

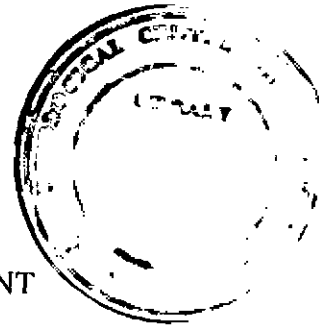
TANGAZA COLLEGE

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EASTERN AFRICA**

**TOPIC: DREAMS IN THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN TRADITION COMPARED WITH
ELEMENTS OF BANTU AND MODERN CULTURE**

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DECLARATION

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INTRODUCTION	1
PROLOGUE	2
i) DREAMS IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST	2
ii) FORMS OF DREAMS IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST.	3
iii) DREAM INTERPRETATION IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST. ...	4
CHAPTER 1	6
DREAMS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT	6
i) THE PENTATEUCH: JOSEPH IN EGYPT	6
ii) GENESIS 40-41: 45 (E,J)	10
NOTES	15
CHAPTER 2	17
DREAMS IN PROPHETIC AND APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE	17
A. PROPHETIC LITERATURE	17
i) ISAIAH	17
ii) JEREMIAH	19
iii) JOEL	20
B. APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE	21
DANIEL	21
NOTES	25
CHAPTER 3	26
DREAMS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT	26
i) Dreams in the Gospel of Matthew	27
ii) Dreams in the Letter of Jude	28
NOTES	30
CHAPTER 4	31
DREAMS AND CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA	31
i) Africa and Dreams in the Bible	34
ii) Dreams and Christian Counselling in Africa	35
iii) Towards A Christian Understanding of Dreams	37
CONCLUSION	40
NOTES	42
BIBLIOGRAPHY	44

INTRODUCTION

Dreams have always been with us as far back as history can recall. The part they play in human life has been the focus of study for scientists, sages and religious leaders of all societies.

To understand better the scope of this study we will consider in addition to biblical sources some elements of dreams from the Ancient Near Eastern world. God has always spoken to people of all ages in many ways as the author of the letter to the Hebrews tells us (Hebrews 1, 1-3). However God's self communication to people has always been mediated through many persons and events. It is in this context that dreams from the Ancient Near East will be studied in this paper.

When we come to these extra-biblical sources we see that even in the Ancient Near East dreams have not gone unnoticed but have a very strong importance given to them. For these people dreams are not just the product of an uncontrolled mind in sleep but have a big influence in their religious and secular lives. These two are seen as being inseparable.

In the paper I will study dreams as they are found in the Judaeo-Christian scriptures and in traditional Africa. The passages examined are what I consider as key texts however there are many other incidences of dreams in the Bible which will go unmentioned but this only means that they are not extensive in their treatment of dreams. The proposals for pastoral counselling on dreams in Africa serve as reminders that no matter how good the scriptures are they have to be contextualized in order for them to serve their purpose.

Dreams will always be central to peoples' lives and as such they deserve our attention. More research in dreams is needed and this paper is providing only part of the tip of this iceberg which is the study and living out of dreams in our life.

PROLOGUE

i) DREAMS IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

Before embarking on any deep study of the topic of dreams we have to first ask ourselves what dreams meant to the mind of a person living in the Ancient Near Eastern region. In Egypt, dreams were viewed as a mystery which had to be unravelled. They provoked speculation about another actual sphere of existence in which a person acted and lived while the body slept. On the aspect of dreams as a means of communicating with the world of the gods more evidence is found in the hieroglyphs that have been preserved from Ancient Egypt.

For 4000 years Egypt had a flourishing and very highly developed civilization. At the same time it had a very elaborate system of government which can be considered as one of the best at that time. When we come to the aspect of dreams as a mystery for the Egyptians it was always in the context of dreams as a religious phenomenon. The many achievements of Egyptian civilization cannot be fully understood without taking into account the religious world view of the Egyptians. The Egyptians believed that the will of the gods was to be discovered in dreams.¹

Dreams for the Egyptians were considered as the perception of things that existed on another level of reality and normally these things could not be seen or heard in waking life. The only name we can give to this other world of things is to call it as the *spiritual world of the gods*. How could a dreamer know the contents of a dream? The knowledge came through the inspiration of the gods which was found through incantations and the use of potions, ointments which were thought to have a link with the world of the gods.²

At this stage then we can talk of the Egyptian view on the dream as a *riddle*. The dream was a riddle whose solving brought knowledge of the will of the gods. Through incantations, the use of potions and ointments they believed that they could derive warnings, advice, success for their life.³

ii) FORMS OF DREAMS IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST.

The first commonly recorded dream in Ancient Egypt is that in which the gods appear to demand a favour, normally something to be done to them. The evidence for this kind of dream is found on a large stone inscription placed before the gigantic Sphinx at Giza which tells of the dream of King Thutmose IV who reigned about the year 1450 BC. He was promised a kingdom by the god Hormakht if he accepted to be ruler over Egypt.

The gods also give warnings and revelations. We come across a type of a dream in Ancient Egypt called the *predictive dream* in which something that is going to happen to the dreamer is revealed. The dream of Thatutamun the Ethiopian conqueror of Egypt is a case in point. In a dream he saw a snake to his left and another to his right. This was later interpreted as a prediction that he was going to rule the two Egypts, north and south.⁴

Another type of dream was the one which was invoked by some elaborate rituals for specific purposes like the desire to know the will of the gods in relation to one's state like illness, success and other situations. The third type of dream is very much connected with the second type. This was the *incubation* of dreams. For example it was common for very sick people to be brought to the temple where they fasted or took special potions to induce a beneficial dream in which the gods would effect a cure for the illness.⁵

If we go across the borders of Egypt we come across other cultures of the Ancient Near East. Among them we find the Babylonian and Ancient Israel where dreams held a very important place in the lives of the people. Among other types of dreams found in Babylonian, Egyptian as well as later cultures like Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome there are the following groups of dreams:

The Political Dream;

The *political dream* was normally a prediction and reading of political events in order to foretell their future outcome. Some political dreams supposedly intimated the birth of great leaders. For example the coming of great leaders like Pericles and Augustus was supposed to have been foretold in dreams.⁶ Another kind of *political dream* is when victory or defeat in battle is also foretold. An example of this are the dreams of Xerxes and Caesar.⁷

The Cultic Dream;

Here as a result of a dream cults and religious sanctuaries were set up to honour the gods. A temple in Hierapolis and the cult of Serapis in Alexandria are examples of this dream.⁸ In the cultic dream directions were also given by gods where they threatened punishment for neglecting to carry out their commands.

The Personal Dream;

This is the last type of a dream which we find from the Ancient Near East. In this dream, ordinary people as well as leaders have dreams which are related to their lives. Such dreams are usually symbolic or allegorical. They normally have to do with death or the consequences of evil acts. Overall the *personal dream* was the commonest among Ancient Near Eastern peoples.⁹

iii) DREAM INTERPRETATION IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST.

In Egypt dream interpretation was a very advanced form of religious duty. The Chester Beatty Papyrus is the earliest extant record on dreams and their interpretation in Egypt and in this document we find a distinction made between bad and good dreams. In distinguishing between the two types of dreams the method used is that of contraries. For example if one dreams that he or she is dead the dream meant that the person was going to have a long life.¹⁰

Another form of interpretation was to rely on verbal, visual puns or hidden associations. The Chester Beatty Papyrus tells us that to dream of uncovering one's buttocks is a bad omen foretelling the death of one's parent. The Egyptian word for '*buttock*' resembles the word for '*orphan*' hence the association with the death of one's parent or parents.¹¹

The Chester Beatty Papyrus also includes several incantations for warding off the effects of unpleasant or threatening dreams. Incantations seem to have played a very important role in Egyptian rituals of dream interpretation though they appear to have been understood more in a magical sense when it came to their general place in Egyptian religion. It is also interesting to note that not all dreams from Egypt are recorded but it is mostly dreams of important persons such as priests and kings. Important people were supposed to be closer to the gods hence much is written about their dreams.¹²

We have seen that dream interpretation was a well developed art among the Egyptians. However this does not mean that Egypt was not the only one in this art but in the rest of the Ancient Near East dreams were given a lot of attention as well though maybe not with the same sophistication as that of Egypt. Some of the ways of dream interpretation in the Ancient Near Eastern region were as follows:

The Intuitive Method;

We find the *Intuitive Method* where people who interpreted dreams knew of common patterns in dreams hence some common ways of interpreting them. For example pleasant dreams usually indicated pleasant things coming one's way and vice-versa evil dreams indicated evil things that were going to happen to one.

