Dream Type-Scene in Old Testament Narratives: Structure and Significance

by

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This dissertation identifies and presents the dream type-scene in the Old Testament. The dream type-scene narratives are: Abimelech’s dream (Gn 20:1–21:7), Jacob’s dream at Bethel (Gn 28:10–22), Jacob’s claim to have a dream and Laban’s dream (Gn 31:1–55), Joseph’s dreams (Gn 37:1–11), the dream of the cupbearer and the dream of the baker (Gn 40:1–23), Pharaoh’s two dreams (Gn 41:1–40), the Midianite soldier’s dream (Jdg 7:8–23) and Solomon’s dream (1 Kgs 3:5–15). The defining characteristic of the dream type-scene in Old Testament narratives is the presence of the term חלום (dream). Other key terms are לילה (night), שׁכם (arise early) and ירא (fear). The dreamer is in a seemingly powerless situation at the outset of the narrative, responds to the dream (first to create a narrative delay and second to resolve the tension within the plot), verbalizes the content of the dream and accepts the dream as truth from God. Elements concerning the dream-giver and the dream itself include: God speaks and/or there is an image, a divine promise or warning, a disclosure of a potential but seemingly unlikely future, and an element of hope. Further, the dreamer’s introductory situation is one of initial danger or crisis, the dream introduces or intensifies the narrative tension, a character presents an understanding of the dream, the tension related to the dream is resolved and the conclusion relates back to God. Within the dream narratives, there is usually an effort to rescue or deliver the dreamer and a
positive outcome for the dreamer and other characters. The presentation of all of these dream
type-scene characteristics undergoes some level of modification in the dream narratives.
Observing the presence, function and modifications of these characteristics in each narrative
enables the reader to find additional meaning in the passage and thus has implications for our
understanding of the meaning of the text from the perspective of the dream type-scene. A key to
analyzing the type-scene narratives is to observe how the tension in the plot is resolved and the
resulting outcome for the dreamer and other characters.
Acknowledgments

Thank you to all those who made this work possible, particularly my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Michael Kolarcik, and the other members of my committee, Dr. Keith Bodner, Dr. John McLaughlin, Dr. Glen Taylor and Dr. Marion Taylor.

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# Table of Contents

Introduction

Chapter 1 – Background

1.1 Overview of Scholarship
   1.1.1 Type-Scenes 4
   1.1.2 Research On Old Testament Dream Narratives 13
1.2 Present Approach to Dream Narratives
   1.2.1 Primary Literature 24
   1.2.2 Methodology: Narrative Criticism 25

Chapter 2 – Ancient Context of Dream Literature

2.1 Ancient Near Eastern Dream Literature and Interpretation 37
2.2 Homeric Dream Literature and Type-Scene 72
2.3 Uniqueness of Old Testament Dream Literature 82

Chapter 3 – Dream Type-Scene Criteria, Characteristics and Narratives

3.1 Dream Type-Scene Criteria 85
3.2 Dream Type-Scene Characteristics 88
3.3 Dream Type-Scene Narratives 93
   3.3.1 Abimelech’s Dream (Genesis 20:1–21:7) 94
   3.3.2 Jacob’s Dream at Bethel (Genesis 28:10–22) 106
   3.3.3 The Dream Claim of Jacob and the Dream of Laban (Genesis 31:1–55) 113
   3.3.4 The Dreams of Joseph (Genesis 37:1–11) 127
   3.3.5 The Dreams of the Cupbearer and Baker (Genesis 40:1–23) 132
   3.3.6 The Dreams of Pharaoh (Genesis 41:1–40) 137
   3.3.7 The Midianite Soldier’s Dream (Judges 7:8–23) 144
   3.3.8 Solomon’s Dream (1 Kings 3:5–15) 149

Chapter 4 – Significance, Implications and Summary

4.1 Implications of Identifying the Biblical Dream Type-Scene 161
4.2 Significance of Biblical Dream Type-Scene Characteristics 163
4.3 Summary of the Narrative Meaning Indicated by Old Testament Dream Type-Scene Narratives 163
4.4 Significance of Old Testament Dream Literature in Its Ancient Context 169
4.5 Future Study 172

Bibliography 174
### List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABD</td>
<td>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANE</td>
<td>Ancient Near East</td>
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<tr>
<td>AOAT</td>
<td>Alter Orient und Altes Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>AOS</td>
<td>American Oriental Series</td>
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<td>AS</td>
<td>Assyriological Studies</td>
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<td>BO</td>
<td>Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry</td>
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<tr>
<td>BZ</td>
<td>Biblische Zeitschrift</td>
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<td>BZAW</td>
<td>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</td>
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<td>CQB</td>
<td>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</td>
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<td>FOTL</td>
<td>Forms of Old Testament Literature</td>
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<td>HUCA</td>
<td>Hebrew Union College Annual</td>
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<td>ICC</td>
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<tr>
<td>JANESCU</td>
<td>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University</td>
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<td>JAOS</td>
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<td>Journal of Biblical Literature</td>
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<td>JHS</td>
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<td>JJS</td>
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<td>JSOT</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</td>
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<td>KUB</td>
<td>Keilschrifturkunden aus Bogazköy</td>
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<td>KTU</td>
<td>Keilschrift Texte aus Ugarit (collection of cuneiform texts)</td>
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<td>NEA</td>
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<td>Acronym</td>
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<td>TOTC</td>
<td>Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries</td>
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Introduction

Dreams are common to the human experience, and so it is no surprise that dreams have a role in the biblical text. Like Homer, the biblical narrator has crafted dream type-scene narratives to communicate a great deal more narrative commentary than is immediately apparent upon an initial surface reading. By creating a dream type-scene, the narrator is able to build additional layers of narrative tension and play with reader expectation.

While Robert Alter’s *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (1981, 2011) has drawn attention to several biblical type-scenes, the biblical dream type-scene has yet to be identified. The identification of the dream type-scene is important because the reader needs to be aware of the literary type-scene convention employed by the narrator and the particular characteristics of the dream type-scene to fully engage with Old Testament (OT) dream narrative texts. Equipped with knowledge of how the type-scene works within the dream narratives, the reader is able to gain a fuller understanding of the narrative meaning within dream narratives by observing how each type-scene fulfills or contradicts narrative expectations.

This dissertation argues for the presence of a dream type-scene by identifying and examining dream narratives and dream type-scene characteristics in the Old Testament, particularly the narrative corpus of Genesis to 2 Kings. It highlights characteristics of the dream type-scene, demonstrates how dream type-scene characteristics are rendered in the text, and comments on how the type-scene functions in each dream type-scene narrative. Dream narratives are primarily selected based on the presence of the Hebrew root חזון in each passage and are: Abimelech’s dream (Gn 20:1–21:7), Jacob’s dream at Bethel (Gn 28:10–22), Jacob’s claim to have a dream and Laban’s dream (Gn 31:1–55), Joseph’s dreams (Gn 37:1–11), the dream of the cupbearer and the dream of the baker (Gn 40:1–23), Pharaoh’s dreams (Gn 41:1–40), the Midianite soldier’s dream (Jdg 7:8–23) and Solomon’s dream (1 Kgs 3:5–15).

The dream type-scene has several characteristics that have been identified through careful and detailed observation and the comparison of OT dream narratives to one another. The defining characteristic is the presence of the term חזון (announcing that a *dream* is given to a character) in each narrative. There are several key words generally present in the dream narratives: לילה (indicating the dream occurs at *night*),AWN (noting that the dreamer *arises early* after having the
dream to respond to the dream) and יָרָא (recording fear experienced by one or more characters after the dream is given). Several components of the dreamer’s character play a role in dream narratives. Usually, the dreamer is in a seemingly powerless situation at the outset of the narrative, verbalizes the content of the dream and accepts the dream as truth from God. Importantly, the dreamer typically responds to the dream—first to create a narrative delay and second to resolve the tension within the plot. Dream narratives have several common characteristics concerning the dream-giver and the dream itself. These characteristics of dream narratives include: God speaks and/or there are visual images, there is a divine promise or warning, there is a disclosure of a potential but seemingly unlikely future, and the message provides an element of narrative hope. There are also several key characteristics pertaining to the structure and plot of the narrative: the dreamer’s introductory situation is one of initial danger or crisis (though the dreamer may not be aware of it at the outset), the dream introduces or intensifies the narrative tension, a character presents an understanding of the dream, the tension related to the dream is resolved and the conclusion relates back to God. Two narrative themes are usually present within the narratives: an effort to rescue or deliver the dreamer and a positive outcome for the dreamer and other characters. The presentation of these dream type-scene characteristics may undergo some level of modification in the dream narratives that subverts the narrative expectations. Observing consistencies and modifications in the presentation of these characteristics provides an understanding of the meaning of each narrative.

In addition to examining dream type-scene narratives, this dissertation also presents the OT dream type-scene narratives specifically and dream texts generally in their ancient context. A comparison between ancient Near Eastern and Homeric dream texts and OT dream texts reveals many similarities in the conceptual understanding of dreams and the mechanism of dream interpretation. However, the identification of the biblical dream type-scene also highlights the significant divergence of ancient Israelite dream texts from other ancient dream texts. This comparative work highlights the unique elements of the ancient Israelite dream type-scene.

This dissertation provides a significant contribution to biblical scholarship by identifying the biblical dream type-scene and presenting the first detailed narrative critical examination of it. Identifying the dream type-scene provides criteria to distinguish dream narratives from other OT narratives. This type-scene positions each dream narrative as an intentional independent text
rather than merely a duplicate of an earlier text. Identifying the type-scene characteristics at work within a particular scene enables the reader to find meaning in the passage by observing how each characteristic is presented. It also provides a context in which the narrative may be understood by creating particular expectations. The identification of this type-scene illuminates the literary complexities of the narratives, augmenting our knowledge of the artistic value of the text.

The present work builds on Robert Alter’s work by using his methodological principles (in addition to those of other narrative critical scholars) to introduce another type-scene to the list of type-scenes already identified in biblical studies. It expands the work of Diane Lipton by providing an even closer reading of the text and identifying additional and more specific characteristics common to dream accounts. This work relies on Oppenheim’s work as a foundation for understanding ancient Near Eastern dream texts and Scott Noegel’s model for understanding ancient Near Eastern dream interpretation, and is indebted to James Morris’ work on the dream type-scene in Homeric writings.
Chapter 1
Background

1.1 Overview of Scholarship

The following section presents an overview of the scholarship on type-scenes, particularly the introduction of type-scene studies in Homeric literature by Walter Arend and the application of type-scenes to biblical studies by Robert Alter. The specific approach to type-scenes and terminology in the present work is also detailed.

1.1.1 Type-Scenes

In the great narrative corpus from Genesis to the end of the Book of Kings, there are perceptible artful devices for the manipulation of time, the deployment of episodes, the intimation of motive and character, the articulation of dialogue, the enunciation of theme; and if we neglect these, we condemn ourselves to reading the stories badly.¹

The narrative corpus of Genesis to 2 Kings utilizes many literary devices—one of these is type-scenes.² A biblical type-scene is a narrative unit with numerous literary characteristics that are presented in a narrative pattern generally common to other similar passages but with key modifications. The characteristics of a well-developed type-scene include a combination of key terms and phrases, aspects of plot development and theme, and character actions and behaviours. While some of these elements may be common to many narratives throughout the biblical text, a good presentation of a type-scene highlights a collection of characteristics that distinguishes the narratives of the type-scene from all other passages. The presence of several distinguishing characteristics in a collection of narratives is no mere coincidence but suggests that the narrator has intentionally created a type-scene and intends the set of narratives to be understood both individually and as a collection.


For example, Robert Alter presents a betrothal type-scene. This type-scene always includes a meeting at a well. The presence of wells is common in the biblical text and does not itself indicate a type-scene. However, only in the betrothal type-scene narratives does the text present a prospective bride who meets a male stranger and hurries to tell her family about the stranger, along with a character who draws water from the well. Thus, the element of a meeting at a well is insufficient to indicate a particular type-scene, but once the additional details surrounding the meeting are considered the type-scene characteristics distinguish the betrothal scene from all other biblical scenes.

1.1.1.1 Homeric Type-Scenes

The identification of type-scenes in an epic literary work was introduced within Homeric studies and published by Walter Arend, who presented the concept of a type-scene and followed this with a description of the taxonomy of major Homeric type-scenes. Arend reached his conclusions by observing collections of scenes that have repeated literary elements. He noted that particular actions were common to a given collection of scenes and the same terms were used to describe certain common details. Arend called the collection of similar scenes die typischen Scenen (typical scenes). After discussing the occurrence of common narrative types in Homeric literature, Arend presented his identification of the type-scenes within the Iliad and Odyssey. He drew attention to numerous elements that Homer presented in the same order and pattern. These type-scenes include: the arrival (including visits, messages, dreams), sacrifice and meal preparation, sea and land journey, donning armour and clothing, sleep, deliberation, assembly, swearing an oath and bathing.

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4 Walter Arend, *Die typischen Scenen bei Homer*, Forschungen zur Klassischen Philologie 7 (Berlin: Weidmansche Buchhandlung, 1933). Coincidentally, George Calhoun, “Homeric Repetitions,” *University of California Publications in Classical Philology* 12 (1993): 1–25, published an article highlighting the repetition in Homeric scenes the same year, though much briefer. Also, in his introductory remarks, Vasilii Radlov, *Der Dialect der Kara-Kirgisen*, Proben der Volksliteratur der nördlichen türkischen Stämme 5 (St. Petersburg: Commissionäre der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1885), commented on the Bildtheile (image-parts) in a Turkish epic. Radlov noted that the artist is able to engage the audience while repeatedly conveying the same idea through the manipulation of idea-parts, variously providing detailed and broad descriptions. The artist’s ability is revealed in the diversity of the presentation of the idea-parts. Though Radlov was concerned with oral poetry, many of his observations readily apply to written traditions. For a survey of scholarship on Homeric type-scenes, see Mark Edwards, “Homer and Oral Tradition: The Type-Scene,” *Oral Tradition* 7.2 (1992): 284–330; and John Foley, *Traditional Oral Epic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 240–45.
By way of example, a guest arrives and is recognized, greeted and entertained in a Homeric arrival type-scene. Mark Edwards, building on the work of Arend, identifies the features of this type-scene in Homeric literature as: (1) a guest stands at an entrance, (2) the host sees the guest, (3) the host gets up from his seat, (4) the host greets him, taking his hand, (5) the host brings him inside, (6) the host offers him a seat in a place of honour, (7) there is eating and drinking, and (8) there is conversation.  

In Homeric type-scenes, as a rule, the literary elements are presented in a fixed order and no elements are omitted. Yet, there may be slight, minor variations in the presentation of the type-scene elements. The play between the fixed form and the variations is the peculiar and unique nature of Homeric art. As in biblical type-scenes, meaning is revealed by the study of this play.

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6 Other scholars agree that the form remains fixed; there may be variations of the form, especially in the Odyssey, but the fixed form remains intact. See Lord, Peabody and Nagy. For an overview, see Foley, Traditional Oral Epic, 244–256.

7 Michael Nagler, Spontaneity and Tradition: A Study in the Oral Art of Homer (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), 81–2, rejects the assumption of an underlying fixed form in Homeric type-scenes and instead defines a type-scene in more generic terms: “a type-scene is not essentially a fixed sequence...nor even a fixed pattern for the progressive selection of fixed or variable elements...but an inherited preverbal Gestalt for the spontaneous generation of a ‘family’ of meaningful details.” Nagler proposes that no two passages are the same verbatim and the particular features do not need to be in a pattern of identical sequence in order to be recognized as an occurrence of a type-scene. Mark Edwards, Homer: Poet of the Iliad (Baltimore: John S. Hopkins University Press, 1987), 285–87, agrees and defines a type-scene as “a recurrent block of narrative with an identifiable structure.” See also Michael Nagler, “Towards a Generative View of the Oral Formula,” TAPA 98 (1967): 269–311. Milman Parry, The Making of Homeric Verse, ed. Adam Parry (Oxford: Clarendon, 1938), 272, suggests that a type-scene is a “group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea. The essential part of the idea is that which remains after one has counted out everything in the expression which is purely for the sake of style.” When a formula is used many times within the poem, it is to be understood as essential. However, this definition does not distinguish between textual formulas that are intentionally related to the type-scene from those that are incidental or coincidental. Nagler, “Towards a Generative View of the Oral Formula,” 269, notes that Parry’s definition focuses on the statistical aspects of “repetition” found among phrases in the text rather than the real nature of the formula as a mental template in the mind of the poet.

To this point, Norman Austin observed the elaboration and amplification in Homeric type-scenes and discussed how they were used by the poet to convey emphasis.9

1.1.1.2 Biblical Type-Sceens

The idea of type, or genre, in the poetic biblical text has been well-developed; but only in the last few decades did Robert Alter apply Arend’s work to the biblical narratives.10 Alter refers to the elements of a type-scene as required or free, and as verisimilar and fabulous.11 He observes that there is no fixed form in biblical type-scenes whereby common characteristics are exhibited in nearly the same pattern in each narrative. Rather, in each scene, the type-scene characteristics are presented with slight modifications. Thus, the literary elements are not necessarily in the same sequence or all present within each passage. The biblical narrator uses repetition and modification of the type-scene characteristics within each passage to indicate the meaning of the passage. Repeated elements in a homogeneous pattern draw attention to the common elements between the narratives. Modifications of the characteristics highlight different plot and character developments by drawing attention to the differences between the narratives. The key to understanding type-scenes is to perceive both the common and modified characteristics and to observe how the narrator uses them to give meaning to the text.

It is the narrator’s intention that the audience will recognize that a type-scene is at work in the narrative and observe the variations and repetitions. Alter comments,

The contemporary audiences of these tales, being perfectly familiar with the convention, took particular pleasure in seeing how in each instance the convention could be, through the narrator’s art, both faithfully followed and renewed for the specific needs of the hero under consideration. In some cases, moreover, the biblical authors, counting on their audience’s familiarity with the features and function of the type-scene, could merely allude to the type-scene or present a transfigured version of it.12

Following the example of Alter’s betrothal type-scene, generally, in each betrothal type-scene narrative the prospective bride encounters the prospective bridegroom at the well. This creates an

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10 Alter, Art of Biblical Narrative, 59–60.


12 Alter, Art of Biblical Narrative, 69.
expectation that when the narrator presents a maiden at a well, it follows that she will have an 
encounter with a male “stranger” who will be revealed as a potential bridegroom. However, in 
the scene of Rebekah at the well (Gn 24:10–64), the male stranger she encounters is not the 
bridegroom Isaac but Abraham’s servant. The type-scene characteristic is present in the 
narrative, but it is slightly modified. This modification indicates that the narrator is emphasizing 
a point by providing a variation of the typical feature. The observation of this modification 
enables the reader to draw meaning from the text. Alter makes the following observation based 
on this particular modification, demonstrating his interpretation of the narrator’s emphasis:

Isaac is conspicuous by his absence from the scene: this is in fact the only instance where a 
surrogate rather than the man himself meets the girl at the well. That substitution nicely accords 
with the entire career of Isaac, for he is manifestly the most passive of the patriarchs. We have 
already seen him as a bound victim for whose life a ram is substituted; later, as a father, he will 
prefer his son who can go out to the field and bring him back provender, and his one extended 
scene will be lying in bed, weak and blind, while others act upon him.13

Alter came to this conclusion by observing the narrative characteristics that were generally 
common among the collection of similar betrothal scenes and then observing how each 
characteristic specifically played out in each scene. The modification of the identity of the male 
stranger provides a moment of characterization and reveals the narrator’s perspective of Isaac’s 
character. This example illustrates that the identification and study of a type-scene is useful in 
highlighting the meaning of the text and intent of the narrator—not only for the immediate 
passage but also for the ongoing narrative at large.

Alter has identified six biblical type-scenes: the annunciation of the birth of the hero to his barren 
mother; the encounter with the future betrothed at a well; the epiphany in the field; the initiatory 
trial; danger in the desert and the discovery of a well or other source of sustenance; and the 
testimony of the dying hero.14 Other biblical type-scenes have also been suggested. Brian Britt 
proposes a type-scene based on Exodus 32–34 and 1 Kings 19 in which the prophet is concealed

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13 Alter, Art of Biblical Narrative, 64.
14 Alter, Art of Biblical Narrative, 60. Benjamin Johnson, “What Type of Son is Samson? Reading Judges 
13 as a Biblical Type-Scene,” Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 53.2 (2010): 269–286, 
expands on Alter’s annunciation type-scene by proposing another occurrence of it in Judges 13.
or restrained at a moment of danger and theophany. Min Suc Kee presents a type-scene of the heavenly council. Koowon Kim suggests an incubation type-scene. Pamela Thimmes discusses the biblical sea-storm type-scene. Kasper Bro Larson observes a type-scene of recognizing a stranger, particularly in the Gospel of John. Norm Hagel examines the form and significance of the call narratives. Saundra Schwartz writes of an adultery type-scene. Finally, George Savran presents the theophany type-scene. This thesis proposes to add another type-scene to this list—the dream type-scene.

1.1.1.3 Comparison of Homeric and Biblical Type-Scenes

Robert Kawashima draws attention to the striking difference between the type-scenes in Homeric and biblical texts. In Homeric type-scenes, any minor variations from the fixed form are what he terms “‘well behaved,’ that is, they operate within precisely defined boundaries.” There is some variation in Homeric type-scenes, but generally all type-scenes conform to the

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15 Brian Britt, “Prophetic Concealment in a Biblical Type Scene,” *CBQ* 64 (2002) 37–59. Britt determines four type-scene characteristics: “First, the prophet faces a crisis, usually because the people have broken the covenant. A theophany comes next, followed by the third element, the commissioning or recommissioning of the prophet. Finally, a new divine plan is given and it takes effect immediately. Along with these basic four elements, the type scenes also include references to food or fasting, rival prophets and mantic practices, and the concealment or restraint of the prophet.” He perceives the type-scene as having basic elements (crisis, theophany, commissioning and divine plan) and other elements (food or fasting, rival prophets, successor, mention of prophet’s death, etc.).


commonalities found in each and usually in the same order, in the sense that any individual scene could serve as the model or paradigm of the convention. In biblical type-scenes, however, variations in the presentation of type-scene characteristics are far more liberal. Usually, there are few (and sometimes no) scenes that embody all the characteristics of the type-scene, and rarely could a scene serve as the model for all the other scenes within the type-scene. Contrarily, Homer never transforms the type-scene pattern’s fundamental structure. Kawashima explains this difference between Homeric and biblical type-scenes:

This is because the variations exhibited in biblical type-scenes do not consist of mere modifiers. Rather, the very structure of each scene changes. One should not therefore conclude that there is no convention...But it indicates already the biblical writers’ restless impulse to innovate, to transform and reinterpret convention...If the type-scene’s basic underlying form, the convention’s norm, constitutes its “deep structure,” the biblical writers depart from convention, and play with literary form, by “transforming” this primary narrative syntax.

Kawashima argues that this fundamental difference between Homeric and biblical type-scenes is the result of a fundamental difference at a structural level. Auerbach has already illuminated the fundamentally different representations of reality between Homeric and biblical writings. Following Milman Parry’s thesis that Homer’s work is the product of oral tradition, Kawashima accounts for the two different modes of narrative art with reference to the different possibilities available to oral tradition and written verbal literature:

Homer follows certain primary rules of composition in order to generate his type-scenes, variations and all. In this way, he never leaves the familiar terrain of tradition. Biblical narrative, on the other hand, performs secondary operations, “transformations,” upon the convention’s underlying syntax or “deep structure.” Its defamiliarizing art treats the type-scene’s norm as a mere point of departure. For the biblical writers systematically displace, distort and even delete the type-scene’s expected constituents, forcing their readers to perceive literary form anew. As a

25 This seems to contrast Nagler’s argument that there is no true fixed form of a type-scene in Homer. While there may be no precise fixed form, Kawashima and others note that the Homeric type-scenes generally follow a very similar pattern of words and sequence of features with only minor variations.


28 Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse*, 406, relates Arend’s concept of type-scene in Homeric literature to his own study of oral epic traditions in Bosnia: “The singer of tales, unlike the writer of poetry, is never free of his tradition. He has not learned his art from a varied reading, but only from listening to older singers. He has no pen and ink to let him slowly work out a novel way of recounting novel actions, but must make up his tale without pausing, in the speed of his singing. This he can do only by telling each action as it comes up in more or less the usual way, and in more or less the usual verses which go with that way.”
result, the function and meaning of [any one] biblical type-scene differs radically from one example to the next.\textsuperscript{29}

Kawashima’s observations lead us to study the literary device of type-scenes within biblical narrative as something with strong similarities to Homeric literature and yet distinct in its own right, and to be aware of both the modified characteristics and the transformed structure of the biblical type-scene narratives.

1.1.1.4 Present Study and Terminology

In the present biblical dream type-scene study, it is accepted that the biblical narrator does not establish a fixed form for a type-scene. As a result, the narrator presents the characteristics of the type-scene in only a similar manner and sequence. The literary features that are generally present in all or almost all of the narratives are considered in the present work as common characteristics. The divergence of a characteristic from its common presentation in the narratives is considered a modification. The modification may be subtle or markedly pronounced, such as the complete subversion of a characteristic from the narrative. Both types of modifications are considered here as significant and noteworthy. At times, the narrator may purposefully modify the characteristics and narrative structure to convey a message particular to the individual narrative.

The present work accepts that the narrator creates meaning using type-scenes by modifying its characteristics and altering the order of the sequence of those characteristics in each narrative to highlight a point of interest. A given modification may emphasize plot, character and thematic developments. As in Homeric literature, the elaboration of a type-scene conveys emphasis. Thus, a key element of this study is the detailed observation of common characteristics and their modifications. In light of Kawashima’s observations, attention is also given to the transformation of a type-scene on a fundamental structural level.

Finally, this work focuses on a literary perspective of the text. The characteristics of the dream type-scene and the role of the type-scene in the narrative are deciphered without a view to their compositional history and redaction. Thus, following Alter, this study has a primarily synchronic

\textsuperscript{29} Kawashima, “Verbal Medium and Narrative Art,” 113–14.
interest in OT narratives. Ancient Near Eastern and Homeric concepts of dreams and dream interpretation are placed in a literary and historical context to provide a background of the surrounding cultural understanding of dreams and how the OT compares with other ancient dream texts.

1.1.1.5 Implications

Identifying a biblical type-scene has several implications. First, it enables the reader to identify and study the dream type-scene narratives as such. Second, it positions the literary scenes as intentional, independent and unique passages. Rather than one scene being perceived a duplicate of an earlier scene, the repetitions within the story point to emphasis and connection between the scenes. Third, identifying the type-scene characteristics at work within a particular narrative enables the reader to find meaning in the passage by observing how each characteristic is presented. Once the common characteristics are identified, the reader may then distinguish between common elements of the passage (characteristics of the type-scene that are plainly presented) and modified elements (characteristics that are presented slightly differently, transformed, omitted or presented in a way that subverts narrative expectations). This leads to a greater understanding of the meaning of the narrative, particularly in areas of plot and characterization.

Fourth, the biblical narrator creates the expectation that common characteristics of a type-scene will be present in each narrative. Meaning is often determined by the degree to which this expectation is met.

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31 For a discussion of the implications of the OT dream type-scene, see section 4.1.
32 Alter, Art of Biblical Narrative, 67: “One can clearly see that the betrothal type-scene, far from being a mechanical means of narrative prefabrication for conveying the reader from a celibate hero to a married one, is handled with a flexibility that makes it a supple instrument of characterization and foreshadowing.”
33 A straightforward example is that the annunciation type-scene establishes the expectation that a child will be born.
1.1.2 Research on Old Testament Dream Narratives

Very few scholarly works treat OT dream narratives as a collection distinct from other ancient Near Eastern dream texts. Generally, scholarly works on dream texts from the ancient Near East (ANE) focus on the interpretation and categories of dream texts following the extensive work of A. Leo Oppenheim (1956). Prior to Oppenheim, most research on ancient dream texts focused on the Bible and Talmud. As a greater body of texts have become available, Oppenheim’s work has been updated. Following Oppenheim, several scholars have sought to expand his work by focusing on the form and structure of dream texts in the OT, particularly Jean-Marie Husser (1996), Frances Flannery-Dailey (2004), Robert Gnuse (1984, 1996) and Shaul Bar (2001). A literary analysis of several OT dream narratives in Genesis is provided by Diana Lipton (1999). Another important resource for understanding ancient dream interpretation is the work of Scott Noegel (2001, 2007).

1.1.2.1 Foundational Work: Oppenheim

The foundational resource for any study of ancient dream texts is Oppenheim’s *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Near Ancient East.* It is a detailed and thorough survey of the available ancient dream literature, including texts and translations of many ancient Near Eastern dream writings. Oppenheim offers an extensive study of dream texts from the ANE based on the patterns he observes in Akkadian, Assyrian, Chaldean, Egyptian, Hittite and Sumerian dream texts. Oppenheim presents general dream report patterns from the plethora of fragmented texts

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34 Diana Lipton, *Revisions of the Night: Politics and Promises in the Patriarchal Dreams of Genesis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 10, observes that scholarly work “in the past 40 years has been based on the larger unit of biblical dreams, with the result that a close reading of the dreams in Genesis, or even an acknowledgement that this group deserves separate consideration, is almost entirely lacking in existing studies.”


available and divides the texts into three categories. Most dream-related texts are not in narrative form but rather are presented as royal reports, omen lists or poetry. It follows, then, that Oppenheim’s work is not a literary study but an anthology of a variety of ancient poetic and prose texts related to dreams.

There is much variety in available ancient dream texts, and so Oppenheim’s comments are necessarily general in nature. Oppenheim presents the typical form and structure of dream reports as consisting of a setting, dream content, formal conclusion and fulfillment of the dream. Reports of the setting of dreams include information about the dream recipient, the time that the dream is received, the site where the dream is received and other various conditions.

Throughout the ANE, dreams were considered a form of communication from a divine being to a human. According to Oppenheim, the first category of dreams, auditory message dreams, are vocal messages presented in clearly understandable terms that do not necessitate interpretation.38 Symbolic dreams, Oppenheim’s second category, consist of visual images or scenes, thought to contain veiled messages.39 There are symbolic dreams with good messages that benefit the dreamer and ones with evil messages that predict a negative future event for the dreamer. Interpretation, or understanding, of such dreams is of high import, and professional interpreters are required for the task. The third category of dreams that Oppenheim presents is mantic (prophetic) or psychological status dreams. These dreams are often fragmentary visual images that also require a professional diviner to determine the dream interpretation. Though texts recording these dreams are not available, we know of the interpretation of such dreams from several dream books used for interpretation.

Finally, Oppenheim dedicates a section to dream interpretation and interpreters. An interpreter brought comprehension to a symbolic dream by an auditory message or by dispelling the evil implications of the dream through ritual practices. The interpreter used a dream book consisting of lists of omens to decipher the dream. Once the dream was deciphered, the dreamer fulfilled a

38 Oppenheim, Interpretation, 187–204. Oppenheim states that most or perhaps even all of the dream-reports are: the Elohist source of the OT, the Gospel of Matthew, the autobiography of Hittite king Hattushili, and the inscriptions of the Assyrian king Assurbanipal. One can observe the limited scope of texts included in his study.

39 Oppenheim, Interpretation, 206–211.
ritual practice to dispel the evil (believed to be inherent to the dream) and to prevent the potential evil future it entailed.

1.1.2.2 Limitations of Oppenheim’s Work

Oppenheim’s work remains foundational in that his presentation of ancient dream texts is unparalleled in scope or detailed analysis. Yet several limitations exist. First, there is a lack of criteria in his evaluation of the texts. He does not present any criteria for determining whether a text qualifies as a dream passage. Oppenheim’s use of the term dream is very general and encompasses a variety of texts, including clairvoyance, visions and theophanies. The distinctions between these experiences are not clarified. For example, in discussing dreams, he refers equally to YHWH’s appearance to Samuel, Saul locating a lost donkey by the help of a seer and David’s instructions for the temple.\(^40\) Further, Oppenheim collects all references to dreams without distinguishing the category of dream narratives.

Second, although Oppenheim’s categories are clearly defined, many dream texts do not neatly fit into his categories. For example, Jacob’s dream at Bethel is both symbolic and auditory. Prophetic dreams may also be message or symbolic dreams or both. Many symbolic dreams require an interpreter, but others do not. Indeed, there is much overlap between the categories. Further, his categories present a conceptual problem. In the ANE, there was no distinction made between non-symbolic and symbolic modes of discourse. Consequently, Oppenheim’s categories are modern conceptions applied to ancient texts.\(^41\)

Third, Oppenheim does not analyze why or how differing views of dreams have emerged in the ancient world. Historical and social contexts and concerns seem to have a distant second place to the analysis of the texts themselves. Thus, the biblical text is analyzed alongside those of other cultures without much distinction. Indeed, his treatment of the biblical material is too limited and his observations of the biblical material tend to be over-generalized. For example, Oppenheim comments that message dreams only come to Israelites and symbolic dreams only come to

\(^{40}\) Oppenheim, *Interpretation*, 189–93.

