

Dream Reference Guide

I. Getting Started: Understanding the Setting

Dream interpretation is intuitive, not scientific, so grab an eight-year-old if you need help! Simple is better. We are drawing stick figures, not painting a Michelangelo.

Was the dream hopeful or was it discouraging? Did it take place at night, or during the day? Was the atmosphere sunny, or gloomy? Were the other characters friendly, or intimidating? Did the dream conclude with a situation being resolved, or was it simply a snapshot of an event in time? **The setting establishes the overall context of what we can expect to learn from the dream.**

Record every detail of the dream, including the people, places and activities that you can clearly recall. Date it as well. Descriptive details add clarity. Example: Instead of a robe, a *purple robe* or *priestly garment*. A *sunny sky* reveals a pleasant or ordinary day; a *swamp with alligators* indicates the presence of danger or an unseen predator. Not simply *a city*, but *New York City*; not just *a woman*, but *my former high school teacher*; not just *attended school*, but *took a test in high school*. A *class in general* could symbolize learning, whereas a *college calculus class* could symbolize a search for solutions to a difficult problem. Details can make important distinctions. Don't manufacture them, simply recall all of the ones you can.

In the dream, are you an observer (possibly prophetic), the primary participant (it's all about you), or simply present among others (part of a group situation)?

II. Identify the obvious symbols

These are the primary people, places, objects and activities that generate the story of the dream. At this point, we are not trying to establish what the symbol means, just that it is a substitute or replacement for something else. Begin with the most dominant feature. Was the emphasis on a person (e.g., a celebrity), a place (e.g., the White House), an object (e.g., a Lexus), or an activity (e.g., running)? As you interpret, maintain the same emphasis the dream does. If the most memorable part of the dream is that it occurred in a pitch black room, emphasize that.

My wife had a dream with a line from a Beatle's song: "I'm fixing a hole where the rain comes in to stop my mind from wandering." The lyrics were meant to reveal to her that a defect (a hole) was causing her to battle a negative outlook (rain) in her thinking (wandering mind).

III. Inventory on current life events

Have you been promoted recently? Engaged? Are you in a season of trials? In the midst of a divorce? Are you pregnant? Have you recently lost a loved one?

The most common type of dream springs from the overflow of daily life, according to Ecclesiastes 5:3: *As a dream comes with many cares, so the speech of a fool with many words*. Restated: like a man who talks too much, our dreams are reflective of the emotional, spiritual and psychological concerns that bubble up from our daily life.

IV. Compare these life events to your dream

Is the dream just a restatement of the challenges you face, goals you would like to achieve or daily obligations you must complete? This is by far the biggest common denominator in the dreams you will have or interpret. All attempts to interpret a dream should start with a quick update on the life of the dreamer. The key to a dream is inside the dreamer. Interpretive success can be gauged by how it resonates with them, unless they are in some form of denial. NOTE: It can be difficult to interpret old dreams from the past unless the life events faced by the dreamer at the time of the dream can be recalled in detail.

V. Attempt to compare the actual life events you face with the symbols you have listed in II. above

Pair a symbol from your dream with a person, place, activity or thing. Start with the most obvious or dominant things first. For example: did the storm in your recent dream represent the one you are facing in your marriage? At this point in the interpretation process, we must speculate. Do you see a parallel? If so, assign a definition to each dream symbol. Build slowly until you have a general sense of the meaning of the dream.

VI. Two simple dream examples

Here is an example of how to connect the dots:

A. Holly had a dream in which she heard a booming voice ask, "Do you want to be Sweet-and-Low — or Equal?"

Interpretation: This dream occurred as God was encouraging her to be more assertive. It was both an encouragement and a clarification that she would have to forfeit the approval of others to recapture her own sense of self respect.

B. Holly dreamt she was chopping down the tree of knowledge. It wasn't very thick, and she was using an axe.

Interpretation: Holly was forced to make a decision that seemed illogical, yet caused her conscience to be at rest. She had to trust her intuition.

VII. Flexibility is key

Remember: a symbol can be literal or figurative, so try both. For example, an earthquake could be a seismic event, or conversely, a great shaking in politics, finance or our personal lives. A tsunami could be a giant outpouring of blessing — or divine judgment, as well as a wall of water produced from an undersea earthquake. A wedding could represent the act of matrimony, commitment, or a reference to the "Bride of Christ," which is the Church. A bomb is both an explosive event, as well as the more commonly understood, instrument of war. Most of the time, the dream symbols need some breathing room, as they are a loose approximation of ideas. Again, we are not talking differential equations, but rather a campfire story.