We also find the dream seen as a *mirror*. In this method of interpretation the dream was viewed as a puzzle representing one's whole life. Harmless dreams as well as evil dreams could be delicately unravelled to show the state of one's life. Money, health, safety as well as sexual fulfillment were read from a dream.¹³

CHAPTER 1

DREAMS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

i) THE PENTATEUCH: JOSEPH IN EGYPT

Context

When we come to the Book of Genesis we notice that the sense in which dreams and process of dreaming varies. This is obviously the case when we see that in Genesis there are different circumstances in which the dream in point is situated. This variation does not mean that there are no common patterns that can be identified in the dreams accounts of Genesis. There is a whole common theology underlying the sense of these dreams.

What we find is that dreams are sometimes seen in a positive light whereas in other places there is a doubt cast over the validity of dreams as a whole. In the positive light dreams and dreaming are a vehicle of God's self-manifestation to a people or to an individual. Added to this is the fact that dreams are reverently preserved as part of Israel's dialogue with God in history. On the negative side Genesis sometimes shows dreams as being an object of scorn and ridicule, something that cannot be taken seriously.

In examining dreams from Genesis we also have to bear in mind the existence of what scholars of scripture call the four traditions in the Pentateuch. These are independent stories, cult narratives, primitive songs and oracles which are grouped together and are thought to have originated in what we can call various 'schools' or traditions.¹⁴

The **Yahwistic Tradition (J)** is the earliest known tradition in the Pentateuch. It is well known for its use of the term *Yahweh*. It is well known also for its colourful presentation of scenes especially the dialogues, a perceptive psychology and deep theological insights usually depicting God almost assuming human qualities ; this is what is called anthropomorphism.¹⁵

When we come to the **Elohistic Tradition (E)** we find it using the term *Elohim* for God . Whereas the Yahwistic Tradition dated more commonly about the 10 th Century BC in the southern kingdom, the Elohist is dated some time after the schism of 922 BC.¹⁶

The third tradition is the **Deuteronomic Tradition (D)** which points to the period of religious crisis in Israel. The stress of this tradition lies in its insistence on the loyal response to Yahweh's covenant laws and a return to the pure worship of God which was to be centred on Jerusalem the sanctuary of the Lord.¹⁷

The fourth tradition is the **Priestly Tradition (P)** with its concern and emphasis on the liturgy. It is fond of genealogies, chronological exactness and detailed descriptions of ritual elements. Unlike the Yahwistic Tradition the Priestly Tradition seems to be wary of anthropomorphisms.¹⁸ When we consider dreams within the book of Genesis we see that they do not fall only under one of these traditions but are found throughout these traditions as we shall see. However **E Tradition** seems to have more dreams than the rest of the traditions.

In the dream as a vehicle of God's self-revelation we see that in Genesis 20:3 (J) God came to Abimelech who had taken Sarah, Abraham's wife thinking she was Abraham's sister as had been told to him by Abraham himself.¹⁹ God warns Abimelech of the dangers of taking Sarah for a wife. God was going to punish him. This dream is not negative but rather serves as an example of how God communicates his message to people, in this case to Abimelech to save him from punishment as well as to protect Abraham from having his wife taken off him.²⁰ The dream of Abimelech can be rightly called a *dream apparition* to differentiate it from other types of dreams like the *predictive dream* which we shall see later in Genesis 40,41. In a *dream apparition* the dreamer has an experience of being shown something as if he were in a waking state.

In Genesis 28: 12 (E) we see God appearing to Jacob who is fleeing from his brother Esau. On the way as he is asleep he dreams of " *a ladder set up on the earth and the top of it reached to Heaven ; and behold , the angels of God were ascending and descending on it and behold , the Lord stood above it ..*" Genesis 28 verse 12.

This awesome appearance of God is followed by an assurance that He is going to protect Jacob and make him prosperous as a nation. Jacob rises and thanks God for the dream. For Jacob, the place has changed its name altogether and he calls it Bethel meaning 'The House of God'. A dream from God has sanctified the place. In this account we see a very strong link between *angels* and dreams as we shall see later on in the paper.²¹

When we come to this dream of Jacob we see several factors coming to light which can help us in getting to know more about the nature of this dream. J and E seem to have merged to form the account as we have with the theology of E dominating. What this means is that the two traditions over a period of time gave shape to the unified account as we have it in the shape of Jacob's dream at Bethel.²²

In studying this dream narrative scholars have come up with the explanation of why the place came to be called by such a name. They offer what can be called an aetiological explanation. What do people normally mean by the word *aetiology* ? In trying to explain the meaning of what has been passed from one generation to another, people tend to look back from the present state and construct or recreate the original meaning behind the practice in question. In recognising the holiness of Bethel the account of Jacob's dream serves as an explanation of how the place came to be associated with the presence of God.

Scholars studying the history of Bethel tell us that it was considered as sacred ground even before Israel came to settle in that place.²³ Later on Bethel came to be associated with Jacob's dream. The place came to be regarded as a place of the theophany, that is the self-revealing of God. Along with Bethel another place that had the same meaning attached to it was Mahanaim. In verse 11 we are told that Jacob used a stone as a pillow. We are told that he put the stone '*under his head*'. The expression '*under his head*' in Hebrew can also mean '*at his head*'. In this second meaning the pillow might have served as a form of protection.²⁴

When we come to the content of the dream we see him shown '*a ladder set up on the earth*' whose top '*reached to heaven*'. This is not a stairway towards heaven as some people have suggested, or a ladder linking heaven and earth, but some scripture scholars have compared it to the stairways found on the Mesopotamian *ziggurats*. Here as in many dream accounts of the Bible we come across the presence of *angels*. An *angel*, '*Malak*' in Hebrew as in many dream accounts means '*a messenger*' of God.

In this dream, these mysterious messengers of God '*were ascending and descending*' on the ladder. This means that through them God is opening Himself to communicate with human beings.

The angels establish contact between Israel represented by Jacob and Himself. Part of the dream is the continuing theophany; the Lord appears and renews His promises to the land of Israel, to the descendants and through the descendants blessings are given to all the nations of the earth.

This promise has always formed the pattern of the traditional Jewish blessing used even to this day. The '*Berakah*' as it is called has the same pattern. It can be said spontaneously without any prescribed formula. The first part contains the Divine Name. This is the Divine Name revealed as the '*God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*'.

He is what He has done for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Hebrew reluctance to pronounce directly the name of God is obvious here. In the second part of the *Berakah* God is asked that the prayers of Israel be heard. Israel in this part of the prayer is understood as the vessel of God's blessings to the nations. First to Israel and then to the nations.²⁵

In Genesis 31: 10 (J and E) we see God intervening in the fight between Jacob and his father-in-law Laban over Jacob's wages. Laban cunningly cheats Jacob by going against their agreement that Jacob was to take all the spotted animals from the flock. Powerless before this unjust oppressor, Jacob finds an ally in God Himself who appears to him in a dream and assures him of his protection.

The message in the dream is said to be conveyed by an *angel* of God. Here is one of the many instances in the Scriptures where we see the figure an *angel* very much connected to a dream. God appears to Laban as well in a dream (Genesis 31;24) and warns him not to harm Jacob. Here is a dream as a vehicle of God's *protection* over His innocent servants.

In Genesis 37: 20(E) we see the dream as a paradox. The dream is feared and it is taken seriously while at the same time there appears to be a considerable amount of ridicule put on it. Joseph is an object of great jealousy and hatred from his brothers who do not like the fact that he is the favourite of their father, Jacob.

To make things worse , Joseph has been having dreams in which he has been seeing himself ruling over his brothers in the time to follow. When he tells the dream to the family there is great bitterness resulting from the fear that the dream might have come to be realised in the future.

The occasion comes to get rid of this nuisance when Joseph is sent to his brothers who are pasturing the family flock far away. Seeing him afar as he is coming, the brothers conspire against him *"Here comes this dreamer. Come let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild beast has devoured him and we shall see what will become of his dreams"*, Genesis 37: 19-20.²⁶

Here Joseph's dreams are seen as the ravings of a spoilt and selfish son who wants to be the centre of attention in the household. At the same time every one in the family seems to believe that dreams come to be realised later on hence the jealousy of the brothers. The brothers look at Joseph's dreams as a source of their unhappiness at home. By killing the dreamer these dreams will come to an end.

The aim of the story is to show that human power cannot stop God from fulfilling what He has promised, namely that Joseph was going to be the one to continue the line of the true Israel and that he was going to lead Israel into the land of Egypt. In spite of human skepticism and ridicule the dream continues to be God's vehicle of self-revelation.

One thing worth noting is that Joseph's dreams as recounted in Genesis 37: 5-10 are paired. That means that the dream is not single as it is communicated to the person but rather two of them occur to the person. In the scriptures this serves to show that the genuineness of the message as coming from God should not be doubted. We shall see other pairings of dreams dreamt even by pagan Egyptians as they recount them to Joseph in Genesis 41.

(ii) GENESIS 40-41: 45 (E,J)

The probable date for the accounts of Joseph which we shall study , especially of those telling of Joseph's stay in Egypt is placed by historians at around 1720-1550 BC. This is the time when the Hyksos Dynasty ascended to power in Egypt as pharaohs, however the writing of the story was done around 960 BC.²⁷ When we look at the accounts of dreams that are reported in chapters 40 to 41 of Genesis one thing that immediately strikes the reader on close examination is the way the authors devoted a great deal of their reporting to detail.