Gentiles in the OT. Notably, there is the significant omission of any acknowledgement of Abimelech’s dream.

1.1.2.3 Post-Oppenheim Studies: Husser, Flannery-Dailey, Gnuse, Bar

Several scholars have followed up Oppenheim’s work by applying his categories to the OT text. Jean-Marie Husser begins by summarizing Oppenheim’s work on ancient dream texts and by incorporating many of his own observations. He then analyzes OT dream texts specifically. The criterion for a dream passage is the presence of the Hebrew noun for dream, and the passages are categorized according to Oppenheim. He distinguishes between intuitive (inspired or spontaneous) and deductive types of oneiromancy—a distinction that presents the same limitations as Oppenheim’s categories because the biblical dream passages do not neatly fit into one or the other type. Further, these categories prohibit Husser from analyzing the dream narratives as a collection or drawing attention to common characteristics of dream narratives irrespective of whether or not the message is auditory or symbolic. His observations of the biblical text are general. For example, Husser suggests that a complete account of a symbolic dream in the OT consists of three or sometimes four elements: (1) introduction, (2) description of the dream, (3) interpretation and (4) realization. This observation is too general to be useful for identifying a type-scene. Husser’s comments regarding the literary function of dreams are more specific. First, the dream unifies different elements of the narrative; the plot is the development between the dream, which forecasts the outcome, and its realization. In this sense, the dream fulfills the role of initial prophecy. Second, dreams provide structure to the text by permitting and provoking the symmetrical organization of the text. Third, dreams serve a literary purpose of enabling the narrator to introduce dialogue between God and humans. Husser’s work provides a close reading of the texts and is thorough, though he omits the dream of Laban (Gn 31:24).

42 Oppenheim, *Interpretation*, 207. Many scholars have noted this problematic generalization. Oppenheim does state, though, that Joseph’s dreams lay outside his interest in this category. Oppenheim suggests that the biblical text itself testifies to God’s preference of speaking face-to-face with the prophets and not in riddles, citing Numbers 12:8.


44 Husser, *Dreams and Dream Narratives*, 106.
Frances Flannery-Dailey applies Oppenheim’s categories to OT dreams and extends the discussion to include texts from the Apocrypha, pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea scrolls, Josephus and the New Testament.45 Her work is helpful in that it includes texts that Oppenheim’s work does not, and as such is an important contribution to the work available on ancient dream texts. Flannery-Dailey argues that typical patterns of message and symbolic dreams include: the dreamer is asleep at night, the dream occurs at a sacred place, the divine being stands, the dreamer is told “Do not be afraid,” the dreamer is in shock upon waking, the dream is fulfilled when the dream recipient acts or it is fulfilled later. Because her work is expansive, though, her conclusions are based on excessively general observations. For example, she argues that the biblical dreams adhere very well to the conventional literary structure of ancient Near Eastern dreams and then demonstrates this by observing that Jacob’s ladder dream has an introduction, dream and conclusion. Indeed, she notes the similarity in pattern and expectation between the texts she examines and external texts as consistently having an introduction, conclusion and fulfillment. The problem is that these characteristics are not in any way distinctive from other narratives. Indeed, it would be difficult to identify any narrative that does not have these fundamental elements. In short, Flannery-Dailey’s general observations overlook the unique contribution of the Hebrew dream narratives in the ancient Near Eastern setting.

Also using Oppenheim as a foundation, Robert Karl Gnuse’s work features dream texts in Josephus’ writings and considers 1 Samuel 3 as a dream message rather than a call narrative.46 He continues the same type of work as Oppenheim by summarizing his work and using his categories, but Gnuse does not provide many observations beyond what is already available. Gnuse’s focus is on source criticism and the work of the Elohist in particular, rather than a literary study. His definition of a dream passage is general and includes visions. He sees a similar structure between biblical dream narratives and those of the ANE:

A setting is given in which the dream reference, recipient, place, time [usually at night], and conditions under which the dream is received are given. The theophany occurs with the address to the recipient, self-identification of the deity, and the message. The actual message is introduced with the particle hinneh, it is short and direct, there are either promises or commands, and the

message may be interrupted by pious dialogue from the human recipient. A formal termination follows the message [usually “XX awoke,” “behold, it was a dream”], and a report of the subsequent activity by the dreamer may also be mentioned...The usual expression used by the Elohist which compactly embodies most of these components is, “God came to NN in a dream (by night), and he said, ‘Behold.’”

Following the dream report there is a fulfillment of the message. According to Gnuse, “clear examples” of message dreams include Genesis 46:1–7 (God appears to Jacob in a vision), Numbers 22:8–13 (God speaks to Balaam) and 19–21 (God speaks to Balaam again) and 1 Samuel 3 (God calls to Samuel in a vision). In general, Gnuse’s work does not provide many observations of ancient Near Eastern dream texts beyond Oppenheim. His work on 1 Samuel 3, while thorough, is based on the broad and general criteria of parallels to other ancient Near Eastern texts.

Shaul Bar’s work focuses on the categories, meaning, interpretation and purpose of dreams as a collection using Oppenheim’s system, although he reduces Oppenheim’s categories to two: message and symbolic. Beginning with an overview of Oppenheim’s work, Bar then narrows his focus to symbolic dreams in the OT text, particularly those of Joseph, the cupbearer, the baker and Nebuchadnezzar, and then discusses dreams in the wisdom and prophetic writings. His survey of the texts is cursory, and many of his observations lack explanation, context and implications. For example, Bar compares OT prophetic literature with the Talmudic writings without discussing the differences in their respective social settings and intentions. His observations are general and align with Oppenheim’s work, such as: the dream takes place at night, the dreamer is always asleep, the dreamer is passive, the dream may include both audible and visual elements. Bar does draw attention to the fact that God is the active party in the dream while the dreamer passively waits to hear what God has to say to him and that the OT includes no detailed attempt to describe the image of the divine being. Further, Bar dedicates a chapter to considering the intent of symbolic dream narratives within the OT. Bar argues that each dream serves an ideological function. Jacob’s dream at Bethel sanctifies the site of Bethel, the dreams of Joseph and Daniel emphasize God’s control of Israel’s future and Solomon’s dream legitimates his kingship. In short, while providing a basic overview of texts, the work does not

47 Gnuse, *Dream Theophany of Samuel*, 64.

provide a narrative evaluation of the texts or many observations beyond what has been published in earlier works.

1.1.2.4 Limitations of Post-Oppenheim Studies

In closely adhering to the work of Oppenheim, the work of Husser, Flannery-Dailey, Gnuse and Bar present similar limitations. First, these works have a corresponding lack of clear criteria to define and determine a dream episode. As a result, each work tends to analyze and compare a different set of texts. Second, consistently, OT dreams are organized and analyzed according to Oppenheim’s categories and encounter the same limitations as his work. The problem is that the biblical dreams do not straightforwardly fit into Oppenheim’s categories. Moreover, by evaluating the dream texts solely by categories, the texts are not evaluated as a whole collection. Third, the narrative observations in these works are limited. These studies tend to reference literary aspects of dream episodes only in the general terms of Oppenheim: introduction, conclusion, fulfillment. Further, scholarly works tend to compare ancient Israelite dream literature to that of other ancient societies and neglect to provide inner-biblical comparisons. Fourth, due to the extensive volume of texts that qualify as dream literature, these studies are often too general in their observations. Rather than offering a close reading of the text, only cursory comments are provided.

Two other works published about the same time as Oppenheim face similar limitations. Ernest Ehrlich provided a historical-critical approach to the dream texts of the OT.\textsuperscript{49} He discussed incubation, symbolic dreams, divine orders and instructions transmitted through dreams, dreams as vehicles of divine revelation, dreams in comparison and the rejection of dreams as vehicles of revelation. His focus was incubation and the concept of dreams as revelation. While providing a critical and methodical inventory of OT dream texts, Ehrlich’s work offers little by way of narrative analysis. Wolfgang Richter observed the general form in OT visual-symbolic dream texts.\textsuperscript{50} The pattern he observed is: (1) announcement of the dream, (2) introductory dream formula, (3) dream corpus (including the image and result of the image’s activity), (4) interpretation of the dream (including the formula of interpretation, the actual interpretation with

\textsuperscript{49} Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich, \textit{Der Traum im Alten Testament} (Berlin: Alfred Topelmann, 1953).

identification of symbols and the meaning of symbols), and (5) dream fulfillment. Richter’s study is generally limited to the dreams in the Joseph cycle and thus the pattern he observed is useful only to a few narratives.

1.1.2.5 Literary Approach: Lipton

Diana Lipton’s *Revisions of Night* is distinguished from the above works in that it is not based on Oppenheim’s categories and focuses on the form and structure of the dream narratives. This approach leads her to make literary-based observations. Lipton notes six common narrative features that she draws from a selection of Genesis dream episodes that she analyzes. The six features of dream scenes form the key contribution of her work and are: each dream (1) is received at a time of anxiety or danger (for the dreamer or the person for whom the dream is actually intended); (2) concerns the descendants (immediate or eventual); (3) signals a change in status for the dreamer or person the dream is intended for; (4) highlights divine involvement in human affairs; (5) deals with at least one aspect of the relationship between Israelites and non-Israelites; and (6) concerns absence from the land. Lipton limits her work to five passages in Genesis and provides an analysis of each. Her criteria for choosing these passages in Genesis are based on the occurrence of the Hebrew term for dream in the narrative and the presence of the six literary characteristics noted above. This leads her to analyze Abimelech’s dream (Gn 20:1–18), Jacob’s dream at Bethel (Gn 28:10–22), Jacob and the speckled flocks (Gn 31:10–13), and Laban’s dream (Gn 31:24) and to include the vision of Abraham (Gn 15:1–21) because they comprise the six narrative features. She omits the dreams of the Joseph cycle on the assumption “the stylistic and theological differences suggest that they do not belong with the dreams of the patriarchal narratives.” In addition to the six dream scene characteristics, she determines four narrative advantages of the presence of a dream in a biblical narrative: the dream (1) allows for a seamless insertion by the narrator; (2) provides a connective device to bring the other elements to cohesion in the narrative; (3) fills the gaps of the story by providing key information; and (4) reveals the character’s inner life.

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52 Lipton, *Revisions of the Night*, 9, adds, “they seem to reflect an Israelite view of how dreams were perceived in Egypt, rather than a distinctively Israelite conception of dreaming.”
An immediate strength of her work is that Lipton establishes criteria for the limitations of her texts at the outset, though she deviates from her primary criterion of the presence of the Hebrew root for dream by including Genesis 15 as a dream narrative. That she limits her work to these few passages in Genesis enables her to provide a more thorough and detailed reading than other scholarly works. Her analysis is more detailed than Flannery-Dailey’s work, focuses more on the literary elements of the text and generally demonstrates a close reading of OT material and a good evaluation of scholarly work related to those passages. Most importantly, her observation of common narrative features is a step toward the identification of a type-scene.

The most glaring weakness in Lipton’s work is that the six common features of the dream texts that she presents do not precisely distinguish a dream passage from other passages in Genesis. Indeed, the themes of danger, descendants, character change, human activity, relationship between Israelites and non-Israelites and the land are characteristic of many narratives, even most narratives in Genesis. Additionally, Lipton ignores characteristics that are common to most narratives but not all. In biblical studies, narrative omissions often contribute much to the passage and are an intentional literary device of the narrator to highlight aspects of a text. As a result, her decision to include Genesis 15 based on the presence of features common to many biblical narratives and omit other passages seems arbitrary. Further, the six features are based on an overly limited selection of dream passages. Because Lipton neglects to include the dreams of Joseph, the baker, the cupbearer and Pharaoh, her study can hardly be called a study of dream narratives in Genesis. Even the subtitle of her work, *Politics and Promise in the Patriarchal Dreams of Genesis*, is misleading because her work is wider in scope than patriarchal dreams by including the dreams of Abimelech and Laban.53

The four narrative advantages of the presence of a dream in a biblical text that Lipton proposes are also questionable. First, some dreams do not appear to be seamlessly inserted at all. The dream of Abimelech, for example, comes upon the reader rather unexpectedly and without introduction. Second, the observation that dreams serve as a connective device suggests that they are a necessary element within the narrative. In fact, dreams are often superfluous; dream messages could be conveyed in a number of ways. Further, since dream messages are often the

53 Lipton attempts to circumvent this issue by proposing that Abimelech’s dream is intended for Abraham and Laban’s dream is intended for Jacob.
source of tension in the plot (as in Joseph’s dreams) or the main element of the plot (as in Jacob’s dream at Bethel), dreams can hardly be considered to bring cohesion to the plot. Third, narrative gaps in the biblical text are key bits of information to which the reader is not privy. It is logically impossible for the dream to fill in the gap of information that is not provided by the narrator. Fourth, the claim that the dream “reveals the character’s inner life” is suspiciously similar to other typical modern-day projections of psychological analysis upon the text that are foreign to the ancient world. While many actions do reveal a character’s inner life in the biblical text, dreams in the ancient world are not considered a reflection of the inner person in any sense. Thus, the dream narrative only reveals the character’s inner life insofar as the reader may evaluate the response of the character to the dream. (Thus Abimelech, for example, is positively portrayed when he responds appropriately to the dream.) Even with her limited content, her comparative work is lacking in that she does not extend her close analysis of the individual texts to include a comparison of one passage to the next. Finally, an oversight of Lipton’s work is the lack of discussion of other ancient Near Eastern texts. She does provide general comments about ancient Near Eastern dream literature but provides no evidence. Examples of ancient Near Eastern dream texts throughout her work would help to justify her claims.

1.1.2.6 Dream Interpretation: Noegel

Scott Noegel deciphers the cultural context and function of wordplay as employed by ancient Mesopotamian diviners and the influence of ancient Mesopotamian punning practices, particularly on ancient Egyptian culture. Noegel successfully argues that ancient dream interpretation was based on the technique of wordplay employed by highly skilled literary specialists, a technique that was subsequently employed throughout the ANE. Dream texts from the OT indicate that the Mesopotamian punning hermeneutic was also incorporated by ancient Israel. Noegel’s work provides insights into a variety of subjects, including the social context of divination and the production of literary texts, the role of writing and script in the divinatory process, the impact of Mesopotamian intellectual thought, the authorship of certain biblical pericopes, the relationship of oneiromancy (the practice of interpretation) to prophecy, and the

function of ancient Near Eastern literary devices. His work is very thorough, provides an extensive bibliography and is a substantial contribution to biblical scholarship. Among other aspects, it provides a verifiable conceptual framework for understanding dream interpretation in the OT, specifically those by Joseph, the Midianite’s soldier and Daniel. The limitation of Noegel’s work as it relates to the present study is that he does not discuss the “message” dreams of Abimelech, Jacob or Laban or Joseph’s enigmatic dreams that require no interpretation.

1.1.2.7 Present Work

As detailed above, no study to date has provided a detailed examination of all OT dream narratives from the approach of narrative criticism. Past studies are consistently broad in scope or, in the case of Lipton, too narrow. As a result, there is no acknowledgement of a dream type-scene in biblical studies. Commentaries may provide insight into the symbols of the various dreams, but as Lipton notes, “they often say little about the special nature of the dream revelations. Indeed, many proceed with scant regard for the fact that the text in question is a dream report.”

This dissertation avoids the general limitations of previous works in several ways. First, all of the dream narratives in the entire narrative corpus of Genesis to 2 Kings are included. This ensures that the analysis of the dream type-scene is based on the entire corpus of available literature and thus avoids the limitation of analyzing only a segment of the dream narratives. Commentary on each passage is limited to statements that directly relate to the type-scene. Importantly, the conclusions regarding the dream type-scene equally apply to all dream narratives because they have been drawn from observations of all dream narratives. This provides a comprehensive approach to identifying the type-scene.

Second, the texts are not divided into categories. This avoids the arbitrary cataloguing of dreams that do not fit neatly into typological categories, such as message dreams and symbolic dreams. As a result, observations presented in this work provide a unique contribution to the discussion of ancient Israelite dream texts by drawing attention to the unity and consistency among the collection of dream narratives throughout the Genesis to 2 Kings corpus.

55 Lipton, *Revisions of the Night*, 10.
Third, this study provides clear and verifiable criteria for identifying a dream narrative. Characteristics that are generally applicable to many biblical narratives are avoided. The criteria presented distinguish the dream narratives from other similar passages, such as the vision, call and theophany narratives. Also, by providing characteristics that are distinct to the dream type-scene, it sets dream narratives apart from the plethora of other biblical narratives.

Fourth, narrative criticism is employed to identify type-scene characteristics. This avoids discussions based on historical and source criticism and allows for a detailed, narrative-based examination of the text in its final form. Since the biblical dream type-scene has yet to be studied, this provides a much needed contribution to biblical literary studies.

Lastly, the present work offers a comparison of OT dream type-scene narratives with other ancient dream texts from biblical and non-biblical sources. Other works also study ancient Israelite dream texts in an ancient Near Eastern context and compare them with Homeric literature, but this work provides more focus on the biblical text than other works. Further, a comparison of ancient Near Eastern and Homeric dream texts and the OT dream type-scene narratives is also included. This highlights distinctions that have been hitherto unnoticed. In this, the present work provides a wider context than typical biblical type-scene studies.

1.2 Present Approach to Dream Narratives

A background for the present work has been established by the overview of the pertinent scholarship on type-scenes and OT dream narratives, and by the definition of the terminology that is employed. Below is an outline of the primary literature referred to in this study, followed by a detailed description of narrative criticism, the methodological approach used in the present work.

1.2.1 Primary Literature

The primary literature of this dissertation is OT dream literature (according to the Masoretic text),\textsuperscript{56} ancient Near Eastern dream texts and Homeric dream passages in the \textit{Iliad} and \textit{Odyssey}. The focus of this study is OT dream narratives, and they are discussed individually and as a

\textsuperscript{56} References point to the chapter and verse system of the English Bible. The biblical translation is the author’s own and is intentionally literal to convey the nuances of the Hebrew.
collection. There are eight dream narratives in the Genesis to 2 Kings corpus (listed in the introduction). Beyond these OT dream narratives, there are several dream reports in Daniel and a number of references to dreams throughout the OT (discussed in 2.1.6). Most of the ancient Near Eastern dream texts are from ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt and are presented in the form of dream reports and dream books containing lists of omens. The Homeric writings contain seven dream narratives, three in the Iliad (1.605–2.48, 23.58–110, 24.673–95) and four in the Odyssey (4.786–5.2, 5.481–6.48, 14.518–15.56, 19.600–20.91).  

1.2.2 Methodology: Narrative Criticism

Since the aim of the present work is to focus on literary characteristics of biblical dream narratives, narrative criticism is the interpretive methodology best suited for this study. This approach has distinct literary elements that address the specific needs of Hebrew narratives. In the present work, narrative criticism is applied to dream narratives individually and as a collection.

In the last half-century, narrative criticism has been reintroduced as a major systematic approach to understanding the biblical narratives. In 1968, James Muilenburg drew attention to the importance of a literary perspective of Scripture and the need for scholars to move beyond form criticism. Scholars responded to Muilenburg’s appeal. Of note is a study in the art of storytelling by Jacob Licht in 1978. One of the landmark introductory books is Robert Alter’s The Art of Biblical Narrative in 1981 (revised and updated in 2011). Alter emphasized several aspects of biblical narrative, including type-scenes. Soon after, Meir Sternberg wrote The Poetics of Biblical Narrative (1985). In the years that followed, many more scholars produced books on narrative methodology.

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58 The general structure of this section on narrative criticism was first published in Marina Hofman, “Tamar as the Unsung Hero of Genesis 38” (MA diss., McMaster University, 2008), 4–36.
59 Muilenburg, “Form Criticism and Beyond,” JBL 88.1 (1969): 8, specified that narrative criticism is “an activity that extends…from the time of Jerome and before and continuing on with the rabbis and until modern times.”
60 Muilenburg, “Form Criticism and Beyond,” 1–18.
There are three main distinguishing features of narrative criticism. First, it emphasizes text-centred and reader-centred perspectives of the text. Second, narrative criticism studies the biblical text in its final form, focusing on a synchronic study of the text and not its developmental process or sources. Narrative criticism also approaches the text as a unified whole. Another advantage is that narrative criticism illuminates the artistic value of the text, presenting it as “an art form, characterized by beauty, craftsmanship and technique.”

1.2.2.1 Main Components of Narrative Criticism

Narrative criticism examines the literary components of the text, here presented under four headings: perspective, structure, narrative technique and characterization. These components are interrelated, but for the purpose of describing them, it is best to present them individually. The section on perspective describes the role of the narrator. Structure includes the setting, plot and unity of the passage. Narrative technique describes linguistic elements of the text, the narrator’s control over details and narrative gaps, and the use of repetition, parallelism and irony. The final section presents the aspect of character and characterization.

1.2.2.1.1 Perspective

The first element of narrative criticism to be considered is perspective. There are significant challenges to deciphering between authors and editors of the biblical text. For this reason, it is beneficial to distinguish between the real author and the implied author of the text. The real author is the individual(s) who actually wrote the text, while the implied author is the textual

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64 Ryken, *Read the Bible as Literature*, 23.

manifestation of the real author, referred to as the narrator. The authors and editors carefully constructed the narrator’s perspective to communicate their desired message to the audience. Narrative criticism focuses on the narrator’s perspective that is provided. Thus, this work refers to the efforts, aims and work of the narrator, assuming that behind the narrator’s are those of the authors.

The personal identity of the narrator is generally unknown. It is usually assumed that the words of the narrator are always trustworthy and authoritative. The world of science, history and even theology may contest the facts that the narrative presents, but in the biblical context in which the narrator communicates, the perspective of the narrator must be taken as the “truth.” In this sense, the perspective of the narrator provides a standard by which we may weigh the events, dialogue and action of the narrative. Throughout Hebrew narratives, it is evident that the narrator is an omniscient member outside of the story, freed from the boundaries of space and time.

A key role of the narrator is to give shape to the text. This ensures that the desired theological message is communicated. Although the narrator is reliable and omniscient, the narrator certainly does not disclose the whole truth, carefully selecting only those events that have some function in the narrative. On the other hand, at times, the narrator insinuates that a great deal of significant activity occurs outside of what is written. In this, “statements about the world—character, plot, the march of history—are rarely complete, falling much short of what [the]


67 Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, Mark As Story, 40, note that the narrator is “not a character in the story [and] there is no identity, social location, or place in time and space” that directly provide us with any explicit knowledge about him.

68 Sternberg, Poetics of Biblical Narrative, 51.

69 Sternberg, Poetics of Biblical Narrative, 51.

70 Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, Mark As Story, 36, 40. Also, Shimon Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art in the Bible (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), 20–21. At times, though, the reader is provided with a limited perspective, as in Ezra, Nehemiah and Ecclesiastes.

71 Sternberg, Poetics of Biblical Narrative, 128, comments on this selective process: “As the voice of the one and indivisible truth, in short, the narrator formally disavows not just all reconciliation but also, all knowledge of narratives at odds with his own, since even a distant nod at them would saddle him with the unwelcome title of maker rather than shaper of plot.”
elliptical text suggests between the lines.” Textual clues prompt the reader to extract the often subtle message of the narrator, rather than outright judgment. The narrator guides the reader’s interpretation of the text by providing an ideological evaluation of events. In this, the narrator is not a neutral storyteller, but has an overarching ideological point of view.

1.2.2.1.2 Structure

The structure of the narrative is its overall organization. Structure is important in that it provides the context of the story and ordering of events and details within the story and connects the passage to its broader context.

1.2.2.1.2.1 Setting

Every narrative is written with a particular setting. The setting provides a time and space within which the story occurs. Also, the setting presents certain cultural, sociological and historical assumptions and a context that has influence on the events and characters. The text itself may not provide all of this information, but an important aspect of narrative criticism is a focus on the context that is provided by the time and space of the setting.

Time is an essential component of the setting of a narrative. There are two kinds of time within a narrative. From the perspective of narrative criticism, the historical time is of less importance than the narrated time, which is the point and time of the event in the text. It is key to observe

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72 Sternberg, Poetics of Biblical Narrative, 51.

73 Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art in the Bible, 34, remarks that the narrator subtly reveals an opinion by controlling the way the events are presented using an array of literary devices and terms that “are not neutral but are imbued with a powerful positive or negative charge and thus, while giving what appears to be a factual account of events, the narrator’s attitude is transmitted.”


75 Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, Mark As Story, 36, 43. Culpepper, Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel, 32, states, “no narrator can be absolutely impartial; inevitably a narrator…will prejudice the reader toward or away from certain characters, claims, or events and their implications.”

76 Ryken, Words of Delight, 60.

77 Yairah Amit, Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 114; Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art in the Bible, 141.

78 Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art in the Bible, 143, differentiates between “objective time outside it ( narration time) and literary time inside it (narrated time).” Berlin, Poetics and Interpretation, 96, terms these as “the time of the action and the time of its telling.”
that if “the narrative is revealed to the reader gradually, the [narrator] can exploit the reader’s temporary ignorance in order to heighten interest and tension.” Thus, the narrator not only creates but also intentionally uses and manipulates time. The speed with which events are told is often an indication of the important and most meaningful moments of the passage. When the text slows down and provides detail or dialogue it is usually an indication that the narrator is highlighting the particular section. Other details are important, but they are often given in quick succession and communicated using few words. Finally, the narrator uses time gaps in narration for a variety of functions (discussed below).

Space is the second major element of setting. Descriptions of place and objects that occupy space are usually not provided, so when descriptions are included in the text, they serve a specific function. Physical dimensions of an object may be given, and the specifics of the dimensions may bear significance. Geographic locations and descriptions can add to the dynamics of the story. Place can serve a variety of functions and have symbolic importance. Names of places often characterize the locations or events that occur there. Place creates atmosphere, such as Sodom, with its association to sinful deeds.

When the setting changes the shift establishes a new scene in the story. Observing shifts in space and time allows the reader to structurally divide the plot into scenes. Narration time and space are used to create an intentional background and context, and this contributes to the setting, which in turn establishes a foundation upon which the plot will be developed.

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80 For example, characters often enter the scene and leave at crucial moments. A prime example is 1 Samuel 13:10, where Samuel shows up just after Saul finishes making a burnt offering. The timing of Samuel’s arrival results in a devastating turn of events in the life of Saul.
81 Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, 123, 125: “place is so significant that entire stories revolve around particular places… [and] may even be the leading figure of the story.”
82 Ryken, *Words of Delight*, 60.
1.2.2.1.2.2 Plot

The element of plot distinguishes narrative from every other biblical genre.\(^{85}\) Within the introduction, the narrator often presents all the important elements for the unfolding story, such as a specific narrative perspective of the characters, plot and events.\(^{86}\) Because there are rarely physical descriptions in Hebrew narrative, much of the middle of the plot is dialogue. Indeed, dialogue is very important; as Alter observes, “narration is often relegated to the role of confirming assertions made in dialogue.”\(^{87}\) The ending of the plot will often bring meaning or fulfillment to the story and create a sense of completion or closure.\(^{88}\) Within the plot is tension and resolution. Throughout the story, the tension builds, until it is resolved at the end.

The element of dialogue and speech moves the plot forward to the extent that Hebrew narrative is often “narration-through-dialogue.”\(^{89}\) The narrator uses dialogue to slow down the pace of the plot by delaying the advancement of the action and/or focusing on characterization, highlighting the focus of the story. Sometimes the speech of a character contrasts the narrator’s perspective, providing another point of view. A character’s words reveal thoughts, motives, desires and beliefs. Mark Boda writes, “Through a speech the narrator is able to convey with simplicity the inner psychology and ideology of a character.”\(^{90}\) Finally, the narrator uses speeches to contribute to the drama and liveliness of the passage and to provide information in a creative manner.\(^{91}\)

1.2.2.1.3 Textual Unity

The third element of structure is the textual unity within the text that connects the stories together. Unity occurs at all levels of the text. Small units of the overarching plot are connected through a variety of methods. Certain keywords, phrases or ideas may be repeated. The plot may simply be held together by the same main character appearing in each scene. In many instances,


\(^{86}\) Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, 34. See also Ryken, *Words of Delight*, 360.

\(^{87}\) Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 82.

\(^{88}\) Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 105.

\(^{89}\) Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 87.


\(^{91}\) Boda, “Prayer as Rhetoric,” 6.
the narrator holds two passages together through contrast, emphasizing one passage or
highlighting the “rightness” of one aspect of the passage over and above another.\textsuperscript{92} Broadly
speaking, a given text is also related to the surrounding passages and, by extension, the book or
genre.\textsuperscript{93} A common theological or didactic theme or message may work to unify a text on a large
scale. Type-scenes also contribute to the sense of narrative unity. The unity present within
Hebrew narratives provides the reader with the option to understand and interpret one passage in
light of another passage.\textsuperscript{94}

The setting, plot and unifying elements of the narrative provide organization and structure.
Setting establishes a context for the story, plot is helpful in guiding narrative expectations and
understanding the character roles at work within the story and unifying elements connect the
story to surrounding narratives.

1.2.2.1.4 Narrative Technique

In narrative criticism, the study of the usage of language is essential and careful attention is given
to the words employed within the text.\textsuperscript{95} The arrangement and pattern of words and phrases
including word order and choice, repetition and parallelism are often key. The order of words
usually follows the standard grammatical structure; inversion is used for emphasis. In many
instances, the Hebrew language offers several optional terms to communicate an idea, thus the
choice of vocabulary is important.\textsuperscript{96} The frequency of a word is significant when a term is rarely
used within the biblical text or repeatedly used within a short passage. Word association is a key
method that the narrator uses to deepen the significance of one passage by subtly referring to
another similar situation with a potentially similar didactic value.

Many ancient Hebrew terms have multiple meanings, and the narrator often uses ambiguous
terms to endow the text with multiple potential readings. Each meaning may provide a different
perspective on a statement and often contributes to characterization; “an attentive and

\textsuperscript{92} Bar-Efrat, \textit{Narrative Art in the Bible}, 109.
\textsuperscript{93} Ryken, \textit{Read the Bible as Literature}, 36.
\textsuperscript{94} Ryken, \textit{Words of Delight}, 363.
\textsuperscript{95} Ryken, \textit{Words of Delight}, 16.
\textsuperscript{96} Alter, “Reading Biblical Narrative,” 19.
imaginative audience may recognize the interplay of both (or several) meanings, while the characters may perceive only one.”  Symbolic language is applied through a variety of literary techniques, such as metaphor and allusion.

Phonetics, the sound of the Hebrew language, is also used as a literary device. When the text is read aloud, wordplays are created through homophone terms (similar sounding words), onomatopoeia (the formation of a word from a sound associated with what it refers to), and alliteration (the occurrence of the same letter or sound at the beginning of adjacent or closely connected words). Although this is not as immediately obvious as other literary elements, a learned Hebrew reader is able to detect these masterful enhancements of the text.

Thus, the language of the text is very revealing. The narrator carefully uses language to provide characterization. It is an avenue for the narrator to send subtle messages to the reader through the range of meanings of carefully selected terms. Linguistic elements add to the aesthetic aspect of the text, creating irony and humour within the text.

1.2.2.1.4.1 Details and Gaps

The Hebrew narrative text contains numerous details and creates gaps of information by the lack of detail. Every detail that is included has a role in the narrative. Even minor, seemingly insignificant details may present key information or insight into the text. The lack of details is also important. Some gaps are unimportant omissions, but others function to raise important questions and can lead to different interpretations of a passage based on the reader’s speculation about the missing information. The function of gaps may be temporary, building suspense for a later revelation, or permanent, encouraging imaginative exploration of what remains a
significant mystery. Details and omissions are important to consider because of their influence on the reader, the subtle but pivotal information they may provide, and the perspective of the narrator that they reveal.

1.2.2.1.4.2 Repetition, Parallelism and Irony

The narrator uses a variety of other techniques throughout the narratives. Of particular note is the frequent use of repetition, parallelism and irony. Repetition can be a guide to what the story is about. A word or phrase may be repeated, creating emphasis or structure or alerting the reader to an important moment of plot or characterization or a didactic point in the narrative. Alter calls attention to how the biblical narrators “use almost verbatim repetition. The ‘almost’ is the aperture of defining meaning…a whole shift in perspectives and relationships.” Different trends, patterns or repetitions also occur within the larger plot. Type-scenes exemplify the narrator’s calculated play between repetition and variation.

Closely related to the significance of repetition is the narrator’s use of parallels. Often, parallels are developed through repeated or similar terms and themes within a verse, passage or book or between books. Variations in parallel episodes are key to understanding a passage.

Irony is a subtly humorous perception of inconsistency, in which an apparently straightforward statement or event is undermined by its context so as to give it a very different meaning or significance. A situation may arise that is the very opposite of what the reader expects, or characters may act in a manner that is not in their best interests. Repetition, parallelism and irony are used within a passage to point to the narrator’s meaning.

