

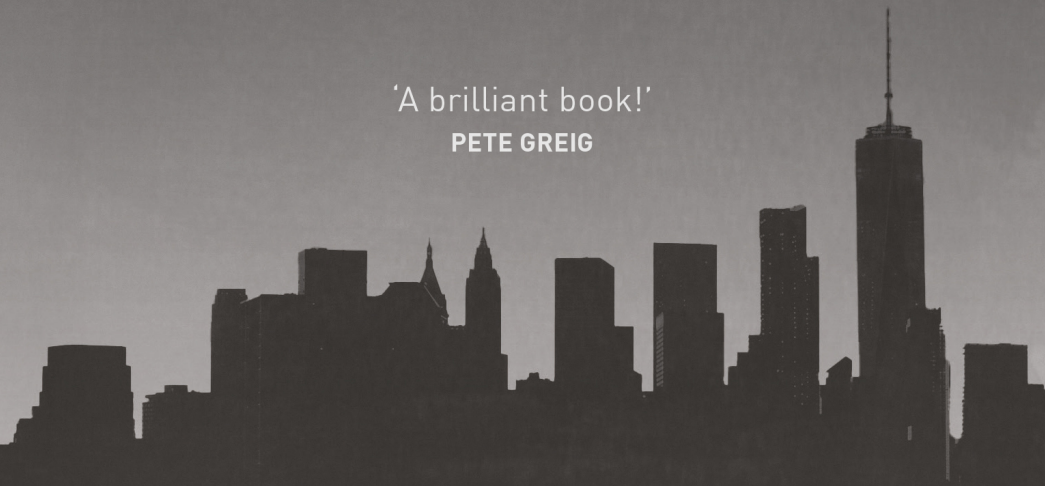
TANIA HARRIS

GOD DREAMS

HOW TO HEAR GOD'S VOICE
IN DREAMS AND VISIONS

'A brilliant book!'

PETE GREIG



'As a psychotherapist, I've experienced the delight that comes with accompanying people on a deeper walk with God. For me, the psychological and the spiritual have always been deeply entwined. Tania's book *God Dreams* reflects this perspective and works to integrate them in a fresh and practical way. God does indeed speak to us in imagery and dreams, often from outside our conscious awareness. Learning to listen to these "messages from beyond" helps us to process our daily walk in the world and make concrete what God has for us. I'm thrilled to recommend Tania's very articulate and profound approach to deepening our sense of God and how we can share more fully in the promises he has for us!'

Dinah Eades Buchanan (M. Couns. Grad Dip Gestalt; Grad Dip Spiritual Direction), Clinical Supervisor, Psychotherapist, Spiritual Director and Educator

'Rev Dr. Harris's groundbreaking work, *God Dreams*, adds a much-needed synthesis to the growing conversation on lived spirituality. In a day and age when many are deconstructing their faith, Harris offers a biblically and theologically sound meditation on these widely misunderstood phenomena to create a bridge between faith and empiricism. But, more importantly, Harris's work is practical, full of examples and instructive suggestions. Refusing the typical Charismatic reductionism that turns complex experiences into neat packages, Harris sensitively qualifies, describes and explores the many dimensions of dreams and visions from biblical times to the contemporary moment. Refreshingly ecumenical and scholarly sourced with a conversational and accessible style, *God Dreams* sets a new standard for pastoral and lay resources on dreams and visions.'

Benjamin Crace PhD, Professor of Religious Studies, Tennessee Technological University

'Rev Dr. Tania Harris has done a truly thorough work in laying out the spiritual, neurological and practical elements of dreaming in this book. By pulling each dimension together like drawings into the centre of God's wisdom, we discover some of the wondrous ways that the Holy Spirit communicates to us and in us all. Tania's detailed explanation of dream-life is written in a conversational style that is rich with revelation and contemporary examples, making it a most enjoyable read. This book will awaken in readers a fresh desire to pay close attention to their dreams and follow the relational course set by Jesus. Dream-visions are finally being recognized as a place where heavenly realities are unearthed and the Spirit counsels us in our innermost person. Readers, the night is still young! I recommend reading this before sleeping!'

*Isi de Gersigny, Senior Pastor, Jubilee Church;
Leader, Australian Prophetic Council, Australia*

'This is a brilliant book on a vital subject for anyone serious about hearing (and seeing) the word of God today. Dreams and visions are, according to Scripture, one of the primary ways in which God wishes to communicate with us, but they are particularly open to misunderstanding, negligence and downright abuse. Tania Harris does a great job combining her academic rigour and love for the Scriptures with personal experience in a way that will equip many to experience God's leading in exciting and life-changing ways. The church needs this book!'

