerful man in Egypt, next to Pharaoh himself. Joseph's new position was used by God to rescue Egypt and Joseph's estranged family, which was the budding nation of Israel.

In [Genesis 40](#) we read about the dreams of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker.² The cupbearer dreamed of a vine that had three branches, which budded, blossomed and bore grapes, which he would then have squeezed into the king's cup. Joseph told him that the three branches were three days, and that in three days the king would lift up his head and restore him to his position. The chief baker dreamed of three baskets of bread stacked on his head, from which birds were eating. Joseph

¹ [Matthew 5:11–12](#) – “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven...”

² The Bible doesn't record the reason or reasons these men were in prison with Joseph.

³ <http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/user/morewedg/personal/papers/dreams2.pdf> (Pages 252–253) (56% of

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gave him the tragic news that the three baskets represented three days, and that in three days Pharaoh would have him hanged!

In the next study we'll learn more about what the dreams Pharaoh had mean, but today's study will focus on the topic of biblical dreams, especially since the topic of dreams is unavoidable in any study from the book of Genesis. In fact, there are more references to dreams from God in Genesis, than any other book in the Bible, and four of them are in chapters 40 and 41. The Bible records more than 100 references to dreams, which clearly demonstrates that dreams are one of the ways God communicates with people.

Pastor Gary mentioned that he wrestled with this subject because it's one that some people take and run with, oftentimes to an unhealthy extreme. First, there is an inherent risk that some people will think every dream they have has been sent expressly to them by the Lord. Second, those who think this way believe their "dream from God" gives them the appropriate authority to advise and admonish people based on the dream the Lord gave them. It should go without saying that every dream we have is not from God.

While we don't know everything there is to know about dreams, there are scientific studies that have been done which bring a greater understanding to the subject. It's been determined that most dreams are a natural psychological function that is common to every human being. It's interesting to know that dreams are necessary for maintaining adequate mental and emotional health, and it's known that people who are deprived of the Rapid Eye Movement cycle, which happens when most dreams occur, can suffer serious medical and mental health problems. Another interesting fact, found in G. William Domhoff's book, *The Scientific Study of Dreams*, is that most people over the age of ten typically have between four and six dreams per night. And finally, according to a study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*,³ a majority of people in the United States, India, and South Korea, believe the Freudian Theory that their dreams reveal meaningful hidden truths.⁴

So, there are natural dreams, and then there are supernatural dreams that God gives. This study will present a balanced and biblical view that centers on three points: the possibility of dreams from God, the purpose of dreams from God, and the proof of dreams from God.

³ <http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/user/morewedg/personal/papers/dreams2.pdf> (Pages 252-253) (56% of Americans - 65% of Koreans - 74% of Indians)

⁴ <http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/user/morewedg/personal/papers/dreams2.pdf> (Page 264) "Emotions buried in the unconscious surface in disguised form during dreaming, and the remembered fragments of dreams can help uncover the buried feelings."

The Possibility Of Dreams From God

1. Dreams from God are real, but they are rare.
2. Dreams should not be discounted, but neither should we become preoccupied with them.
3. We do not read of anyone in the Bible who prayed and asked for a dream from God; dreams just happened and will continue to happen as God gives them.
4. Dreams in the Bible are not reserved specifically for prophets or Believers.
 - a. In [Genesis 20:1-7](#), we read that Abimelech, a Philistine king, had the first dream recorded in the Bible.
 - b. Other dreams include [Genesis 28](#) (Jacob's stairway to heaven), [Genesis 31](#) (Jacob's selective breeding of sheep), and [Genesis 37](#) (Joseph's dreams about his future).
5. Dreams are not exclusive to the Old Testament.
 - a. Joseph, the stepfather of Jesus, had four dreams, which were all related to the birth and early years of Jesus. ([Matthew 1-2](#))
 - i. Take Mary as your wife.
 - ii. Escape to Egypt with Mary and Jesus before Herod killed Jesus.
 - iii. Return to Israel after Herod died.
 - iv. Settle in Galilee instead of Judea.
 - b. Pontius Pilate's wife had a dream about Jesus not being condemned because he was innocent. ([Matthew 27](#))
6. The last dream mentioned in the Bible concerns the work of the Holy Spirit.
 - a. [Acts 2:17](#) - "*In the last days, God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.'*"⁵
7. Even though we may not have had a dream from God, we need to be open to the possibility that God could still choose to communicate with us through dreams.