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103 Ryken, Read the Bible as Literature, 59.
104 Alter, “Reading Biblical Narrative,” 27.
105 Alter, Art of Biblical Narrative, 59.
106 COD, “Irony.”
107 Leland Ryken, Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 361, and Read the Bible as Literature, 55; Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art in the Bible, 125.
There are many other narrative techniques used in ancient Hebrew narratives, but all of the major ones have now been covered—perspective, structure and additional narrative techniques of the text.

1.2.2.2.1.5 Character and Characterization

In ancient Hebrew narratives, characterization is essential because characters regularly embody the meaning and didactic intents of the text. The narrator uses all of the components of narrative criticism to portray the character. This section examines the main elements of characters and then discusses characterization.

Characters may be round and complex, with multiple characteristics presented, and may demonstrate a transformation or development of character over time. Minor characters are simple and flat, with only one or two characteristics of their character provided. Each agent in the text, however, has a structural role, with minor characters often paralleling and highlighting major ones, whether through correspondence or contrast.108

Characterization is the method of representing an individual in the text through direct and indirect means.109 In narrative approaches to the text, characterization always receives a great deal of attention. Bar-Efrat notes the importance of characters, who “transmit the significance and values of the narrative to the reader, since they usually constitute the focal point of interest.”110 Characterization may be presented directly through the voice of the narrator or indirectly as the product of an analysis of the character’s discourse, actions and conduct.111

The narrator utilizes several methods of direct characterization. The most obvious are the narrator’s epithets and statements about the individual’s thoughts, motives, feelings or will. These asides reveal the attitudes, motives, goals and responses of characters. They also “serve as the basis for speculation that must be verified or disproved by means of other information

109 COD, “Characterization.”
110 Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 47.
supplied by the story.” Names are a dominant form of characterization, immediately creating a context in which to view the character or place and often hinting at a character’s disposition. At important moments in the plot, the narrator may refer to a character by a title or relation to emphasize a point. Physical descriptions normally provide characterization. The inaction of a character may also contribute to characterization.

Indirect characterization occurs through characters rather than the narrator. The speech, action, responses, relationships and roles of a character demonstrate personal abilities, skills, qualities and traits. In the case of minor characters, single actions necessarily serve to define the person and are intended to constitute the essential nature of the individual. The opening words of a character are important and, as Alter deems them, “a defining moment of characterization.” A character’s responses and interactions may reveal more than just his or her own character. At certain key times, a character will cast judgment on another character. Though the judgment may or may not be true, it influences the reader, especially if it comes from the mouth of YHWH or a prophet.

In short, characterization allows one to understand the characters, which is the essential material of every narrative. This is accomplished through direct and indirect means—every character having a role in the text and every moment of characterization contributing to the overall analysis of the character.

1.2.2.1.6 Summary

Narrative criticism is a systematic analysis of the literary qualities of the text. It is distinguished by emphasizing text-centred and reader-centred perspectives of the text, studying the final form as the primary text, approaching the text as a unified whole and illuminating the artistic and literary value of the text. Narrative criticism provides an engaging approach to

112 Amit, “Whom To Believe?” 76.
113 Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art in the Bible, 38; Provan, Kings, 21.
115 Gunn and Fewell, Narrative in the Hebrew Bible, 77.
117 Amit, Reading Biblical Narratives, 12; Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, Mark As Story, 3.
studying the Hebrew Scriptures. The role of the narrator is important because it determines the perspective from which the narrative is presented. Knowledge of the components of structure is also important, including setting, plot, unity and a variety of narrative techniques. Characterization is at the heart of the biblical narrative and typically reveals the meaning of the text.
Chapter 2

Ancient Context of Dream Literature

This chapter provides an overview of ancient Near Eastern dream texts, including dream interpretation, incubation practices, omens and rituals and dream interpreters. General patterns of thought in the ANE are introduced at the outset. This section is not intended to be exhaustive but to reveal important patterns in dream literature. A more detailed analysis and excerpts that provide a sense of the writing style and content of the dream texts of each major ancient Near Eastern region follows. Dream literature of the Mesopotamians, Hittites, Egyptians and Syro-Phoenicians are examined separately to illuminate the unique developments of each region. The greatest detail is allotted to ancient Israelite dream texts. Homeric dream literature and the Homeric dream type-scene are also examined. This chapter concludes with commentary on the uniqueness of OT dream literature in this milieu and a summary that presents an overview of the whole chapter.

2.1 Ancient Near Eastern Dream Literature and Interpretation

2.1.1 General Remarks

The strongest consistent assumption throughout the ANE is that dreams are given by a divine being. This is demonstrated by nearly every dream report from the ANE. Dreams may be given by a specific dream god, the “gods” in general, or (as in the OT) the Israelite monotheistic God, but it is accepted without question that dreams are given by a divine being. That dreams are given by a divine being is a marked difference from modern psychological concepts of dreams. In the ancient world, dreams are not perceived to be a reflection of a person’s inner being, and the discussion of psychology plays no role in understanding or interpreting dreams.

With the origin of dreams firmly established as divine, it is not surprising that dreams are regarded as a means for the divine to communicate to humans. The communication is usually instruction, guidance, affirmation, warning, promise or a combination of these purposes. Of course, dreams are not the only form of divine communication in any ancient Near Eastern

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118 For excerpts of dream reports from the ANE, see sections 2.1.2 to 2.1.5.
culture, but dream texts appear in many forms and this indicates the acceptance of dreams in everyday life.

In the ANE, all dreams needed to be understood. Dreams were thought to have inherently hazardous qualities because they foretold the future. We know of this belief from the long lists of instructions that were created to inform the dreamers of what ritual activities were required to dispel the hazardous qualities of their dreams. It was believed that dreams foretold a future that was fated to occur if the dreamer did not have the dream properly interpreted. Once the dream was understood, the dreamer could act to prevent the evil future from befalling him or her by following the instructions in the ritual lists. Particularly, if the prophecy was of an evil future, the dreamer could avoid it by enacting certain ritual activities that would dispel the inherent hazard of the dream. The combination of inherently hazardous qualities with prophetic aspects was considered deadly. Thus, an entire field developed to enable the commoner to understand his or her dream. The Assyrians and Egyptians created long lists of omens to assist in the interpretation of dreams of all persons.119 These lists played an important role in escaping the evil future that dreams could reveal by providing the tools of interpretation and prescribing the needed ritual.

Dream interpretation was considered a professional task. The dreamer—whether royal or commoner—was required to have the dream interpreted by a professional diviner, though there seemed to be no profession solely dedicated to dream interpretation.120 Rather, these diviners were masters of several divinatory arts and experts in literature. Dream interpretation was far from random; it was more of a literary science that required several areas of skill. Interpretation was “a deductive process, one based not on the observation of physical phenomena, but on the study of words, which the ancients perceived as equally ‘empirical.’”121

119 For a discussion on omen lists, see sections 2.1.2 and 2.1.4.
120 Noegel, Nocturnal Ciphers, 34: “Among all the specialists of divination, there is no evidence for a specific group of professionals solely devoted to oneiromancy.” Also, Husser, Dreams and Dream Narratives, 28.
121 Noegel, Nocturnal Ciphers, 181. Robert Anderson, Signs and Wonders: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 77, states, “The dream-interpretation or vision-interpretation schema is a literary device and must be understood and treated as such.”
Scott Noegel has convincingly proposed that the key to dream interpretation was in the art of punning.\(^{122}\) Writing was of great importance throughout the ANE.\(^{123}\) Notably, written languages of the ANE lend themselves to punning in a way that modern English cannot. Punning in the OT is well attested. Ancient Hebrew, with its lack of vowels, frequently gives way to wordplays and multiple meanings.\(^{124}\) Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics present an even greater opportunity for punning, as the script consists of images that have a wide spectrum of meaning. Dreams were interpreted by examining the words of the message and identifying the multiple meanings behind the language used to convey the dream message. The multiple meanings of the words used by the dreamer to describe the dream were examined and then associated with a potential meaning of the dream. Possessing great literary skill, ancient Near Eastern dream interpreters were able to

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\(^{122}\) Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 24, notes that punning is not the only interpretive strategy of the ANE, but it was one of the most pervasive divinatory hermeneutics and its influence was widespread. For another hermeneutic, see Ann Guinan, “Left/Right Symbolism in Mesopotamian Divination,” *SAAB* 10 (1996): 5–10.

Noegel’s work contradicts views such as Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977), 410: “Interpretation of dreams does not depend on a learnt or professional skill, but is alone made possible by the enlightenment of God”; and Monford Harris, *Studies in Jewish Dream Interpretation* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1994), 3, who states, “There is no systematic analysis of dreams, nor are any rules formulated for dream interpretation.”


\(^{124}\) Punning is not limited to an array of meanings of a given root, and correct grammar is not required. See Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 11–51, especially 23–24; and James Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 47–48.

utilize this process of identifying potential meanings imbedded in the description of the dream to divine the meaning of the dream and thus solve the riddle of the dream for the dreamer.\textsuperscript{125}

In this sense, “there is nothing ‘playful’ about wordplay” in dream interpretation.\textsuperscript{126} Dream interpreters closely examined the “pictograms” incorporated in the dream, deciphered them and translated them.\textsuperscript{127} Words held secrets; “the punning hermeneutic aimed to reveal divine secrets hidden in texts, to some degree we must consider wordplays as containers of divine secrets and/or as tools for revealing them.”\textsuperscript{128}

Dream interpreters wielded significant power in society. Since the interpretation depended on the text of the dream report, the interpretation could only be made after the dream was realized in written form.\textsuperscript{129} Because the scribes put the dream report into writing, they held power over the dreamer, since the dream text embodied the meaning of the dream and its interpretation. The belief in the power of words was so strong that even the act of writing was credited with divine origins in ancient Mesopotamia.\textsuperscript{130} In essence, the dream interpreter determined the very future of the dreamer. Indeed, Noegel states that by deploying the performative power of words, mantic determined an individual’s fate and so could exhibit social control through dream interpretation.\textsuperscript{131} Since words were considered vehicles of power throughout the ANE,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{125} Martti Nissinen, “The Socioreligious Role of the Neo-Assyrian Prophets,” in Prophecy in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context: Mesopotamian, Biblical, and Arabian Perspectives, ed. Martti Nissinen, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series, 13 (Atlantic: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 108, writes, “What united scholars of different kinds (astrologers, haruspices, and exorcists) was their scholarship, the profound knowledge of traditional literature, and a high level of literacy—qualities that are not prerequisite to non-inductive divinatory skills, which may not include literary activity at all.”
\item \textsuperscript{126} Noegel, Nocturnal Ciphers, 41.
\item \textsuperscript{128} Noegel, Nocturnal Ciphers, 38. See this work for a full bibliography on the belief in the power of words.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Noegel, Nocturnal Ciphers, 23; and Rivka Ulmer, “The Semiotics of the Dream Sequence in Talmud Yerushalmi Ma’aser Sheni,” Henoch 23 (2001): 308.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Noegel, Nocturnal Ciphers, 39.
\item \textsuperscript{131} Noegel, Nocturnal Ciphers, 221–22.
\end{itemize}
ambiguous words represent potentially unbridled forms of power. Punning interpretations limit that power by restricting the parameters of a dream’s interpretation. The dream cannot now mean anything, but only one thing. The employment of puns in the process of interpretation therefore, constitutes an act of power.¹³²

The power of scribes and diviners was limited to the potential meanings of the words used to describe the dream.

Omen lists themselves were also powerful.¹³³ Because scribes used writing as a tool of divination inquiry, an omen was a reading across a juncture of categories.¹³⁴ Diviners referred to an omen’s prediction as purussû (legal decision or verdict).¹³⁵ The form of omen lists was in legal format. Noegel comments, “Punning in divinatory texts not only affirms theological and legal principles, it embodies them; and it is more performative than literary, since words index power and since the acoustic impact is only the result of a pun’s talion function.”¹³⁶

Incubation is another feature of dream texts throughout the ANE. When the dream report includes details—or more accurately, rituals—of the dreamer’s activities before receiving a dream, it suggests that the dreamer is intentionally behaving in an effort to receive a dream. This activity is known as incubation, and the practices are part of a system of incubation rituals. Incubation practices were developed in Mesopotamia and enacted throughout the ANE as a way of inducing a dream and discerning the will of the divine being, particularly in a time of distress. In general, the practice of incubation included several main components. Gnuse summarizes these.¹³⁷ The incubant passes the night in a sanctuary, perhaps a room set aside for such activity. Sacrifices are offered to the divine being, sometimes food or drink. Special preparatory purification rites are performed. The recipient does something to his clothing; he either puts the

¹³³ Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, especially 11–55, draws attention to the importance of recognizing the conceptual framework that undergirds Mesopotamian divination and its relationship to written and oral learning.
¹³⁵ Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 43.
clothing somewhere or sprinkles it. Finally, there is an element of weeping, evident particularly in the Mesopotamian incubation rituals.

A study of available ancient Near Eastern dream reports demonstrates several commonalities. Usually, in the dream report, the divine being comes to the dreamer during the night and stands at the head of the bed. Details of the dream report frequently include the dreamer falling asleep. The report often makes reference to the night. For reasons described below, there is often an element of fear within the dreamer. Sometimes the bed chamber is described, as are the events leading up to the dream experience. Commonly, the dream report includes the exclamation “Behold!”

History has preserved the dream reports of royalty almost exclusively. These royal dream reports emphasize great characteristics and victories of the royalty, often relating to military victories or throne successions. The purpose of royal dream reports usually includes aggrandizement and propaganda, indicating that the divine being has secured the military victory or throne for the royalty.

While dream texts across the ANE share many common features, there are also distinctions that set various regions apart. The Mesopotamian understanding of dreams and dream interpretation seems to inform all other regions of the ANE, which adopted the Mesopotamian influence with variation. Most important to the present work is the distinction of dream literature from ancient Israel. The following sections provide a more specific look at each region with more focus on their distinctives, along with examples of their dream texts.

In summary, the concept of dreams and the method of dream interpretation developed along similar lines throughout the ANE, influenced heavily by ancient Mesopotamian beliefs. Consistently, dreams were understood to come from a divine being as a form of divine communication. Dreams were considered to have a hazardous quality that required the dreamer to understand the dream so that any evil future the dream foretold could be avoided. Dream interpretation was supplied by professional diviners equipped with a high level of literary skills. They used the technique of punning to decipher the riddles embedded in dreams. Dream interpreters held significant power in society. Omen lists attributed meaning to varying dream
content and demonstrated the skills of diviners. Generally, dream texts have similar content elements and are ascribed to royalty.

2.1.2 Mesopotamia

An understanding of dream literature from ancient Mesopotamia is foundational for understanding dream literature and dream interpretation throughout the ANE. The Mesopotamian influence of dream interpretation and punning was pervasive, particularly in ancient Egypt.

Among the 1500 tablets of Assurbanipal’s library, 11 tablets contain the Assyrian Dream Book, which provides the foundational material for understanding principles of dream interpretation in the ANE. We have evidence of priests and seers who participate in oneiromancy. Of the other texts we have from ancient Mesopotamia, the writings related to dreams are limited. There are only two references to a dream in the available cuneiform texts. A dream is something seen at night and is distinguished from a vision. The deity Šamaš presides over dreams and alone possesses the knowledge of dream messages.

The dominant feature of dream literature in ancient Mesopotamia relates to oneiromancy. Dreams were considered to hold a prediction about the future, and there was a desire to understand these messages, encoded in ordinary, everyday dreams. It was vital that the meaning of dreams be interpreted, as dreams were thought to be inherently dangerous. Dream interpretation was normally practised by a professional. Individuals who were consulted for

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139 Husser, Dreams and Dream Narratives, 27–8.

140 Oppenheim, Interpretation, 228.

141 Husser, Dreams and Dream Narratives, 28.

142 Husser, Dreams and Dream Narratives, 29.
dream interpretation were often priests, priestesses, divine beings, physicians, divinators or other “wise” persons. Often, women interpreted dreams; there are numerous examples of mothers and sisters being consulted for dream interpretation.\footnote{Noegel, \textit{Nocturnal Ciphers}, 33, comments that the earliest glyptic evidence for dream interpretation depicts a woman (24th century BCE). See J. M. Asher-Grève, “The Oldest Female Oneiromancer,” in \textit{La femme dans le Proche-Orient antique}, ed. Jean-Marie Durand, 33rd Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale (Paris: Recherches sur les civilisations, 1987), 27–32; and Wolfgang Heimpel, “A Female Dream Interpreter,” \textit{NABU} 77 (1998): 67.} Usually, in Mesopotamia (like Egypt), dreams were interpreted by a professional who referred to a list of omens to decipher the meaning of the symbol through the technique of punning. There were other means of interpretation. Hughes remarks, “Dreams could be interpreted by means of dreams: someone could sleep and, on behalf of the dreamer, receive a dream that explained the original one.”\footnote{Donald Hughes, “Dream Interpretation in Ancient Civilizations,” \textit{Dreaming} 10.1 (2000): 8.} Such priests were called “one who sleeps beside (or at the head of) another person.”\footnote{Oppenheim, \textit{Interpretation}, 223–224.}

Lists of omens were created to discern the meaning of events that occurred in the dream. Once the meaning of the dream was understood, ritual purification would be undertaken to dispel the potential evil. Gnuse comments, “Ritual purification had to accompany all dreams, especially in Assyria. Meaning was found, but the danger had to be removed by additional action.”\footnote{Gnuse, \textit{Dream Theophany of Samuel}, 15.} Thus, these lists of omens were a necessity when a person had a dream. The lists of omens were written like casuistic laws, with a hypothesis and then corresponding interpretation. This is one of the oldest examples of these omen collections, dated to 1700 BCE:

\begin{verbatim}
If a man while he sleeps [dreams that]
The town falls again and again upon him
And he groans and no one hears him:
The [protective spirits] Lamassu and Šedu are attached
To this man’s body
...
If a man while he sleeps [dreams that]
The town falls again and again upon him
And he groans and someone hears him:
\end{verbatim}
The Assyrian Dream Book is much like the above passage. Its eleven tablets contain three tablets of exorcisms and eight tablets of these dream presages. Typically, the presage will be short and direct:

If he eats the meat of a dog: rebellion, not obtaining his desire.
If he eats the meat of a beaver: rebellion.
If he eats the meat of a gazelle: painful disease.
If he eats the meat of a wild bull: his days will be long.

The first and last table of the Dream Book contain incantations. These are prayers for the dreamer to recite in order to remove the consequences of bad dreams. One example of an incantation is “If a man had a wrong dream he must, in order that its evil may not affect him, say to himself before he sets (in the morning) his foot upon the floor: ‘the dream I had is good, good, verily good before Sin and Shamash!’”

Ritual purifications offered the dreamer the opportunity to rid him- or herself of the associated danger of the dream. The activities required and the techniques used varied. Noegel comments, the techniques mentioned in these rituals (namburbû) texts vary according to the specific goals of the practitioner and include the use of amulets, figurines, substitution, deity invocation, purification of the dreamer, and incantations. Some rituals purify the sleeper and his environment in preparation for the dream state or instill the dreamer with a good dream. Others aim to provoke dreams that disclose and manipulate the future. Still others exorcise demons and the potentially harmful consequences of bad dreams.

By no means were any of these rituals random. They held significance and meaning. The namburbû ritual of smashing of a pot, for example, as a symbolic act must have made a deep impression on the person involved, since it had its Sitz im Leben not only in the rituals but also in profane jurisprudence. In manumissions of slaves for example this act has the function of emphasizing that the enslavement had been terminated, that is to say, had been smashed.

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148 Husser, Dreams and Dream Narratives, 31.
150 Noegel, “Dreams and Dream Interpreters,” 53.
151 Translation from Lewis, Interpretation of Dreams, 19.
152 Noegel, Nocturnal Ciphers, 48. See also Butler, Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams, 91, 97.
It was thought that cultic purity promoted good health; without cultic purity, the individual was susceptible to various evil dangers.\textsuperscript{154} Thus, dispelling the danger of dreams through ritual purification contributed to the overall well-being of the individual, in addition to being a safeguard against the future fulfillment of the evil prediction. Once the dream was properly interpreted and the purification rituals completed, the dreamer could be restored to proper wholeness. Ritual purification practices were also associated with healing. The concept that dream interpretation had medicinal and healing properties was prevalent and widely accepted.\textsuperscript{155} It was believed that puns and onomatopoeic phrases (in which phonic form imitates a sound) provided a way of combating sickness through sympathetic magic.\textsuperscript{156}

Most of the symbolic dream material from Mesopotamia is contained in the Gilgamesh Epic. In one instance, Gilgamesh has two dreams in one night (1.216–63). He describes them to his mother, who interprets them. The second set of dreams is in \textit{Gilgamesh} 4, where Gilgamesh has a dream of a dangerous situation. He tells them to Enkidu, who interprets the dreams positively. These dreams foreshadow a future event in the plot and thus function to heighten the suspense of the developing plot.\textsuperscript{157}

One literary element frequently present in dream reports is a reference to how the dream came about. In the Mesopotamian culture, where the meaning of dreams was important, it is no surprise that incubation was developed as a method to obtain a message from the gods. Incubation narratives are similar to the following passage from Gilgamesh, describing what Gilgamesh did to receive his dream. Note the dramatic build up that precedes the dream report:

\begin{quote}
At twenty leagues they ate their ration.
At thirty leagues they stopped for the night.
Fifty leagues they travelled during the day.
(There) they dug a pit in front of Shamash.
They refilled (?) [their waterskins (?)].
Gilgamesh went up to [the mountain],
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{154} Noegel, \textit{Nocturnal Ciphers}, 47, observes, “Mesopotamian divinatory professionals promoted the belief that cultic purity ensured good health; bad dreams were blamed on a dreamer’s impiety, which in turn caused the absence of the protective canopy of his personal deities.” See also Butler, \textit{Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams}, 23. See also Aldina da Silva, “Le rêve comme expérience démoniaque en Mésopotamie,” \textit{SR} 22 (1993): 301–10; and Butler, \textit{Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams}, 28, 62.

\textsuperscript{155} Harris, \textit{Studies in Jewish Dream Interpretation}, 29–32.

\textsuperscript{156} Noegel, \textit{Nocturnal Ciphers}, 55.

\textsuperscript{157} Gnuse, \textit{Dream Theophany of Samuel}, 24.
And made his flour-offering to [-----]:
“O mountain, bring me a dream, a favourable one!”
Enkidu arranged it for him, for Gilgamesh...
Gilgamesh sat with his chin on his knees.
Sleep, which spills out over people, overcame him.
In the middle watch he finished his sleep.
He rose up and said to his friend:
“...[I had a dream]
And the dream that I had was extremely upsetting.” (Gilgamesh 4.1.4ff)

In the following Sumerian epic excerpt, the description of ritual incubation practices in preparation for a dream is not as detailed. Still there are literary elements that indicate incubation is present. The writer states explicitly that Lugalbanda lays down for the purpose of dreaming. Before doing so, he does several ritual activities that might otherwise seem mundane but serve to set the stage for a dream scene. A reference to the bed chamber is made, and the writer discusses the god of dreams. The message consists of a divine instruction to sacrifice the animals that Lugalbanda captured earlier in the story. After the dream, the narrator verifies that it was a dream.

Lugalbanda...laid down ilinnuc, pure herb of the mountains, as a couch, he spread out a zulumhi garment, he unfolded there a white linen sheet...The king lay down not to sleep, he lay down to dream—not turning back at the door of the dream, not turning back at the door-pivot. To the liar it talks in lies, to the truthful it speaks truth. It can make one man happy, it can make another man sing, but it is the closed tablet-basket of the gods. It is the beautiful bed chamber of Ninlil, it is the counsellor of Inana. The multiplier of mankind, the voice of one not alive—Zangara, the god of dreams, himself like a bull, bellowed at Lugalbanda. Like the calf of a cow he lowed: “Who will slaughter (?) a brown wild bull for me? Who will make its fat melt for me? He shall take my axe whose metal is tin, he shall wield my dagger which is of iron. Like an athlete I shall let him bring away the brown wild bull, the wild bull of the mountains, I shall let him like a wrestler make it submit. Its strength will leave it. When he offers it before the rising sun, let him heap up like barleycorns the heads of the brown goat and the nanny goat, both the goats; when he has poured out their blood in the pit—let their smell waft out in the desert so that the alert snakes of the mountains will sniff it.” Lugalbanda awoke—it was a dream. (Excerpt from Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave lines 326–360)

Message dreams that have been preserved are limited to royal inscriptions, particularly the reigns of Assurbanipal (668–627 BCE) and Nabonidus (555–539 BCE). These inscriptions “attest to

159 Translation from J. A. Black, et al., The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (http://www-etcsli.orient.ox.ac.uk/), Oxford 1998–.
160 Husser, Dreams and Dream Narratives, 38; Oppenheim, Interpretation, 185.
the astonishing diversity of styles proper to each particular sovereign. one well-preserved example of a message dream is from the Sumerian Legend of Sharrumkin (Sargon of Akkad, 2334–2279 BCE): At that time, the cupbearer, in the temple of Ezinu, Sargon, lay down not to sleep, but lay down to dream. Holy Inana, in the dream, was drowning him (Urzababa) in a river of blood. Sargon, screaming, gnawed the ground. When king Urzababa heard those screams, He had them bring him (Sargon) into the king’s presence. Sargon came into the presence of Urzababa, (who said): “Oh cupbearer, was a dream revealed to you in the night?” Sargon replied to his king: “Oh my king, this is my dream which I will have told you about. There was a single young woman, she was high as the heaven, she was broad as the earth, She was firmly set as the [bas]e of a wall. For me, she drowned you in a great [river], a river of blood.” It is common for a dream report to stress that the dreamer had gone to bed and was deeply asleep. The time seems to be unimportant, as it is usually not mentioned. Ancient Mesopotamian dream texts have numerous purposes. Here, the dream is used as a method for a divine being to give instructions to a king and to highlight the importance of the king, for he is given a dream at outset of his rule: In my legitimate reign Bel and the great lord, for the love of my kingship, became reconciled with that city and temple and showed compassion. In the beginning of my everlasting reign, they sent me a dream. Marduk, the great lord, and Sin, the luminary of heaven and the netherworld, stood together. Marduk spoke with me: “Nabonidus, king of Babylon, carry bricks on your riding horse, 161 Husser, Dreams and Dream Narratives, 39. 162 Bottéro, “Symptômes, signes, écritures en Mésopotamie ancienne,” 146, observes that the Assyrian Dream Book features the Sumerian language. Adam Falkenstein, “‘Wahrsagung’ in der sumerischen Überlieferung,” in La divination en Mésopotamie ancienne et dans les régions voisines, Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale 14, Strasbourg (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966), 56–64, observes the important role of interpretation in Sumerian life. For a discussion of Sumerian dream interpreters, see Jack Sasson, “Mari Dreams,” JAOS 103 (1983): 283–93, on allusion and ambiguity in dream reports of the Mari letters; Jean-Marie Durand, “Les prophéties des textes de Mari,” in Oracles et Prophéties dans l’Antiquité: actes du colloque de Strasbourg 15–17 juin 1995, ed. Jean Georges Heintz, Travaux du Centre de Recherche sur le Proche-Orient et la Grèce Antiques 15 (Paris: Université des sciences humaines de Strasbourg, 1997), 115–134. 163 Translation from Jerrold S. Cooper and Wolfgang Heimpel, “The Sumerian Sargon Legend,” JAOS 103 (1983): 73. 164 Oppenheim, Interpretation, 187.
rebuild Ehulhul and cause Sin, the great lord, to establish his residence in its midst.” (Excerpt from *Nabonidus Cylinder* i.8–ii.25)\(^{165}\)

The following dream is used to legitimize the reign of Nabonidus:

In the same dream, when my royal predecessor Nebuchadnezzar and one attendant (appeared to me) standing on a chariot, the attendant said to Nebuchadnezzar: “Do speak to Nabonidus, that he should report to you the dream he has seen!” Nebuchadnezzar listened to him and said to me: “Tell me what good [signs] you have seen!” I answered him, saying: “In my dream I beheld with joy the Great Star, the moon and Marduk high up on the sky and it [the Great Star] called me by my name!”\(^{166}\)

**Dreams are revealed in poetic literature:**

I groan day and night alike,
Dreaming and waking I am equally wretched.
A remarkable young man of extraordinary physique,
Magnificent in body, clothed in new garments—
Because I was only half awake, his features lacked form.
He was clad in splendour, robed in dread. (Poem of the Righteous Sufferer III:7–12)\(^{167}\)

Dreams are also presented in reported speech, where the intent of the text is to communicate the message rather than present literary motifs and themes, indicated by the great variety of literary elements in these texts. The variety of style in these dream reports suggests that there is no intent to create a narrative type-scene or consistency in these reports beyond the basic elements, such as nighttime and apparitions to royal figures.

### 2.1.3 The Hatti

Extant texts suggest that dreams were generally of little interest to the Hittites.\(^{168}\) Incubation and dream interpretation practices were never really developed, and so there are no lengthy lists of dream omens, or at least no extant ones.\(^{169}\) There is no mention in any available texts of any kind

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\(^{165}\) Translation from Paul-Alain Beaulieu. Available at http://www.livius.org/na-nd/nabonidus/cylinder.html.

\(^{166}\) Translation from *ANET*, 309–10.


of interpreter. Divinatory practices penetrated the Hittite world under the influence of the Hurrians in the Cassite dynasty, which explains why “during the reign of Hattušili (1280–1255 BCE)…under this usurper sovereign, on the eve of the brutal decline of the empire, that all sorts of forms of divination enjoy unprecedented favour, and that particular interest is paid to dreams.”

The Hittite epics did not contain developed dream narratives. The dream texts functioned to report the dreams of royalty in which divine beings communicated their will. Dreams were used to foreshadow the future and increase the suspense of the narrative. Most notably, the main character in “Kessi the Hunter” has seven symbolic dreams of images that his mother interprets.

Sometimes these dreams occur in response to a prayer by the royal individual: “May God freely open his heart and his soul and tell me my sins, so that I may know them. May my god either speak to me in a dream…or may a prophetess speak to me” (KUB XXX 10:24ff). Dreams are also related to personal piety, particularly as it relates to vow-making. Here, Queen Puduhepa, wife of Hattušili III, makes such a vow.

A dream of the queen…the queen has made a vow in her dream to the goddess Hebat of the town Uda as follows: “If you, goddess, my lady, will have made well again His Majesty and not have him given over to the ‘Evil,’ I shall make a statue of gold for Hebat and I shall make her a rosette of gold. They shall call it ‘Rosette of Hebat.’” (KUB XV 1 I:1–11)

Consistently, the dream setting establishes a context to communicate the will of the divinity, with other purposes often being accomplished by the details of the divinity’s message. The purposes

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170 Husser, Dreams and Dream Narratives, 53.
171 Husser, Dreams and Dream Narratives, 52.
172 Gnuse, Dream Theophany of Samuel, 26.
175 This dream message is generally considered the only one preserved where the recipient is female (Oppenheim, Interpretation, 197). Noegel, Nocturnal Ciphers, 33, comments, “Others typically are important figures (kings and priests), except at Mari, where there exist no royal message dreams and where nine out of seventeen individuals whose dreams are mentioned are female. Neo-Asyrian dream narratives report only the experiences of men.” For commentary on dreams given to females at Mari, see Sasson, “Mari Letters,” 283-93.
176 Translation from Oppenheim, Interpretation, 254.
of these dream reports are varied, but similar to other ancient Near Eastern dream texts. An example of the use of dream reports for propaganda is present in the Apology of Hattušili III, which is a long autobiographical text that relates the events that led to his seizure of the throne after the deposition of his nephew UrhiTeshub.\textsuperscript{177} Clearly, Hattušili is caricatured as having a most pious history:

\begin{quote}
Ištar, My Lady, sent Muwatalli, my brother to Muršili, my father, through a dream (saying): “For Hattušili the years (are) short, he is not to live (long). Hand him over to me, and let him be my priest, so he (will) live.” My father took me up, (while still) a boy, and handed me (over) to the service of the goddess, and as a priest I brought offerings to the goddess. \textit{(KUB I 1:1 13–17)}\textsuperscript{178}
\end{quote}

The use of dream messages to elevate royalty and affirm one’s reign is pointedly exemplified in this message from Ištar to Hattušili’s wife: “Ištar, My lady, appeared at that moment to my wife in a dream (saying): ‘I will march ahead of your husband...Since I elevated him, I never ever exposed him to an evil trial (or) an evil deity. Now too, I will lift him and install him in priesthood for the sun goddess of Arinna” \textit{(KUB I 1: iv 9ff)}.\textsuperscript{179} This dream occurs just when Hattušili advances to overtake his nephew, the king, making it seem that his successful usurping of the throne was the will of the gods.