*Pete Greig, Founder, 24-7 Prayer International, and author of
How to Hear God: A Simple Guide for Normal People*

'Imagine missing the voice of God! Tania cares so much for the church that she has written a book to ensure it doesn't happen. While advocating for God's voice in the words of Scripture, she

presents the case that God still speaks through dreams and visions outside Scripture. Her analysis of the visionary experiences of Peter the apostle and John in Revelation provides insights into discernment, discipleship and the power of the Holy Spirit. Whether you spend your time behind the pulpit or in the pew, this book will convince you that we all need to “wake up” to the reality of God’s voice as we sleep. *God Dreams* is written in an easy-to-read style that will cause you to stop and think as you uncover its many important truths. Everyone should read this book!

*Revd Paul Hudson, General Secretary,
Elim Churches Global*

‘Everyone dreams, but it takes a prophetic specialist like Tania Harris to awaken us to the possibility that God might be speaking through them! Drawing on psychology, neuroscience, Scripture and experience, Harris takes her readers on a fascinating (and perhaps life-changing) journey into a realm we need to stop ignoring. The book is packed with intriguing personal stories and some provocative insights into the Bible. Don’t ignore it!’

*Revd Dr Jon Newton, Associate Professor and Revelation Scholar,
Alphacrucis College, Australia*

‘Dreams never cease to amaze me with their clever details and layered messaging. God designs these “night visions” like a book with chapters, themes and characters, so that careful and thoughtful detective work is often needed to investigate them! Tania Harris’s book *God Dreams* provides the training we need to sort through the puzzle pieces and identify God’s voice in them. With her pastoral and scholarly background, the book provides a thorough explanation of the language of dreams and visions and reflects her deep care for the church. I am blessed to

endorse this well-written book that will help build a prophetic culture in every local church. *God Dreams* is brilliant and will help many. A must-read!

*Maria Mason, Senior Leader, Tribe Church;
Member, Australian Prophetic Council, Australia*

'You only have to spend a few minutes on social media to see all the misunderstandings surrounding dreams and visions. It's no wonder that so many prefer to politely ignore them. But in *God Dreams*, Tania skilfully, practically, historically and academically cuts a clear path through the jungle of noise. She directs us back to the Bible, gives us simple, profound truths about God's visual forms of communication and backs it up with real-life stories of ordinary people. Readers will find their lives enriched as they explore this fresh aspect of their relationship with God.'

*David Shadbolt, Co-founder and Coaching Lead,
School of Prophecy, UK*

God Dreams

**How to hear God's voice in dreams
and visions**

Tania Harris, PhD



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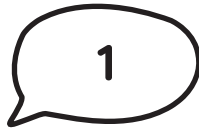
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The First Time I Had a God-Dream

A Thief in the Night

The first time I had a God-dream was in the middle of a difficult season in my life. It was one of those moments when God seemed agonizingly, run-your-fingernails-down-the-chalkboard *slow*. Frustration had risen to boiling point and threatened to erupt in a volcanic display. Why was God so slow?! When was he going to do what he promised?

My solution was an attempt to project-manage God. I even had timelines and subtasks: 'God, if you could do this *now*, then I could do *this . . .* Or, if you did this *next month*, then I could do *that . . .*'

Then I had a dream. In the dream, I woke up to discover my apartment had been broken into. Items of jewellery, cash from my handbag, and my stereo had all been stolen.

My first instinct was to check the time, so I looked to the clock on my bedside table. Oddly, the clock hands were spinning round and round and I couldn't read the display.

It's okay, I thought, I have a digital clock on the other side of the room. But when I looked at the digital clock, its digits were all scrambled and I couldn't read them.

What time is it?! I cried out. And who has sabotaged my clocks?!

My next thought was: How could a thief have broken into my house while I was sleeping? Surely I would have woken up?

Then I literally woke up.

Afterwards, the feelings from the dream lingered as I showered and dressed for the day. I felt frustrated and powerless – even stupid: why didn't I wake up? Surely the noise of a thief breaking into my flat would have woken me?

But it was *just a dream*, so I shrugged it off and turned to my morning coffee and quiet time.

At the time, I had been using a devotional book with daily Bible readings. The reading for that day was from Matthew chapter 24: 'If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him' (vv. 43–44).

What?