Interpreting other people's dreams using dream symbols alone is normally a mistake. Interview your dreamer!

VIII. Add additional dream elements to round out your interpretation

Once you feel confident you have the gist of the meaning, you can look at secondary details to contribute to a greater understanding of the dream. A dream of a hospital housing burn victims could refer to ministry in a women's shelter for battered wives. In this example, the hospital is the shelter and the burn

victims are the battered wives. They were "burned" in their marriage or circumstances. Get it?

IX. Demonic dreams and nightmares

Most people have nightmares (or demonic dreams, depending on your theology) at some point in their life. These are generally negative, and often contain events, characters or animals that produce fear or anxiety (as well as anger, lust, envy, bitterness, sorrow, or other things). Despite the negative content, they can be helpful diagnostic tools that pinpoint attitudes and belief systems that are broken or damaged.

For example: A lost child being chased by a large black dog should cause us to question the dreamer: Is this child somehow *you*? Are you running from a problem or from fear?

It's often the case that dream characters represent the enemies of our peace, and are snapshots of the emotional wounds we carry. Dreams of broken windows = shattered vision or outlook; tornados = storms of life; lost wallet, purse or shoes = lost identity, including possible financial loss — these are often the recurring themes of dreams we may have during seasons of difficulty.

X. Prophetic dreams

Many people have reported having dreams that either inspired them or forecast a future event. Paul McCartney wrote the song "Yesterday" after hearing the melody in a dream. Albert Einstein had a dream about the nature of light that aided him in his discovery of the theory of relativity. I personally had a dream about a famous politician who bought four tires, then carried them off, two over each shoulder. Two days later, it was front page news that this senator announced a totally unexpected *retirement* from national politics.

Even the most rationally-minded among us may have a dream that forecasts a coming event in their lives. One of the most common dream themes is of an approaching storm. Although this dream often occurs as a result of personal turmoil, the dream may appear well before that turmoil is apparent, in which case you have a prophetic element.

We have seen dreams that have accurately forecast national election results and financial calamity in the world markets, as well as other significant events. I have come to believe some have a rare and exceptional gift in terms of prediction.

XI. Common dream themes

Appearance of deceased friends or relatives — a signal to re-examine a past relationship; their presence is somehow a clue to current events

Asleep — asleep to spiritual matters or other things, such as relational issues; spiritually oblivious; lack of awareness about truth

Basement, first floor, second floor — basement may refer to prior generations, as well as the unseen realm (below the surface); first floor is where life and vocation are dominant; second floor represents the spiritual realm

Being chased or pursued by a person or animal — retreating in fear from a situation

Climbing or falling — climbing = success in facing a challenge or overcoming adversity; falling = failing

Drafted into the service — responding to the call of God

Finding change — may refer to a small financial windfall, but more often indicates a departure from current circumstances

Flood, earthquake, tsunami, or storm coming — these precede dramatic life changes. Floods/tsunamis = most often judgments or events that threaten to overwhelm us; earthquakes = a great shaking; storms = a season of testing

Flying — flying in the spirit; soaring above the limitations of pragmatism; defying gravity and overcoming earthly limitation

Having an operation — spiritual surgery to address character issues, often during a season of hardship; a circumcision of sorts

Insects, spiders, snakes, wild animals — these creatures bite, sting, poison or kill, and are symbolic of people, places and things that do the same

Late for an appointment — something (long) overdue needs attention. This often, though not always, refers to the need to address personal issues of an emotional nature, or to remedy toxic thinking, or just to right something; procrastination regarding this issue must end.

Lost wallet, money or keys — lost identity, finances or keys to understanding. These can also be found again.

Naked or partially undressed in public — feeling exposed; exposing your heart. (If a shirt or blouse is missing = battling shame).

Need to use the bathroom, privately or publicly — need to expel toxins, such as bitterness, anger, anxiety or unforgiveness; searching for a safe place to vent

Pregnancy/having a baby — about to give birth to something, newness; growth

Sexual experiences — battling lust, including material things. This includes covetousness in general.