There are also instructions for healing through dreams. The following passage describes a cure for male impotence:

\begin{quote}
In the house in which I make offerings a new table is set up and I shall put the rations upon that table; in front of it I shall put a pitcher. The broken sacrificial loaves which are lying on the rations, I shall take a little of them and give it to the male sacrificer. He will put it into his mouth and he will drink (for) Uliiyassis three times. When night falls, the sacrificer will lie down in front of the table; they will set up a bed for him in front of the table….The sacrificer will lie down, (to see) whether he will experience the bodily presence of the deity in his dream, coming to him and sleeping with him. During the three days on which he is entreating the deity he tells all the dreams which he has, whether the deity appears to him and whether the deity sleep with him.\textsuperscript{180}
\end{quote}

In short, the known Hittite dream reports are predominantly dream messages from divine beings to royalty. Their primary purpose is to convey the will and desires of the divine being, and their

\textsuperscript{177} Husser, \textit{Dreams and Dream Narratives}, 56.
\textsuperscript{180} Translation from \textit{ANET}, 349–50.
secondary purpose is to establish and support the royalty in various ways. Though there is no evidence of incubation practices or the interpretation of dreams, there is evidence of some practices related to dreams as methods of healing.

2.1.4 Egypt

In ancient Egypt, dreams were thought to be a “doorway to the divine.” As with the Hittite culture, divination in Egypt did not develop into a highly systematic practice, suggesting a lesser cultural interest in divining the future than in ancient Mesopotamia. Nevertheless, the Mesopotamian belief in the power of words and the importance of dream interpretation influenced ancient Egyptian culture, and a highly skilled level of dream interpretation is evident in the texts.

As with Mesopotamian dream literature, the key to understanding Egyptian dream literature is to realize that the Egyptians believed that dreams were not natural or neutral; a dream was good for those who understood it but caused evil for those who did not understand it. The Dream Stela of Tantamati of the 25th dynasty concludes with this precise assumption: “True indeed is the dream; it is beneficial to him who places it in his heart but evil for him who does not know it.”

As we would expect from Mesopotamian influence, in ancient Egyptian culture the interpretation of dreams in terms of dispelling the danger thought to be inherent in dreams is required whenever a person dreams. The dream must be understood, and then magic is required to expel the danger and prevent a negative future from befalling the dreamer.

Interpretation was the task of divinatory specialists in magic and religious writings. The process of writing was sacred, magical, symbolic—and manipulable. The power of words and interpretation, to the point of determining the future, is highlighted by Noegel:

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182 Translation from Oppenheim, Interpretation, 251.
183 Husser, Dreams and Dream Narratives, 65.
Egyptians, much like the Mesopotamians, viewed their script as divine, capable of communicating on multiple levels. Hence, mastery of the scribal art was prerequisite for performing [magic]...the writing of tomb incantations, like the Pyramid Texts above, did not merely depict what would happen to the Pharaoh, they enscripted the future. They made it happen.  

Ancient Egyptian dream interpreters were masters of words and riddles. Dream interpreters could manipulate words through punning, which was the primary means that enabled the mantic experts to manipulate the things that those words represented.

The Egyptians had *Dream Books* like the Assyrians. The omens contained in the Egyptian *Dream Books* are structured like the Assyrian *Dream Book*, but the omens are not systematically classified. Omens could be either good or bad. They differ significantly from the Mesopotamian dream manual in that the Egyptians inserted “good” and “bad” to explain the apodosis, but Mesopotamian omen apodoses were understood as positive or negative by the diviners. Frederick Cryer reasons, “The fact that Egyptian tradents of Chester Beatty Papyrus Nr. III found it necessary to explain the apodoses in question to their readers seems...an obvious sign of the adoption of...[the] Mesopotamian tradition.” The following provides an example of the Egyptian omen lists:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If a man sees himself in a dream...</th>
<th>good; it means pleasure.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sitting in an orchard in the sun:</td>
<td>good; it means absolution from all ills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dislodging a wall:</td>
<td>good; eating his possessions in his house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Eating] excrement:</td>
<td>good; passing a happy day in his house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a connexion with a cow:</td>
<td>good; [acting as] an official among his people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating crocodile [flesh]:</td>
<td>good; it means prosperity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directing (a jet of) water:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Chester Beatty collection, III recto 5:13–18)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If a man sees himself in a dream...</th>
<th>bad; […] him […]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entering into the temple of a female divinity:</td>
<td>bad; it means pangs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating notched sycamore figs:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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186 Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 92; note also, 106: “While wordplay is not the only strategy by which the Egyptian interpreters decoded enigmatic dreams, it certainly is one of the most prevalent, and it brings us closest, as it did in a Mesopotamian context, to seeing how the process of dream interpretation fits within a social and mechanical context of performative praxis.”


Copulating with a female cerboa: bad; the passing of a judgement against him.
Drinking warm beer: bad; it means suffering will come upon him.
Eating ox flesh: good; it means something will accrue to him.
Munching a cucumber: bad; it means words will arise with him on his being met.

(Chester Beatty collection, III recto 7:1–6)\textsuperscript{189}

As is clear even in the above few examples, the relation between the dream symbol and the corresponding omen is often not readily obvious to the contemporary English reader. Husser comments that even if we can ascertain basic principles, “we notice that they are not applied systematically.”\textsuperscript{190}

Noegel’s work on punning provides a method to understanding the otherwise seemingly random association between many dream symbols and their corresponding omen interpretations. Noegel observes the pattern of punning in Egyptian omen lists, in the likeness of Mesopotamian punning. Here are three examples:

If a man has a dream in which he peels off his finger nail (\textit{be’ek}). Bad omen.
The work (\textit{be’ek}) of his hands will be seized.

If a man has a dream in which he offers incense (\textit{sntr}) to the god. Bad omen.
The rage of the god (\textit{ntr}) is against him (i.e., he is incensed!).

If a man has a dream in which he uncovers (\textit{kf’w}) his derriere (\textit{phwy}). Bad omen.
He will come to an end (\textit{kf’w phwy}).\textsuperscript{191}

In light of Noegel’s observations of punning techniques, these omen lists need no longer be considered random.

Like Mesopotamian dream-related rituals, the ancient Egyptians had a variety of rituals. There were incubation rituals for the purpose of obtaining a dream.

To procure dreams: Take a clean linen bag and write upon it the names given below. Fold it up and make it into a lamp-wick, and set it alight, pouring pure oil over it. The word to be written is this: “Armiuth, Lailamchoûch, Arsenophrephren, Phtha, Archentechtha.” Then in the evening, when you are going to bed, which you must do without touching food, do thus. Approach the lamp

\textsuperscript{189} Translation from Gardiner, \textit{Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum}, 11–18.
\textsuperscript{190} Husser, \textit{Dreams and Dream Narratives}, 68. Husser did not observe any divinatory system of interpretation, contra Noegel.
and repeat seven times the formula given below: then extinguish it and lie down to sleep. The
formula is this: “Sashmu…the Aeon, the Thunderer, Thou that hast swallowed the snake and dost
exhaust the moon, and dost raise up the orb of the sun in his season, Chthetho is thy name; I
require, O lord of the gods, Seth, Chreps, give me the information that I desire.”

Rituals for ridding the dreamer of the enigma of the dream included binding, smashing, piercing,
burning, overturning and burying items, “but each of these also involved the recitation of
incantations, the application of writing...the primary element uniting all acts of performative
praxis in ancient Egypt was the word.”

The Egyptian dream manual also had healing purposes. “Because Chester Beatty III is written in
the tradition of the Egyptian medical texts, the prediction is the equivalent to a medical
diagnosis.” Like the Hittites, the Egyptians developed various rituals and practices that
describe how to induce healing dreams. This passage from the first century BCE demonstrates
how Isis brings healing to individuals by magic through dreams:

As for Isis, the Egyptians say that she was the discoverer of many health giving drugs and was
greatly versed in the science of healing; consequently, now that she has attained immortality, she
finds her greatest delight in the healing of mankind and gives aid in their sleep to those who call
upon her, plainly manifesting both her very presence and her beneficence towards men who ask
her help. In proof of this, as they say, they advance not legends, as the Greeks do, but manifest
facts; for practically the entire inhabited world is their witness, in that it eagerly contributes to the
honours of Isis because she manifests herself in healings. For standing above the sick in their sleep
she gives them aid for their diseases and works remarkable cures upon such as submit themselves
to her; and many who have been despaired of by their physicians because of the difficult nature of
their malady are restored to health by her, while numbers who have altogether lost the use of their
eyes or of some other part of their body, whenever they turn for help to this goddess, are restored
to their previous condition. (Diodorus Siculus 1.25)

192 British Museum Papyrus, no. 122, lines 64ff and 359ff (quoted in Wallis Budge, Egyptian Magic
193 Noegel, Nocturnal Ciphers, 92.
in Pharaonic Egypt: The Bible and Christianity, ed. Sarah Israelit-Groll, (Jerusalem: Magnes Press,
1985), 73.
Ancient Egyptian dream literature differed from Mesopotamian dream literature in that it did not create a god of dreams or a divine being responsible for protecting the sleeper from nightmares; nor did they incorporate dreams into their myths.\(^{196}\)

As we can expect from other ancient Near Eastern dream texts, Egyptian dream reports preserved focus on those related to royalty. There are three main themes among these reports: (1) the announcement of victory, (2) a request to look after a sanctuary or a statue, and/or (3) the promise of kingship.\(^{197}\) One dream is particularly well-preserved and illustrates elements common to ancient Egyptian dream reports. This dream report is the dream of a royalty and contains affirmations from a divine being that celebrates the royalty:

One of these days it happened that the King’s son Thut-mose came on an excursion at noon time. Then he rested in the shadow of this great god. Sleep took hold of him, slumbering at the time when the sun was at (its) peak. He found the majesty of this august god speaking with his one mouth, as a father speaks to his son, saying:

“See me, look at me, my son, Thut-mose! I am thy father, Harmakhis-Khepri-Re-Atum. I shall give thee my kingdom upon the earth at the head of the living. Thou shalt wear the southern crown and the northern crown on the thrown of Geb, the crown prince (of the gods). Thine is the land in its length and its breadth, that which the Eye of the All-Lord illumines. Provisions are thine from the midst of the Two Lands and the great tribute of every foreign country. The time is long in years that my face has been toward thee and my heart has been toward thee and thou hast been mine. Behold, my state was like (that of) one who is in need, and my whole body was going to pieces. The sands of the desert, that upon which I had been, were encroaching upon me; (but) I waited to let thee do what was in my heart, (for) I knew that thou are my son and my protector. Approach thou! Behold, I am with thee; I am thy guide.”

When he had finished these words, then this king’s son awoke, because he had heard these [words…] and he understood the speech of this god.\(^{198}\)

The exaltation and elevation of the royalty is easily perceived, as is the legitimizing of his taking the kingdom. Here, as in many other ancient Egyptian dreams, interpretation for comprehending its meaning is not required.

We may observe, then, that ancient Egyptian dream texts were centred on two types of dream writings. First, omens lists were established to understand the dreams of ordinary people and enable the dreamers to respond through magic rituals to dispel the danger of their dreams.


\(^{197}\) Husser, *Dreams and Dream Narratives*, 61.

\(^{198}\) Translation from *ANET*, 449.
Second, dream reports were used to promote the status of royalty, similar to writings of other ancient Near Eastern dream reports that exalt the royal member.

2.1.5 Syro-Phoenicia: Ugaritic and Aramea

The limited dream report texts available from Syro-Phoenicia allow for only a few remarks. The dream texts include those of Ugarit from the Canaanite world of the Late Bronze age and Deir ‘Alla from the Arameans during the 8th century BCE. The dream literature of the Ugarit reveals almost no divinatory texts. There are certainly not enough dream texts for a significant comparison to ancient Israelite dream texts.

One Ugaritic dream text available is that of El in the myth Baal and Mot:

For perished is the Prince, Lord of the earth!
But if Valiant Baal should be alive,
And if the Prince, Lord of the earth should exist
In a dream of the Compassionate, the god of mercy,
In a vision of the Creator of Creatures,
Let the skies rain oil,
Let the wadis run with honey
And I shall know that Valiant Baal is alive,
That the Prince, Lord of the earth exists! (KTU 1.6: iii 1–9)

This could hardly be called a dream report; it is simply a reference to a dream. It occurs in a myth, rather than a royal inscription. There is no connection to incubation or interpretation. Moreover, the dreamer is a divine being. Clearly, these are marked differences from other ancient Near Eastern dream texts.

Another dream text is a dream message from El to King Keret. In this Ugaritic epic, there is one scene that demonstrates Keret’s effort to obtain a dream and offers a prime example of

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200 Husser, Dreams and Dream Narratives, 73.

201 Husser, Dreams and Dream Narratives, 73.

incubation practices. It is a lengthy epic narrative, and because it consists of El’s directives to the king, the communication naturally takes the form of a dream:

He enters his room, he weeps,  
While repeating his words, he sheds tears,  
His tears are poured out like shekels on the ground,  
As “Pieces of five (?)” on the bed.  
Sleep overpowered him and he lay down;  
Slumber, and he curled up.  
And in his dream El came down,  
In his vision the Father of Man,  
And he drew near, asking Keret:  
“What ails Keret that he weeps,  
The gracious one, heir of El, that he groans?  
Does he desire the kingship of bull, his father  
Or dominion like the Father of Man?” (KTU 1.14: i 26–43)203

It seems likely that dream reports from Syro-Phoenicia were used in generally the same sense as elsewhere in the ANE. Royal figures experienced dreams that were given to them by divine beings. Writers used dream reports to bolster the image of the royal figure. Extant texts suggest that contrary to the Mesopotamians and Egyptians, and even the Hittite culture, the Syro-Phoenicians seem uninterested in practices of interpretation to understand their dreams and incubation to arouse dreams, unless such texts are simply lost.204

2.1.6 Ancient Israel and Old Testament Dream Literature

Broadly speaking, there are strong similarities between OT dream texts and other ancient Near Eastern dream texts and methods of dream interpretation. Upon a close examination, it is evident that the concept of dreams and dream interpretation developed with slight variations.

Dream texts from ancient Israel include dream narratives, dream reports and teaching on dreams. The OT dream type-scene narratives are divided here into eight units.205 God comes to Abimelech in a dream and warns him that he is a dead man because the woman he has taken is married (Gn 20:1–21:7). At Bethel, Jacob has a dream of heaven during which YHWH affirms several promises to him (Gn 28:10–22). Jacob claims to have a dream of flocks in which the

203 Translation from Wyatt, Religious Texts from Ugarit, 183–184.

204 Sasson, “Mari Dreams,” 283, notes, “it is probably due to an accident of discovery that the Mari archives have not, as yet, provided us with letters which testify to the critical ability of an expert Mari dream interpreter.”

205 For a full discussion of each OT dream type-scene, see section 3.3.
angel of God instructs him to leave Laban’s land, and Laban has a dream in which God warns him not to speak good or ill to Jacob (Gn 31:1–55). Joseph describes two dreams, one is an image of sheaves and one is an image of the sun, moon and stars (Gn 37:1–11). An Egyptian cupbearer dreams of a grapevine and an Egyptian baker dreams of three baskets of bread (Gn 40:1–23). Pharaoh has a dream of cows and then a dream of ears of grain (Gn 41:1–40). Gideon overhears the dream of the Midianite soldier (Jdg 7:8–23). YHWH appears to Solomon in a dream and grants him a discerning mind, along with riches and honour (1 Kgs 3:5–15).

In addition to the dream narratives listed above, there are three dream reports in Daniel (Nebuchadnezzar’s two dreams and Daniel’s dream). Other texts in the OT briefly teach about dreaming or make a reference to dreams in a general sense. There are teachings about true and false dreamers (Dt 13:1–5; Jer 23:25–32, 27:9, 29:8–9; Zec 10:2), dreams associated with fear (Jb 7:13–14), references to God choosing to speak or not speak by dreams and the purpose of doing so (Nm 12:6; 1 Sm 28:6, 15; Jb 33:13–18; Jl 2:28), references to having a dream in a general sense (Eccl 5:2–7; Ps 126:1–3; Is 29:7–8; Dn 1:17, 5:12) and discussion of the fleeting nature of dreams (Jb 20:4–9; Ps 73:18–20).

Consistent with other ancient Near Eastern thought, OT dreams are conceived as being given by a divine being. In the case of ancient Israel, dreams come exclusively from the monotheistic Israelite deity. God speaking directly to the dreamer is a characteristic of the narratives, and the narrator frequently attests that the dream is from God. Numbers 12:6 states, “Hear now my words: If there is a prophet among you, I, YHWH, will make myself known to him in a vision; I will speak with him in a dream.” Joel 2:28 prophesies of a future day when YHWH’s spirit will bring about dreams: “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your elders shall dream dreams, and your young will see visions.”

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206 God came and spoke to Abimelech (Gn 20:3ff), YHWH stood above Jacob and spoke (Gn 28:13), God came and spoke to Laban (Gn 31:24), God appeared and spoke to Solomon (1 Kgs 3:5).
Though dreams come from God, sometimes God may choose not to give a dream.\textsuperscript{207} When Saul suffers a time of distress, he calls upon YHWH in vain. The narrator informs us, “When Saul inquired of YHWH, YHWH did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim, or by prophets” (1 Sm 28:6). Later in the text, Saul inquires of the dead spirit of Samuel and confesses, “I am greatly distressed, for the Philistines are waging war against me, and God has departed from me and no longer answers, neither by prophets or by dreams” (1 Sm 28:15).

Fear is often associated with dreams in the OT. The response of fear to a dream from God is a characteristic of the biblical dream type-scene.\textsuperscript{208} Job also laments the terror he endures from the dreams—which he attributes to coming from YHWH. In his distress, Job seeks physical rest and yet laments,

\begin{verbatim}
When I say, “My bed will comfort me, 
my couch will ease my complaint,”
then you scare me with dreams 
and terrify me with visions. (Job 7:13–14)
\end{verbatim}

Elihu claims that God answers humanity, even though the individual may not perceive it. He confirms the terrifying effect of the dreams God gives, though he reasons that God does not give frightening dreams to prolong the dreamers’ distress but to warn them against sin:

\begin{verbatim}
Why do you complain against him, 
that he will give an account of all his doings?
For God speaks once or twice, 
though none perceives it.
In a dream, in a vision of the night, 
when sleep falls on men, 
while they slumber in their beds, 
then he opens the ears of men 
and terrifies them with warnings,\textsuperscript{209} that he may turn man away from his conduct 
and keep him away from pride; 
he keeps his soul back from the pit, 
his life from passing over into Sheol. (Job 33:13–18)
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{207} For a discussion on incubation practices and potential OT references to incubation practices, see comments in sections 3.3.2.1 and 3.3.8.1. For an example from the ANE of a nobleman who experiences increasing bad fortune and seeks a dream in vain, see Poem of the Righteous Sufferer II.

\textsuperscript{208} For a detailed discussion of fear in the OT dream narratives, see section 3.2.

\textsuperscript{209} The Masoretic Text is יָחְתֹּ וּבְמֹסָרָם (and seals their bonds). The LXX, Aquila, and the Syriac have “terrifies” for the verb by an amendment of the text to יְחִתֵּם. The passage indicates that God reveals people’s errant ways by terrifying dreams.
Ecclesiastes seems to suggest (1) dreams come when there is too much burdensome activity and (2) pride follows many dreams: “Let your words be few. For the dream comes by excessive responsibility, and the voice of a fool by many words...Why should God be angry because of your voice and destroy the work of your hands? For in many dreams and many words is emptiness, but fear God” (5:2–7). Oppenheim relates this passage to an Akkadian text: “Remove woe and anxiety from your heart (literally: from your side), woe and anxiety create (only bad) dreams!”

In OT dream narratives, dreams from God are accepted by the dreamer and the narrator as truth. However, other Scriptures refer to false dreams and false dreamers. Deuteronomy 13:1–5 warns against dreamers who interpret their dreams with a message that instructs the people to worship other gods. Such dreamers are false and deceptive, and the people are warned not to heed the words of the dreaming false prophet. Moreover, they are to put the dreamer of dreams to death and in doing so purge the evil from their midst. Jeremiah picks up this theme in a report of YHWH’s speech:

> “I have heard what the prophets said who prophesy falsely in my name, saying, ‘I had a dream, I had a dream!’ How long will this be in the hearts of the prophets who prophesy falsely, even prophets of deceptive hearts, who intend to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell to one another... Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully... Behold, I am against those who prophesy false dreams,” declares YHWH, “...I did not send them.” (Jer 23:25–32)

This is not a criticism of the use of dreams and dream interpretation as a method of prophesying but a polemic against the falsifying of dream interpretation. It is the element of deception that upsets YHWH. A similar warning against false dream interpreters is given in Jeremiah 27:9–10. Once again, dream interpretation itself is not condemned—just the misuse of it. Jeremiah confirms that YHWH does not send deceptive diviners and false dream interpreters to the people.

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211 For the detailed discussion of this feature in the OT dream narratives, see section 3.2.

212 Jeremiah later repeats this message, declaring that YHWH did not send the false dreamers and warning the people not to listen their dreams; “Thus says the YHWH of hosts, God of Israel, ‘Do not let your prophets who are in your midst or your diviners deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams which they dream’” (29:8–9).

The fleeting nature of dreams is referenced by Zophar, who compares the exaltation of wicked men to a dream that comes and goes and is not remembered:

Do you know this from old,
from the establishment of man on earth,
that the triumphing of the wicked is short,
and the joy of the godless is temporary?
Though his height reaches the heavens,
and his head touches the clouds,
like his own refuse he will perish forever;
those who have seen him will say, “Where is he?”
Like a dream he will fly away and they cannot find him;
he will be chased away like a vision of the night.
The eye that saw him will no more,
and his place will no longer behold him. (Job 20:4–9)

Psalm 73 presents a related passage. The composer takes note of the prosperity of the wicked. The wicked seem to have a life of ease and wealth, even though they mock God. But then the psalmist realizes the end of such wicked people and concludes,

Surely you set them in slippery places;
You set them down for destruction.
How they are destroyed in a moment,
Utterly swept away terrors,
Like a dream when one awakes,
O Lord, when you are aroused,
you will despise their image. (Ps 73:18–20)

Just like a dream is fleeting, so is the seeming prosperity and trouble-free existence of the wicked.214

Dreams were perceived as both a positive and negative phenomenon. In OT narratives, dreams convey either divine promise or divine warning, and some dreams communicate both at once.215 Dream messages in the narratives are generally positive in that they produce a good outcome for the dreamer, even if the message is one of warning. Indeed, that the dreamer has received a dream is itself positive, for God has communicated a divine message to the dreamer (in contrast to Saul, who is denied a dream). The message discloses a reality that enables the dreamer to act to prevent an evil future from occurring. In the ANE, the dreamer fulfills rituals to prevent the evil future from befalling him or her. However, in OT dream narratives the dreamer can take

215 For example, in Genesis 20:7, God warns Abimelech that if he returns Sarah he will live, but if he does not he will die. For a detailed discussion of this passage and the theme of divine promise or warning in the dream type-scene narratives, see section 3.3.1.
practical steps to prevent the evil future, such as Abimelech, who returns Sarah, and Laban, who chooses not to harm Jacob.

The psalmist also draws upon the positive element of dreaming to describe the joy experienced by restored Zion:

> When YHWH brought back the captives of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue joyful. Then they said among the nations, “YHWH has done great things for them.” YHWH has done great things for us; we are glad. (Ps 126:1–3)

There is an OT text that refers to the negative aspects of dreaming. Isaiah notes the aspect of dreaming whereby the dreamer has a positive experience in the dream, only to awake to a harsh reality. In lamenting the siege of Jerusalem, Isaiah comments,

> The multitude of all the nations that wage war against Ariel, even all who wage war against her and her stronghold and who distress her, will be like a dream, a vision of the night. It will be as when a hungry man dreams, and behold, he is eating but he awakes with his soul not satisfied, or when a thirsty man dreams, and behold, he is drinking but he awakes, behold, he is faint, and his soul longing. Thus will become the multitude of all the nations waging war against Mount Zion. (Is 29:7–8)

Like many other texts from the ANE, the OT contains dream communications that require no interpretation. In such dreams, the meaning of the dream is evident and immediately understood by the dreamer. For example, the dream message that Abimelech receives is straightforward: “Behold, you are dead on account of the woman/wife who you have taken for she is a wife of a man...Now then, return the wife of the man for he is a prophet and he will pray for you and you will live, but if you do not return her know that you will certainly die—you and all that is yours” (Gn 20:3...7). Similarly, the message to Laban is clear and pointed: “Beware of yourself lest you speak with Jacob good nor evil” (Gn 31:24).

The dream of the Midianite soldier is also interpreted without the aid of a professional diviner. The Midianite’s comrade immediately understands the meaning of the dream, and Gideon accepts the interpretation as true, immediately acting upon it.

> And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the people of the East were lying [斝姦] in the valley like locusts in abundance, and their camels were without number, as numerous as the sand
on the seashore. Then Gideon came, and behold, a man was telling a dream to his friend. And he said, “Behold, I dreamed a dream, and behold, a moldy loaf of barley [לחם שערים] turned [пал] into the camp [מחנה] of Midian [מדין] and came upon the tent [אהל] and struck it [כהה] so that it fell [מתהפך] and overturned it [יהפכהו] upside down, so that the tent [אהל] was fallen [ונפל].” And his friend answered and said, “This is none other than the sword [חרב] of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given into his hand Midian [מדין] and all the camp [מחנה].” And it happened when Gideon heard the accounting [‘writing’] of the dream and its interpretation [שברו], he worshipped; and he returned to the camp of Israel and said, “Arise, for YHWH has given into your hand the camp of Midian.” (Jdg 7:1–15)

Even though the Midianite’s soldier’s friend is not a professional, the interpretation is still based on punning.216 The moldy loaf [לחם] is associated with terrifying news and death in other OT passages. The loaf [לחם] is the root for loaf and war, as in the reference to fighting in Judges 5:8. Just as the loaf turns [_pal] into the camp, so it overturns [יהפכהו] the camp. The injured party is the Midianite (מדין) camp. The loaf strikes (כהה) the tent; Gideon strikes Midian (מדין, Jdg 6:16, 8:11). Midianites and Amalekites lay (כמות) in the valley (Jdg 7:12); the narrator confirms that many soldiers were felled (fell, Jdg 8:10). Gideon hears the interpretation (חרב), the Israelite men smash (חרב) their jars and cry out “A sword [חרב] for YHWH and for Gideon” (Jdg 7:20), and the Midianites attack each other by the sword (חרב, Jdg 7:22). Finally, the tent (אהל) is attacked in the dream, and Gideon successfully ambushes the dwellers of tents (אהל, Jdg 8:11).

Punning plays a role in the OT similar to in ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian dream texts.217 The narrator used wordplay as a vehicle for dream interpretation. Various techniques of wordplay are used to draw a connection between the dream report and the dream interpretation.

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216 Noegel, Nocturnal Ciphers, 141–46. For a full discussion of the punning in this passage, see section 3.3.7.

217 For a discussion on the employment of puns as a vehicle of performative power, see Noegel, Nocturnal Ciphers, 123–129.

By way of example, Noegel demonstrates the use of puns in Jeremiah 51:36–57 and concludes, “The combined impact of these prophetic puns, like wordplays in Mesopotamian divinatory texts, serves to transform one reality into another. In this case, the prophet’s puns quite literally transform Babylon the dragon into a lair for jackals, and its sea waves into wasteland rubble. The nations shall no longer ‘flow’ to Babylon, because Yahweh has transformed Babylon’s wealth into a wasteland. Such reversal fits well with William Holladay’s observation on the passage’s mythological context: ‘There is an irony in that whereas in the Babylonian myth Bel is the conqueror of the chaotic waters, here it is Yahweh who is ultimate conqueror over those waters.’...Thus, just as Jeremiah’s prophecy reverses letters, Yahweh reverses Babylon’s fortunes. The latter is achieved through the former. As the Mesopotamian divinatory parallels suggestion, this lingual manipulation represents more than literary and rhetorical style—it is the very mantic means by which divine judgement is enacted. It is the power of words realized” (215–27). See also William Holladay, A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 26–52 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 429.
More than a function of rhetoric and style, biblical punning is a performative divinatory hermeneia informed by a religious worldview in which the divine principle of lex talionis is mediated through the spoken and written word. Noegel draws attention to the puns in the dreams of the cupbearer, baker, Pharaoh, Gideon, Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel, and the writing on the wall. For example, the words used to describe Nebuchadnezzar’s dream are the foundation for Daniel’s interpretation. The head (ראשׁ) of the statue is interpreted as the head (ראשׁ) of his kingdom; the iron and clay that is mixed (מערב, Dn 2:31–45).

Joseph’s dreams are interpreted, but not by a professional diviner. However, Pirson suggests that the interpretation of Joseph’s dream was incorrect on several points. It would seem that God can give a dream, but the dreamer may not immediately understand its meaning. It is not until later, Genesis 42:9, that Joseph “remembered the dreams which he had dreamed.” Husser suggests that he only understood the full meaning of his dreams at this point of the story.

Other dreams in the OT require interpretation. Dream interpretation is presented as a divinatory art in Zechariah 10:2. These types of dreams are not self-evident to the dreamer. The cupbearer and the baker do not understand their dreams (Gn 40), and Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar also require interpretation of their dreams (Gn 41 and Dn 2, 4, 5). Even Daniel himself has dreams that require thoughtful interpretation (Dn 7:1ff).

There are numerous dream interpreters in the OT. The main two are Joseph, who is an interpreter in the Egyptian court of Pharaoh, and Daniel, who is an interpreter in the Babylonian court of Nebuchadnezzar. Other characters who act as dream interpreters are Jacob, Joseph’s family members, the Midianite soldier, Gideon, and Balaam (who is described as the equivalent of a

218 Noegel, Nocturnal Ciphers, 128.
219 Refer to Noegel, Nocturnal Ciphers, 147–150, for a full commentary on the punning in this passage and more examples of puns.
221 Husser, Dreams and Dream Narratives, 71.

Importantly, Joseph and Daniel allocate interpretation not simply to the sphere of the wise but as originating in God. Joseph asks rhetorically, “Do not interpretations belong to God?” (Gn 40:8). Daniel also attributes interpretations to God. When the mystery of King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream is revealed to him, he blesses God (Dn 2:19ff). He declares to the king, “There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries...a great God has made known to the king what will happen” (Dn 2:28, 45). The narrator of Daniel also attributes the skill of dream interpretation to God (1:17).

Further to the superiority of YHWH in dream interpretation, the biblical dream interpretations themselves have a way of undermining the divinators and divine beings of Mesopotamia and Egypt. Al Wolter’s comment illustrates how the wordplay in Daniel 5 serves as a polemic against Babylonian astronomy:

Daniel’s interpretation of the riddle, referring as it does on three different levels to the images of the scales, alludes to a significant celestial phenomenon and by implication gives it a thoroughly anti-astrological significance. Libra is not a great god of heaven with power over the fate of nations, but rather an instrument in the hands of Daniel’s God, who uses it to weigh the nations against his standards, and to punish them if they do not measure up.223

Though the Israelite God is presented as superior in OT dream texts, the dream interpretation still depends on the human agent. Joseph attributes interpretation to God but then proceeds to provide the interpretation the cupbearer and baker seek. Cryer observes, “while the Joseph novella superficially emphasizes the superiority of the Yahweh-inspired Israelite to the court diviner, it does so in a manner explicitly derived from the tradition of that very diviner.”224 Joseph’s attribution of dream interpretation to God links not the dreams themselves but their more crucial interpretation with the divine. But more importantly, this statement places Joseph in the position of explaining the role of God to these men. When he then urges them to tell him their dreams, he assumes his own direct access to divine interpretations. Thus interpretations that are “from God” also may come from Joseph...It is only


224 Cryer, Divination in Ancient Israel, 183.
God who is the decisive acting subject of this narrative before whom Joseph remains the effaced instrument.\textsuperscript{225}

The statement may be applied to Daniel as well, who uses the context of ancient Egyptian dream interpretation to demonstrate the superiority of the Israelite God.

In the OT, some non-Israelites are not as quick to relate dream interpretation to the Israelite God. When the cupbearer later reports the interpretation to Pharaoh, he attributes the interpretation to Joseph and makes no mention of God. A similar occurrence happens with Daniel. When Daniel is brought before Belshazzar, his remarks point to Daniel’s abilities and make no mention of interpretation belonging to the Israelite God; “You are that Daniel, one of the exiles from Judah, whom the king my father brought from Judah. I have heard of you that the spirit of the gods is in you, and that light and understanding and extraordinary wisdom are found in you” (Dn 5:13–14).

Yet, once the Israelite interpreters reveal the mystery of the dreams, their divine source is recognized. It is the demonstration of Joseph’s literary skill that “places Joseph on a par with the most skilful of dream interpreters in the ancient Near East.”\textsuperscript{226} Pharaoh himself confirms that the spirit of God is within Joseph and declares, “Since God has made known to you all this, there is none as discerning and wise as you” (Gn 41:38–39). Nebuchadnezzar also acknowledges Daniel’s divine source of wisdom: “Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery” (Dn 2:47). When the writing on the wall appears, Daniel is called upon as one “in whom is the spirit of the holy gods...light and understanding and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him” (Dn 5:11, 14).