The Purpose Of Dreams From God

8. In the Bible, God gave dreams as warnings, confirmation, foretelling or a combination of the aforementioned.

⁵ This verse does not mean that only old men will dream dreams; it means that God can still use dreams to speak to people, and that in particular, he will reveal things to older men through dreams.

- a. Warning
 - i. [Genesis 20](#) – God warned Abimelech not to touch Sarah because she was Abraham’s wife.
 - ii. [Matthew 2:11-12](#) – The Magi
 - iii. [Matthew 2:19-23](#) – Joseph
- b. Confirmation
 - i. [Matthew 1:18-21](#) – This dream confirmed that Mary did not become pregnant by another man, but by the Spirit of God.
- c. Foretelling
 - i. [Genesis 40-41](#) – Joseph interpreted the dreams of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker.
 - ii. [Daniel 2](#) – Daniel interpreted the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon.⁶

The Proof Of Dreams From God

9. Commonality

- a. In the Bible, the one thing that is common to every dream from God is that the one who experienced it knew with certainty that it was from God, no matter whether they were a Believer or not.
- b. If you have a dream and you’re not sure it was from the Lord; then it probably wasn’t, because you should have a certainty beyond a shadow of a doubt and you should not be left to wonder, “Was that that God talking to me or not”?
 - i. [1 Kings 3:15](#) – *“Then Solomon awoke – and he realized that it had been a dream. He returned to Jerusalem, stood before the ark of the Lord’s covenant and sacrificed burnt offerings. Then he gave a feast for all his court.”*

10. Discerning the natural from the supernatural is not always easy, because it’s like trying to discern between the still, small voice of God in your heart, and your own voice.

11. Two Tests

- a. The Test of Time
 - i. If you can wait it out, that’s the best way to go, because if it’s really from the Lord, time will always tell the rest of the story!

⁶ Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that after the Babylonian Empire, there would be other kingdoms that would rise to power and influence in the world. Daniel described what would become the empires of the Medo-Persians, Greeks, Romans, as well as the Ten-nation confederation (yet to come) from which the Antichrist will rise.

- ii. We should never live our lives based on the words of other people, which means, that if God wants to show you something or tell you something, he knows exactly how to speak to you directly.
 - 1. If someone tells you they have a “word” from the Lord for you or a “dream” for you, and you are a Christian, what they have to say should only be confirmation of the leading of the Lord, not direction from the Lord.
 - 2. The Lord knows your “phone number,” so to speak, so he’ll be able to get in touch with you if a dream is the way he’s going to speak to you.
 - 3. Be careful to let the Lord speak to you first, and then you can be open to receive confirmation from others.
- b. The Test of Truth
 - i. Everything we experience should be passed through the filter of the Word of God, because God would never give us a dream that contradicts Scripture.

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Genesis 41:15-32, 39-43](#) to provide an overview for this study.
3. Would it be helpful to you to consider the fact that viewing the circumstances of life should be viewed as though you were looking at the underside of a quilt, with all of the messy, zig-zaggy and indiscernible threads, knowing that on the other side there is a beautiful design in your life?
4. Do you believe, as do 56% of Americans, the Freudian Theory concerning dreams? (See page two, footnotes three and four)
5. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences concerning dreams that came from Taco Bell or Pizza Hut!
6. If someone in your group has received a dream from the Lord, allow them to give the specifics concerning the purpose behind the dream, as well as how they tested the dream to make sure it was from the Lord.
7. Have you had the experience of having someone in the church or perhaps a Christian friend coming to you with a “word” from the Lord that came to him or her in a dream?

- a. What was your reaction to their advice or admonition?
 - b. What did the test of time and/or the test of truth reveal?
8. Close your time in prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person: remember that not every dream they have is from the Lord; use the tests of time and biblical truth when it comes to interpreting their dreams or the dreams of others; trust in the Holy Spirit to help them discern between the natural and the supernatural.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).