Taking a test of some sort (in school) — facing a challenge in life that measures our growth or understanding in some area, often to reveal if we have learned our lesson (or not)

Teeth falling out — loss of personal power, vitality or wisdom

TV set or windows — prophetic vision

Vividly sensing a presence — peace/tranquility = the Holy Spirit; anxiety or oppression = demonic attack

Waiting to catch an airplane — preparing to embark on a spiritual journey or to answer a call

Wedding, banquet, festival or reunion — assembly of people for a common spiritual purpose; the Wedding Supper of the Lamb

XII. Dream Symbols

We have included a limited number of symbols for reference; the list is endless. As Christians, we assign meanings to symbols based on Biblical references (e.g., a lion could be *the Lion of the Tribe of Judah* from Revelation 5:5, or *the great roaring lion* from 1 Peter 5:8, seeking someone to devour), but many dreams also contain stereotypes from pop culture. When this occurs, we must adopt the chief characteristic of that person, place or thing as a clue to the meaning of the dream. The Statue of Liberty, for example, would obviously represent the U.S.A. or freedom; Jay-Z or Beyoncé could represent fame and fortune; the Olympics would symbolize a great contest.

NOTE: The following meanings are suggested, but can vary dramatically. **Intuition is key.**

Vehicles

Are you a passenger (passive) or operator (in control)? Are you being carried along, or actively engaged as a decision maker in the things you face?

Airplane – flying, or being in the spirit, either individually or corporately; spiritual life

Bicycle – simple transportation; operating under limited power or your own strength

Boat – sometimes as part of an epic journey or odyssey, generally with a certain measure of danger or risk attached, due to sharks, storms or uncertainty

Bus – transport to school or to training with a group of like-minded people; church

Car – your current personal journey in life. Is it parked, broken down, or out of control?

Motorcycle – powerful, fast, maneuverable; sometimes indicates danger or vulnerability

Semi/tractor trailer – carries cargo, often in the form of help or aid to others

Buildings and Places

If it's a building, what is the facility used for? The use determines the meaning. A house is the place where our life takes place. An office is a place of work or business and indicates our vocation; it can be actual or spiritual. Of particular note is the condition of the place; is it luxurious, or stark and barren; new, or in a state of disrepair? Is it well lit and located in a place of safety, or down a dark alley? The details can significantly alter our translation of the dream.

Attic or second story – the spiritual realm; often a place of refuge from problems

Basement – the subsurface (often invisible) origin of things, including generational issues; hidden

Bathroom – private place to evacuate poisons, toxins and waste. These are the physical, spiritual and emotional things from life that we need to get rid of, such as bitterness, anger, depression, low self esteem, etc.

Bridge – transition between changing landscapes of life

City – either a type of metro area or a specific place; if a specific city, it may represent what the city is known for (e.g., New Orleans could symbolize drunkenness or revelry)

Door – transition to a new or different environment or opportunity

Elevator/stairs – rising or falling fortune in life

Fence – boundary; place of confinement

First story – the natural realm

Gas station/auto repair – place to refuel, rebuild or repair something

Gate – entrance point for good/evil; spiritual authority; breakthrough

House – place where our personal life takes place

Hospital – place of healing, often a church

Mall – materialism; consumer mentality

Mobile home – can be modest finances or a lack of rootedness, yet not necessarily bad

Prison – place of confinement or bondage

Restaurant – place to be fed

Roof – covering; protection from elements and intruders, physical and/or spiritual

School – place of training, spiritual or physical

Staircase – spiritual ascent or descent

Tent – dwelling that lacks permanence; can be a person's life

Nature

Desert – arid wasteland devoid of distraction due to unchanging scenery and daily monotony. People who dream about the desert or sandy vistas are often stuck in a rut, or feel imprisoned by their circumstances. Days lapse into weeks and months, as long-awaited change is delayed, and hope is deferred. (See *parking lot*)

Fire – purification or testing

Flood – threat of being overwhelmed; divine judgment

Grass – fading glory of man

Mountain – a place of majesty; a life challenge, as in climbing a mountain

Parking lot – static life events; waiting on God

River – flow of life; continuity of existence for individuals and groups

Trees – in the Bible, they symbolized men; tall trees = important men

Valley – low place, emotionally or physically

Wilderness – place of testing and transition to the next spiritual destination. Jungles and heavily vegetated locations frequently harbor wild animals or demons. Dreams about the wilderness normally accompany personal trials, which include a stronger sense of vulnerability or exposure to spiritual attack.