While Joseph and Daniel distinguish themselves by attributing the ability to interpret dreams to God, the mechanism they use to interpret the dream message is aligned with Mesopotamian dream interpretation (see remarks on punning below). Old Testament texts suggest, then, that God gives wisdom, understanding and the ability to decipher the linguistics of the text to the interpreter and this divine gift enables the interpreter to know the meaning of the dream.\textsuperscript{227} We


\textsuperscript{226} Noegel,\textit{ Nocturnal Ciphers}, 140.

\textsuperscript{227} Noegel,\textit{ Nocturnal Ciphers}, 181–82, states, “Like the mantics of Mesopotamia, Mari, Egypt, and Ugarit, the Israelite oneirocritics [interpreters] were a literate lot, familiar with mantic traditions, and capable of employing the illocutionary power that literacy provided.”
may conclude that the writers of the OT themselves “were both knowledgeable about divination and able to adapt it in literary contexts in a sophisticated manner.”

Both Joseph and Daniel are characterized as clever. Dream interpretation, then, was certainly not merely intuitive or inspired.

Noegel observes that in ancient Israel, like in ancient Mesopotamia, “dream interpretation was a deductive process, one that depended on a close examination of words, both spoken and written.” Numbers 12:6–8 draws an association between dreams and riddles, hinting at the need for dreams to be interpreted:

Hear now my words: If there is a prophet among you, I, YHWH, will make myself known to him in a vision, I will speak to him in a dream. Not so, with my servant Moses, in all my house he is faithful. Mouth to mouth I speak with him, clearly and not in darkness.

Noegel understands this passage to suggest “the Israelites, like the Mesopotamians, understood enigmatic dreams as divine puzzles, and the process of interpretation as one demanding linguistic skill.”

Conceptually, the word was a powerful force in ancient Israel, as it was throughout the ANE. Noegel perceives the influence of three Mesopotamian concepts of language upon the OT text: “The first is a socio-religious conception of deity as judge. The second is a belief in the performative power of words...The third conceptual element shared is the productive legal and

231 Durand, “Les prophéties des texts de Mari,” 130–31, notes that punster dream interpreters at Mari were called ḫayyādum (riddlers).
232 Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 121. See also Proverbs 1:5–6: “Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the understanding acquire counsel, to understand a proverb and an interpretation, the words of the wise and their riddles.”
233 Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 121: “the Israelites also shared with the Mesopotamians a similar conceptual framework for the spoken and written word.”
literary principle of *lex talionis*. Gerhard von Rad makes an observation about ancient Israel that was also at work in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt: “Only when it is expressed, only when it is told, does the prophecy contained in the dream become potent.” One indication of the power of the written word is the necessity to write down the dream before it can be interpreted. Noegel draws attention to this point: “In some cases, the connections between the words used to convey the dream and the interpretations they are given are based on orthographic puns, implying that the interpreter, whether Joseph, Gideon, or Daniel, had to visualize the word in written form in order to draw the connection.” We find this made explicit in Daniel 5:15–16, where King Belshazzar states,

> Now the wise, the enchanters, were brought before me to read this writing and make its interpretation known to me, but they could not show the interpretation of the message. But I have personally heard that you are able to give interpretations and solve difficulties. Now if you are able to read the writing and make its interpretation known to me, you will be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck and will be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Again, in Daniel 7:1, Daniel writes down his dream before he gives its interpretation. Elihu’s perception of dreams in Job 33:13–18 highlights the element of listening and understanding as well. The passage draws attention to God’s role in dream interpretation by commenting that God opens the ears of the dreamer so that they may hear the message. Pharaoh remarks that Daniel, quite amazingly, can *hear* the dream and interpret it; “I have dreamed a dream, but no one can interpret it; and I have heard it said about you that you hear a dream and can interpret it” (Gn 41:15). Normally, the dream interpreter would need to *read* the dream message because the interpretation depended on the written word. Pharaoh is impressed by Joseph’s ability to hear the message yet understand its meaning.

The influence of ancient Mesopotamia on ancient Israel is also reflected in the power that the dream interpreter wielded. In the case of Joseph, Pharaoh acknowledges Joseph’s discernment

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237 Other examples of listening to dreams include Genesis 41:15, Judges 7:12–15, Job 33:155–17 and Jeremiah 29:8.
and understanding and gives him authority over all of Egypt, charge of his signet ring and public recognition, making him second only to Pharaoh himself (Gn 41:37–45). Daniel is rewarded with great honour and gifts and made ruler over the province of Babylon and chief prefect over the wise of Babylon when he interprets Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams and similarly when he interprets the writing on the wall for Belshazzar (Dn 2:46–28, 5:29–31).

Moreover, these two interpreters possess power by the very act of their interpreting. Note the cupbearer’s description of Joseph’s interpretation: “he interpreted our dreams for us, to each one he interpreted according to his own dream. And just as he interpreted for us, so it happened. He restored me to my office, and he hanged [the baker]” (Gn 41:12–13). Later exegetes and commentators have sought to amend the text.238 Noegel comments, “emendations are unwarranted if we recall the role of dream interpreters as wielders of fate.”239 Similarly, it may be said of Daniel that he “invents fate by reinscribing the inscription into a new narrative” in Daniel 5.240 There is a subtle difference between the performative power of dream interpretation exhibited in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt and that of ancient Israel:

In Mesopotamia and Egypt, performative power was centred in the divine script, and was activated by the professional during the processes of writing and speaking. Israel inclined toward oral modes of performative power, which naturally centred the locus of power more firmly on the speaker.241

Ancient Israel did not preserve any dream books or omen lists. Dream interpretation was not a systematic process but seems to have been done on an individual, dream-by-dream basis, inspired by YHWH. Thus, there are no ritual lists containing practices to dispel the danger of dreams.

Whether or not the Bible contains instances of incubation practices is debated.242 Some scholars argue that Jacob at Bethel (Gn 28) and Solomon at Gibeon (1 Kgs 3) are examples of

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238 See Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 176–77. Several Targums want to translate this “I was restored;” Rashi and BHS interpret the “he” as Pharaoh.
239 Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 177. It may be noted that it is the cupbearer, not the biblical narrator, who attributes this power to Joseph.
incubation. However, one may note Jacob’s surprise at the dream and the effort of the narrator to emphasize the anonymity of the place. Some argue that an incubation scene does not necessitate the dreamer’s intentional desire for a dream, but this defies the definition of an incubation practice (intentionally acting in such a way as to obtain a dream). Indeed, Gnuse comments, “magical practices for inducing dreams, common among the Egyptians, are lacking in Israel, for such divination would only yield false dreams.”

One feature of ancient Israelite dream texts that is unique in the ANE is the highly developed dream type-scene within dream narratives. Whereas dream narratives of surrounding ancient Near Eastern cultures do not follow any general pattern, OT narratives have a number of distinct characteristics.

Old Testament dream texts include dream reports of both royalty and commoners. This is unique among the dream literature of the ANE. The purpose of royalty dream reports is not necessarily for royal propaganda or aggrandizement. Indeed, the purpose of most dream texts is to reveal a present reality to the dreamer and to foretell upcoming events, which the dreamer may then prepare for. There are no female dreamers or dream interpreters recorded in the OT. Further,

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242 Ehrlich, Der Traum im Alten Testament, perceived the following passages as incubation: Genesis 28, 15, 46; 1 Samuel 3; and Pss 4, 63. Gnuse, Dream Theophany of Samuel, 38, argues for 1 Samuel 3 as an incubation narrative but also argues, “The OT accounts lack a clear reference to any incubation procedure.” If the text did indicate any incubation practice it would be Genesis 15, 28, 46:1–4, 1 Samuel 3 and 1 Kings 3, but Gnuse comments that these texts are not incubation dreams according to the ancient Near Eastern model. In contrast, Kim, Incubation as a Type-scene, proposes a biblical incubation type-scene.

243 For a detailed discussion, see sections 3.3.2.1 and 3.3.8.1

244 Gnuse, Dream Theophany of Samuel, 36, states, “The category of unintentional incubation dreams may be our own modern creation imposed upon brief literary accounts before us. It is difficult to call any dream an incubation dream when it lacks the deliberate intent of the dream and any preparation.” Gnuse has since changed his view and now accepts the category of unintentional incubation (Dreams and Dream Reports, 234).

245 Gnuse, Dream Theophany of Samuel, 61.

246 Although they do contain the general commonalities noted above, such as the divine being comes and stands at the head of the dreamer, the bed chamber is described and the dreamer is male.

247 For a full description of the dream type-scene characteristics, see section 3.2.

248 Flannery-Dailey, Dreamers, Scribes, and Priests, 47, comments, “the absence of women in the biblical dream traditions is all the more noteworthy when one considers that message dreams and dream interpretation both function to increase social power in the Bible.”
there are no otherworldly dream journeys, no dreams of living or deceased persons and no physical description of the dream-giver God of Israel.²⁴⁹

In summary, then, ancient Israel preserved dream texts in the form of a type-scene in OT narratives and in references throughout the OT, along with several dream reports in Daniel. Dreams were given by the monotheistic deity, who on occasion chose not to give a dream. Often dreams in the biblical text are associated with fear. Dreams from God were accepted as truth, but deceptive diviners told false dreams. The nature of dreams was thought to be fleeting. Dreams were perceived as both a positive and negative phenomenon. There were dreams that did not require an interpretation or the aid of a professional diviner, while some dreams did require a professional diviner to provide an interpretation. Dream interpretation is chiefly associated with Joseph and Daniel. Though the Israelite God is presented as superior in dream texts, the dream interpretation still depends on the human agent to skilfully apply the ancient Near Eastern punning mechanism to the dream. As was common through the ANE, interpreters wielded power through their manipulation of the word. Whether the OT records incubation practices in ancient Israel is debatable, and the purpose of dream reports varies from the predominant trends of ancient Near Eastern dream texts.

2.2 Homeric Dream Literature and Type-Scene

Traditionally, Homer is considered the author of the Iliad and the Odyssey. It is generally accepted that he lived in the 7th or 8th century BCE, or as early as the 12th century BCE. His poetry is widely considered to originate as oral stories with a long tradition that provided a well-developed formulaic system.

Homeric dream passages are related to ancient Near Eastern dream texts in several key ways.²⁵⁰ Primarily, Homeric dream passages are given by divine beings and are used as a means of divine

²⁴⁹ Flannery-Dailey, Dreamers, Scribes, and Priests, 56.
communication. One god may send the dream message, usually Zeus or Athena, while a different divine being delivers it to the dreamer. The divine being who delivers the message always takes the form of a being that the dreamer recognizes. The dream usually includes speech by the divine being, though Penelope provides a simple dream report of an image (Odyssey 19.508–553). The dreamer is generally passive.

Dream reports often contain elements that are common in the ANE. In the dream, the dream-giver comes to the sleeping dreamer during the night and stands at the head of the dreamer’s bed. Typically, the bed chamber and the events leading up to the dream experience are described. Only royal or important characters have dreams. Like elsewhere in the ANE, the word “to see” is used to describe the dream experience, which supports the perception of dreams as external. Dreams have an elusive quality (Odyssey 11.150–224). There is also an element of power related to the dreams, as dream messages are used to inspire the actions of the dreamers, even to their peril. All of these elements suggest that at some stage of its history the Greek epic tradition has been influenced by contact with the ancient Near Eastern tradition. One key commonality between Homeric and ancient Near Eastern dream texts is the use of the punning hermeneutic that is characteristic of ancient Near Eastern divinatory and literary texts. Noegel notes that a


marked divergence from ancient Near Eastern punning is that Homeric punning is based on sound (paronomastic and homonymic punning).  

Other elements in Homeric dream literature demonstrate a divergence from typical ancient Near Eastern dream literature patterns. Many dreams are interpreted, but not necessarily by a professional diviner. Still, dream interpreters are referred to and named (Iliad 1.53–100, 5:84–165). There is a distinct lack of purification rituals and omen lists. Dreams can be true or can be used to mislead the dreamer. Penelope comments,

> Dreams are things hard to interpret, hopeless to puzzle out, and people find that not all of them end in anything. There are two gates through which the insubstantial dreams issue. One pair of gates is made of horn, and one of ivory. Those of the dreams which issue through the gate of sawn ivory, these are deceptive dreams, their message is never accomplished. (Odyssey 19.560–65)  

Generally, the dreamer does not experience fear related to the dream.  

Finally, incubation does not play a major role in Homeric literature; dreams are certainly desired as a divine communication but characters do not make much effort to receive them.

The most distinguishing features of Homeric dream texts is that they are presented in a well-developed literary form much like OT narratives and they contain a dream type-scene. Generally, dream narratives move the plot forward and foreshadow future events. A character may verbalize the dream verbatim (Iliad 2.48–108). Upon hearing the dream, the characters usually respond with action. Dreams generally have a positive message of hope or false hope, or they are terrifying and portend a bad future.

From the earliest considerations of type-scenes, the Homeric dream type-scene has been discussed. Walter Arend first coined the term die typischen Scenen (the type-scene) in a short book in which he presented several type-scenes in the Iliad and Odyssey, including the dream type-scene, in basic form: (1) motif of night and sleep, (2) visitant (dream-giver) sets out, (3)

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254 Noegel, Nocturnal Ciphers, 219.
256 Husser, Dreams and Dream Narratives, 82.
257 For a more detailed discussion and history of type-scenes, see section 1.1.1.
visitant arrives, (3) visitant finds a person sleeping, (4) visitant stands above the dreamer’s head, and (5) the dreamer’s reaction and the visitant’s departure.258

David Gunn discusses the dream type-scene (under the title “supernatural visitant”) and draws attention to the uniform stylistic use of the type-scene in the Iliad and Odyssey.259 Gunn observes that the dreamer need not be asleep. His description of the dream type-scene characteristics is more precise than Arend’s:

A theme which has several instances in our texts concerns the visitation of a supernatural figure to the bedside of a hero or heroine with the purpose of imparting some information, usually such as to provide some essential motivation for the further action of the narrative Odyssey 4.787–481, 6.15–47, 15.1–43, 20.24–55, and Iliad 2.18–36, 23–59–100, 24.628–689.

We find, with a few exceptions...a common structure of elements which fit easily into the natural shape of the scene: the person to be visited lies pondering or sleeping or, in some case, has gone through both states; the visitant draws near in the likeness of someone known to the visited and stands above the latter’s head; the visitant speaks and departs, whereupon the other usually awakens or springs up, if asleep, or goes to sleep, if awake. Noticeable is the element concerning the particular likeness of the visitant.260

Alfred Heubeck also comments on the dream type-scene in his Homer commentary and notes its compositional function.261 Heubeck observes,

Characters are made to have dreams appropriate to the story, but in no way indicative of their mental states...Dreams serve to motivate new developments in the action and provide simple means for divine intervention in human affairs.262

James Morris builds upon these works and expands them extensively.263 He studied these dream narratives in far greater detail, observed their common elements and presented several type-scene characteristics. First, the dream occurs at night, and there is reference to the dreamer retiring. Second, there is a description of the dreamer. Third, reference is made to the arrival of the dream-giver. Fourth, the likeness of the dream-giver is described. Fifth, the dream-giver stands above the dreamer. Sixth, the dream-giver speaks to the dreamer. Seventh, the dream-giver

262 Heubeck, Hainsworth and West, Commentary on Homer’s Odyssey, 242.
departs from the dreamer. Eighth, the dreamer reacts. Ninth, dawn arises. The pattern of these characteristics is standard, but the placement of the description of the dreamer and the likeness of the dream-giver varies.\footnote{Morris, “‘Dream Scenes’ in Homer,” 39.} Morris’ analysis of Homer’s dream type-scene varies slightly from Arend’s. Morris omits the characteristic of the dreamer being asleep and includes the regular placement of the characteristics. Particularly, he analyzes the consistent and purposeful distributed patterns that the likeness and description follow. The fact that there are type-scene characteristics emphasizes the effort made by Homer to create a dream narrative more than simply a dream report.

There are seven dream narratives in the Homeric texts, three in the Iliad and four in the Odyssey.\footnote{Husser, Dreams and Dream Narratives, 79, adds to the list of dream writings the dream of Rhesus (10.494–97), but this text presents a reference to a dream rather than a dream narrative.} Each of them is briefly examined below.

### 2.2.1 Priam’s Dream

This excerpt from Priam’s dream in the Iliad highlights the characteristics of the Homeric dream type-scene. In this narrative, Hermes delivers the dream message:

> Priam and the herald who were both men of close counsel...Now the rest of the gods and men who were lords of chariots slept nightlong, with the easy bondage of slumber upon them, only sleep had not caught Hermes the kind god, who pondered now in his heart the problem of how to escort King Priam from his ships and not be seen by the devoted gate-wardens. He stood above his head and spoke a word to him, saying: “Aged sir, you can have no thought of evil from the way you sleep still among your enemies now Achilles has left you unharmed. You have ransomed now your dear son and given much for him. But the sons you left behind would give three times as much ransom for you, who are alive, were Atreus’ son Agamemnon to recognize you, and all the other Achaeans learn of you.” He spoke, and the old man was afraid, and wakened his herald...Hermes left them and went away to the height of Olympos, and dawn...scattered over all earth.” (Iliad 24.673–95)\footnote{All quotations from the Iliad are taken from Richmond Lattimore, trans., The Iliad of Homer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).}

There is a reference to the event happening at night. The dreamer, Priam, is retired and has fallen asleep. The dream-giver, Hermes, stands at the head of Priam and speaks, then departs. Priam reacts by being seized with fear and rouses the herald. Finally, the text indicates that dawn arrives. The reader can observe that Homer is presenting the dream type-scene characteristics in his typical straightforward fashion. In addition to the dream message itself, Homer demonstrates
an interest in the narrative details of the dream-giver and his thoughts, the dreamer’s environment and the awakening of the dreamer. In biblical narratives, the dream-giver’s thoughts are not revealed; God does not ponder how the dreamers should be guided.

2.2.2 Agamemnon’s Dream

In this dream, Zeus communicates to Agamemnon the instructions on how to overthrow Troy. Like Jacob’s dream at Bethel, the dream combines an auditory message with images. It is a false dream intended to lead Agamemnon astray. As such, the dream message serves as a prime example of how dreams in Homeric literature can be deceptive to the extent of intending to lead an entire army to its death. Noegel notes the parallel to ancient Mesopotamian deceptive dreams; Mesopotamian dream rituals refer to misleading (sarāru) dreams as well as obscure (ekēlu, literally “dark”) dreams.267

Zeus, the dream-giver, wonders “how he might bring honour to Achilles, and destroy many beside the ships of the Achaians. Now to his mind this thing appeared to be the best counsel, to send evil Dream to Atreus’ son Agamemnon” (Iliad 2.3–6). So Zeus sends an “evil” dream to Agamemnon with this instruction:

“Arm the flowing-haired Achaians for battle in all haste; since now you might take the wide-wayed city of the Trojans. For no longer are the gods who live on Olympos arguing the matter, since Hera forced them all over by her supplication, and evils are in store for the Trojans from Zeus...”

So he spoke and went away, and left Agamemnon there, believing things in his heart that were not to be accomplished. For he thought that on that very day he would take Priam’s city; fool, who knew nothing of all the things Zeus planned to accomplish, Zeus, who yet was minded to visit tears and sufferings on Trojans and Danaans alike in the strong encounters. (Iliad 2.28–40)

More than receiving directives, Agamemnon is also provided with the divine activities and reasoning behind the instructions. These details go beyond the scope of the divine message in biblical dream narratives. The military nature of the message is typical in ancient Near Eastern texts and is an element of the Midianite’s dream, but generally, biblical dream messages are targeted at the personal situation of the dreamers.

267 Noegel, Nocturnal Ciphers, 213; and Butler, Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams, 28.
2.2.3 Achilles’ Dream

In the dream of Achilles, a spirit of the dead Patroclus speaks. This is certainly a divergence from biblical divine messengers. Moreover, the spirit mourns his situation and desires a funeral so that his soul may depart. Unlike the OT, the dream-giver is at the mercy of the dreamer. In a quite different tone than the other Homeric dreams, Patroclus’ spirit sorrowfully speaks:

You sleep, Achilleus; you have forgotten me; but you were not careless of me when I lived, but only in death. Bury me as quickly as may be, let me pass through the gates of Hades. The souls, the images of dead men, hold me at a distance, and will not let me cross the river and mingle among them, but I wander as I am by Hades’ house of the wide gates. And I call upon you in sorrow, give me your hand; no longer shall I come back from death, once you give me my rite of burning. (Iliad 23.69–76)

This speech requires no interpretation and its transparency no doubt causes the audience to feel compassion for this dead spirit caught between life and death. Homer’s interest in the dream-giver is forefront, to the extent that the dream is primarily interested in the situation of the dream-giver rather than the dreamer. This presents a divergence from biblical dream texts, which do not include the feelings and laments of the dream-giver but rather focus on the situation of the dreamer. Achilles answers this spirit but, alas, realizes the spirit has disappeared.

2.2.4 Penelope’s Dream

In the Odyssey, Athena visits four characters in four separate dream episodes. The dream that Penelope receives comes from a spirit that Athena conjures in the likeness of a woman whom Penelope recognizes. In this dream episode, Penelope dialogues with the spirit. The spirit brings Penelope comfort and tells her not to fear: “Penelope, are you sleeping so sorrowful in the inward heart? But the gods who live at their ease do not suffer you to weep and to be troubled, since your son will have his homecoming even yet, since he has done no wrong in the god’s

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sight” (*Odyssey* 4.804–7). The directive in this dream is simply to not fear, because, as the spirit discloses, her son is in good standing with the gods and a powerful guide travels with him.

The scene of Penelope’s dream offers another example of the Homeric type-scene.\(^{269}\) First, there is a reference to the night, when evening came, and a reference to Penelope retiring. Homer indicates that Penelope lay in her bed chamber, thinking until sweet sleep came upon her. Second, there is a description of the dreamer. Penelope lay in her bedroom “fasting, she had tasted no food nor drink, only pondering...when the painless sleep came upon her and all her joints were relaxed so that she slept there reclining” (*Odyssey* 4.790–94). Third, reference is made to the arrival of the dream-giver, who “went into the bedchamber passing beside the thong of the door bar” (*Odyssey* 4.802). Fourth, the likeness of dream-giver is described as an image in the likeness of Penelope’s sister, Iphthime. Fifth, the dream-giver stands above the dreamer’s head. Sixth, the dream-giver speaks to the dreamer, a speech longer than other dreams and one that includes dialogue with Penelope. Seventh, the dream-giver departs from the dreamer. After the conversation, the dream-giver “drifted away by the bolt and the door post and out and into the blowing winds” (*Odyssey* 4.888). Eighth, the dreamer reacts in some way. Penelope wakes up with a start and her heart is comforted by the dream. Ninth, dawn arises.

Like the other dream scenes, the pattern of these characteristics is standard, appearing in the expected order, with the description of the dreamer and the likeness of the dream-giver preceding the dream itself.\(^{270}\) Kelly Bulkeley observes that Penelope’s dream is unusual in that it is the only dream that occurs “offstage” and the audience does not “see” the dream while it is happening but only hears the dreamer describe it afterward.\(^{271}\) This is like the dream report of various characters in the OT, such as Joseph, the cupbearer and the baker. Penelope does not engage the services of a professional interpreter but rather a beggar; the audience will discover later on that this is no beggar but Odysseus himself. In the ANE, the response to a dream is usually fear, whereas in this

\(^{269}\) Morris, “‘Dream Scenes’ in Homer,” 54, demonstrates that all of the dream type-scene narratives in Homer present the dream type-scene features and pattern consistently.

\(^{270}\) Morris, “‘Dream Scenes’ in Homer,” 54.

scene Penelope is not afraid, only confused, upon waking from her dream.\textsuperscript{272} Finally, Penelope does not practise any ritual purification after the dream.

One distinct difference between Penelope’s dream and those of the OT is the presentation of the dream-giver. Athena gives Penelope the dream through a spirit, rather than directly. The spirit is made to look like a woman known to Penelope. The Israelite God always gives dreams directly and does not take on the likeness of another being. As a result, the OT dream-giver is immediately recognized by the Israelite dreamers as the God of Israel.

2.2.5 Nausikaa’s Dream

A close reading of the dream episode where Athena visits the Princess Nausikaa in the *Odyssey* reveals an affinity to an OT dream narrative. This excerpt highlights the key type-scene characteristics:

Grey-eyed goddess Athene went...into the ornate chamber, in which a girl was sleeping, like the immortal goddesses for stature and beauty, Nausikaa...[Athene] came and stood above her head and spoke a word to her, likening herself to the daughter of Dymas, famed for seafaring, a girl of the same age, in whom her fancy delighted. In this likeness the gray-eyed Athene spoke to her: “Nausikaa...go on a washing tomorrow when dawn shows...you will not long stay unmarried. For already you are being courted by all the best men...”

So the gray-eyed Athene spoke and went away from her...the Dawn came, throned in splendour, and wakened the well-robed girl Nausikaa. (*Odyssey* 6.13–49)

This dream has literary connections to the narrative of Joseph’s dreams. The dream message is concerned with the future elevation of the individual dreamer and requires no interpretation. Athena discloses information to Nausikaa that prepares the reader for the following scene. Nausikaa’s immediate response is to tell her family members, including her father. A main motif in this dream passage is beautiful clothing worn by the dreamer that attracts the attention of others, similar to the attention drawn by Joseph’s beautiful cloak.

Unlike in biblical narratives, Homer describes the scene of Nausikaa’s sleeping chamber in detail. The dream is given to a female, as in other Homeric dreams, which does not occur in the OT. In the text that follows this excerpt, the father responds favourably to the dream, taking the

\textsuperscript{272} Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 219. Daniel is troubled by his dream as well (for example, see Dn 4:19; 7:15, 28).
opposite reaction of Joseph’s father, for here the fulfillment of the dream will be beneficial to Nausikaa’s father.

2.2.6 Telemachus’ Dream

When Athena visits Telemachus, her message consists of a divine warning against leaving his house and possessions unguarded, and an instruction to hurry home. She also discloses information in a warning to Telemachus:

The best men of the suitors are lying in wait, on purpose, for you in the passage between rocky Samos and Ithaka, longing to kill you, before you come back to your own country. But I think they will not achieve it. Sooner the earth will close over some one of the suitors, they who are eating away your substance. But you must keep your well-made ship away from the islands, and sail with the night, and that one of the immortals who watches over you and guards you will send a following stern wind. (Odyssey 15.28–35)

This straightforward dream message does not inspire the level of trust in the divine being as do OT narratives. Athena demonstrates more of a hope than an assurance. The OT dream-giver is more specific, and the message is stated directly and strongly. It seems that Homer is unconcerned with presenting the dream-giver idealistically. Athena reveals what she is thinking to Telemachus, which is reminiscent of Priam’s dream episode where Homer reveals that Hermes pondered how to guide king Priam (Iliad 24.679–80). This contrasts with the divine dream-giver of the OT, who is consistently presented as omniscient. Reflections of the OT dream-giver are never revealed.

2.2.7 Odysseus’ Dream

In the final Odyssey dream, sleep itself comes to Odysseus from Athena, appearing in the likeness of a woman. Athena is revealed as a powerful divine being in this episode—more like the Israelite God. She asks, “Why are you wakeful now, O most wretched of all men? Here is your house, and here is your wife in the house, and here is your son” (Odyssey 20.33–35). Like the OT character Abimelech, Odysseus enters into dialogue with the dream-giver and asks a question. In contrast to the language of the OT dream-giver, Athena focuses on herself. Her assurance to Odysseus is confident, like the ancient Israelite dream-giver: “I am a god, and through it all I keep watch over you in every endeavor of yours. And now I tell you this plainly: even though there were fifty battalions of mortal people standing around us, furious to kill in the spirit of battle, even so you could drive away their cattle and fat sheep...You will soon be out of your troubles” (Odyssey 20.45–53). Once again, the dream does not require interpretation.
2.3 Uniqueness of Old Testament Dream Literature

2.3.1 Comparison to Other Ancient Near Eastern Dream Literature

Several strong links exist between OT dream literature and that of the surrounding ANE. In both, dreams are consistently given by a divine being as a means of communication to humans. Available ancient Near Eastern dream report texts indicate a concern to preserve dreams only of important figures, whereas not all biblical dreamers are royalty. In most cases, dreams are intended to warn the dreamer of a future potentiality. The dream literature of the ANE is not influenced in any way by considerations of the dreamer’s psyche.

There is also a strong similarity in the fundamental concept of dreams. Like ancient Mesopotamians and Egyptians, ancient Israelites believed that the word was powerful. Some dreams were considered to be riddles that must be solved. Interpreters used a high level of linguistic skill to decipher the meaning of the text. This was based on the technique of wordplay, particularly punning between the dream message and its interpretation. Several OT characters were skilled in dream interpretation. As was the case for other ancient Near Eastern scribes and dream interpreters, this wielded power for OT interpreters. Noegel states, “the power invested in Near Eastern mantics as handlers of divine mysteries was activated in the process of interpretation, an act that forged the fate of the dreamer.”

Old Testament dream texts, particularly the dream narratives, also present distinctions from ancient Near Eastern dream texts. Dream narratives in the Genesis to 2 Kings corpus demonstrate the presence of a type-scene. The content of biblical dream narratives provides few details beyond the message or images of the dreams; it also lacks a dramatic introduction. Details of the dreamer’s sleep chamber, sleep behaviour and incubation practices are of little concern in biblical texts, although they do have a role in ancient Near Eastern dream literature. Incubation as a practice to intentionally induce a dream through ritual acts seems to have no role in biblical dream narratives, and there is no discussion of omens in procuring or understanding a dream and no ritual purification from dreams. This lack of incubation practice, omen lists and ritual purification prescriptions is particularly significant in consideration of the volumes of omen lists in ancient Near Eastern texts. The biblical text indicates no necessity to interpret dreams in terms

273 Noegel, Nocturnal Ciphers, 181.
of dispelling a foretold evil future by ritual means. This is a fundamental difference from other ancient Near Eastern texts in that the dreams from the Israelite God are free from inherently hazardous qualities. Because biblical dreams do not need to be deciphered in the same sense as other ancient Near Eastern texts, there are no dream interpreters who must consult lists of omens to understand the dreams. The narrator emphasizes that the ability to interpret dreams is not only based on linguistic skill but also has a divine element as a gift from God, who reveals the interpretation to chosen persons. Finally, contrary to most dream reports from the ANE whose primary intent is the aggrandizement and propaganda of the dreamer, the primary purpose of biblical dream narratives is to provide the dreamer with a divine warning or promise.

2.3.2 Comparison to Homeric Literature

Of all the ancient dream texts, Homeric dream writings bear the greatest literary resemblance to OT dream narratives. There are a number of strong similarities and revealing differences. Importantly, Homeric and OT dream narratives are written in a similar form. They both reveal a dream type-scene, although the characteristics of each type-scene are different. Generally, the situations of dreamers in Homeric and biblical narratives are negative when they receive the dream, and the message of the dream seems to address the situation, whether directly or indirectly. All the dreams seem to indicate some degree of instruction for or prediction of the future. While instruction is direct in all accounts, Homer alone may include background information into the objectives and reasoning that motivate the directives of the divine being. Homeric dream-givers are all divine beings, as in the biblical text, but they cannot always be trusted and are not always truthful. This contrasts to the ancient Israelite dream-giver, who can always be trusted to give a straightforward dream with a truthful message. In Homeric literature, the dream-giver is often in disguise, sometimes with the intent to deceive. However, in the OT, the dream-giver is never in disguise and, generally, is immediately recognized as the God of Israel. The reader learns very little of the dream-giver in the OT, but Homer reveals the thoughts, motivations and even weaknesses of various dream-givers. In the OT, the dream-giver has a minor role, while the role of the dream-giver in Homeric writings is more developed. The biblical narrator provides only the very basic setting of the dream, whereas Homer may provide details of the dreamer’s sleeping chamber, sleeping practices and how the sleeper is awakened, in addition to descriptions of the dream-givers, their entrances and exits. Like biblical dream narratives, Homeric dream narratives may or may not contain dialogue between the dreamer and
the dream-giver. In both biblical and Homeric dream texts, there is an absence of incubation and oneiromancy and the dreamers are generally developed characters who act upon the dream message.