When we talk of detail in dream accounts we are talking of a skilled way of narrating which brings out the moods , tastes of the dreamers. Unlike modern reporting which tends to give bare and hard facts of an event , ancient dream narrators especially those of Egypt tended to report in a colourful and dramatic way.

It is not surprising that the authors of the Book of Genesis of all places chose to report dreams of a Hebrew in Egypt. Egypt as we have seen was prominent among Ancient Near Eastern cultures when it came to believing in the power of dreams and their impact on a person's life. The difference is that the biblical author(s) of Genesis 40-41: 45 have placed this story of Joseph's as it is on purpose.

Unlike Egyptian polytheistic views on dreams where the gods empowered or disempowered people through dreams , Joseph shows that *dreams come from one God , Yahweh and only Yahweh Himself can give meaning to a dream.*

No one can pride himself in knowing the art of interpreting dreams as was the case with Egyptian dream interpreters. Only God is the interpreter of dreams, all of which have only one source in Yahweh Himself (Genesis 41: 6).²⁸

In general we find that there is a noticeable polemic against pagan Egyptian pride. The Hebrews are under the rule of the Egyptians who seem to be very advanced in their civilization . The Egyptian gods apparently seem to be a very big force behind this great civilization. On the other hand there is a minority of Hebrews on Egyptian land and these people claim to have their own Supreme God , Yahweh. At this time the Hebrews cannot be said to be pure monotheists as was to be the case later on, but at this time the writer(s) of this account is clearly advocating the supremacy of Yahweh over Egyptian gods and Pharaoh himself.

GENESIS 40 - 41: 45

In Genesis 40 we see the figure of Joseph who is first introduced in chapter 30: 24 as the son of Rachel , Jacob's favourite wife. In Genesis 37 we find Joseph at the centre of a rivalry that shakes the house of Jacob. All the brothers are resentful of the fact that Joseph is the favourite of their father.

In chapter 40 (E) he is now in Egypt after being sold by his brothers. It is here in Egypt where God has providentially sent him to prepare the way for the coming of his people, the Hebrews into the land of Egypt. We are told in Genesis 39 that Joseph is falsely accused of trying to rape Potiphar's wife in whose house he has been a servant. As a result he is put into a prison where he meets two Egyptians who had been working for Pharaoh, a cup bearer and a baker. The picture shows Joseph not as a condemned prisoner but as a servant assisting the chief steward of the jail caring for the prisoners who are there.

It is not very clear whether Joseph is in strict confinement or some kind of house arrest. In the case of the cup bearer and the baker they are said to be under house arrest in the house of the captain of the guard. Since Joseph meets them it indicates that Joseph is not in strict confinement. The captain of the guard obviously has a lot of trust in Joseph and entrusts to him the duty of looking after the prisoners in the jail.

In verses 3 and 15 we are told also that the place is a *dungeon*. This implies that the occupants, namely the baker and the cup bearer are in some kind of confinement. However the case of confinement may be clear when we look at the two workers of Pharaoh as verse 3 shows " *And he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard in the prison where Joseph was confined*". For Joseph the situation seems unclear as in verse 15 we hear him lamenting about his situation " *For I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also I have done nothing that should put me in the dungeon*". Is the confinement of verse 3 the same as the *dungeon* of verse 15 ? Apparently the text is not very clear.²⁹

We see Joseph starting the subject of dreams with the question in verse of chapter 40 " *Why are your faces downcast today ?*". Here questioning is a procedure followed in unravelling the mystery behind the downcast faces of the two people. We see that this method seems to have been employed by dream interpreters in many parts of the Ancient Near East.³⁰ However we cannot conclude from the text that there is an Ancient Near Eastern influence in the opening question of Joseph. Verse 5 of chapter 40 tells us that the two officials had dreamt " *each in his own dream and each dream with its own meaning* ". This introduction is not without significance for it shows that dreams were understood singularly; each dream had its own peculiar meaning and significance.³¹

The answer to the question is " *We have had dreams and there is no one to interpret them* " chapter 40: 8. Perhaps Egypt being prominent among many Ancient Near Eastern cultures would have provided for many dream interpreters with different methods.

Most likely these two workers would have gone immediately to consult interpreters if they had been free.³² Joseph's answer seems to go against Egyptian confidence in dream interpreters " *Do not interpretations belong to God ? Tell them to me , I pray you* ".

In the mouth of Joseph this statement expresses the Hebrew idea that inspiration comes from God and is not just a wisdom of wise men or ' *the discernment of a discerning man* ' (Isaiah 29: 14).³³

The Hebrews unlike many other peoples from the civilizations surrounding them who believed that dreams are in the power of the gods and people, believed that dreams are from their one God and this one God gives the key to their interpretation. Gods and humans have no influence on our dreams and the course which these dreams are going to take. Here there is a possible polemic against the Egyptian understanding of dreams and their interpretation.

When the cup bearer tells his dream to Joseph we see in it a mixture of realism and fantasy. On the realistic side the dream shows the cup bearer pressing grapes for Pharaoh. This was indeed his profession. The fantasy in the dream shows the vine growing at an incredible speed! The cup bearer's dream is interpreted as a favourable one as we see in chapter 40 verse 13 " *Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office*". The words " *lift up your head*" here imply a promotion from a degrading state, namely the cup bearer's dismissal and imprisonment is changed to a restoration to his office.

The same phrase " *lift up*" means a totally different thing altogether as we shall see when the baker tells his dream. In chapter 40 verses 16 to 19 we see the chief baker also telling his dream to Joseph. In the baker's dream again we see the same mixture of realism and fantasy operating again. The dream shows him engaging in what was his previous profession, namely baking, but on the fantasy side the dream shows birds eating what he has prepared for Pharaoh.

In interpreting this dream Joseph uses the same expression '*lift up your head*' but this time he means something else when he adds '*lift up your head from you*'. " *Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head from you and hang you on a tree; and the birds will eat the flesh from you* ". Joseph plays on the words '*lift up your head*' to convey two different interpretations to these two dreams. Here we see the scriptures portraying Joseph as a very skilled dream interpreter. Both dreams are eventually fulfilled.

This is one example of dreams in the scriptures when they have or rather God gives them a predictive power. The predictive power of dreams was also acknowledged in Egyptian dream interpretation.³⁴ Another interesting detail is that here in chapter 40 we see the dreams being paired again. Another case of dream pairing is found in Joseph's dreams as they are narrated in Genesis 37: 5-10.³⁵ In the accounts of Genesis 41: 1-32 (E) and Genesis 41: 33-45 (J) we see Joseph being called upon by Pharaoh to interpret his dreams after he fails to get help from his sages and scribes. Here again Egyptian professional dream interpreters have failed. Unlike the case of the two prisoners where the interpreter's presence is denied due to lack of freedom on their part, here Pharaoh has actually sought their help but they have failed.³⁶

The dream of Pharaoh proves to be too difficult to be interpreted by these dream interpreters. The dream is full of symbols which only Joseph can fully understand. In it we see seven fat cows being eaten up by seven other thin ones. The second dream of Pharaoh shows seven good ears of grain being swallowed up by seven other thin ears of grain. In the dream the happenings seem so real that the text tells of Pharaoh's surprise when he discovers that it was not a waking experience that he had been in " *And Pharaoh awoke , and behold it was a dream*" verse 7.

This realization apparently does not bring relief but adds more anxiety when we are told that he calls for '*wise men and magicians*' who are probably professional dream interpreters. The dreams of Pharaoh are paired as in chapters 37 and 40. Dreams and their interpretation as we have seen were very important issues in the Ancient Near East. If the dreams were royal as is the case with Pharaoh's dreams, they took on a particular meaning and were thought to be related to the world of the gods.

Some commentators on this text have posited an influence from Egyptian mythology in Pharaoh's dreams; the seven cows seem to have strong similarities with the god OSIRIS who often appeared in Egyptian mythology accompanied by seven cows who nourish him even in death. The seven ears of grain are symbolic of OSIRIS the giver of fertility.³⁷

However seven is also the biblical number for the ultimate good or bad. It indicates the maximum duration of either fortune or misfortune. Even though the dreams seem to have an Egyptian influence their interpretation by Joseph is very un-Egyptian " *Do not interpretations belong to God ?* "

This question is also present in Genesis 41: 16 when Pharaoh tells of his frustration with Egyptian interpreters. Joseph answers " *It is not in me , God will give Pharaoh a favourable answer* ". After giving the interpretation to Pharaoh in Gen 41: 28, Joseph says " *It is as I told Pharaoh, God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do* ".³⁸

The ' *favourable answer* ' in Genesis 41: 16 does not correspond to the bad years foretold in verses 30-31 but rather that ' *favourable answer* ' refers to the general welfare of Pharaoh when the whole famine is over. Why are dreams paired in the Genesis accounts ? This pairing indicates the seriousness with which such dreams should be taken, namely in this case they have *divine* and *predictive* dimensions.