Suddenly my dream didn't feel so ethereal any more.

That day was a Tuesday – and I was working at a local Bible college. With visions of clocks, oversleeping and thieves fresh in my

mind, I drove to work, greeted my colleagues and headed to the downstairs classroom for our weekly staff meeting.

After the usual briefing and announcements, the principal began to share an exhortation from the Scriptures: 'Turn your Bibles to Matthew chapter 25.'

My Bible fell open easily.

The principal then began talking about one of Jesus' well-known parables. In the story, ten bridesmaids were waiting for a wedding. Their role was to prepare the bride for the groom's arrival, which in Jewish custom was typically at night. Five of them were deemed foolish because they didn't have enough oil in their lamps and they blew out. The other five were wise because they had plenty of oil to keep them burning. When the groom was delayed and they all fell asleep, only the wise bridesmaids were ready when the groom eventually arrived. The foolish, on the other hand, were not ready and were shut out of the wedding.

On finishing his retelling of the story, the principal paused and scanned the room: 'Some of you here are like those five foolish bridesmaids – you've been waiting for the promises of God, but it's been too long and you've fallen asleep. God is telling you to keep oil in your lamp and stay awake! Even though you don't know what time it is, be ready! Trust God for the timing and stay faithful to what he's said.'

While They Were Sleeping

We know that God speaks in a variety of ways, but in church life we are particularly familiar with two. The first is via the

Scriptures – when we're reading the Bible and the Spirit takes a principle from the text and applies it to our situation. It's almost as if the verses 'jump off the page' and land directly in our hearts.

The second way is through preaching – when we're listening to a sermon and our hearts begin to quicken as the Spirit nails us with a message we need to hear. It feels as though the preacher is reading our mail.

That morning, God had used both these methods, but he'd also spoken in a dream. At the time, it seemed absurd. Since when did God speak in dreams?

I had never heard anyone talk about it. I'd never heard it in a sermon or read it in a Christian book. When I told my friends about the dream, they shrugged their shoulders. My pastor called me strange.

Then I started rereading my Bible, and I was shocked by what I found.

Biblically speaking, hearing from God in dreams and visions is 'normal'. These colourful and creative experiences communicate in a sort of picture language, and there are hundreds of them in the Bible. One commentator has said that if you were to take all the dreams and visions out of Scripture, you would remove more than one-third of its contents.¹ Another has counted 700 separate visionary experiences.² While today we tend to distinguish dreams and visions by our level of consciousness – so we have 'dreams' while we're asleep and 'visions' while we're awake – the terms are used interchangeably in Scripture, and nearly every Bible character experiences them.

For a quick snapshot, there's Abraham dreaming of a blazing torch passing through bloody animal parts, the symbols of ancient treaty-making (Gen. 15:1–20), and Jacob seeing angels flying up and down a staircase, initiating a life-changing decision (Gen. 28:10–22). There's Gideon gaining military assurance through a vision of a speeding bread roll (Judg. 7:9–14) and Solomon dreaming of a genie-like offer he can't refuse (1 Kgs 3:5). There's Joseph and Daniel, Jeremiah and Zechariah, as well as unlikely pagans such as Abimelech, the Egyptian pharaoh and the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. Later, there's Amos with his basket of ripe fruit (Amos 8), Zechariah getting a clothing makeover (Zech. 3) and Ezekiel with a vision of spinning celestial wheels (Ezek. 1).

Fast forward to the New Testament and there's Pilate's wife dreaming of Jesus' innocence (Matt. 27:19), the apostle Peter envisaging a menu of unappetizing food while waiting for lunch (Matt. 17:19), and the apostle Paul receiving travel directions while he slept (Acts 16:9). And who could forget John living out a veritable movie of fantastical scenes in his visions of Revelation (Rev. 1:9,17).

When we take a closer look at Scripture, we see that many of the most pivotal points in biblical history began while someone was sleeping!

We Don't Recognize It

The God of the Bible hasn't changed. The Spirit is still communicating in visual forms today. It took a dream about broken clocks and spiritual slumber for me to realize it. God was speaking an

important message about his timing in my life that enabled me to walk through the season with grace and patience. I'm glad I noticed it.

My lack of awareness about dreams and visions in the early years of my spiritual journey is true of the contemporary church everywhere – at least in the West. God is speaking by his Spirit in dreams and visions, but we don't always recognize it.³

The irony is that many of us struggle to hear from God. It's a refrain I hear across the global church: 'I can't hear God's voice!' We are like the ancients in one of the oldest books of the Bible complaining that God doesn't speak (Job 33:13).