2.3.3 Summary

Ancient Israelites recorded dreams of important figures much like the rest of the ANE. Basic elements of the ancient Near Eastern and Homeric dream literature are the same—a divine being gives a dream to an important individual as a means of divine communication, often involving a future prediction or warning and unrelated to the individual’s psyche. The important distinction of biblical dream literature is that it does not involve omens or incubation prescriptions. The ancient Israelite dream-giver communicates directly with humanity. Because OT dreams given to Israelites are straightforward, there is no need for a professional interpreter to consult omens to decipher the meaning of the dream. Dreams given to non-Israelites do require interpretation. Further, dreams do not seem to be considered as inherently dangerous—a significant difference from the perception of dreams in Israel’s neighbouring cultures. This is no doubt a reflection of the ancient Israelite understanding of God, who generally does not deceive humanity and generally tends not to bring about evil to the innocent. We find this key distinction when OT narratives are compared with Homeric writings. Despite the impressive similarities between OT and Homeric presentations of dream narratives, one major difference is the unique biblical presentation of the dream-giver as a truthful divine being that never deceives or disguises. It is with this understanding of OT dream narratives in their ancient context that the present work examines the biblical dream type-scene in detail.
Chapter 3
Dream Type-Scene Criteria, Characteristics and Narratives

This chapter focuses on the dream type-scene. The main criterion for determining a dream type-scene is stated and each dream type-scene characteristic is described. A detailed analysis and summary of each dream type-scene in the OT narrative corpus is presented, focusing on the function, presence and modification of the dream type-scene characteristics in each OT dream type-scene narrative and the conclusions that can be drawn from these observations.

3.1 Dream Type-Scene Criteria

The defining characteristic of the OT dream type-scene narratives is the presence of the term dream (חלום).274 This term differentiates dream type-scene narratives from passages that contain other forms of divine communication. The etymology behind the Hebrew root חלום is uncertain. In the Hebrew text, the verb and noun form of חלום are both used. There seems to be a relation to the meaning “strong.”275 The association with strength is attested in Syriac by ħelim (strong) and in Arabic by ḥalama (to become a man [sexually]). HALOT suggests the connection between reaching puberty and sexual dreaming.276 It may be argued then that the semantic development is “to be strong” > “to reach puberty” > “to have erotic dreams” > “to dream,” though TDOT comments that this semantic relationship seems forced.277 An alternative theory is that the different terms come from separate roots.

The root חלום is the only root used for “dream” in Arabic, Aramaic, Hebrew and Ugaritic.278 Numerous ancient Near Eastern languages indicate a semantic relationship between “dream” and “sleep.” The Akkadian word for the noun dream is šuttu from the root šittu (sleep), however the Hebrew root for sleep is yšn.279 Tabrît mûši is another Akkadian word for dream, typically used

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274 For a discussion of the root חלום throughout the OT, see section 2.1.6.
276 HALOT I:320.
278 Husser, Dreams and Dream Narratives, 75.
279 In Akkadian, like Sumerian, there is no verb “to dream.”
in poetic literature. It is taken from *burrû* (to indicate, show) and suggests a nocturnal revelation rather than a *bîru* (vision). In Sumerian, a dream is indicated by the word *ma.mû* and is related to *ù* (sleep). Hittite texts record both of these Sumerian terms in addition to the term *tešhaš* (dream or sleep), which is synonymous with *zašhai*. The Egyptian term *rswt* (dream) is written with the character representing an opened eye, indicating a state of consciousness between wakefulness and sleep.

The dream type-scene narratives are: Abimelech’s dream (Gn 20:1–21:7), Jacob’s dream at Bethel (Gn 28:10–22), Jacob’s claim to have a dream and Laban’s dream (Gn 31:1–55), Joseph’s dreams (Gn 37:1–11), the dream of the cupbearer and the dream of the baker (Gn 40:1–23), Pharaoh’s two dreams (Gn 41:1–40), the Midianite soldier’s dream (Jdg 7:8–23), and Solomon’s dream (1 Kgs 3:5–15). Many dream type-scene characteristics in a given passage occur several verses before or after the actual dream message itself. To allow a proper analysis of the text, the dream type-scene passage demarcations extend beyond the dream messages to include the opening and closing of the narrative unit. In the analysis below, the biblical text before and after dream type-scene narratives is occasionally examined when relevant.

This list omits visions (מַהֲוָה, תְּרֵוָה, חֲזָיוֹן, חָזֵית, חָזִית) and other forms of divine revelations. In the OT, visions differ from dreams in that they tend to occur during daytime rather than nighttime, the message is much longer than dream messages, the content refers to kingdoms rather than individuals and they address future events rather than immediate situations. The speaker typically announces a message of warning or promise, but does not act to prevent the portent. This lack of response and a general lack of positive outcomes in vision passages are a fundamental difference from dream narratives. Additionally, many visions utilize apocalyptic language.

Particularly, Genesis 15, viewed by some scholars as a dream narrative, is omitted. Gnuse defends Genesis 15 as a dream passage by arguing, “If the experience has all the earmarks of a

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280 Other languages have a similar semantic relationship. For example, the Arabic *nāma* (sleep) in Ethiopic is also dream.

dream, the actual use of the word is not necessary.”  

This comment is certainly warranted; however, Genesis 15 does not meet the criteria of a dream type-scene for several reasons. In addition to lacking a reference to a dream (חלום) and being labelled as a vision (מראה), there is no reference to night (לילה) or arise early (שאם). Abraham is not in a seemingly powerless situation. He does not yet have a biological heir, but in Genesis 12, God promised that Abraham would have a son. There is no initial danger or crisis for Abraham, and no rescue or deliverance takes place. Abraham does not verbalize the revelation. No character expresses an understanding of the vision. Importantly, the divine message does not introduce a narrative tension to which the vision can respond. Thus, Abraham does not directly respond to the vision or create a narrative delay. The narrative tension that is iterated by Abraham (Gn 15:2–3) is not resolved in the immediate passage. The supposed dream message (Gn 15:15-16) presents a divine warning of future enslavement that seems hopeless. Importantly, Abraham does not respond to the divine revelation in an attempt to thwart the future affliction. Dream type-scene characteristics present in Genesis 15 are: God instructs Abraham not to fear (ירא), Abraham accepts the revelation as truth from God, God speaks, there is a divine warning, the dream intensifies the narrative tension by introducing a new tension and the conclusion relates back to God. Thus, more than simply providing a modification to the dream type-scene, Genesis 15 is fundamentally different from the dream type-scene and is lacking so many of the type-scene characteristics that it should not be categorized as a dream type-scene.

Similarly, 1 Samuel 3 is also not listed as a dream type-scene in the present work. The narrator does not refer to a dream (חלום) in 1 Samuel 3. Instead, the narrator refers to the divine message as a vision (מראה, 1 Sm 3:15). Further, in contrast to the biblical dream type-scene, at the outset Samuel is not in a dangerous situation or facing a crisis and is not powerless. There is no reference to the terms night (לילה) or arise early (שאם). The divine message does not present a seemingly unlikely future but rather one that has been stated earlier in the text. In this sense, the message does not introduce a narrative tension. The message is a divine warning but offers no hope. God speaks, yet the feature of God repeatedly calling to Samuel is unlike the dream narratives. Old Testament dreamers accept the dream as truth from God, yet Samuel does not

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282 Gnuse, Dream Theophany of Samuel, 141.

283 Gnuse in particular presents this as a dream passage in Dream Theophany of Samuel. See also Oppenheim, Interpretation, 197.
even recognize that the speaker is God. Importantly, after the divine revelation, Samuel does not act to resolve the tension in the plot. Moreover, no character acts to resolve the narrative tension. The tension is only resolved when the negative prediction is fulfilled. Samuel does not need to be rescued, and no one seeks to rescue the characters who incur divine wrath. Several characteristics of the biblical dream type-scene are present in 1 Samuel 3. Samuel does verbalize the content of the divine message. His fear of telling the message to Eli indicates that Samuel understood the message. There is also a positive outcome for Samuel, although certainly not for the other characters. Finally, like in the biblical dream type-scene, the conclusion relates back to God. However, there are not enough dream type-scene characteristics in this passage for 1 Samuel 3 to be considered a dream type-scene.

Finally, the dreams in Daniel do not seem to be dream type-scenes. Although there are striking similarities to the Joseph dream type-scene—the dreamer is a descendant of Abraham thriving in a foreign court after being violently taken from his homeland, rising to prominence by interpreting the king’s dream—the narrative differs from other biblical dream type-scene narratives significantly. The narratives lack key elements of the dreamer: the setting before the dream and the response to the dream afterward, along with a lack of reference to rising early, night and fear. As a result, the tension presented by the dream messages does not find any resolution. Since neither Nebuchadnezzar nor Daniel work to resolve the tension, we cannot evaluate their response. There is not positive outcome for the dreamer or other characters, resulting in a rather hopeless narrative that provides little by way of narrative expectation. Rather than dream type-scenes, the dreams in Daniel seem to correspond more to OT visions. The dream messages are apocalyptic in nature and refer to the future rise and fall of kingdoms rather than the dreamer’s individual situation. Indeed, the divine messages are repeated referred to as visions throughout Daniel, including Daniel’s dream in chapter 7.

### 3.2 Dream Type-Scene Characteristics

Every dream type-scene mentions a dream (חלום). There are three other key words usually present in the dream type-scene narratives. Night (לילה) is used to indicate the timeframe of the dream, namely, that the dream occurs at night. It is used 115 times in the Genesis to 2 Kings narrative corpus and consistently refers to the nighttime. The term שׁכם specifies that the dreamer rises early after having the dream to respond to the dream. It is used less frequently than לילה in
that the verb occurs only 42 times in OT narratives. The dream type-scene records the *fear* (ירא) of one or more characters after the dream is given.\(^{284}\) The narrator almost never provides information on the emotional state of the dreamer, except that the dreamer may experience fear. Often, it is the other characters who experience fear upon hearing the dream message, rather than the dreamer.

Several components of the dreamer’s character play a role in the dream type-scene narratives. The narrative reveals that the dreamer is in a *seemingly powerless* situation. The vulnerable state may be due to the dreamer’s actions, as when Abimelech takes Sarah and nearly incurs divine wrath, or it may be due to circumstances beyond the dreamer’s control, as when Pharaoh faces a looming natural disaster. In available ancient Near Eastern texts, it is often powerful figures of society who receive dreams, particularly royalty and priests.\(^{285}\) Yet, in the biblical text, it is usually a powerless figure who receives a dream, whether royalty or otherwise.\(^{286}\) Thomas McAlpine observes, “Vulnerability in general is a concern often addressed in dreams” and in the OT, the situation of vulnerability is often heavily ironic.\(^{287}\) For example, Joseph dreams of ruling his brothers in the same chapter in which he is sold into slavery; a Midianite soldier is given a dream portending defeat for the benefit of his eavesdropping opponent. Notably, the dreamer’s situation may seem powerless, but the dream provides a way for the dreamer to overcome the situation, as when Abimelech is instructed to return Sarah, and Pharaoh is advised to store up food during the abundant years.

The response of the dreamer is important. The dreamer’s first response creates a *narrative delay*, which tends to be a dialogue that the dreamer initiates. The dreamer’s second response works to *resolve the tension* within the plot. Usually, the dreamer’s actions demonstrate the desire to avoid further conflict. A dreamer is negatively portrayed when he does not act to resolve the narrative tension after the receiving the dream. A dramatic example of this occurs when Joseph’s actions

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\(^{284}\) The term ירא is used 152 times in the OT narratives.

\(^{285}\) See the related discussion throughout chapter 2.

\(^{286}\) Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation: Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 302: “Dreams are dreamed especially by the powerless one in the family.”

after each dream is given actually increase the narrative tension rather than resolve it. One aspect of the dreamer’s response includes verbalizing the content of the dream. This is how the audience is informed of the dream content. Sometimes, the dream is made known by the narrator directly, as in the case of Jacob’s dream at Bethel.

Consistently, the dreamer and characters accept the dream as truth from God. The dream message is considered true in every dream type-scene. This means that the dreamer perceives that the dream is not intended to deceive or misguide, in contrast to many dreams in ancient Near Eastern and Homeric literature. All dreams are also considered to be given by God, as was believed throughout the ANE. In some cases, this is more implicit than explicit, but there is no reason to doubt that ancient Israelites viewed dreams as divine communication.

Dream type-scene narratives have several common characteristics concerning the dream-giver and the dream itself. First, God initiates speech or there are visual images. The message tends to be far vaguer than other ancient Near Eastern dream messages, which can consist of precise building instructions. In the OT, dream messages often consist of a divine direction that provides the impetus for the dreamer’s next actions. Second, there is a divine promise or warning. Usually, the promise or warning is ultimately for the good of an Israelite character. In every case, divine promises given in dreams are fulfilled. Third, the dream message is a disclosure of a potential but seemingly unlikely future. The foretold future seems unlikely based on the dreamer’s preceding characterization and circumstance. For example, the grandiose statements about Jacob’s future seem unlikely in light of his negative characterization as a deceiver and trickster. Fourth, the dream message provides an element of narrative hope. When a divine promise is given, the element of hope often extends beyond the dreamer to other characters in the narrative. Although the dream may reveal a divine warning, it also provides a solution that enables the dreamer to avoid the negative future. A stark exception is the baker’s completely hopeless dream, though it highlights the hopeful elements of the cupbearer’s dream by contrast.

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288 Noegel, “Dreams and Dream Interpretations,” 54, notes that in Mesopotamia, dreams had associations with the underworld and were derived from the god of dreams or demons. The Israelites’ monotheistic belief system left little room for any agent (mechanical or divine) other than YHWH, the God of Israel, in the dreaming and interpretive process.

289 In the case of Jacob at Bethel, God speaks and there is an image.
Two narrative themes are consistently present within the dream type-scene narratives. There is an *effort to rescue* or deliver a character—usually the dreamer. The deliverance may extend beyond the dreamer. Even when dreams are given to non-Israelites, dreams serve to rescue the Israelites. For example, Abimelech’s dream saves Sarah, Laban’s dream saves Jacob, the cupbearer’s dream leads to Joseph’s release from prison and Pharaoh’s dream ultimately saves Jacob and his family. Another theme is the *positive outcome* for the dreamer that extends to other characters. This theme is most pointedly demonstrated by the ultimately positive outcome of Joseph’s dreams, which work to bring deliverance to his entire family and many Egyptians.

Several key characteristics pertain to the structure and plot of the dream type-scene. First, the dreamer’s introductory situation is one of *initial danger or crisis*. Sometimes the dreamer is aware of the dangerous situation. Other times, the dreamer is not aware, and the dream itself reveals the looming danger. Second, the dream message *introduces or intensifies the narrative tension*. By introducing a narrative tension, the dream message often serves to interrupt the natural progression of the larger storyline, thus creating a sense of narrative surprise. The tension introduced by the dream functions to create narrative suspense and expectation, as the reader must wait to discover how the tension will be resolved. Third, *the tension related to the dream is resolved*. The resolution comes about in a variety of ways. Typically, the dreamer has a key role in the resolution. Examining the character’s response and the modifications of this characteristic provides an important key to understanding the passage. Fourth, *a character presents an understanding of the dream*. The identity of the character varies between the dreamer, an interpreter and a family member. Fifth, in some way, *the conclusion relates back to God*. In some dream type-scene narratives the connection to God is lacking and is only revealed later in the text.

There are other common elements to dream type-scene narratives, but they seem to be incidental. For example, an oath is sworn and/or there is a naming scene at the conclusion of several dream type-scene narratives. Also, the introductory character is often travelling at the outset and close of the dream type-scene narratives. There tends to be a theme of eating or the presence of food during or after the dream type-scene narratives as well. Some elements that are common in

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290 Bar, *Letter Not Read*, 45, suggests that the dream messages create dramatic tension because “the readers are eager to find out whether the dreams will come true.”
ancient Near Eastern and Homeric dream literature are also present in the biblical text, although they are not characteristic of the dream type-scene narratives. For example, in Jacob’s dream at Bethel, God appears and stands at the head of the dreamer (or at the head of the ladder or stone).

Scholars have proposed numerous purposes for the presence of dreams in the narratives. Cryer states,

> in the OT narrative materials, dreams serve either to legitimate important cultic (e.g., the sanctuary at Bethel) or theological (the covenant with Abraham) themes, or else they are simply narrative instruments which illustrate Yahweh’s protection (e.g., from Abimelech of Gerar, Gn 20; Laban, Gn 31) of and care for his chosen people (Jacob and Joseph).291

Noegel comments, “A dream account can serve non-literary functions by contributing to the authority, ideology and persuasiveness of the text.”292 As a whole, the presence of dreams in the biblical text indicate that God is not limited to any given form of communication and that divine communication is not limited to Israelites or to royalty.293 Indeed, the status of dreamers varies, and some dreamers do not exhibit a close relationship to God at all. Gnuse comments that the dream narratives indicate, “This deity is the God of all people…omnipresent and may be worshipped in a foreign land.”294 Dreams indicate that God’s revelation is available in Canaan, Egypt and even in captivity. It may be argued that dreams are used as a means of direct revelation295 or that they are meant to express the distance between human beings and God.296

From a narrative perspective, though, dreams seem to be optional or even unnecessary to the text in that a different form of divine communication could equally serve to communicate the message. Moreover, the presence of various characteristics of the dream type-scene may also be

291 Cryer, Divination in Ancient Israel, 265.
292 Noegel, Nocturnal Ciphers, 257.
296 Bar, Letter Not Read, 3. Husser, Dreams and Dream Narratives, 103, discusses how dreams play a part in the prophetic office.
considered extraneous to the narrative. However, though the dream form may seem to be extraneous, narrative tensions and expectations created by the dream type-scene suggest that the dream type-scene serves a key narrative purpose. From a narrative critical perspective, we may consider the type-scene to be a deliberate and purposeful inclusion by the narrator. Once readers are aware of the dream type-scene convention, they can analyze the narratives and observe how dream type-scene characteristics are presented and modified. Such observations are key to understanding the narrative text. In particular, the narrative tension introduced or intensified by the dream message provides important plot development. The dreamer’s effort to resolve the tension presents key moments of the dreamer’s characterization, generally confirming the dreamer’s earlier and ongoing characterization. Observing how each type-scene fulfills or contradicts narrative expectations enables the reader to examine the narrator’s intentions and subtle methods of communicating the meaning of the passage.

In the remainder of this chapter, each dream type-scene is examined individually. The context of each biblical passage is presented, the text is discussed with particular attention to the presence and modifications of the dream type-scene characteristics and commentary on the passage as dream literature is provided.

### 3.3 Dream Type-Scene Narratives

This study now launches into an examination of OT dream type-scene narratives. Each text is analyzed separately. First, there is a brief note on the context of the passage, usually highlighting the dreamer’s initial situation. The context may also introduce a narrative tension. Next, the text itself is presented with relevant commentary on characteristics of the biblical dream type-scene in each passage. The presence or modification of each dream type-scene characteristic is discussed, following the order of their appearance in the text. After the passage is dissected, summary remarks on the passage as a dream type-scene are provided, along with remarks relating elements of the narrative to other ancient Near Eastern dream texts.

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297 Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1978), 19, notes that the type-scene is not necessary to the narrative or poem but is rather the “expression, the means by which the content is communicated.” See also Irene de Jong, *Narrators and Focalizers: The Presentation of the Story in the Iliad* (Amsterdam: Grüner, 1987), 31.

298 William Stuart Messer, *The Dream in Homer and Greek Tragedy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1918), 47–48, demonstrates how dream scenes in Homeric literature also serve to advance the plot.
3.3.1 Abimelech’s Dream (Genesis 20:1–21:7)

In the Abraham cycle, there is an ongoing expectation of an heir (from Gn 12) that creates an overarching tension still present at the outset of Genesis 20. This tension is reinforced by the story of Lot’s daughters conceiving sons (Gn 19), which functions in part as a subtle reminder that while the line of Lot is multiplying, Abraham is still without an heir. At this narrative junction, Abimelech enters the scene.

The narrative of Abimelech’s dream begins with Abraham travelling and settling in the land of Gerar. The introduction of Abraham at the outset would suggest that the narrative is about his character. Bruce Waltke regards Abraham’s encounter in this chapter as a test of the nature of the covenant between the Lord and his “elect human partner.” If the setting indeed presents a test to Abraham, the patriarch does not fare well. He is the first speaker and what he says is a misrepresentation of the truth. He calls Sarah his sister, but her primary and most relevant relationship to Abraham is as a wife.

Immediately, consequences of Abraham’s lie are revealed. Abimelech, the king of Gerar, sends for Sarah and takes her with a clear conscious. By letting the king take Sarah, Abraham allows Sarah’s life and the divine promise to be jeopardized. To make matters worse, the reader may translate YHWH’s words to Abraham in Genesis 18:14 to state, “I will return to you, in the spring, and Sarah shall have a son,” as the RSV does. This translation indicates that Sarah may already be pregnant during the encounter with Abimelech. The attentive reader, then, is alerted

299 A comparison of Genesis 19 and 20 suggests that when read together the two episodes present foils. In Genesis 19, Lot receives a divine visitation at night (לָילה). Lot faces a crisis because of a desire for an inappropriate relationship and is given a divine warning. Abraham appears in the story and rises early (שָׁם) in the morning (Gn 19:27). Toward the end of the chapter, the non-Israelite, Lot, is deceived. Similarly, in Genesis 20, there is a divine communication at night. The main character is also a non-Israelite who faces a crisis because of an inappropriate relationship, is deceived and receives a divine warning. A response of fear (ירא) is also present in both stories. However, in Genesis 20, it is Abraham who sins and the non-Israelite who acts righteously.


302 The NRSV translates Genesis 18:14 as “I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.” David Clines, *What Does Eve Do to Help? And Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament*, JSOTSup 94 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 75–76, presents the timeline of Sarah’s pregnancy in detail: “For if there were 12 months to run from 17:21 to the birth of Isaac, and 9 months
to the tension in the story—Sarah and by extension the lineage of Abraham and the divine promise of Genesis 12 are threatened because Sarah has become a member of Abimelech’s court.

The narrator has drawn attention to the crisis very early in the narrative. Then, with brevity, the dream scene is introduced. God comes to Abimelech, as the narrator confirms, in a dream by night (הלילה, Gn 20:3).³⁰³ God comes to Abimelech and initiates a dialogue with him, which elevates Abimelech’s status in the text, indeed higher than Pharaoh in Genesis 12, a similar narrative with literary connections to this passage. In Genesis 12, God only communicates to Pharaoh by afflicting him with plagues, not through a dream or a dialogue.

God sends Abimelech a divine warning, saying, “Behold, you are dead on account of the woman/wife who you have taken for she is a wife of a man” (Gn 20:3). The message is direct and definitive, highlighting the tension in the narrative. Abimelech was in a dangerous position.

In addition to incurring divine wrath, adultery merited the death penalty throughout the ancient Near East.³⁰⁴ Gordon Wenham summarizes the situation that led to Abimelech’s precarious state and why this severe condemnation from God is warranted:

A wife is seen as much more than the property of her husband: she is his alter ego and one flesh with him...she is at least her husband’s most precious possession, and to take her is the worst kind

from 18:10 to the birth of Isaac, and Isaac is to be born immediately the wife-sister narrative concludes...Sarah has to be pregnant during the dangerous incident of ch. 20.”

³⁰³ Claus Westermann, Genesis 12–36: A Commentary (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984–86), 322, argues that the dream setting is used by the narrator as an acceptable method to present God in dialogue with a non-Israelite: “The first sentence ‘Then God came to...in a dream by night and said,’ occurs word for word in Gn 31:24 while Nm 22:9, 20 is similar; in both cases God speaks to a non-Israelite or outsider. All three passages are concerned with averting a danger. It is a matter of a fixed form which appears in ancient narratives and has been taken over here.”

Viewing the dream setting as a narrative technique to allow for dialogue between God and a non-Israelite informs Westermann’s perception of the entire narrative structure in this passage: “the dialogue is introduced as a dream, or a more accurately set in the framework of a dream. No exegete has seen that what is within the framework does not suit the frame. A legal process with its accusation, sentence and defence cannot be the matter of a dream. God’s address to Abraham in a dream is but a literary venture just as is the dialogue the literary venture of the discussion of the question of guilt. The frame, the dream, merely enables the dialogue between God and the Canaanite king to take place. If this is correct then one must be rather cautious about the criterion for the Elohist that almost all exegetes agree on” (321–2).

However, as the previous chapter illustrates, God communicates to non-Israelites in a variety of ways and the dream setting is certainly not the standard method in the biblical text. The dream framework works well with this passage and serves as more than simply a structure for God to dialogue with Abimelech.

of theft. So although the threat of death is not surprising here, it is unusual for it to come from God. Usually it was the aggrieved husband who demanded it.\textsuperscript{365}

In this assessment, Wenham draws attention to the protective role of husband that the reader may expect from Abraham but is glaringly absent. Tension is thus highlighted from multiple perspectives; the narrator will use the remainder of the story to resolve it.

The fast pace of the story is an indication that the narrator is motivated to resolve this story quickly. The reader is still waiting for the expectation of Abraham to become a great nation from Genesis 12, which we are reminded of in Genesis 15. A number of negative expectations have also been created by the narrator regarding Abraham’s progeny. Sarah’s attempt to have a child through Hagar is a miserable failure. More pointedly, Abraham’s request for Sarah to pose as his sister has already caused trouble for the couple. Here, the situation is similar, and similar results can be expected. Just as Abraham’s deception of Pharaoh resulted in great infliction, so also Abimelech is to suffer.

Though Abraham has lied, God is truthful to Abimelech, directly revealing the marital status of Sarah. Abimelech accepts the accusation of God as true, and his response reveals that he recognizes the dream as one from God. He understands the ramifications of what has happened but challenges the justice of God, who is threatening to bring death to the innocent. Abimelech asks, “Will you a nation—moreover righteous!—slay? Did he not say to me, ‘She is my sister,’ and moreover she said, ‘He is my brother’” (Gn 20:4–5). Contrary to Abraham’s characterization as deceptive, Abimelech is portrayed as completely truthful, quoting Abraham’s words exactly. We have no reason to doubt that Abimelech’s claim of Sarah’s speech is also true. Abimelech’s speech reveals his seemingly powerless situation—he did not know that Sarah was married and so he took her in ignorance of her marital status.

Abimelech’s appeal to God’s justice is a clear allusion to Abraham’s earlier appeal to God’s justice in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abimelech uses the same term that Abraham used (צדק) to question if God would really kill the innocent with the guilty and destroy an entire

\textsuperscript{365} Wenham, Genesis, 70.
nation. This elevates Abimelech’s status again, for in essence he “repeats Abraham’s question to God: will not the Judge of all the earth do justice?” (Gn 18:25). \(^{306}\)

In responding to God, Abimelech is equally direct and uses “a mini-catalogue of Hebrew words for blamelessness”\(^ {307}\) to question the nature of God’s divine justice,\(^ {308}\) stating “in the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this” (Gn 20:5). Abimelech clearly presents his case before God, claiming innocence and calling for justice. God assures Abimelech that justice will indeed prevail and furthermore, God has already been acting in his favour. The narrator tells us, “And God said, in the dream, ‘Moreover, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this and moreover I spared you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not allow you to touch her’” (Gn 20:6). This speech confirms again the characterization of Abimelech as truthful and, in this situation, innocent by repeating verbatim Abimelech’s claim and thus verifying it.\(^ {309}\)

In this dialogue, God’s specification of “I” is “not required except for emphasis. So God does not grudgingly admit Abimelech’s integrity but asserts it emphatically.”\(^ {310}\) In contrast to what we might expect, in this whole encounter it is Abimelech, the outsider, who possesses integrity.\(^ {311}\)

The word “integrity” is significant. It provides vindication of Abimelech by employing a word that describes great piety; it has been applied to Abraham (Gn 17:1) and to Job (Job 1:1, 7; 2:3), the utterly pious man.\(^ {312}\) It also confirms that Sarah will not conceive from her encounter with Abimelech—a very important point in the greater narrative.

God then gives Abimelech instructions on how to make the situation right and save himself from suffering divine wrath: “Now then, return the wife of the man for he is a prophet and he will pray for you and you will live, but if you do not return her know that you will certainly die—you and all that is yours” (Gn 20:7). Abraham’s identity as a prophet is new to the reader. The terms נביא


\(^{307}\) Cotter, *Genesis*, 131.


\(^{310}\) Cotter, *Genesis*, 132.

\(^{311}\) Cotter, *Genesis*, 131.

\(^{312}\) Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 178.
(prophet) and פלל (pray) appear only here in Genesis. The introduction of the first prophetic and intercessory office in the biblical text is ironically associated with a character who is being revealed verse by verse as a less-than-noble character. Moreover, Abraham is appointed to pray for Abimelech, who has done nothing wrong.\textsuperscript{313} To this end, Laurence Turner raises a legitimate question: “Given Abraham’s record in his relationship with foreigners (e.g., 12:10–20), how likely is he to do this? And if Yahweh now speaks directly in a dream to Abimelech, why does he need a prophetic intercessor?”\textsuperscript{314} The text does not explain why Abraham will pray for Abimelech, but Abraham’s act of praying will provide an opportunity for Abraham to redeem himself by doing good for Abimelech.

At this point in the narrative, it is clear that the dream has disclosed a potential but seemingly unlikely future. God reveals that Abimelech is as good as dead because he took a married woman, yet the rest of the story will reveal this is only a potential future, and indeed it does not come to be. In the similar situation with Pharaoh and Sarah in Genesis 12, God was merciful to Pharaoh—a similar outcome can be expected here.

The dialogue reveals that Abimelech clearly understands the dream, and there is no need for interpretation of God’s clear warning. In the end, God both warns Abimelech that he must act or die and gives him a divine promise that if he does return Sarah he will live. The dream message provides hope for the larger narrative in that it now seems likely that Sarah will be returned to Abraham.

Abimelech shows no delay in responding to his dream. Abimelech rises early (שכם) in the morning and calls to his servants (Gn 20:8). Waltke sees this as a sign of Abimelech’s “prompt obedience.”\textsuperscript{315} Abimelech verbalizes the dream by telling his servants all that transpired, and they are “exceedingly afraid” (וייראו מאד, Gn 20:8), presumably of God’s impending wrath. Notably, the text does not state that Abimelech is afraid. It may be that Abimelech is confident that God will show him mercy in response to his effort to resolve the situation.

\textsuperscript{313} Gnuse, \textit{Dream Theophany of Samuel}, 66.


\textsuperscript{315} Waltke and Fredricks, \textit{Genesis}, 285. Hamilton, \textit{Genesis}, 67, comments that Abimelech could have returned Sarah discreetly and avoided humility, yet, his “willingness to be open and tell the truth [publically!] contrasts with Abraham and his subterfuge.”
Although we might expect Abimelech to take immediate action to fulfill God’s instructions, he actually delays and instead calls Abraham to question his actions. Abimelech asks, “What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you that you have brought upon me and upon my kingdom a great sin? Acts that should not be done you have done to me” (Gn 20:9). Abimelech knows both of these answers—he knows what Abraham has done and he knows that he has not knowingly sinned against Abraham or Sarah at all.

Abraham has heard this asked of him before by Pharaoh (Gn 12:18). As he did previously in the earlier scene before Pharaoh, Abraham does not answer. His silence is a subtle indication of self-condemnation. So Abimelech continues, “What did you see that you did this thing?” (Gn 20:10). Alter observes,

The repetition of the formula for introducing direct speech, with no intervening response from Abraham, is pointedly expressive. Abimelech vehemently castigates Abraham (with good reason), and Abraham stands silent, not knowing what to say. And so Abimelech repeats his upbraiding, in shorter form.  

Finally Abraham speaks, though he does not answer the question directly. He explains his actions: “Because I said, ‘Surely, there is no fear (ירא) of God in this place and they will kill me because of my wife’” (Gn 20:11). Here Abraham speaks the truth, at least by referring to Sarah as his wife. Now we realize the importance of the narrative note that Abimelech’s servants were exceedingly afraid. Abimelech responding early in the morning and the fear of the men emphasizes how unjustified Abraham was to suggest that there was no fear of God in Gerar. Abraham acts outside the fear of God, thinking that there is no fear of God in Gerar, yet the very opposite is true. Thus, Abraham, while explaining his motives, actually condemns himself out of his own mouth.  

Next, Abraham attempts to justify his actions by suggesting he did not actually lie: “And, moreover, truly my sister, the daughter of my father, is she, though not the daughter of my mother and she became to me a wife” (Gn 20:12). To his credit, Abraham then provides background information that confirms Sarah’s innocence in the matter: “And it happened when God caused me to wander from the house of my father that I said to her, ‘This is the loving-kindness that you will do by me: to all the places that we go, there say of me, He is my brother’”

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316 Alter, Genesis, 94.
317 Wenham, Genesis, 72.
(Gn 20:13). As Coats notes, “Abraham’s appeal in effect passes responsibility first to [his] physical relationship to Sarah, then to [his] relationship with God.”\textsuperscript{318} The action that Abraham attributes to God is hardly an accurate presentation. Instead of indicating that God is leading him to a promised land, Abraham “stresses to the native king that the gods have imposed upon him a destiny of wandering.”\textsuperscript{319}

This conversation between Abimelech and Abraham has created a narrative delay before Abimelech acts to resolve the narrative tension. The plot can now move forward. Abimelech does not provide any further comment on Abraham’s statement. The guilty one has both confessed and released Sarah of wrongdoing. At this point, the reader finds an early level of resolution to the tension in the larger plot created when Abimelech took Sarah. The narrator has already assured the reader that Abimelech did not touch Sarah. This leaves the larger issue of Sarah’s promise of conception still unfulfilled, but also uncompromised. The reader may certainly expect that the blameless man of integrity will return Sarah to her husband.