NOTES

¹ Norman McKenzie, Dreams and Dreaming, New York: The Vanguard Press, 1965 pgs 21-30.

² Ibid. pgs 26-28

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Gerhard Kittel & Gerhard Friedrich ed. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company , 1990. pg 690ff.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Norman McKenzie, op. cit pgs 26-28

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

- ¹² Richard Clifford J & Roland E Murphy, Genesis, in: The New Jerome Biblical Commentary, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1990. pg 38
- ¹³ Gerhard Kittel & Gerhard Friedrich , op. cit. pg 690 ff
- ¹⁴ Eugene Maly H, Genesis, in: The Jerome Biblical Commentary, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc, 1968. pg 3
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Ibid pgs 3-4
- ¹⁸ Ibid pg 4
- ¹⁹ Verses 13, 16-17(J) and verses 11-12, 17-18, 20-22 are thought to have been originally an aetiology explaining the origin of a holy place, Bethel, Richard Clifford J & Roland Murphy E, op. cit. pg 32
- ²⁰ In Joseph's story several hands have been identified in the composition of the story. J, E and E accounts were edited to form one narrative, they were tradition not documents which were put together. The plots by Joseph's brothers(J) and Joseph who is defended by Judah(J) or Reuben(E). Joseph is sold to the Ishmaelites(J) and is carried off by Midianites(E), Ibid.
- ²¹ Bruce Metzger & Roland E Murphy, ed. The New Oxford Annotated Bible , New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, pg.53
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Richard Clifford J & Roland E. Murphy, op. cit. pg 32
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Enrico Mazza, The Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Rite, New York: Pueblo Publishing House, 1986, pg. 15
- ²⁶ Bruce Metzger & Roland E Murphy op. cit. pg 53
- ²⁷ Eugene H Maly , op. cit. pg 40
- ²⁸ Ibid
- ²⁹ Ibid
- ³⁰ Ibid
- ³¹ Ibid
- ³² Norman Mckenzie, op. cit. pgs 28-30
- ³³ Walter Elwell A & Marshall Morgan ed. The Marshall Pickering Encyclopedia of the Bible vol 1, London: Scott Publications, 1990. pgs 641-642
- ³⁴ Dreams especially important in Egypt especially when they were royal because royal dreams suggested a particularly closer relationship with the divine, Richard J Clifford & Roland E Murphy , op. cit. pg 38
- ³⁵ Claus Schedl, History of the Old Testament, vol 2, New York: Alba House, 1971. pg 76
- ³⁶ Ibid.
- ³⁷ Ibid .
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- ³⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

DREAMS IN PROPHETIC AND APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

A. PROPHETIC LITERATURE

i) ISAIAH

In Isaiah chapter 6 we come across a very profound experience which affects the whole life and ministry of the prophet. This experience launches the prophet Isaiah on his very difficult and dangerous mission of speaking on behalf of God. It is called a vision though we do not find the mention of it as a vision at the start of chapter 6. What we are told at the beginning is that the whole thing happened '*In the year that King Uzziah died*'. Why do we have to study a vision at all when all along we have been focusing our attention only on dreams ?

The vision of Isaiah as we have it in chapter 6 offers us a lot of material for understanding dreams as they were seen in the Old Testament. The vision of Isaiah has as its basis the call of God to the prophet and it is from this that the prophet has proof that God has spoken to him. Dreams fulfilled this role as well especially when we consider them as *vocational dreams*. Through a dream or a vision as in the case of Isaiah, God puts a stamp on his mission.

Chapter 6 : A Study

The vision and call of Isaiah as we have it in this chapter is dated around 740 BC and this date is calculated from the event of Uzziah's death.⁴⁰ The Hebrew year ran from autumn to autumn and it seems that the time Uzziah died was the time between these two seasons. From these observations scholars have put it as a strong possibility that the vision of Isaiah took place between these same two seasons.⁴¹

Why does the prophet tell us the detail about the death of the king as an introduction to the vision? This seems to have been a common practice in the Ancient Near East whenever a very important event was described. It used to be situated together with some royal event. For example early Babylonian usage defined the remainder of a year after the succession to the throne of a new king in the same way '*In the year in which N. entered into the house of his father*'⁴²

We are told by the prophet '*In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple*'. When he says '*I saw the Lord*' there is no elaborate and extensive description of the divine being here. Does it offer a physical description of how God's appearance was like? No. What it shows is the kingliness of Yahweh. Yahweh is enthroned over Israel and the world. It is interesting to see that Yahweh is shown in almost human terms. The reader can be tempted to think that it is nothing more than a description of an earthly king.⁴³

We see the Lord dressed in very kingly garments. The loose flowing parts of the robe or upper garment especially the part from the waist downwards can be pictured behind this vision of a kingly Yahweh. He is dressed in full majestic regalia. '*His train filled the temple*' This description of the '*train*' describes the robe of a king which is very long. The word used for '*robe*' is the one translated as '*train*'.

Here we see the vision bringing back to the mind of Isaiah the Temple in Jerusalem. The vision does not succeed in bringing completely new things. The surroundings described were not unheard of but very familiar to the reader and audience who received the prophet's message. '*Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew*'.

Who were the seraphim? What was their role? Different explanations have been put forward by scholars about these mysterious beings. The first explanation is that these were half human, half animal in appearance. Some have added that they also had a serpentine form and the reasoning behind this serpentine addition is that probably in Isaiah's time there stood in the Temple Court an image of a bronze serpent attributed to Moses. The Hebrew word for serpent has the meaning of a burning effect caused by the bite it gives. The same word for '*burning*' or '*fiery*' is similar to the word '*seraph*'⁴⁴

The second explanation given by scholars is that the *seraphim* belonged to the class of guardians of Ancient Near Eastern holy places. They were believed to repel intruders or admit people to the presence of the deity.⁴⁵

This is seen in verse 6 when we see them active in transmitting God's cleansing and blessing to the prophet *'Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth, and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven'* This second explanation seems to be the most favoured among those who have commented on this vision.

Overall we see the vision emphasizing the '*Glory of the Lord*' or '*kabod*' in Hebrew. This is reminiscent of '*the cloud*' that always accompanied the manifestation of God in many other passages of the scripture. We see this '*kabod*' in Ezekiel 10:4 Exodus 14: 19; Exodus 40: 34 and I Kings 8: 10ff.⁴⁶ The vision offers the background for the prophet's vocation and also serves as a reminder of Yahweh's majesty over Israel and the whole universe.

In **Isaiah 29: 7-8** a woe against Ariel announces a siege by the following year. The verses announce the deliverance of Israel by the following year. Ariel may have meant either '*the nether world*' or '*altar hearth*'.⁴⁷ What began as a threat becomes an assurance of salvation. All this is likened to a dream in the sight of the nations that are giving problems to Israel. After dreaming of eating or drinking one awakes disappointed to find no food or drink. Just as the nations are expecting to conquer Israel so will they be disappointed to find themselves defeated.

ii) JEREMIAH

Jeremiah wrestles with the problem of how to distinguish an impostor prophet from a genuine one sent by God. Jeremiah never stopped denouncing the false prophets of his time (2:8; 4:9; 5:3; 6:13-15; 14:13-16). They are accused by Jeremiah of being inauthentic transmitters of God's word. The adulterous state of the land has been caused by both idolatry and moral decadence. Priests and prophets have a share in these evil doings. The first characteristic of the false prophets is their moral conduct (6:13-15).

The second way to recognise false prophets is to look at the object of their message; they are flatterers of popular passions and whims. These prophets have not been sent by God. The final criterion is the form of communication they use; they use dreams to deceive people into believing them " *For thus says the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel; do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you; and do not listen to the dreams which they dream for it is a lie which they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them says the Lord*" (14:13-16).

iii) JOEL

The book of Joel is one among the books known as 'The Twelve Prophets' (Minor Prophets). The prophet Joel talks of the ' *Day of the Lord* '. Yahweh is calling the people to repentance. The prophet speaks of Yahweh answering the people's prayers and ushering in His Reign: in other words ' The Day of the Lord '. The prophet speaks of the cosmic, pneumatic effects of this day on Israel (2:28-32 3: 1-5) .⁴⁸

The presence of Yahweh brings with it a charismatic outpouring of the Spirit of God on all people. This cosmic, universal outpouring of the Spirit of God reminiscent of Num 11: 24-30 will have the following sign " *Your old men shall dream dreams, young men shall see visions* " (2:28). Here we see that dreams seem to have been part of Israel's prophetic hope; dreams from Yahweh were going to be a feature of salvation when God was going to pour out His Spirit. These were going to be dreams with a prophetic power.

B. APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

DANIEL

Introduction

What is Apocalyptic Literature ? This is the first thing that has to be clarified before embarking on any study of dreams as found in the Book of Daniel. The subject of what apocalypticism is all about is very vast but I will focus only on how it shaped the subject of dreams as they are found in the Book of Daniel.

