

COFFEE AND PHILOSOPHY

April 2024

Are there any New Testament references (after Jesus' infancy narratives) to God speaking to people in dreams?

- Acts 27:23 talks about “an angel of God” coming to Paul in the night. We don't know if that messenger came into Paul's sleep as a dream or just happened to arrive at night.
- Acts 9:11-12 refers to Saul/Paul praying and seeing a vision about a man named Ananias restoring his sight. Again, there is no context to attest to whether the “vision” happened during sleep.
- Joel 2:28 discusses prophecy and says “It will come after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind. And your sons and your daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions.”
- The Book of Revelation is a vision, series of visions, and/or a dream.
- We may not see any specific reference to God talking to New Testament people in ways that are clearly sleeping dreams,(at least, not after the birth of Jesus, flight into Egypt, and return to Nazareth), but there is New Testament evidence of God speaking through visions and dream-like states to give guidance.
- However we can accept it, God comes to us.
- Islam puts a great deal of emphasis on dreams. There are frequent reports in the Muslim world of people dreaming about a “man in white,” but they do not know who He is. Some missionary groups actually post billboards advertising to people who have had this dream, asking them to call a number to learn more about the “man in white.”

Who speaks to us in response to prayer?

- God
- Ourselves
- Satan

How do we know when we are receiving guidance from God or when we are just hearing our own thoughts/desires or, worse yet, temptation from the Enemy?

- Humility/obedience/love- What are we praying for/about? How are we praying? Are we praying in line with God's will? Are we bargaining with God (God is a God of abundance, not a role of the dice), What is our motivation in prayer? Are we authentically and genuinely putting ourselves in God's hands?

- Commanding Scripture- Have we vetted our prayer by Scripture? Is our prayer in keeping with the Word of God? Are we asking God to change His nature?
- Compelling Signs of the Holy Spirit- a dream, a vision, an intense sense of calling, seeing a billboard or hearing a song or having continual experiences that seem to point in the direction you should take.
- Counsel of Saints- Have you vetted your prayer and perceived response with wise and godly people you trust? Might they have additional insight that will either confirm or question what you perceive the response to be?
- Circumstantial Signs- Your decision kind of gets made for you. For instance, you are praying about whether you should take a new job or not and, while you are deciding, the company announces a policy that is counter to your conscience.
- Common Sense- God gives us all reason and expects us to use that reason to weigh critical factors when making decisions.
- Typically, we don't use one of these vetting methods in isolation. We consider them all when making big decisions. If we think God has given us an answer to a prayer, either "yes" or "no," but aren't sure if the answer is really coming from God, all of the above resources (plus additional prayer) can help us feel at peace with the decision we make.
- Remember, even if we make a mistake and go in the wrong direction, God will often use that error to create something wonderful.

Mistakes vs Sin

- If we make a mistake, is it a sin?
- Maybe a "mistake" is doing the best you can with the information you have with the best motives and getting it wrong. A "sin" might be doing the wrong thing when you know or should know better.
- The more we know- the more resources God gives us- the more accountable we will have to be, God expects more from us. The less we know- the fewer spiritual resources we have access to- the less God expects from us.

Nativity Narratives Not In Mark and John

- Mark was the first gospel to be written and just didn't pick up that particular piece of the story.
- John does have a "nativity narrative," in a way- the Incarnation... The Word was made flesh. John's gospel is less about chronological/biographical detail and more about the spiritual significance of the events.

Revelation

We talk about the four gospels, but Revelation is also a type of gospel. While the first four gospels concentrate on Jesus' first coming, Revelation is the gospel of the second coming.

The "mark of the beast-" traditionally 666- may actually have been 616, based on a newly discovered manuscript fragment.

"Progressive Revelation"

Isaiah is the oldest piece of the Bible we have, found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. It is only a partial rendition of Isaiah, but it is substantial.

Islam claims that their holy writing all dates from the same time and believes all their Quran has been preserved together in one piece.

The Bible we use today is a combination of discovered manuscripts from all over. Scholars over millennia have worked to identify the most accurate translations and accounts that are likely closest to the actual events of the time. Scholars continue to evaluate how current discoveries impact the Bible through history, archeology, science, linguists, paleography, and other discipline. In some cases, new information gives us additional evidence of the truth of our Bible. In other cases, it leads us to ask questions about how we interpret the Bible.

This can be a very good thing for our faith because finding new information leads us to keep grasping, which fosters discussion, which fosters understanding, which fosters faithfulness (and resilience against attempts to debunk the faith.)

Parting Words of Wisdom:

You may call me a nut, but I'm screwed to the right bolt!