For Abimelech, the tension of God’s impending judgment remains. To this end, Abimelech does not further challenge Abraham but acts to deter God’s judgment. Abimelech takes sheep, oxen and male and female servants and gives them to Abraham and also returns Sarah to Abraham. Further, Abimelech states, “Behold my land is before you. Settle wherever is good in your eyes” (Gn 20:15). God does not ask Abimelech to provide Abraham with gifts and the freedom to settle in his land. These narrative details depict Abimelech as generous (or perhaps, hoping to placate the God of Israel). As the story draws to a close, the situation is restored to its opening setting, where Abraham is free to continue his journey and Sarah is safe.

To Sarah, Abimelech adds, “Behold, I gave a thousand pieces of silver to your brother; behold, it is to you as a covering of the eyes to all who are with you and [before] everyone that you are vindicated” (Gn 20:16). Contrary to Pharaoh’s action in Genesis 12, “who bestows gifts on Abraham as a kind of bride-price, the noble Abimelech offers all this bounty after Sarah leaves

\textsuperscript{318} George Coats, \textit{Genesis: With an Introduction to Narrative}, FOTL (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1983), 150. Gunther Plaut, \textit{The Torah: Genesis} (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1974), 193–200, attempts to lessen the negative characterization of Abraham by proposing that Elohim does not mean “God” but must mean “rulers,” suggesting that Abraham said “rulers made me go into exile because I was a God-seeker.”

\textsuperscript{319} Alter, \textit{Genesis}, 95.
his harem as an act of restitution.”

This great bounty further signifies Abimelech’s generosity.

This gift of a thousand pieces of silver is to be a covering of the eyes (עיניםכסות). In the OT, this is a rare idiom, and in Genesis, it only appears here. Although TDOT notes its usage here as a bribe, BDB understands the verse to refer to a covering of the eyes so that the wrong cannot be seen, indicating a figurative reference to a present offered in compensation. The silver as a “covering of the eyes” may mean that Sarah’s eyes are covered as an act of propriety. It may also refer to the eyes, or attention, of those who are aware of the situation. Whatever the phrase is intended to mean, the context suggests that Abimelech is acting in such a way as to “ward off public disapproval.” Sarah is thus fully vindicated.

As this story immediately follows the dramatic action of Lot’s daughters, we may certainly expect Sarah to act. The speech of Abimelech may also draw attention to this expectation. Abimelech gives אלף (one thousand) pieces of silver. The only other use of this numerical term in Genesis is 24:60, where a number of similarities are present. A gift of silver is given (24:53); there is an arising early in the morning (שכם, 24:54) and the sending of a woman (24:59). Here Rebekah is blessed to become the mother of thousands of ten thousands of descendants (24:60). The textual connections between these two passages may excite the attentive reader’s expectation of Sarah’s promised conception and suggest that like Rebekah, Sarah too will have tens of thousands of descendants.

320 Alter, Genesis, 95.
321 Waltke and Fredricks, Genesis, 285, call this a “fabulously large sum. A Babylonian labourer, usually paid a half shekel per month, would have had to work 167 years to earn such a sum.” Wenham, Genesis, 74, notes this as well and adds, “Fifty shekels was the maximum ever asked for in bride money (Dt 22:29)...this gives an indication of the scale of Abimelech’s compensation.”
322 TDOT 3:36; BDB, 492. Six of the eight uses of the root כסות in the Hebrew Scriptures refer directly to clothing (Ex 21:10; 22:26; Dt 22:12; Jb 24:7; 31:19). The other two uses are a reference to the covering of sky (Is 50:3) and a reference to the underworld (Jb 26:6). One of the eight uses of this term is in Exodus 21:10 (“If he takes another wife for himself, he may not reduce her food, her clothing, or her marital rights”). Of course, this is exactly what Sarah will demand that Abraham do to Hagar by demanding that she be sent away in the very next chapter. Could the narrator also be subtly rebuking Sarah?
323 Sarna, Genesis, 144: “Interpreted figuratively, the phrase tells us that the payment is a recognition that Sarah’s honour was not violated, and so the eyes of others are henceforth closed to what has occurred and she will not be an object of scorn.”
324 Alter, Genesis, 96.
The narrator reports, “So Abraham prayed to God” (Gn 20:17). In doing so, Abraham fulfills the role of an intercessor. Pray is only used twice in Genesis—here and earlier, in verse 7. It is also featured at the opening of Samuel 1, where Hannah prays for a son. Notably, prayer for a child is absent in Genesis.

After Abraham prays to God, the narrator informs us, “God healed Abimelech and his wife and female servants, and they conceived, for YHWH had certainly closed all the wombs in the house of Abimelech because of Sarah the wife of Abraham” (Gn 20:17–18). Abraham’s character is restored—YHWH listens to Abraham and grants his request. Abimelech is healed. This may be a reference to an illness that was the cause of Abimelech’s imminent death announced in verse 3 and one that prevented him from having sexual relations with Sarah. The women in the kingdom are also healed. The reader becomes privy to their closed wombs, a detail absent in the setting of the narrative.

Before the story reaches a conclusion, we can observe Abraham’s changed status. Though Abraham is clearly to blame for the troubles of this passage, he emerges from the crisis richer than before, with the honour of his wife exonerated. He now has the freedom to choose where he wants to live, his wealth has increased and, moreover, as we will read in a moment, he is established as a religious figure in that as a prophet he must intercede for Abimelech and his family in order for them to be healed. By the end of the story, the narrative centres back on the character of Abraham when he prays for Abimelech and his household and they are healed. The focus of the storyline returns to the journey of Abraham and Sarah.

The narrative presents hope for the resolution of Sarah’s own fertility problems. Sarah has suffered her own infertility, and in this narrative her presence in Abimelech’s household is the cause of the infertility of an entire nation. It is ironic that while Sarah has not been touched, the whole nation is healed of infertility. With the healing of the nation, Sarah may hope for her own healing. A close reading of the text may suggest this. In Genesis, the Hebrew root close is only used twice. The first is when Sarah claims that YHWH has “closed” her womb from having

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325 Sarna, Genesis, 140.
326 Cotter, Genesis, 134.
327 Cotter, Genesis, 134.
a child (Gn 16:2). The second is in this passage to state that YHWH had “closed” all the wombs that are now healed. Just as the closed wombs of many women are healed, Sarah may expect her own closed womb to be healed. God’s healing action may be demonstrated yet again. If the close reader has reasoned that Sarah must be pregnant, then the reader may notice the irony that the hitherto infertile Sarah is pregnant in a court of hitherto fertile women unable to conceive.

At this point, the narrator has resolved the immediate tension in the plot. The life of Abimelech and an innocent nation were jeopardized, yet God has acted to save them. Moreover, this statement of conception for barren women draws attention to the tension in the larger plot, and we can anticipate that the concern for the conception of barren Sarah will soon be resolved as well. The only reference to רָזִים (healing) in Genesis is here. It may be that this term, found at a powerful moment of national fertility in a story where Sarah has been a central figure, is also a sign of hope for Sarah’s character that she will indeed have a child.

At the closing of Genesis 20, the overarching tension that Sarah is still barren remains. This tension calls the reader to observe the next three verses: “Then YHWH visited Sarah as he said and YHWH did for Sarah as he spoke. Sarah conceived and bore for Abraham a son in his old age at the time that God spoke to him. And Abraham called the name of his son, the one born to him, whom Sarah had born, Isaac” (Gn 21:1–3). Here we find the final resolution to the tension of the Abimelech dream type-scene. The conclusion relates to YHWH, who acts decisively to fulfill the promise to Sarah. She conceives and bears a son, and expectations created by the narrator are met. The scene ends with the action of naming—Abraham calls his son Isaac.

This story started with an indication that Abraham disregarded Sarah’s vital role in the procreation of a son when he let Sarah go without an objection. It ends with the birth of that son and the naming of him, resolving the tension surrounding the danger to the promised lineage. Dealings between Abraham and Abimelech are not finalized though. Towards the end of the next chapter (Gn 21:22–34), Abimelech approaches Abraham, asking Abraham to swear that he will not deal falsely with him or his offspring. Abraham agrees but complains about the seizure of one of his wells. Abimelech declares his blamelessness in the dispute. Then Abraham gives

Turner, Genesis, 88, keenly observes that “Sarah’s indispensable part in the story has been revealed to both Abraham (17:15–16) and to the couple together (18:9–15),” leaving no room to excuse Abraham’s actions.
sheep and oxen to Abimelech, and they make a covenant. As the passage draws to a conclusion, there is a naming of the place where they took the oath and Abraham calls on the name of YHWH. The final note that Abraham travelled in the land of the Philistines for many days closes the unit on a note of Abraham’s travels, the same way this narrative of Abimelech, Abraham and Sarah began.

3.3.1.1 Commentary on the Dream Type-Scene (Genesis 20:1–21:7)

This dream type-scene has several functions in the text. On a basic level, it serves to make Abimelech aware that Sarah is a married woman, that the situation is severe and demands his attention, and of what he must do to resolve the problem. The dream type-scene draws attention to the main focus of the narrative: God will act to protect Sarah and uphold the divine promise of Genesis 12. The narrator uses the content of the dream to highlight the tension in the plot. That the dream is announced suddenly and that the message is dramatic may serve the purpose of gaining the reader’s attention by an unexpected turn in the general flow of the text. The dream also contributes to Abimelech’s characterization. Though Abimelech is a non-Israelite, God communicates with him in the same way that he will next communicate to Jacob, a revered patriarch. The dream provides a setting for dialogue between God and Abimelech. God could have simply sent angelic messengers in physical form (as happens elsewhere), but divine communication to non-Israelites is not limited to one method. Generally, the dream setting is not necessary to the plot. However, in light of the biblical dream type-scene, the dream scene presents the attentive reader with the expectation that Abimelech will act with haste to resolve the tension—even rising early in the morning to respond. The dream type-scene is a literary aspect that distinguishes this narrative from Genesis 12 and promotes it as a distinct passage that fits well with the collection of dream episodes in Genesis.

In Genesis 20, characteristics of the biblical dream type-scene are presented in typical fashion. The narrator confirms that the divine communication is a dream (חלום) that occurs at night (לילה),

329 The dream type-scene in Genesis 28 and 31 also include the naming of a place and an oath.

330 Husser, Dreams and Dream Narratives, 133, and others argue, “Genesis 20 cannot be considered to be an independent, parallel version” of Genesis 12, “but it is rather a theological rereading of the other...the argumentation of Genesis 20 is scarcely comprehensible without foreknowledge of Genesis 12.” This is hardly true. The chapter itself is rich with meaning and sense independent of Genesis 12. Read as part of the dream type-scene, its meaning is even richer. (Gnuse, Dream Theophany of Samuel, 65, refers to Genesis 20 as a doublet of Genesis 12 and 26.)
and after the dream, the dreamer rises early (שכם) to respond. Abimelech’s servants experience fear (ירא) after hearing the content of the dream. At the outset, the dreamer is in a seemingly powerless situation because he has unknowingly taken a married woman and is guilty of a crime punishable by death. The dreamer responds to the dream immediately. His first action is to verbalize the content of the dream to his servants. He then has a conversation with Abraham that creates a narrative delay. Abimelech’s second response is to resolve the tension by returning Sarah, thus saving his life and removing the threat to Abraham’s future lineage. His response to God reveals that Abimelech accepts the dream as truth from God.

In the dream itself, God speaks to Abimelech and is the initial speaker, but there are no images. The message contains both a divine promise of life and a divine warning of death. Also, the dream discloses that Abimelech will die because he took Sarah—this is a potential but seemingly unlikely future if we consider God’s response to Pharaoh (Gn 12) in the similar situation. Hope is provided when God offers a course of action that will save Abimelech and return Sarah to Abraham.

The dreamer’s introductory situation is that of initial danger. Abimelech was not aware of it, but his actions had placed his life in jeopardy and he was under God’s wrath. The dream introduces the tension of the immediate narrative by announcing that Sarah has been taken by Abimelech. This intensifies the tension of the broader narrative surrounding Abraham’s future progeny. When the dream is given, Abimelech demonstrates that he understands the dream by his pertinent response to God and his appropriate response to the dream message.

By the end of the type-scene, the tension related to the dream is resolved. Abimelech has made reparation and his life is no longer in peril. The females in his kingdom are healed of their infertility. In the broader narrative, the tension surrounding Abraham’s progeny and Sarah’s infertility is also resolved when Sarah gives birth to a son. The conclusion also relates back to God. Genesis 20 ends with YHWH healing the closed wombs, foreshadowing the healing of Sarah’s womb. If the first verses of Genesis 21 are considered a final word on chapter 20, the actions of God conclude the story by the announcement of YHWH visiting Sarah and fulfilling the promise of a child.
The narrative reveals two themes common to the dream type-scene. The effort to deliver the dreamer is accomplished by God when Abimelech is warned of his actions in a dream and given instructions on how to save himself. Both Abimelech and Sarah are rescued from the crisis. Second, there is a positive outcome for both the dreamer and the other characters. The dreamer’s life is saved and the entire non-Israelite nation is healed. Narrative emphasis, however, is ultimately on the positive outcome for Sarah and Abraham. Thus, the dream type-scene has a purpose in the text that extends beyond the life of the dreamer to impact the future of the nation of Israel.

3.3.2 Jacob’s Dream at Bethel (Genesis 28:10–22)

Jacob’s dream episode is set in the context of strong family tensions. Esau, Jacob’s brother, despises him. Jacob is seemingly powerless. He has no choice but to seek safety and protection from his brother. Rebekah, his mother, instructs Jacob to run away from the homestead and venture out alone to begin a new life. In this sense, the dreamer’s introductory situation is one of danger and crisis.

In Genesis 28, Isaac tells Jacob to avoid taking a wife from Canaan and blesses him a second time. Isaac’s blessing seems to conflict with Jacob’s character, portrayed by the narrator as deceiving and opportunistic. In the broader narrative, the divine promises to Abraham have yet to be fully fulfilled. Thus, narrative expectations for Jacob’s character are high, yet his character portrayal is not promising. It is at this important narrative juncture that the second dream type-scene narrative takes centre stage.

The dream type-scene begins with the narrator’s report that Jacob was travelling from Beersheba to Haran (Gn 28:10). He occasions upon a certain place where he spends the night: “And he


332 Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 454, presents an alternative perspective by calling Genesis 28 rather than Genesis 20 the first dream narrative in the Old Testament; he further states that Genesis 28 is not a true narrative but a report because he claims there is no narrative tension. Wolfgang Richter, “Traum und Traumdeutung im Alten Testament: Ihre Form und Verwendung,” *BZ* 7 (1963): 21, considers Jacob’s dream in der Nähe zu einer Vision (close to a vision).
came upon a certain place and retired (וילן) there because the sun had set” (Gn 28:11). This establishes the setting as nighttime but does not utilize the term לילה (night). The place is anonymous, “in contrast with the precise names in verse 10, and is intensified precisely by this contrast…the many places on the long stretch from Beersheba to Haran make it impossible...to guess the identity of the place; this, too, underlines the anonymity.”

Jacob takes a stone for his head and lays down (Gn 28:11).

Then the narrator announces that Jacob had a dream. This dream consists of images: “And he dreamt (ויחלם) and behold a ladder was standing upon the earth and its top reached the heavens and behold angels of God were ascending and descending upon it” (Gn 28:12). The Hebrew word translated ladder (סלם) only occurs once in the Hebrew Bible, and however this item connecting heaven and earth is understood, it must be from this context.

In Jacob’s dream, the divine being enters the scene: “And behold, YHWH stood above it” (Gn 28:13). A divine being arriving before the dreamer and standing above the dreamer’s head (or ladder or stone) is a common motif in ancient Near Eastern and Homeric literature, but this is the only dream type-scene narrative where the divine being “stands” before the dreamer.

With YHWH’s appearance, Jacob’s dream becomes more than a symbolic or image-based dream. Whereas God spoke to Abimelech, here YHWH appears and speaks to Jacob. In the context of the Abimelech dream type-scene, it is the character of Sarah that the narrator connects with YHWH’s visitation and speech immediately following the dream type-scene. YHWH’s speech begins by establishing the identity of the speaker: “I am YHWH, God of Abraham your father and God of Isaac” (Gn 28:13). The special relationship between God and Abraham was demonstrated in the Abimelech dream episode when God instructed Abraham to act as intermediary for Abimelech by praying for him. Here we see the special relationship of God to Abraham indicated again. Jacob is told,


The land that you lie upon—I will give to you and to your seed. And your descendants will be like the dust of the land and you will break out to the west and east and north and south and in you and in your descendants all the families of the ground will be blessed. Behold I am with you and will keep you in all wherever you go and will return you to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I promised to you. (Gn 28:13–15)

This dream message contains a divine promise. A central theme is that of blessing. Jacob is blessed with God’s promise of presence and protection and the knowledge that God will give him the land, an extensive lineage and the opportunity to return to his homeland. People outside of Jacob’s own descendants will also be blessed through him and his family. Thus, the positive outcome for the dreamer, Jacob, extends to all the families of the earth.

Based on Jacob’s character as a deceptive young man, alone and on the run, this promise of the potential future of all humanity being blessed through his lineage certainly seems unlikely. Yet, despite the negative characterization of Jacob revealed to this point, the dream message provides narrative hope. The promise of land and lineage, in particular, presents hope for the future. It proposes that the blessed lineage of Abraham will continue and that both the Israelite and non-Israelite people have a future of promise. The reader can proceed with the expectation that all that God promised will be fulfilled.

Next, the narrator notes that Jacob awoke from his dream, providing a second confirmation that this passage is indeed a dream episode (יִרְאֵה יִוִּיאכֶח, Gn 28:16). A narrative note that the dreamer awakens (יִוָּכֵח) is common in ancient Near Eastern and Homeric dream literature. In the Hebrew Bible, this root occurs only 11 times. Notably, it is associated with Pharaoh and his dreams (Gn 41:4, 7, 21) and Solomon’s dream (1 Kgs 3:15).335

Jacob states, “Surely YHWH is in this place and I did not know it” (Gn 28:16). By this, Jacob acknowledges that the dream was from YHWH and accepts it as a true dream, not intended to deceive or misguide him. Jacob’s response is one of amazement, surprise and fear.336 The narrator reports, “[Jacob] was afraid (יָרָא) and said, ‘How frightful (רָא) is this place! This is none except the house of God and this is the gate of heaven’” (Gn 28:17). Jacob experiences fear and associates fear with the location. Walter Brueggeman describes Jacob’s reaction as “the

335 Noah awakes (Gn 9:24), Samson awakes (Jdg 16:14, 20), Elijah taunts the false prophets to awaken their god (1 Kgs 18:27), and there is a reference in Habakkuk 2:7 and Psalm 78:65.
336 Sarna, Genesis, 199.
wonder, mystery, and shock” that God should be present in such a decisive way to an exiled person, that the sovereign God would be bound to a treacherous fugitive.\textsuperscript{337} Jacob demonstrates his understanding of the dream by providing an interpretation of his encounter as the house of God and gate of heaven.\textsuperscript{338} This exclamation is Jacob’s first response and presents a narrative delay before he responds directly to the dream message.

The plot moves forward to Jacob’s response after the dream. First, Jacob rises early (שכם) in the morning (Gn 28:18), a common characteristic of the biblical dream type-scene. Next, “he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it as a pillar and he poured oil upon its [the stone’s] head” (Gn 28:18). The oil (שמן) that is poured is a term used in Genesis exclusively within the Jacob narratives. Isaac blesses Jacob with the richness (רזמנים) of the land but Esau will have a home far from the richness (משמות) of the land (Gn 27:28, 39). In Genesis 35, where God appears to Jacob and blesses him again, Jacob sets up a stone pillar and pours oil on it a second time. The irony is that the שמן (oil/richness) that Esau will be far from, Jacob pours out in excess. The first pouring out of oil in the dream episode of Genesis 28 is an early indication that God’s promise will be fulfilled, just as Isaac’s blessing over Jacob at the beginning of the chapter is already in the process of being fulfilled. Jacob calls the name of the, Luz was the name of the city before Jacob’s divine encounter (Gn 28:19).

So far, Jacob has responded emotionally to the dream by surprise and fear. What follows is the most important element of Jacob’s response and one that is a direct response to the message of the dream. Jacob makes a vow to God:

\begin{quote}
And Jacob made a vow saying, “If God will be with me, keep on this way that I take and give me food to eat and garments to wear, and if I return in peace to the house of my father, then YHWH will be my God, this stone which I have set as a pillar will be God’s house and of all that You give me I will certainly give a tenth to you.” (Gn 28:20–22)
\end{quote}

Jacob’s vow corresponds to the promise God made to him by referencing God’s presence and protection and the return to his father’s land. It reveals that he understands the dream message and divine promise and is willing to make a corresponding promise back to God. His response

\textsuperscript{337} Brueggemann, Genesis, 242.

\textsuperscript{338} John Hartley, Genesis, NIBC (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000), 256, understands the gate of heaven to be a place where there was direct communication between heaven and earth.
indicates his desire to make YHWH his God and to serve him. This conclusion relates back to God and draws the dream type-scene to a close. The next verse provides a transition of the dream type-scene to the next unit: “Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the sons of the east” (Gn 29:1). This statement returns the main character to his travels and brings the land back into focus.

3.3.2.1 Commentary on the Dream Type-Scene (Genesis 28:10–22)

This dream narrative has been perceived by some scholars as an incubation scene or unintentional incubation scene. The problematic terminology of “unintentional incubation” is discussed in chapter 2; here the problems of categorizing Genesis 28 as an incubation scene are presented. First, though Jacob spends the night at a holy place while in a time of distress, the place is not regarded by him as a holy shrine. Sarna argues that he stops only because of “the impossibility of travel after sunset...to Jacob, however, it is a profane place with no prior tradition of holiness, and he treats it with indifference.” Other scholars agree that there was no significance to the location until after the dream. The dream is given to Jacob because he is

339 Fokkelman, Reading Biblical Narrative, 81, makes the subtle observation: “whereas in the vow God occurs in the third person, even in all the words Jacob had uttered until then, Jacob now, at the very last moment, addresses God in the second person. This transition displays an obvious change of attitude. The thou form establishes a dialogue, the third person may imply distance.”


For a contrary view, see Lipton, Revisions of the Night, 78, and McAlpine, Sleep, Divine and Human, 159.

341 Sarna, Genesis, 195.

342 Brueggeman, Genesis, 241; Fokkelman, Reading Biblical Narrative, 49; Hamilton, Genesis, 238; Hartley, Genesis, 255; Skinner, Genesis, 11; Waltke and Fredricks, Genesis, 388–9; von Rad, Genesis, 110.
chosen by God, not because of the location where he slept.\textsuperscript{343} Second, God freely takes the initiative of self-revelation to an amazed Jacob. Jacob’s response of surprise suggests that he was not expecting a divine encounter. Third, there are no rituals or prayers performed before or to induce the dream, which we would expect in an incubation scene.\textsuperscript{344} All of these textual details strongly suggest that Jacob is not intentionally seeking a divine encounter in Genesis 28.

The main purpose of the dream in Genesis 28 seems to be the presentation of Jacob as the next future patriarch in Israel’s history. Rather than a simple narrative declaration, the dream provides a stage for God to intimate the plan for Jacob’s life in a personal setting. The images infuse the narrative with a sensational dynamic. God’s promises to Jacob set his character in the larger narrative context by continuing the theme of the Abrahamic covenants and looking forward to future generations. In this, the dream presents the impetus for Jacob to transition to a powerful figure of Israel’s history.

Jacob’s dream at Bethel includes nearly all of the characteristics of the biblical dream type-scene with few modifications. Before the dream is reported, Jacob’s situation is one of danger in that he is fleeing for his life far away from home. The narrator confirms that Jacob experiences a dream (חלום) and that the dreamer rises early (שכם) to respond. Jacob’s first response is that of fear (ירא), which he then associates with the location. The context of Genesis 27–28 reveals that the dreamer is in a seemingly powerless situation. He is fleeing an angry brother and travelling alone in a land not his own.

Upon receiving the dream, Jacob’s first response is amazement. He then sets up a stone, pouring oil upon it and naming the place Bethel. This creates a narrative delay before Jacob responds directly to the content of the dream message.

In the dream itself, God is the initial speaker and there are images. God gives Jacob a dream that delivers him from the status of fleeing alone to having God’s presence wherever he travels, from one who is cast out to one who is in the divinely ordained lineage of Abraham, from despised by Esau to blessed by God. In this sense, his character portrayal is rescued by this dream and set upon a new course that is filled with promise.

\textsuperscript{343} See Hartley, \textit{Genesis}, 255.

\textsuperscript{344} Sarna, \textit{Genesis}, 198.
From Genesis 12 onward, the ongoing narrative tension centres on how the promises made to Abraham will be fulfilled. This tension is at the heart of Genesis 28 as well. Jacob has successfully usurped the place of the older son and has received a blessing from his father (Gn 28:1–4) reminiscent of the blessing to Abraham in Genesis 12.\textsuperscript{345} Yet Jacob—“The home-loving favourite of an overprotective mother is now an exile, utterly alone and friendless, embarking on a long, perilous journey”\textsuperscript{346}—seems unlikely to fulfill the grandiose narrative expectations. Moreover, in the immediate context of Genesis 28, tensions are increased by the conflict between Jacob and Esau. This dream provides a direct response to these tensions.

First, the dream message confirms that Jacob is the heir to the divine promises given to Abraham. The question of whether Jacob will continue the line of promised patriarchs is answered by YHWH. Not only will Jacob be blessed personally, he will also have a great many descendants and all families on earth will be blessed through him. Jacob’s vow plays a key role in resolving the tension. As long as YHWH remains faithful to the promise, Jacob will remain faithful to YHWH. In this sense, the conclusion of the narrative relates back to YHWH.

Second, the dream message presents a resolution to the tension concerning which of the brothers will receive the Genesis 12 blessing. There is no question as to which character will dominate as the plot moves forward; the dream message makes it clear that Jacob will have the firstborn rights and carry on the legacy of his ancestors. Further, YHWH promises to return Jacob to his homeland. This promise suggests that the sibling rivalry will have resolution. Jacob indicates his desire to resolve the tension with his brother by expressing his commitment to returning to his familial home in peace. Yet, the tension is not completely resolved in this chapter. There has been no concrete evidence that the brotherly relationship will be restored or that Jacob will fulfill a great destiny. Indeed, based on the characterization of Jacob at the moment of the dream, the potential future that YHWH discloses seems unlikely.

Thus, while the dream message brings resolution to a number of tensions in the plot, it also introduces a new narrative tension. Jacob is established as a blessed character of promise who

\textsuperscript{345} Both divine messages reference travel instructions, the father’s household, land, blessing and the impact on future families.

\textsuperscript{346} Sarna, \textit{Genesis}, 195.
will one day return to his homeland. However, the reader will have to wait several chapters before the dream message is fulfilled and Jacob sets out to return to his homeland.

Jacob’s vow confirms that he accepts the dream as truth from God and understands God’s message. However, Jacob does not verbalize the content of the dream. This creates a sense of secrecy in the passage. Jacob tells no one. As readers, we are only privy to the dream because of the narrator’s report. We must wait to see if Jacob will actualize the dream and fulfill his vow. In this sense, the dream infuses hope into the narrative.

Finally, the divine promise given in the dream extends to all the families of the earth. There is a positive outcome, not only for the dreamer Jacob but also for all the Israelite and non-Israelite families after him.

3.3.3 The Dream Claim of Jacob and the Dream of Laban (Genesis 31:1–55)

3.3.3.1 The Dream Claim of Jacob

Genesis 31 contains two dreams within one narrative. Jacob’s first dream type-scene (Gn 28) marks a change in Jacob’s status and is full of promise. Though Jacob was revealed as a deceiving trickster and was fleeing his homestead, God appears to him in a dream and blesses him with the divine promise of God’s presence and protection and the knowledge that God will give him the land, an extensive lineage and the opportunity to return to his homeland.

After the Genesis 28 dream type-scene, God’s promises begin to be fulfilled. Genesis 29 and 30 establish a favourable situation for Jacob. He is welcomed into Laban’s household and marries. There is one birth announcement after another until Jacob has a quiver full of children. Jacob acquires a large flock, servants, camels and donkeys and becomes exceedingly rich. This emphasis on Jacob’s acquired wealth sets the stage for Genesis 31.

The deception by Laban regarding Jacob’s wives and the rivalry between Jacob’s wives in Genesis 29 and 30 draws attention to the familial tension that only increases as the narrative continues. The narrator states that Jacob desires to leave, but because Laban is benefiting from Jacob, he requests that Jacob remain. Jacob gains the flock of coloured sheep as payment for his
work from Laban. There can be no deception as to which sheep belong to Jacob because they are easily distinguished from Laban’s flock of sheep.

Tension is introduced at the beginning of Genesis 31. The narrator reports, “Now he [Jacob] heard the words of the sons of Laban saying, ‘Jacob took all that belonged to our father and from what belonged to our father he made all this wealth’” (Gn 31:1). Clearly, the recent elevation in Jacob’s status has not gone unnoticed, and his brothers-in-law’s comment hints at their contempt for Jacob’s success. Jacob is in a predicament much like Abimelech’s. His acquisition seemed a positive advancement, and yet it is the source of serious trouble. The brothers-in-law perceive Jacob as taking what belonged to their father as though Jacob has acquired them illegitimately. Notably, they refer to this wealth, not his wealth.

Though the words of these brothers-in-law are alarming, Jacob’s main concern is his relationship with his father-in-law. The narrator reports, “Jacob saw the face of Laban and behold, it was not with him as formerly” (Gn 31:2). Here the narrator is only suggestive. Laban’s look has changed, but we are left to guess what his attitude toward Jacob has become and what he might do about it. Jacob would be powerless against Laban and his sons if they turned against him while he was living in their territory. Thus, the situation is one of danger for Jacob.

As if to confirm the likelihood of Jacob’s suspicions, YHWH speaks to Jacob. There is no announcement of YHWH appearing and no description of the scene as the reader encountered in the dream at Bethel. In fact, the narrative so far is blunt, and the report of YHWH speaking comes rather suddenly, as it did in the Abimelech dream type-scene. The rising family tensions demand a quick response—the instruction of YHWH is timely: “Return to the land of your fathers and your relatives and I will be with you” (Gn 31:3). Though YHWH does not confirm Jacob’s suspicions, the directive to leave suggests that Jacob is no longer dwelling in safety. The mention of returning to his homeland and the promise that God will be with him is a reminder of the similar divine message to Jacob in Genesis 28. YHWH has renewed the divine promise.

Jacob undoubtedly takes the divine message as a confirmation of his suspicions and acts promptly. The rapid speed of these first three verses gives a sense of urgency to the situation, and it is no surprise that Jacob immediately responds, calling his wives, Rachel and Leah, to his field. If this meeting in the field is a little curious, we can recall that Laban established Jacob in a field
that was three days distance from himself (Gn 30:36), and here Jacob uses this to his full advantage.

In continued rapid succession, the narrator relays Jacob’s speech to his wives: “I see the face of your father, for it is not toward me as it was formerly” (Gn 31:5). Jacob emphasizes that he has made this observation; it may be that the words of the sons of Laban had been circulating among the family before reaching Jacob, but now that he is aware of Laban’s change he is compelled to act. His words are a close approximation of what the narrator has just reported and so far, the reader can be sure of the truth of Jacob’s speech. He adds, “but the God of my father has been with me” (Gn 30:5), a statement that the accumulation of Jacob’s wealth and the earlier dream at Bethel confirms. This last addition also relates to YHWH’s promise to be with Jacob (verse 3).

Then Jacob defends himself and presents the injustice done against him by expanding on this statement to detail Laban’s mistreatment:

You know that with all my strength I served your father. Yet, your father deceived me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not allow him to do evil against me. If he said, “The speckled ones will be your wages,” then all the flocks birthed speckled ones but if he said, “The streaked ones will be your wages,” then all the flocks birthed streaked ones. Thus God delivered the livestock of your father and gave it to me. (Gn 31:6–9)

Jacob’s representation of the situation seems exaggerated. Did Laban really change his wages ten times? And where is it stated that Laban switched his flocks from the speckled to the streaked? (Genesis 30:32–35 states that Jacob was allotted the speckled and streaked flocks.) Further, Jacob attributes all his success to God, but the narrator has described in detail the methods that Jacob used to influence the mating habits of the flocks (Gn 30:37–43). Thus, while the text certainly confirms Laban’s deceptive and unfair treatment of Jacob, Jacob’s speech seems to present Laban in a worse light. Next, Jacob implies that the family tension over Jacob’s economic gains is a result of God’s actions rather than Jacob’s own clever ways. Rather than take any responsibility, Jacob presents himself as a passive player in the drama—one who simply served Laban with all his strength.