Israel had been a victim of many invasions which brought different civilizations that threatened the very existence of its yahwistic faith and religion. The setting for the book of Daniel is said to be in Babylon where the Israelites after being conquered have been taken into exile. On the question of the historicity of the events as told in the book, no scholar has envisaged a literal account of the events.

However the visions are estimated to have been compiled in the years 168 to 164 BC.⁴⁹ The other tales are a much older development as they indicate a Babylonian setting. The whole narrative of Daniel represents Israel's self-awareness and what it thought as its superiority over these dominating forces. Yahweh was the only true and powerful God and He was going to be in charge of the whole universe and the course of history as he had done in the past. The foreign invaders with their apparent superior civilization were all subject to the power of Yahweh, the One God of Israel. Despite the sufferings of His people, Yahweh was going to dethrone these foreign and pagan tyrants and usher in His own Reign.

Due to the fact that these foreign occupants had desecrated Israelite places of worship and ridiculed their religion, Yahweh was going to subject these kings to the same fate; namely defeat and failure. We can say then that the main theme of Daniel is this: God expects His followers to maintain fidelity in the face of threats, persecution, wars, legal pronouncements by foreign rulers or the suppression of their customs.⁵⁰

In the long run Israel and her God were going to triumph. All this was going to happen due to the fact that Yahweh is in charge of history. Apocalyptic literature is highly characterised by symbolic language full of celestial and terrifying figures. All this language is meant to be read in the context of Yahweh's grandeur and human weakness on the other hand.

Apocalyptic literature is full of dreams and visions. Though fictional, the tales of Daniel may well contain the context in which they were actually written. Apocalyptic authors aim at portraying a concrete happening behind symbols and visions. When we read the book of Daniel we have to be conscious of the fact that the book contains different literary styles which intertwine to form the book as a whole.

There are both narrative as well as strictly speaking apocalyptic passages. In the narratives we find more evidence of dreams whereas the apocalyptic passages report more cases of visions.⁵¹ However the situations of oppression and mass slavery of Jews under Babylonian, Persian and Greek forces can easily be read behind both the narratives as well as the apocalyptic passages in the Daniel.

Daniel is distinguished by his ability to interpret dreams, visions and mysterious signs more than Babylonian diviners and wise men. The name '*Daniel*' means *My Judge is God* or '*God has judged*'.⁵² It will also be very important to mention the distinction between '*visions*' and '*dreams*'. There is no clear-cut distinction between the '*dream*' and '*vision*' in the Hebrew language. More often the dream and the vision were seen as aspects of the same basic perception of a reality of the supernatural. The vision was in some cases seen as the literal sense of perception with the physical organs of sight.⁵³ In other cases the vision served as the medium through which the prophetic function of receiving and delivering the Word of God was done by God through a prophet.⁵⁴ This was no human encounter but rather an encounter from beyond the world of sense experience. For the Hebrew mind the two were from God. The words '*chalom*' and '*chalam*' in Aramaic and Hebrew meant '*to be made strong or healthy*'.

Here there may be an empowerment from God of the dreamer or visioner when the message is received by the person. In visions we see the message delivered as in dreams by beings who are called '*angels*'. In Hebrew the word for '*angel*' was *malak* and it meant a human messenger of a divine message (Gen 19: 1; 15) or a spiritual messenger of a divine message (Gen 22:11; Ex 3:2; Num 22:22; Judges 6:11; Zech 1: 9).⁵⁵ All significant dreams and visions in the scriptures are said to bring a very important message from God that was going to influence the course of events .⁵⁶

Daniel 2: 1-49

Here we come across a very strange case of a dreamer asking the interpreter not only to interpret the dream but even guess what the contents of the dream were ! King Nebuchadnezzar has had a dream which greatly troubles him and he does the most normal thing any Babylonian would have done.

He calls soothsayers and wise men to help him interpret the dream but he does not reveal the contents of the dream, instead he goes ahead and threatens them with death if they do not tell and interpret the dream.

According to Josephus, the king had forgotten the dream but this does not seem to be the case if we examine the passage in depth.⁵⁷ He was doing this to see how reliable these soothsayers were. This is evident from verse 9 " *..that if you do not make the dream known to me , there is but one sentence for you: you have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the times change. Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can show me its interpretation "*.

The parallel with Joseph's story in Genesis 41 is obvious with the difference in Nebuchadnezzar's unusual demand. In Genesis 41 Pharaoh like Nebuchadnezzar has had a dream and is greatly troubled and he goes on to call interpreters like Nebuchadnezzar. Some historians have found a possible explanation in the Babylonian King's unusual demand after finding a possible link to a Babylonian King Nabodinus who had an abnormal interest in dreams and was opposed to the priests of Marduk.⁵⁸ However this is not certain and can only be speculated.

In verse 1 we see the expression told of Nebuchadnezzar that he '*had dreams*'. This expression literally meant '*he dreamed dreams*'. This just shows how dreams were held in very high regard by Ancient Near Eastern people. In the same verse we are told that after having seen these dreams "*his spirit was troubled and his sleep left him*". Talking about the spirit of the King being '*troubled*' we find the same expression in Genesis 41:8 about Pharaoh and in Psalms 77:4 and Judges 13: 25.

Here the meaning is that the experience of the dream disturbed him a lot. The expression '*his sleep left him*' is also found in Daniel 8: 27 where the vision from God leaves him '*overcome*'. And just who were these interpreters that Nebuchadnezzar called ? Four groups are mentioned; magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and Chaldeans. These could possibly represent astrologers and prognosticators. They were mostly people who drew up celestial charts and horoscopes (Isaiah 47:13). Their art was much practiced in ancient Mesopotamia and dream interpretation was one of their tasks .⁵⁹

When Daniel comes to the king we see the same attitude as that of Joseph in Genesis 40 before going to the king Daniel consults his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. They pray about it and ask the mercy of "*the God of heaven concerning this mystery so that Daniel and his companions might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon*" verses 26 to 27. The moment when the king asks Daniel to unravel the mystery of the dream, Daniel answers back "*No wise men, enchanters, magicians or astrologers can show the king the mystery which the king has asked but there is a God in Heaven who reveals mysteries and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these....*" and he goes on to tell the dream as it happened.

Here there may be another implicit polemic against Babylonian magic and its view on dreams. Yahweh is the only one ruling over all mysteries and the Babylonian magicians and astrologers are false and do not at all count in front of the God of Israel.

Here dreams are described as '*visions of your head as you lay in bed*'. This is one of the many cases in Daniel where there is no clear distinction between visions and dreams but instead dreams are described as '*visions of the head*'. After finishing describing the dream successfully Daniel goes on to give an interpretation which is equally accurate.

At the end we see Nebuchadnezzar, a great king as he was paying homage to the God of Daniel "*Truly your God is God of gods and the Lord of Kings and a revealer of mysteries for you have been able to reveal this mystery*". Here comes another similarity with Genesis 40. Just as Pharaoh honours Joseph by promoting him to a high office so does Nebuchadnezzar do to Daniel.

He gives Daniel high honours and many gifts and makes him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and Chief Prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. This shows the importance that was given to dreams. Daniel does not attain to these positions due to any other thing other than narrating and interpreting them.

NOTES

- ⁴⁰ S R Driver , The International Critical Commentary, Isaiah, Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1980, pgs 104-111
- ⁴¹ Ibid
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Clifford & Roland E Murphy, op. cit. pg 228
- ⁴⁵ S R Driver, op. cit. pgs 104-111
- ⁴⁶ Ibid
- ⁴⁷ Louis Hartmann J & Alexander A Di Lella, Daniel, in, The New Jerome Biblical Commentary, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1990. pg 40
- ⁴⁸ Trent C Butler ed. Holman Bible Dictionary, Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991. pg 335
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ Louis Hartmann & Alexander A Di Lella , pg 40
- ⁵¹ Trent C Butler ed. pg 379
- ⁵² Ibid. pg 139
- ⁵³ Morton T Kelsey, Dreams and Revelation, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974. pg 20
- ⁵⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵⁵ Josephus (ant. 10. 10.3, 195) Hartmann Louis & Di Lella Alexander A, op. cit. pg 406
- ⁵⁶ The Interpreter's Bible, New York: Abingdon Press, 1956. pgs 341-359
- ⁵⁷ Ibid. pgs 341-359
- ⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

DREAMS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

When we come to the books of the New Testament we then move from the strict Hebrew theology to the Christ-centred theology of the early Christian communities. It would be naive and mistaken to think that nothing is carried from the Hebrew idea of dreams to the New Testament dreams.

With the New Testament Jesus becomes the centre of all thinking about God. He is the peak of all self-communication of God and as such dreams only serve to show that God used them to foretell events in the life of Jesus. God has revealed Himself in Jesus. This is the central message of the New Testament and everything else including dreams is subordinate to this event.⁶⁰ Dreams are significant only in so far as they lead to Christ.