But what is the real problem here? The Scripture goes on to say:

For God *does* speak – now one way, now another –
though *no one perceives it*.

In a dream, in a vision of the night,
when deep sleep falls on people
as they slumber in their beds.

Job 33:14–15, italics mine

While the author of this verse (Elihu) was not someone who could always be counted on for his theological advice (God later rejected it, Job 42:7), his words reflect the understanding of his day: God *was* speaking – in dreams and visions – but people didn't notice. So the problem was *not* with God's desire or ability to communicate. The problem was with humanity for not perceiving it.

The same is true for us today. The Scriptures show that the Creator God is a communicator – it's in his very nature to speak (Ps. 115:4–7). Divine communication enables us to know God personally and join with him in his plans. In fact, God does nothing *without first revealing it* prophetically (Amos 3:7).⁴ Under the Old Covenant, it was largely specially appointed prophets who heard God's voice, but under the New Covenant, all can hear him speak (Acts 2:17). The Spirit speaks today to continue Jesus' mission, reminding us of everything he established (John 14:26) and then applying it to our lives (John 16:13). Jesus himself said that heeding his voice was the essence of discipleship (John 10:27). God speaks, his people respond in faith, and God's plan unfolds. This is the pattern throughout biblical history.

This also explains why Scripture repeatedly admonishes us to hear and respond to God's voice (e.g. Isa. 55:2; Matt. 11:15; Heb. 3:7–8). *God is speaking*, even when we don't notice it. And so the onus falls to us. We must learn to recognize God's voice in dream-visions so that we can follow it. The call echoes through our biblical past and remains with us today: 'Listen and hear my voice; pay attention and hear what I say' (Isa. 28:23).

Aim of the Book

Since my dream about the thief in the night, dreams and visions have become the most common way God speaks to me. The Spirit has spoken about my personal life, my career and my relationships – all in dreams. Some of those experiences have been life-changing; in other cases, the experience has been just one of many small steps in the journey.

In addition, I've listened to the experiences of thousands of people all over the world through the ministry of God Conversations. I've heard the testimonies of friends and family and leaders and pastors, as well as the questions and experiences of spiritual seekers. I've also researched the dreams and visions of the biblical characters through my PhD studies. And this is what I've observed: times haven't changed much since the time of Job; God may well be speaking, but many of us still struggle to recognize it.

The aim of this book is to help provide a solution. Specifically, the book is designed to help you recognize God's voice in his most favoured form: dreams and visions. God hasn't changed his communication methods since the time of the Bible. He is still speaking in dreams and visions, but too often we miss them. There are reasons for this. Some of them are historical – the legacy of old mindsets that reject any sort of supernatural or spiritual experience. Some of them are theological – the outcome of distorted ideas that haven't been properly reconciled in our different church traditions. Some of them are practical – we simply don't understand how dreams and visions work, we're fearful of getting it wrong, or we've experienced too much abuse in this area from those around us. We will explore all of these and more in this book.

God Dreams is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the nature of dreams and visions. We will look at what they are, why God uses them to speak and where they come from. Here we draw on the fields of psychology, neuroscience and world religions in addition to the Christian Scriptures. While dream interpretation is more art than science, we gain much from the work of psychologists and neuroscientists. The goal is to see

the bigger picture and gain wisdom from those who have gone before. Through it all, our main reference point is Jesus and his continuing mission through the Holy Spirit.

In the second part of the book, we explore the practicalities – how to understand dreams and visions and the language of symbolism. Here we delve into the best examples of visual God-conversations from the time of the New Testament church, beginning with Peter’s vision of an unappetizing lunch in the early years of the first century and ending with John’s visions in the latter years. Understanding the creativity and efficacy of the Spirit’s communication in these visions provides profound insights into our own. You will gain an understanding of what dreams and visions are, where they come from, and how to know when they’re from God. You will learn how picture language and symbols work. You will understand why the Spirit speaks and how to respond when he does.

My prayer in writing this book is that you, the reader, will appreciate the beauty and power of your own dream-visions. Having experienced the startling revelation that came from unravelling my own, I am convinced that you too will be surprised by their creativity, wisdom and encouragement. Most of all, I pray that you will hear the voice of God in them.

God is speaking! His words are full of revelation and power. God speaks in order to invite us into relationship and partnership with his plan. Dreams and visions may well be the easiest way to hear from God. All it takes is a heart to know God and a good night’s sleep.



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