Animals

Note whether they are clean or unclean according to the Old Testament

Alligator/crocodile – Leviathan, a prehistoric creature/spiritual predator that attacks unseen from a place of concealment

Bear – overpowering fear

Bee, hornet – demonic attack, often lust (including material things)

Dog – demon; white dogs indicate something that appears harmless, but is not (deceptively demonic); religious spirit

Dogs, snakes, frogs, dragons – demons sent to harass, discourage or to tempt men

Eagle – prophetic majesty

Fish – souls of men; subsurface creature, either harmless or harmful (e.g., sharks), not readily visible

Fox – small version of a wolf; cunning; attack of introspection that questions faith

Frog – spirit; demon; witchcraft

Horse – a vain hope for deliverance (Psalms 33:17); self-reliance as a source of personal strength

Lamb – Jesus, our sacrifice = innocence and purity

Lion – an advocate (e.g., the majestic presence of God) or an adversary (e.g., Satan, the predator)

Mice/rats – unclean vermin that devour provision and invade households

Snake – Satan; deception; lies

Spider – demon; occultic; spider web = temptation; trap

Turtle – slow, plodding, determined (the tortoise and the hare)

Wolf – conventional wisdom which can undermine faith

Weather/Natural Disaster

Earthquake – great shaking

Rain – either gloom or refreshment, depending on context

Storm/tornado/whirlwind – threat of disruption or destruction

Tsunami – wave of change coming that may threaten to submerge you

Clothing

Being naked – emotional transparency, sometimes fear of exposure/shame

Shirt or blouse – covers the heart; without a shirt or blouse = heart exposed

Shoes – corresponds to identity, occupation or calling in life

Wedding dress – covenant; intimate relationship

Colors

Black – darkness, evil

Blue – revelation; prophecy in particular

Gold – purity; glory; idolatry (e.g., the golden calf)

Gray – compromise

Green – growth; envy

Purple – priesthood; royalty; kingship

Red – blood sacrifice; war

Silver – redemption

White – purity; unstained by the world

Numbers

Three – trinity (e.g., the Holy Trinity)

Six – the number of man (Revelation 13:18)

Seven – perfection; completion

Eight – new beginnings

Nine – judgment

Forty – testing

People

Baby – new arrival; growth, either physical, spiritual or emotional

Bride – the Church; someone who enters into a covenant

Faceless person – often a helper, sent to aid us somehow; an angel or the Holy Spirit

Father – authority; God

Policemen – spiritual authority, sent to enforce the law

Weapons

Arrow – spiritual attack

Gun – spiritual authority or power

Sword – Word of God

Food

Bread – spiritual sustenance; Bethlehem means *house of bread*; Jesus, as God's provision to us, is the Bread of Life

Fruit – spiritual growth

Meat – spiritual maturity

Milk – elementary; immaturity

Water – Holy Spirit; cleansing

Wine – outpouring of the Spirit, or conversely, drunkenness

Directions

Left – unconventional or unorthodox; a position of disfavor

Right – conventional wisdom or the place of favor

The goats were on Jesus' left hand, the sheep on His right. (Matthew 25:15)

Miscellaneous

Bath – cleansing

Drowning – overwhelmed by circumstances

Hair – a woman's glory

Key – solution to challenges faced

Rollercoaster – the ups and downs of life

Smoke – confusion; obscured vision

War – confrontation with enemies; toxic character traits

Again, we included only the most frequently occurring symbols, based on our own experience. The list is infinite.

Concluding comments

Over the years, we have seen many dreams, prophecies and predictions that did not come true, including some that were given by nationally-prominent pastors and theologians. In most of those cases, God was named as the Author.

Even the prophet Elijah in the Bible imagined that he was about to be killed because he alone had not bowed his knee to Baal (1 Kings 19). God informed Elijah he was wrong; there were seven thousand others who had not bowed as well. Elijah had fled in fear from Jezebel, having been threatened with death.

My point is that in both of the examples above, godly men were convinced they were seeing/hearing accurately and believed they were right. Only *they weren't*.

We see in *a mirror dimly* (1 Corinthians 13:12), and we need to approach the topic of dreams and revelation with humility and patience. The ultimate destiny of the truth is that it will be made known eventually. No matter how much passion and zeal someone has, their strong opinions can invade and infect their dreams and revelatory gifting. Strong opinion does not equal revelation.

Even now there are numbers of Christian dreamers who disagree wildly with each other about current affairs and future events, yet virtually all of them claim their dreams to be divinely inspired. Obviously, some of them are not.

If you go to horror movies, you will probably have nightmares. If you endlessly watch YouTube videos or ravenously ingest information of any type — they will probably appear in your dreams. Be wary of claiming these dreams are from God. It's not a crime to be wrong, but it gives God a bad name when you claim He is a partner in your speculations.

Feel free to email at job42@att.net
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