One of the words for '*dream*' in the New Testament is the Greek word '*onar*' found only in the Gospel of Matthew.⁶¹ '*Onar*' means '*a vision in sleep*'. However in the New Testament we have something of the problem found in the book of Daniel when it comes to differentiating between a dream and a vision. As we have seen before there is no clear-cut distinction between the two and in the Hebrew understanding, more often the dream and the vision were seen as aspects of the same encounter with God.⁶²

The Greek words for vision '*horama*', '*optasia*', '*horasis*' are found mainly in Luke and Acts. It is not always clear from the contexts in which these words are used for us to know whether they refer to dreams, visionary experiences or some other forms of revelations.

This is made even more difficult by the fact that visionary experiences are not always referred to as visions either. For example the great vision of the book of Revelation which practically covers the whole book is only once referred to as a vision "*And this was how I saw the horses in my vision...Rev 9:17.*"⁶³ The word '*onar*' for dream does not occur in the Septuagint version of the Bible, instead the word '*enypnion*' is used instead of '*onar*'.⁶⁴

When we come to the New Testament only Matthew and Luke mention dreams and for Luke in Acts, he uses the word for visions '*horama*' (Acts 16: 9-10; 18:9). However for the sake of being specific I will focus my study of dreams on Matthew. I have chosen Matthew because it has the highest number of dreams among the Gospels.

i) Dreams in the Gospel of Matthew

Matthew looks at dreams as one of the ways that God uses to communicate with His people and reveal Himself to them. The meaning of the message is more important than the dream through which it is communicated.

In Matthew 1:19-23 we see the link established between the genealogy of Jesus with his birth by the dream of Joseph. After discovering that Mary is pregnant without his being responsible, Joseph decides to divorce her quietly " *but as he considered this behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying...*" In this dream we have a combination of two events; the angelic dream appearance and the communication of the message that Jesus is to be born. Some scholars have seen these two as having been two separate accounts which were later joined to form the single dream account of Joseph .⁶⁵

Joseph is pictured as a '*just man*'; his justice consists in his obedience to the Law (Dt 22:20;21). As we have seen, the appearance of the angel is a common occurrence in Old Testament dream accounts. The angel is seen as a very important aspect of a dream in establishing whether the dream has come from God or not.

In Matthew 1:19-23 we see the divine care and protection being shown to the baby Jesus by putting him in a family of the righteous Joseph and Mary. In Matthew 2:12 the wise men are told not to reveal to Herod the whereabouts of the newly-born baby Jesus " *and being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way..*" Jesus was protected from the jealous King Herod when the parents of Jesus were told to flee to Egypt " *Now when they had departed , behold , an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said..."*

After some time in Egypt, God in another dream tells Joseph to come back home since King Herod was dead by this time " *but when Herod died, behold and angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying ' rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead'*" (Matthew 2:19-20). Another dream follows with more advice from God to Joseph " *but when he heard that Archelaus reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod. he was afraid to go there , and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee*".

All these dreams show God's protection over Jesus. It was as if God was directing each and every step of the life of this new-born baby. As we go deeper into the Gospel of Matthew we do not come across any explicit dream until Matthew 27:19 when Jesus is brought before Pilate to be tried. Pilate's wife has had a dream which is warning Pilate that he ought not to harm Jesus, a righteous man " *Besides, while he was sitting on the judgement seat, his wife sent word to him ' have nothing to do with that righteous man. for I have suffered much over him today in a dream'*."

ii) Dreams in the Letter of Jude

I have chosen the letter of Jude because it says something about dreams and how they can be interpreted in the right way. Here we see the importance of discerning dreams so that they do not divide a community. In verse 8 of the letter of Jude we have the writer speaking of different kinds of teachers in the Christian community.

The focus is on the ones who were causing havoc, bringing discord in the community by their teachings. In general the context is about how to differentiate between true teachers who teach what we can call ' *orthodox*' teaching and those who teach false and heretical teachings. Obviously there were false teachers around who were threatening the very foundations of the community.

In verse 4 the writer states " *for admission has been secretly gained by some who long ago were designated for condemnation, ungodly persons who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ*". One of the divisive issues in their teachings was that they claimed to have revelations from God through dreams.

In Jude verses 8 to 10 these heretical teachers are characterised as immoral and denounced " *Yet in like manner these men in their dreamings defile the flesh, reject authority, and revile the glorious ones*". The word ' *dreamings*' as understood from the passage here may be translatable as both ' *dreams*' and ' *visions*'.⁶⁶

The whole idea is made more difficult due to the reference here to the lasciviousness of these false teachers. If they are so morally corrupt does the reference here on '*dreamings*' mean dreams or visions ? This obviously obscures the real meaning. However since a possibility of it referring to dreams is very probable we can say that these people used to have dreams in which they claimed that God used to speak to them.

For people who claimed to receive messages from God through these dreams, it is only logical that they ought to have lead morally upright lives. However this was not the case with these teachers. For the false teachers dreams not only lead them to defile the flesh but also to reject divine authority present in the worshipping community. Do false dreams bring about moral decay or the opposite happens ? Since '*dreamings*' here probably refers to a divine experience , we can conclude from the passage that it is first the perverted lives of these teachers which work on their imagination to produce false dreams. In turn false dreams only help in justifying teachings and a vicious cycle starts.

The dreamings of these false teachers is similar to that of the false prophets condemned by the prophet Jeremiah.⁶⁷ What is this authority of the '*glorious ones*' that is undermined by false dreams ? '*Authority*' here refers to such authority as that of angelic beings and the same word '*authority*' can mean '*angels*' themselves.⁶⁸

From these facts we can see that the theology behind may be that the worshipping community with its elected leaders has a divine authority compared to that of the angels which should not be disobeyed and rejected as these false teachers were doing. Even if one claims to have a message from God through dreams such a person should not be easily be believed especially if he is leading a life of lasciviousness and does not obey the authority of the church and its leaders.

The Holy Spirit is proposed as the right inspirer of God's people. The dreamings of these false teachers cannot be relied upon " *but you beloved, build yourselves up on you most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life*", verses 20 to 21.

NOTES

- ⁶⁰ David Noel Freedman, The Anchor Bible Dictionary, vol 2, D-G, New York: Doubleday, 1992. pg 231
- ⁶¹ W. E Vine, An Expository Dictionary of the New Testament Words, Chicago: Moody Press, 1985. pg 338
- ⁶² Morton T Kelsey, op. cit. pg 20
- ⁶³ W. E Vine, op. cit. pg 338
- ⁶⁴ Raymond Brown, Joseph A Fitzmyer & Roland E Murphy, op.cit. pg.635
- ⁶⁵ George Arthur Buttrick, The Interpreter's Bible, vol 12, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980. pgs 8-10
- ⁶⁶ Jeremiah 14; 13-16
- ⁶⁷ George Buttrick, op. cit. pgs 8-10
- ⁶⁸ Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

DREAMS AND CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA

*" How and why an unknown man from an
obscure village has so quickly risen
to fame as a healer of AIDS.
Mchape(the medicine) has become
the magic water for thousands of
people.
It all started with a dream;
Two men dressed in black robes
and wearing black shoes....."*

This quotation is taken from the magazine, *The Lamp*(N.1 July-September 1995) from Malawi in which Dr. J.C. Chakanza from the University of Malawi, Chancellor College describes the man who became very famous in Malawi after he claimed to have found a cure for AIDS. What is very interesting is that all those people in their thousands who flocked to this healer believed they might have stood a chance of being cured if they were suffering from AIDS. In other words the man's claims were suspected of being true even though they were based on a dream in which none of them had taken part.

The man, Billy Goodson Chisupe claimed to have had a very unique experience on the night of 22 nd August 1994. Two men dressed in black robes and wearing black shoes appeared to him in a dream while he was asleep in his house. He recognised one of them as his late grandfather. They explained to him " *God could not have created men without providing them with the necessary means to cure any disease. Each ailment has a cure*" .⁶⁹

When in the dream Chisupe pointed out that AIDS has no cure they took him to a tree in the bush from where he was told to chop off pieces of the bark, soak them in water and drink the mixture. This they said was the cure for AIDS. Surprising enough according to Chisupe after waking up in the morning he was able to trace his way back to the bush and was able as well to identify the tree, despite the mysterious disappearance of the marks made by the chopping.

After offering libation to the two spirits and asking for more information about the cure the two men appeared to him again in a dream and told him that the medicine was to be drunk within the premises of his home and he was not supposed to charge any fee except a gift given as a token of thanks.⁷⁰

This account serves to highlight the fact that dreams have been very prominent and influential in African societies. Unfortunately not much has been written by Africans about dreams in their societies. We find dreams featuring in many areas of life for Africans. One area where an example can be taken is the above example from Malawi: namely the dream as a source of someone's profession in society, in the case of Chisupe he became a healer.

Before engaging in a reflection on dreams in Africa we have first of all to consider the world view of the Africans. God is the Supreme One, Creator who is the source of all life. There are many attributes for God serving to underline the different aspects of God's working among people. Among the Bantu peoples, *Mulungu*, *Mungu* is the Creator.

In Malawi God is the Creator (*Mulungu*), The Merciful (*Leza*), The All Powerful (*Mphambe*) and the source of nourishment and life (*Chauta*, *Chisumphu*). The whole universe is filled with powers from God. These powers from God are good but there are also some powers which are bad and come from evil spirits.

In the supernatural world of God there are spirits of the dead ancestors who have some control over the people who are alive. Empowered by God the good spirits dispense the various gifts of life like rain, fertility to people on earth. They only work with the power from God. Evil spirits are another realm altogether and they work against the good done by God and the good spirits.

When they want to communicate some message to people, the ancestors usually do so through dreams. In the case of Chisupe we can better understand his dream with this world view in mind. Dreams of this kind are normally taken very seriously. Only the global level dreams seem to have a greater impact in Third World countries than in the industrial West. The West tends to explain dreams more as psychological phenomena.⁷¹

Dreams for Healing:

The first type of dream in Africa is the one where a person dreams of ancestors and is told on how to become a healer. The healing profession in Africa seems to be the most inspired by dreams. In most of these dreams the person is taken to the supernatural world of the spirits where he/she is shown different herbs and what diseases they cure. On returning to the world the person engages him/herself in a full time profession of healing. These dreams do not discriminate between male and female healers.

The Vocational Dream:

The second type of dream in Africa is the one where a person is told either by God or ancestors to found a church. This founding of churches is only understandable in the context of African Christianity. This type of dream can be called the '*vocational dream*'. It is treated as being a call from God for a prophetic life in preaching the Word of God. For example Simeo Ondeto, founder of the Legio Maria Church in Kenya had a very strong conviction that God had communicated with him through dreams. The Legio Maria owes its beginnings to Simeo's dream of a visit he made to heaven.⁷² In this case the '*vocational dream*' of the leader shaped the whole theology that his church was to adopt especially in regard to Christian revelation and dreams.

The Personal Premonitory Dream:

The third type of dream in Africa is what can be called '*The personal premonitory dream*'. A. Shorter in his book '*Jesus and the Witchdoctor*' has written of some experiences in regard to this dream.⁷³ The *Personal premonitory dream* comes to the person warning or informing him/her of something that is going to happen in the future. This dream is thought to reflect another deeper reality of life which is a continuum that takes no account of time past or time in the future.

Each of the dreams that have been explained is different one from the other but in Africa you sometimes find them mixing in the same person. This only serves to show the complexity of the human being who cannot be fitted into ready made frameworks.

i) Africa and Dreams in the Bible

We can see some parallels between dreams as understood in both Testaments and in Africa. When we look at the dreams of Joseph and those he interpreted in Egypt we see a very strong emphasis running through them namely that only God is the source and ultimate interpreter of dreams. The same holds true for Africans. For Africans God is in constant communication with His people. The difference lies in the intermediaries that He uses. These intermediaries are people who once lived on earth and are sent by God to give messages to their descendants.

The question of dreams in Africa involves mostly ancestors. In the Bible the frequency of an angel's appearance in dreams cannot be ignored and the figure of the angel only serves to draw a parallel with the ancestors in the dreams from Africa. The angelic figure and the ancestor have one difference in that the angel was never viewed as a person who once lived in the world at some stage. He was simply a messenger from God.

When it comes to the dreams of Daniel, the context differs in many ways from that of the Africans. The Apocalyptic movement as we have seen is in many ways different from the African situation.

In apocalypticism the polemic is strong against dominating pagan forces who wish to exterminate the worship of the true God, Yahweh. Dreams from the apocalyptic tradition serve to counteract these pagan influences and defend Yahweh, the God of Israel.

For a long time the African traditional religions have never been in such a defensive position as that of Daniel. It is only with the coming of other religions like Christianity and Islam that we see various polemical movements within the African traditional religions. For example ' *The Church of the Ancestors*'(*Tchalitchi la Makolo*)' in Malawi.⁷⁴

The dream interpretation of the Old Testament was done by someone in whom the Spirit of God was seen to dwell. In other words this person was supposed to be upright and free from all magical influences. Dreams and magic could not be reconciled. In African dream interpretation, the diviner or witchdoctor played a very important role. In many cases divination and witchdoctoring were done at the same time.

Here in the African case the involvement of God in dream interpretation can only be implied but is not explicit as in the case of the Old Testament dreams. The involvement of magic in someone's dream has often been believed in when we consider dreams in Africa.

ii) Dreams and Christian Counselling in Africa

Before proposing any model or guideline for christian counselling on dreams in Africa we have first of all to tackle the issue of whether we agree that God's will can be communicated through dreams or not. How do we discern whether the message contained in a dream is coming from God or not ? What criteria do we use?

When we look at modern interpreters of dreams we see one main point being emphasized over and over; human beings are more than what they consciously conceive themselves to be. Like the tip of an iceberg floating over a mass of water what people see on the surface is just a fraction of what lies beneath. Sigmund Freud explained this in terms of the *conscious* and the *unconscious* parts of our make up. As mental constructs the *conscious* part of us is what we are presently aware of at any given moment of our life.⁷⁵

When we come to the *unconscious* part it refers to the human reality of our mental life, our psyche which is far more extensive than the part which we are aware of. This area of our mental life has a dynamic influence on our dreams.⁷⁶ All the events, experiences which we shelve away from our conscious life do not get lost but they all accumulate in the *unconscious*. It is there that we have a mixture of everything; unfulfilled hopes, anxieties, fears and other trapped emotions. For the sake of our own mental health dreams in sleep act as safety valves in finishing all the business that was left incomplete. Some things simply have to be faced in one way or the other and dreams help us in facing those sides of ourselves which we would rather not face in our waking state due to fear or other reasons.⁷⁷

When we consider the christian aspect of counselling we see that whatever message the dream is intending to give us is bound up with our own identity. If there are positive sides of ourselves which we are made aware of, then we only realise what good God wants to bring to us.

On the other hand if nightmares and other signs of inner conflict surface in dreams then we know that through the unconscious God is giving us warning signs. We either change our way of doing things or we lose our psychological and physical health for the two are interconnected.⁷⁸

When we look at the *vocational dream* we can learn a lot especially when it comes to help people in discerning whether they are truly called by God to various ministries and vocations in the church or not. There are countless examples of people in Africa who have traced their vocation to the priesthood, religious life or lay ministry to a dream they had in which God called them.

Here as in many other similar claims a good knowledge of what scripture and psychology say is very important for the christian counsellor and spiritual director. In other areas of life in Africa we see that a common ground between the biblical and African dreams has been attempted in the many African Independent Churches on the continent. In these churches we see the emphasis being laid on the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is believed to help people in the congregation to interpret dreams and visions which they have. What we have here is a blend of the two traditions.

The Christological dimension of dreams can help in enriching the African understanding of dreams in making it more Christian and also African for those Africans belonging to Christian churches. The ancestors who come to us in dreams can be understood as God speaking to us through those who have gone before us. However great caution should be taken in Christian counselling and spiritual direction in accepting uncritically someone claiming to communicate with God in dreams.

This is where good formation for Christian counsellors is indispensable. A good knowledge of psychology is necessary to help us check possible psychological factors that can bring about some kinds of dreams.⁷⁹ Dreams can help us in identifying areas of our life which attention thus help us to discern what the will of God is for us at a particular time.⁸⁰

Good as it is, knowledge of psychology is not enough but we need to look at the scriptures and see what God is telling us about dreams through the great dreamers of the Bible, for as Daniel tells King Nebuchadnezzar " *No wisemen, enchanters, magicians or astrologers can show the King the mystery which the King has asked but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries....* " Daniel 2; 1-49.

iii) Towards A Christian Understanding of Dreams

On his travels the renowned psychologist Carl Jung talks of his encounter with a medicine man in Kenya. The 'Laibon ' as he is called answering Jung who has asked him to tell his dreams says ' *In the old days the laibons had dreams , and knew whether there is war or sickness or whether rain comes and where the herds should be driven* ' ⁶¹ Jung goes on to tell us that the *laibon's* grandfather too had dreams but since the Europeans were in Africa the *laibon* felt that dreams had ceased because the Europeans knew everything. In other words, to interpret dreams was seen as a key to the mystery. To dream on behalf of the community was to possess power and influence.

Has Africa lost its touch with the infinite resources found in dreams or not ? According to the *laibon* who met Jung, dreams had been replaced by something superior namely the technological power of the Europeans. For Jung the *laibon* was '*the living embodiment of the spreading disintegration of an undermined, outmoded unrestorable world.*' ⁸² Is the touch with the world of dreams and with God so evident in pre- colonial Africa outmoded and unrestorable ? Before going further, it is good to clarify some psychological terms that are indispensable in the study of dreams from a modern scientific point of view;

Psyche

John Sanford in his book *Dreams, God's Forgotten Language*, describes the psyche as the entire personality including the *conscious* and the *unconscious* parts of our makeup. *Psychic* is used to describe the inner energy or activity of the psyche.⁸³ We then can talk of dreams as a psychic activity. How can we talk of God speaking to a person through psychic activity ? God reveals Himself through our being and when we talk of the totality of our personality we are talking about the deepest level of our personhood.

The *conscious* and the *unconscious* can be said to represent the *immanence* and the *transcendence* of God. God both reveals Himself on our level through the direction of our conscious flow of thoughts yet at the same time God is clouded in mystery and will not be grasped fully in this life. The mystery of God is represented by the *unconscious* with its vast and mysterious treasures.

Archetypes

Archetypes are typical figures that represent a basic part of human nature. These basic parts of our nature are at the same time particular, pertaining to a concrete person and yet they have a universal appeal which is shared by humanity all over the world. They are the roots coming from our origin.⁸⁴ It is this universal appeal which makes dreams of other people speak to us. That is why dreams from the Bible cannot be dismissed lightly as some people do, for they offer a very rich source of knowledge for humanity in its quest for God.

Animus/Anima

Jung recognizes that in both male and female there exist parts of both. The *animus* stands for the masculine side and the *anima* stands for the feminine side. A complete man has to come to terms with his feminine side. He has to integrate into his personality that feminine side of his personality. The same holds true for a woman who has to recognize that within herself lies a masculine side which has to be integrated into her whole personality. Failure to do this will result in countless psychological problems for a man and a woman. The balance between the *animus* and the *anima* in a person is crucial for a person's full growth.

What does this tell us about God, dreams and the *animus/anima* ? When we dream the appearance of masculine and feminine figures can at times tell us how to cope with these two sides of our personality. Does this not tell us that our God who communicates with us in dreams has both masculine and feminine attributes ? Is God not Mother and Father at the same time ? Is He/She not reaching out to us in love through the *animus* and the *anima* ?

Shadow (Alter Ego)

Sanford in the book mentioned above, describes the *shadow* or alter ego as an archetypal figure. Where is the *shadow* to be seen ? What is it ? A man or woman always has that side which is presented before the world. This part is like a mask an actor puts on when doing a play. This is done partly as a matter of social necessity. We adapt to the society or the environment we live in.

This side is called the *persona*. In contrast to the *persona*, the *shadow* is the dark and sinister side of our personality which we may not be aware of as it can be hidden in the *unconscious* and only comes out in dreams.⁸⁵

For example a priest can dream of having murdered one of his parishioners. This shows the presence of a *shadow of aggression* which has been repressed into the *unconscious*. Does God speak to us through the *shadow* ? God is calling us in an ongoing process of conversion. What this often means is the recognition of our dark sides and gradually working at their subjection to the grace of God. Dreams as vehicles of God's revelation bring to our attention what needs to be worked at in order for us to be fully God's children.

The Dream as a Parable

When we look at dreams we see that in them we find a kind of parable of our life. What appears in dreams is truth about ourselves in relation to the course our life is taking. John Sanford calls a dream as being both a cartoon and parable. A cartoonist employs symbolic language both in words and images. He normally exaggerates the figures to bring home or emphasize a point.

When we understand this language the message is very clear but if what is being emphasized is foreign to us, or maybe it belongs to another culture then it can be very frustrating to understand what the cartoon is trying to say. The monsters or angels we see in our dreams are signals pointing towards some truth to which we should pay attention if we are to remain sane.⁸⁶

Likewise Jesus in talking about the Kingdom of God used many parables. What is crying out in our dreams is the realization of the Kingdom of God itself. There is a very strong relationship between the Kingdom of God and our dreams through the parables they present to us about ourselves.

God, Dreams and Human Growth

In the study of human growth, psychologists have come up with the term *individuation*.

What is *individuation* and what has it to do with dreams ? Carl Jung used the term to refer to the lifelong project we are called to undertake if we have to be the complete human beings we were called to be. It is called *individuation* because it reveals one's special structure.⁸⁷ If we pay attention to what dreams are telling us we learn about the existence of values within us, our own ways of life, that proceed naturally out of our inborn natures. This is like the mustard seed as it gradually grows in us and brings forth wonders (Mk 4: 30-32 Matt; 13: 31-32; Lk 13: 18-19).

CONCLUSION

The modern world obsessed with technology and the physical sciences has seriously neglected the part of mystery which manifests itself in dreams. The mystery is ultimately God Himself and if we deny it we run the risk of being superficial and empty. This can be the cause of so many psychological illnesses which are common in the so called developed world. The so called primitive cultures of the world have rituals and symbols that take place in order to answer to the world of dreams.

Anything that has a great power for good can also cause irreparable damage if it is abused or mishandled. Dreams are dynamic sources of growth composed of symbols that express movements, conflicts, interactions and developments of the great energy that lies within us put there by God.⁸⁸

Such a great force if ignored can result in terrible frustration for the people especially in Africa where there is not much done by Christian ministers to let people be aware of the God of mystery revealing Himself through dreams. It is my hope that the field of dreams which we have inherited from the Judaeo- Christian tradition and from the world cultures and is manifested in our lives will continue to be explored by the Church in Africa.

One of the areas where knowledge of dreams can help people in relation to Africa is in the field of ancestral veneration. In Africa cosmology is explained in terms of the world of the living and the world of the dead. The dead also known as ancestors are always ready to commune with the living for good or bad.

When someone dies it is normally believed that his spirit joins the world of other spirits. In continuing their presence in the world of living beings, these ancestors have to be made present firstly through their name which has to be given to one of their descendants. This presupposes that the ancestor was of good moral standing in the community. As Michael Kirwen has explained in his book *The Missionary and the Diviner*, in anthropological circles this is called '*nominal reincarnation*'⁸⁹ It is different from the Hindu reincarnation in that the Hindu believes in the rebirth of the soul in various human and non-human forms until the soul is completely purified of its imperfections.⁹⁰

When it comes to dreams, Africans use them as ways of discovering the will of the ancestors. What the ancestors want is usually communicate through dreams after their death to someone in the family. When it comes to naming someone after them dreams serve as ways of discerning the child who has to bear the name. It is seen as an obligation that does not have to be ignored or disobeyed at any cost. If ignored, plagues and other disasters can fall upon the family in question. This belief makes dreams very important to the people.

Christian ministers can help a lot in liberating people from such types of beliefs which bring fear of the ancestors' wrath. People in Africa can be helped to understand that dreams have many dimensions which may have nothing to do with the way they are to relate with those who have died. There is nothing wrong in naming someone after a deceased member of the family but the element of fear has to be removed.

If the respect accorded to ancestors far surpasses the respect given to Christ and the living, we must seriously question our understanding of dreams especially if we are to inculcate the idea of the ancestors into our Christianity. A good knowledge of both biblical and modern scientific approaches to dreams and visions can help us in counselling many of the christians who lack guidance in their dreams.

There have been too many complaints about Africans being prone to superstition which I think are baseless since their experiences of dreams have never been taken very seriously. Only if we listen to people's dreams can we then help them with our modern and scientific knowledge.

This statement holds true especially also in relation to dreams and **witchcraft**. There are countless times when we hear of christians in Africa fearing the effects of witchcraft after dreaming of someone interfering with them in their sleep. These fears are real and should not be minimised but at the same time christianity can never have much impact if people are paralysed with such fear. In counselling a knowledge of psychology and scripture can help us in discerning how dreams can help people who think that someone wants to bewitch them.

Lastly I wish to reemphasize that Africa and the world have a very rich source of growth and conversion in dreams. This entails an attitude of openness and humility. More study has to be done on dreams for such things to happen.

NOTES

⁶⁹ Dr J Chakanza, *Kunadza Mchape*, The Lamp, vol 1, no 1, July- September 1995, pgs 18-19

⁷⁰ Ibid. pg 19

⁷¹ Aylward Shorter, Jesus and The Witchdoctor, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985. pgs 149 ff

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ This church has a considerable following especially among the older generation in Southern Malawi who do not feel like joining either Christianity or Islam. It offers them a sense of pride when they claim that the African Traditional Religions have to be considered on equal basis with either Christianity or Islam.

⁷⁵ Ronald Rolheiser et al, A Fresh Approach to St John of the Cross, Kildare: St Paul's, 1993. pg 88

⁷⁶ John A Sanford, Dreams: God's Forgotten Language, New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1989. pg 24

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Carl G Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, New York: Vintage Books , 1989. pg 265

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ John Sanford, op. cit. pg xiv

⁸⁴ Ibid. pg 106

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid. pg 114

⁸⁷ Robert A. Johnson, Inner Work, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1986. pg 11

⁸⁸ Ibid. pg 33

⁸⁹ Michael Kirwen, The Missionary and the Diviner, New York: Orbis Books, 1993. pg 121

⁹⁰ Ibid.

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