It is in this dubious speech that Jacob makes claim to a dream. The reader has only the evidence of Jacob’s testimony going forward, and the line between fact and assertion blurs: “And it was at the time of the mating of the flocks that I lifted my eyes and I saw in a dream and behold the male goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled and spotted” (Gn 31:10). The text
testifies to Jacob’s successful attempts to breed coloured sheep, but this is the first we read of a
dream, for the narrator has reported no such event. The timing of the dream is also unspecified.
At the very least, Jacob has clearly delayed informing his wives about the dream.\footnote{347}

Jacob states his claim to a dream carefully; he does not “dream” or “have a dream” but rather, he
“sees in a dream” (בחלום ואר). The type of dream that Jacob refers to is also a bit curious. It
would seem that this event happened during daylight hours, as he is watching the sheep mate
when he lifts up his eyes. This suggests more of a daydream or daytime vision than a night dream
while he slept. There is no mention of night (לילה) associated with this dream.

Jacob verbalizes the content of the dream to his wives:

Then the angel of God said to me in a dream, “Jacob,” and I said, “Behold, me.” And he said,
“Please, lift your eyes and see all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or
spotted, for I have seen all that Laban did to you. I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a
pillar and made a vow to me. Now arise, go from this land and return to the land of your relatives.”
(Gn 31:11–13)

The opening conversation is similar to other theophany scenes; the divine being calls to Jacob by
name, and he responds with “Behold, me.”\footnote{348} This type of correspondence does not occur in any
other OT dream type-scene narratives, although it is common in other divine encounters.

The instruction from the divine speaker is to “Please, lift up your eyes” (שא ת dataTable). This exact
phrase is used four times in the OT, and each time, it is spoken by a divine being,\footnote{349} certainly
giving credence to Jacob’s tale. Ancient Near Eastern and Homeric literature commonly include
the exclamation “Behold!” and Jacob includes the term in his dream report. Notably, it is not
God who speaks, but the angel of God. The angel draws attention to the flocks belonging to
Jacob and confirms that Laban’s treatment of Jacob has been noticed in the heavenly realms.

Jacob does not claim that YHWH appears to him, as YHWH did at Bethel, but rather an angel of
God. Yet, this angel declares, “I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and made a
vow to me” (Gn 31:11). Is the divine being YHWH who appeared to him at Bethel or is it an

\footnote{347} The later reference to Rachel stealing the idols during the sheep-shearing season (Gn 31:19) may also
indicate a passage of time between the dream and Jacob’s response.

\footnote{348} See Husser, Dreams and Dream Narratives, 136.

\footnote{349} The first instance (Gn 13:14) is by YHWH to Abraham. This is the second instance. The third instance
(Ez 8:5) is by YHWH God to Ezekiel. The fourth instance (Zec 5:5) is by the angel to Zechariah.
The angel of God as Jacob indicates? Jacob’s lack of clarity on the identity of the divine speaker casts a shadow of mystery on his retelling of events.

The divine being’s reference to Jacob’s earlier dream gives credence to Jacob’s report. But a close reading reveals that the angel’s speech is not the exact wording of the narrator’s report of Jacob’s actions in Genesis 28. From a narrative critical perspective, the subtle differences between the narrator’s report and Jacob’s account of the angel’s speech serve to cast doubt on Jacob’s claim. Whereas the narrator reports that Jacob set a stone as a pillar and poured oil on its top (עֵין אֹתָה מַצְבָּה וַתֶּשֶׁת שָׁם עַל־רֶמֶשׁ, Gn 28:18), the angel is quoted as saying Jacob anointed a pillar (מַצְבָּה שָׁם מְשָׂח, Gn 31:13). Similarly, the narrator states that Jacob made a vow (נָדַר לִשְׁמָךְ נָדַר, Gn 28:20) whereas Jacob quotes the angel stating that Jacob vowed to me a vow (נָדַר לִשְׁמִי נָדַר, Gn 31:13). Further, these two actions are presented in reversed order.

The ambiguity in Jacob’s claim to having this second dream reaches its climax in verse 13. YHWH instructed Jacob to return to the land (שָׂרֵב אֶל־אֶרֶץ, Gn 30:3), whereas the angel instructs Jacob to arise and go from this land and return to the land (קָם וְצָא זֶה אֶל־אֶרֶץ שָׂרֵב נַחֲלָת, Gn 31:13), presenting an expansion of the initial word. The angel’s speech contains a second addition that creates a sense of urgency by the insertion of the initial word “now” (עַתָּה, Gn 31:13). There are two omissions in the angel’s speech. YHWH describes the land as the land of Jacob’s fathers and relatives, but the angel describes it simply as the land of Jacob’s relatives. Also, YHWH’s speech ends with the clause “I will be with you” (Gn 31:3), but this promise is not included in the angel’s speech.

Thus, the angel’s final instruction to Jacob is remarkably similar to YHWH’s instruction to Jacob in verse 3, though there are many subtle differences. The similarity raises the central question: Is Jacob simply embellishing the speech of YHWH, or has he received a second divine instruction confirming YHWH’s earlier word to him? Waltke argues, “Jacob seems to have collapsed two dreams into one.” Sarna suggests, “Jacob is recounting two separate dream experiences—the first relating to the past, the second to the present and immediate future.” Claus Westermann views Jacob’s dream as corrupt (the portion about the flocks is in mutilated form and the

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350 Waltke and Fredricks, Genesis, 425.
351 Sarna, Genesis, 214.
instruction to return is a doublet of verse 3) and he makes an effort to reconstruct the text.\textsuperscript{352}

Finally, Lipton comments,

\begin{quote}
The dream suggests that Jacob’s decision to leave Laban’s house was the result of a divine command, when, in fact, the announcement of his departure (30:25) preceded the command (31:3). Furthermore, the dream implies that God was responsible for the success of Jacob’s flocks, when 30:37–43 has attributed it to Jacob’s own manoeuvring.\textsuperscript{353}
\end{quote}

These textual issues are lessened if what Jacob is claiming is not entirely true and he is fumbling to explain it in exact and clear terms. Viewing the dream as a fabrication may explain why certain dream type-scene characteristics are modified. In addition to lacking a reference to night (לילות), there is no reference to the dreamer arising early (שכם) or one of the characters experiencing fear (ירא). The dream message does not disclose a potential but seemingly unlikely future. If the instruction to return to his homeland is considered a potential future, it is not unlikely—it is almost a guaranteed future. God has already promised to return Jacob to his homeland (Gn 28) and Jacob perceives the need to do so immediately. The dream message contains a divine instruction to leave, but it is neither a divine warning nor a divine promise. Thus, the dream message is also atypical in light of the other OT dream messages.

Wherever we determine the line between truth and fiction in Jacob’s telling of this dream to be, the dream message intensifies the narrative tension. It serves to remind the wives of the family tensions and the way their father has mistreated Jacob, and it increases hostility between Laban and his daughters to the point of persuading them to leave him. Whereas the conflict was primarily limited to Jacob and Laban before the dream report, afterward the conflict includes the wives, who ally with their husband against their father.

The dream message does infuse hope into the narrative. The allusions to the divine promise in Genesis 28 remind the reader of God’s special election of Jacob and his commitment to God. The command to return to his homeland indicates that God is still concerned with fulfilling all of the divine promises given to Jacob. It also may suggest the possibility that once Jacob leaves, the tensions with Laban and his brothers-in-law will be resolved.

\textsuperscript{352} Westermann, \textit{Genesis 12–36}, 491.

\textsuperscript{353} Lipton, \textit{Revisions of the Night}, 115.
Jacob desires to act on the instruction to leave Laban’s land and return to the land of his father. To do this, he must persuade his rival wives to leave their father, settle their differences and join him. Paul Borgman questions, “Can he simply presume on their good will? Apparently not, if his carefully rehearsed and very clever speech is any indication. Jacob anticipates all the main characteristics of what might sway his wives finally to come together. He saves God as his trump card.”\textsuperscript{354} If Jacob has fabricated this dream report to influence his wives, it is clear that his objective of convincing his wives of the urgency of leaving is accomplished.

The first reaction to the dream is by the wives and creates a narrative delay before Jacob is able to respond directly by leaving Laban. The narrator informs the reader of the wives’ response to the dream:

Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, “Do we still have any portion or inheritance in the house of our father? Are we not regarded as foreign to him? For he has sold us and has indeed consumed our purchase. For all the wealth that God took from our father that was for us and for our children. Now then, all that God said to you do.” (Gn 31:14–16)

This speech immediately confirms the success of Jacob’s effort to persuade his wives to leave with him.\textsuperscript{355} The dream is accepted as truth from God and the wives immediately understand the dream. Their response reveals that they accept Jacob’s claim that it was God who took away Laban’s wealth. This stands in contrast to the perspective of their brothers, who claimed that Jacob took away Laban’s wealth. In line with the general desire of Laban and his progeny for wealth, the wives seem to be irritated that their own portion of the inheritance has diminished.\textsuperscript{356} With no financial or other interest keeping their loyalty to their brothers and father, they readily agree to follow Jacob.

Ironically, while the reader may question whether Jacob actually had a dream or if he only claimed to have had a dream, the whole issue of the authenticity of the dream eludes the wives. They seem unconcerned with the dream aspect of Jacob’s speech and reveal that their main

\textsuperscript{354} Paul Borgman, \textit{Genesis: The Story We Haven’t Heard} (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 166. Sarna, \textit{Genesis}, 214, argues that Jacob’s speech to his wives “takes great pains to prove his own integrity as opposed to Laban’s repeated perfidy...exhibits sensitivity to the feelings of his wives when he attributes his prosperity to God and not to his being more clever than their father.”


\textsuperscript{356} Westermann, \textit{Genesis 12–36}, 492, comments that the custom was for the compensating marriage sum to be passed on in part to the daughter; Laban kept the fruit of Jacob’s work all for himself, and thus the wives accuse him of treating them as foreigners.
interest is their inheritance. They do not question their husband’s claims. Perhaps Jacob has included enough verifiable information between reporting the mistreatment by his father-in-law and referencing the dream at Bethel that there is no reason to doubt the rest of Jacob’s claim. From the wives’ perspective, it may not matter if the dream occurred or not because the familial tensions require that action be taken. At any rate, the wives confirm their support for Jacob to act on what God (not the “angel”) has directed him to do (Gn 31:16).

After the digression of dialogue with his wives and securing their allegiance, Jacob is able to act in response to the divine instruction to leave. The narrator shifts from dialogue to narrative reporting by announcing, “Then Jacob arose (וַיקָם) and put his sons and his wives on camels and he drove all his livestock and all his belongings that he had acquired, the livestock in his possession in Paddan Aram to go to Isaac his father—the land of Canaan” (Gn 31:17–18). This statement effectively transitions the narrative scene from Laban’s land to the transitional period of Jacob’s travels.

The narrator includes another detail that will prove important in the following scene. The reader is informed: “When Laban went to shear his sheep, Rachel stole the teraphim that belonged to her father” (Gn 31:19). The theme of deception now turns against Laban. The narrator informs us that the one who has been so deceived by Laban becomes a deceiver himself: “Now Jacob stole the heart of Laban the Aramean by not telling him that he was fleeing” (Gn 31:20). The same root גָּנַב (stole) that is used to described Rachel’s taking of the idols describes Jacob’s intention to flee. The narrator’s choice of words draws strong connections between the characters. The deception and thievery among Jacob, Laban and the women are so interwoven that an explosive resolution seems imminent.

This scene is closed with a final statement from the narrator: “So he fled with all that belonged to him and he arose (וַיקָם) and he passed over the river and he set his face to the hill of Gilead” (Gn 31:21). The narrator has not confirmed that Jacob’s claim to have had a dream is true, yet here the narrator states twice that Jacob fled from Laban. A narrative note that Jacob travels toward Gilead confirms that he is acting upon the words of YHWH and going back to the land of Canaan.
A remaining issue at the end of this section is that Jacob’s actions have not worked to resolve the tension in the larger narrative. Rather than establish peace with Laban and his family, Jacob flees the situation. As the following verses will illuminate, Jacob’s actions work to increase the tension and lead to a direct confrontation with Laban.

### 3.3.3.2 Laban’s Dream

Genesis 29–30 reveals Jacob’s success as a shepherd. The increase in his wealth, however, is at the expense of Laban. Indeed, Laban seems powerless to change Jacob’s good luck. The rise of familial tensions has also created a crisis in Laban’s family. Laban has cheated Jacob and mistreated his daughters. Now his sons are envious of Jacob. When Laban hears that Jacob has left, it is bad news for Laban. While it may calm his sons’ anger, it will remove the blessing Jacob brought to his household.

Interestingly, the narrative of Laban’s dream is similar to the opening of Jacob’s dream narrative—a narrative report of what is happening among his family that causes him to be alarmed. The reader is informed, “On the third day it was told to Laban that Jacob fled” (Gn 31:22). This report is the impetus for Laban’s next action: “He took his brothers with him and pursued after him, a journey of seven days, and he overtook him on the hill country of Gilead” (Gn 31:23). Brothers are mentioned here, as at the outset of the chapter, but they play a minor role. Certainly their presence is threatening to Jacob’s family should a fight ensue.

As tension mounts, an intervention on this journey prohibits a potentially explosive outcome. God speaks to Laban: “God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream of the night and he said to him, ‘Beware of yourself lest you speak with Jacob good nor evil’” (Gn 31:24). This dream report is much like the report of Abimelech’s dream—direct, pointed and brief. It contains a narrative confirmation of the dream (חלום) and the night (לילה) occurrence, and it contains a divine warning that beckons the dreamer to respond.

The narrator returns to direct narrative to bring Laban in contact with Jacob. The text states, “Then Laban overtook Jacob when Jacob had pitched a tent on the hill, and Laban pitched with his brothers on the hill of Gilead” (Gn 31:25). This picture reinforces the familial tensions that

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357 Hamilton, Genesis, 299, notes that like Abimelech, Laban is duped by a Hebrew, and God speaks before he can retaliate.
have escalated. Jacob and Laban are positioned head-to-head, as we might expect before a battle. But Jacob is far outnumbered by the presence of Laban’s brothers. The reader can assume Laban’s evil intentions because God had to intervene to warn him against harming Jacob. In this, the dream message has intensified the narrative tension. It also infuses the narrative with the hope that Laban will back down from harming Jacob and the scene will end peacefully.

It seems the subsequent scene will determine how the tension will be resolved—whether Laban will heed God’s warning or bring harm to Jacob. When a conversation between Laban and Jacob is introduced, it seems unlikely that Laban will honour the divine warning. But whereas God warned Laban with the root דבר (speak), the narrator uses the root אמר (speak) to refer to Laban’s act of speaking. So, while Laban is not disobeying the divine instruction, his actions are dangerously close to disobedience and his speech heightens the tension.

Laban’s dialogue creates a narrative delay before he responds directly to the dream. He says to Jacob, “What have you done?” This is the exact question that Abimelech asked of Abraham (Gn 20:9). Laban indicates that Jacob deceived him, and, like in Genesis 21, the patriarch’s spouses are at the centre of the deception. Laban challenges Jacob, “You stole my heart and drove away my daughters like captives of the sword” (Gn 31:26). The accusation אתה לבבי ותגנב (you stole my heart) is affirmed by the narrator earlier (הארמי לבן את-לב יعقوב ויגנב, Gn 31:20). The same root נهب (drove) is also used by the narrator to describe Jacob’s actions (Gn 31:18). It seems, though, that the description of the wives as “captives of the sword” (חרב כשביות) is an exaggeration, considering the wives agreed to Jacob’s plan (Gn 31:26).

Laban’s following statement is even more questionable than his accusation that his daughters were carried away under duress of sword: “Why have you secretly fled and deceived me and did not tell me? I would have sent you away with joy and singing to timbrels and with songs” (Gn 31:27). This statement can be viewed as exaggeration. Laban’s characterization throughout the text is consistently one of a greedy person. It is doubtful that he would rejoice that Jacob, who brought him so much wealth, planned to leave. His own daughters’ testimony of the

358 See discussion in Sarna, Genesis, 217.

359 Hamilton, Genesis, 299, comments that Laban is not disobeying the dream by speaking. Alexander Honeyman, “Merismus in Biblical Hebrew,” JBL 71 (1952): 11–18, perceives that Laban was not to say anything at all.
mistreatment they received from him also makes the prospect of a celebration unlikely. In Laban’s next statement, “And you did not allow me to kiss my sons and daughters” (Gn 31:28), he shows a personal bond with his lineage that also may be an exaggeration.

Then Laban changes the focus away from Jacob to justify his right to harm Jacob. Laban states, “Now you have done foolishly. I have the power to do evil to you” (Gn 31:28–29). He uses the plural form of “you,” raising the question as to how far Laban was going to act against his own kin. Yet, though Laban admits his plan to bring harm to Jacob and his family, he professes the intervention of God to save Jacob by verbalizing his dream: “But the God of your fathers last evening spoke to me, saying, ‘Beware of yourself from speaking with Jacob good or evil’” (Gn 31:29). Laban relays God’s speech in almost the exact words of the narrator, omitting only the word “lest.”360 His repetition of and compliance to the dream message indicate that Laban accepts the dream as truth from God and understands the meaning of it. Because Laban responds in obedience to the dream, his actions work to resolve the tension in the narrative.

Laban’s speech, then, is trustworthy, but immediately Laban changes the subject by adding, “Now, you have left because you greatly long for your father’s house. Why did you steal my gods?” (Gn 31:30). No sooner is one tension resolved, at least insofar as the conflict arising from Laban’s evil intentions toward Jacob has been averted, then Laban introduces another tension. Yet, the reader knows that Jacob’s family is the guilty party in this case of the missing gods.

Jacob’s response brings the reader back to Laban’s earlier questions. He answers Laban, “Because I was afraid—because I thought, ‘Surely you will take your daughters from me’” (Gn 31:31). Here, after the dream is revealed, Jacob expresses fear (ירא). The reader may question the veracity of this claim because the tension in the passage mounts specifically when there are rumours among Laban’s sons. The reader may reason that Jacob’s fear was more related to the anger of Laban’s sons than the well-being of Laban’s daughters. It seems there is manipulation and positioning from both Laban and Jacob—but all this is put to rest by Jacob’s next statement.

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360 The narrator records עד־רע מטוב עם־יעקבแผน־תדבר לך השומר לו אמר אלי (Gn 31:24), and Laban states, אמר אלו ולא אמרו לך מפריד חכםמעיים מሙך דררה (Gn 31:29).
“The one with whom you find your gods will not live” (Gn 31:32). Though Laban searches all the tents, he does not locate his gods. Rachel successfully deceives her father.361

Laban and Jacob make a peace treaty, set up a stone memorial, name the place and share a meal. By these acts, Laban acknowledges Jacob as constituting a separate, independent social entity of equal status, reflected by the sets of twos: stone markers, meals, place-names, provisions (one family matters, one political nature), daughters and ethnic groups; and by the deity twice invoked by two separate names.362 Their actions bring another layer of resolution to the familial tension in the narrative. In this closing scene, the men call upon God as the witness to their oath and the judge between them. Thus, the conclusion of the story relates back to God.

Peace, though, is only fully accomplished at the close of the narrative. Laban rises early (שכם) in the morning, kisses his grandchildren and daughters, blesses them and leaves. Once Laban and Jacob have completely separated, the families finally arrive at peaceful relations. Jacob has the freedom to return to his homeland and Laban has not brought harm to Jacob. The tension related to the dreams is resolved. This presents a positive outcome for both the dreamers and their families.

3.3.3.3 Commentary on the Dream Type-Scene (Genesis 31:1–55)

It is best to approach this chapter as one dream type-scene containing two dreams. Jacob’s dream is filled with ambiguity and has numerous modifications from the typical dream type-scene, suggesting that it may be a fabrication. Laban’s dream is presented as a real experience, and all of the biblical dream type-scene characteristics but one are present in the narrative.

Both characters are in a crisis at the outset. The jealousy of the brothers, Laban’s own hostility and Jacob’s act to run away with his wives and children have all created a dangerous family situation for those involved. Yet, both Jacob and Laban seem powerless to change the situation. The brothers are hostile toward Jacob and as long as Jacob remains in their territory, he is in danger. Jacob’s acquired wealth makes reconciliation with the brothers unlikely. Laban is also

361 Sarna, Genesis, 219, observes, “at the climactic moment, Laban is outmaneuvered by his own daughter. It is a final act of retribution for the fraud he had perpetrated on her and Jacob on what was to have been their wedding day.”

362 Sarna, Genesis, 221.
powerless to change the situation because Jacob has a divine blessing that no deception is able to thwart. The dream messages intensify the familial tensions. Jacob’s dream reminds the wives that God is on his side and Laban has mistreated him, kindling hostility between his wives and their father. Laban’s dream confirms Laban’s hostility toward Jacob and the threat that Laban poses. Both dreamers understand the dream, and their dreams do not require interpretation. The wives accept Jacob’s dream message as a truthful dream from God; Laban accepts his dream as a truthful dream from God as well.

There is a narrative delay after each dream. Time passes before Jacob relays the dream and the wives respond before Jacob can act. Laban delays his response to the dream by dialoguing with Jacob. Both dreams also infuse hope into the narrative. Jacob’s dream reminds the reader of God’s blessing and providence in the life of this patriarch by alluding to the divine promise in Genesis 28. His telling of the dream indicates his desire to respond. Laban’s dream reaffirms God’s special care for Jacob and presents the possibility that a conflict will be avoided. Laban’s telling of the dream indicates his desire to respond as well.

After the narrative delay, each dreamer responds directly to the dream. Jacob sets out for his homeland, and Laban declares that he will not harm Jacob. Eventually, both dreamers work to resolve the narrative tension of the familial relations. With the parties separated, Jacob is no longer present to ignite the hostility of Laban’s relatives. When the narrative reaches a conclusion, the familial tensions that the dream messages have intensified are resolved. Peaceful relations provide a positive outcome for the dreamers and their families. Finally, the conclusion relates to God, who is called upon as witness and judge. Indeed God has acted to rescue both dreamers. Jacob is freed from the danger he faced in Laban’s territory, and Laban is rescued from the divine wrath he would have incurred had he harmed Jacob.

Generally in biblical dream type-scene narratives, the dream discloses a potential but seemingly unlikely future. This is not the case in Genesis 31. As for Laban, he has no future in the text. After this passage, his character will not make an appearance, and thus his future is of no

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363 Arnold, *Genesis*, 275, notes the importance of Laban’s dream: “the text implies that military conflict would have ensued immediately, had God not warned Laban that night in a dream against precipitous actions (31:24).” Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 494, argues that Laban’s dream and recollection of the dream (Gn 31:24, 29) “have no real function in the narrative.”
narrative interest. It is the only dream type-scene characteristic not present in the narrative of Laban’s dream, and indeed, the omission of reference to Laban’s future highlights the priority and promise of Jacob’s blessed future. In Jacob’s dream narrative, there is also no future mentioned in the dream report. Rather, it is the words of YHWH beforehand that present a potential future. In YHWH’s speech, God is the speaker, there is a divine promise and warning and the future is disclosed. However, in contrast to other biblical dream type-scene narratives, the future is likely. The promises to Jacob in Genesis 28 have begun to be fulfilled, and the reader can expect the renewal of Jacob’s promised future in Genesis 31 to be completely fulfilled.

There are subtle differences between the dreams. Both dreamers verbalize the dream, though Jacob retells the dream from the perspective of first person rather than the usual third person. Laban’s claim to have a dream is reliable because the narrator confirms it is a dream (לָהֲבַע). However, only Jacob reports that he had a dream (לָהֲבַע); the narrator’s confirmation is suspiciously absent. Dreamers typically receive the dream at night (לָיָל), like Laban, but Jacob seems to “see” the dream during daylight. Jacob expresses fear (יָרָע) after Laban’s dream, but there is no mention of a character experiencing fear (יָרָע) as a result of Jacob’s dream. Whereas at the end of the narrative Laban rises early (שָׁם) to leave Jacob, allowing for a permanent resolution to the tension between their families, Jacob does not rise early (שָׁם). The speaker in Laban’s dream is God but in Jacob’s dream is the angel of God. In both dreams, the message includes a divine instruction, but only Laban’s dream message is considered a divine warning.

How can the reader account for these dream type-scene modifications in the narrative of Jacob’s dream? The dream report itself presents difficulties. The time and setting is ambiguous, there is confusion concerning the identity of the divine speaker and the content seems to blend a second (and different) explanation for Jacob’s successful breeding with a repeat of YHWH’s words a few verses earlier. These issues may cause the reader to doubt the quality of the text or, more simply, to conclude that Jacob has fabricated the dream to persuade his wives to follow him.

364 Husser, Dreams and Dream Narratives, 135.
3.3.4 The Dreams of Joseph (Genesis 37:1–11)

The narrative of Joseph’s dreams is set in the context of the Jacob cycle. The opening line may suggest that the narrative will highlight an event in Jacob’s life: “Now Jacob lived in the land of the sojourn of his father, in the land of Canaan” (Gn 37:1). However, we read not of Jacob but of one of his sons—yet not the oldest: “Joseph, a son of 17 years, was shepherding with his brothers with the flock and he was a young lad with the sons of Bilhah and sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives” (Gn 37:2–3). By this, the narrator introduces the tension of the plot; where we may expect to read about Jacob, we read of his younger son. Even the mention of Bilhah and Zilpah at the exclusion of Leah and Rachel contributes to the early indication that roles will be reversed in this story.

Antagonism quickly mounts against Joseph. The narrator presents three facts that establish Joseph as a privileged character: Joseph brought an evil report to his father (presumably an act against his brothers), Jacob loved Joseph more than all his other sons, and Jacob made him a multicoloured coat (Gn 37:2–3). The favoured position of Joseph creates hostility among his brothers: “His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers and so they hated him and they could not speak to him ‘Peace’” (Gn 37:4). This initial situation presents a danger to Joseph.

In the midst of this hostile situation, Joseph has a dream (חלום). “Now Joseph dreamed a dream [יָשָׂר הָאֲדֹנָי] and when he reported it to his brothers they hated him even more” (Gn 37:5). Although the reader is not privy to the contents of the dream, it clearly creates tension between the brothers. Similar to Jacob’s narrative in Genesis 31, there is an explosive situation between the dreamer and his brothers.

The story slows down and narrows in on Joseph’s character. “Please listen to this dream that I dreamt [יִשָּׂר אֲדֹנִי],” Joseph requests to his brothers (Gn 37:6). He relays the dream: “Behold, we were binding sheaves in the middle of the field and behold my sheaf rose up.

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365 Joseph’s situation is similar to Genesis 30 and 31, where Jacob was blessed by God at the expense of Laban’s sons and YHWH spoke to Jacob.
Moreover, it stood up, and behold, your sheaves gathered and bowed to my sheaf” (Gn 37:7). The brothers immediately understand this dream as the subservience of the brothers to Joseph.366

Indeed, his brothers respond to Joseph with seeming indignation, “Are you really going to reign over us? Or will you really rule over us?” (Gn 37:8). Joseph does not respond to these questions, but the narrator relays that Joseph’s dreams and speech induce the brothers to hate him even more (Gn 37:8). To make matters worse, Joseph continues to incite the hostility with his brothers. The text states, “Then he dreamed yet another dream (יָחַלְמוּ וַיַּחַלֵּם) and recounted it to his brothers and he said, ‘Behold I dreamed a dream again, and behold, the sun and the moon and 11 stars bowing down to me’” (Gn 37:9). As if to reinforce the portrayal of Joseph as contributing to the tension, the narrator reiterates that Joseph repeated this dream to his father and brothers. While his brothers’ reaction is not recorded—and indeed would be superfluous, as there is no doubt they are indignant—Joseph’s “father rebuked him and said to him, ‘What is this dream that you dreamed? Will I and your mother indeed come to bow down to you to the land?’” (Gn 37:10). The dream is understood as Joseph’s father, mother and 11 brothers being portrayed as subservient to Joseph.367 The tension is increased in that the dream now includes his parents among those who are to be subservient to him.368

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366 Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, 38, suggests that the dream can only mean that Joseph will rule over them and be their king. However, Pirson, *Lord of the Dreams*, 48–49, argues “in Genesis there is no reason to establish a link between חָלָם (‘bow down,’ meaning ‘to be subjected’), מֶלֶךְ (‘be king’) and מַשֵּׁל (‘rule’) as did the brothers.” Pirson associates bowing in the biblical text to respect (or even gratitude) rather than to subordinance.

367 Pirson, *Lord of the Dreams*, notes how Jacob’s interpretation of this second dream differs from the brothers’ interpretation of the first dream. The brothers interpret the first dream in terms of kingship and domination. This element is not expressed by Jacob, whose rhetorical question exhibits his astonishment about the dream. The narrative later reveals that Jacob’s mother never bows down before Joseph. In Genesis 48:12, Joseph bows down before his father, not the reverse. In Genesis 42:6, only 10 of the brothers bow down—and they bow not because Joseph rules over them but because he is the ruler of Egypt.

Pirson argues that the dream is better understood by references to numbers, a feature of the other dreams in the Joseph cycle. He presents Joseph’s second dream referring to the 13 years that Joseph spends in Egypt before he is promoted to ruler of Egypt and the 22 (11 stars multiplied by the 2 objects of moon and sun) years that pass before Joseph and his brothers meet again as brothers and Joseph is reunited with his father (43:26). For further commentary, see Barbara Green, “What Profit for Us?” *Remembering in the Story of Joseph* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1996), 123, who also suggests Joseph’s second dream refers to 13 years; James Ackerman, “Joseph, Judah, and Jacob” in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives*, eds. Kenneth R. Gros Louis and James S. Ackerman (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982) 2:85–113; Laurence Turner, *Announcements of Plot* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 153;
Joseph’s dream messages have clearly intensified the narrative tension between Joseph and his family members. It seems that Joseph’s family members not only demonstrate an understanding of the dream but also accept the dream as true. The brothers realize the element of divine promise and prophecy in the dream message. Yet it is clear that the brothers perceive the potential future of Joseph’s greatness as unlikely. The dream report concludes with a summary of the state of the family relations: Joseph’s brothers were jealous of him, and his father kept the matter in mind (Gn 37:11), presumably to see how events would unfold and whether the dream would be fulfilled. For Joseph, the dreams present a divine promise and hope of greatness for his character.

Next, the scene changes completely. Focus shifts to the fields, where the brothers are tending their father’s flocks. Missing from the fields is Joseph, perhaps a further indication of his privileged position. Jacob sends Joseph to the field to bring back a report. The tension between the brothers and Joseph reaches a climax when Joseph approaches his brothers, and they plot to kill him. Their berating title of Joseph, “Behold, here comes the lord of dreams,” reveals their chiding feelings toward him (Gn 37:19). They express the desire to kill him and throw him into a pit, adding, “Let’s see what will become of his dreams” (Gn 37:20).

At this point, the oldest son enters the story and arranges a rescue mission for Joseph. Joseph is thrown into a large pit. His brothers sit down for a meal, and just then, a caravan of Ishmaelites passes by. Judah comes forward. At his suggestion, the brothers opt to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites and Midianites. The caravan purchases Joseph and brings him to Egypt. The scene draws to a close with the brothers deceiving their father by indicating that Joseph had been killed. Indeed, Jacob is persuaded by their deception and concludes that his son is no more. The

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However, Eric Lowenthal, *The Joseph Narrative in Genesis* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1973), 20, suggests that Jacob is ridiculing the dream “by pointing out that ‘the moon’ can only refer to Joseph’s mother who is already dead.” Vawter, *Genesis*, 384, attempts to explain the text by suggesting that Rachel is alive (the Elohist’s 35:16–20 is unknown) and the birth of Benjamin is not until later.

368 Sarna, *Genesis*, 257.

369 Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 502, comment that the brothers “identify him only by their resentment.”

370 Arnold, *Genesis*, 320, suggests that the brothers desire to kill Joseph in an effort to prevent the dream from being fulfilled.
narrative concludes with the report that Joseph was sold to Potiphar, the captain of the bodyguard.

Although the narrative unit ends, the story does not have closure. A variety of dream type-scene characteristics are inverted. The narrative has served to increase the family tension. Particularly, the dreamer has not acted to resolve the tension—the very opposite. The conclusion does not relate back to God, who seems to be completely absent from events at this point. Rather than a positive outcome for any of the characters, there are negative outcomes for everyone. Indeed, the reader is left to wonder what will happen to the dreamer and his dreams. Additional factors contribute to the varied type-scene. There is no mention of night (ليل), arising early (שכם) or fear (ירא). Joseph is in a seemingly powerless situation when he faces the hostility of his brothers at the outset of the chapter, and he remains in a seemingly powerless situation at the end of the chapter, being powerless before his brothers and the caravan.371

The situation turns progressively worse for Joseph, and there is no connection between him and his family until years later. When his brothers make the trip to Egypt during a famine, the journey toward restoration with Joseph begins. Sure enough, they approach Joseph and bow down before him (Gn 42:6). However, rather than work toward a resolution immediately, Joseph delays the process. He confronts the brothers with questions, tests them and allows them to travel back and forth between Egypt and Canaan before he reveals his identity. This presents a long narrative delay before Joseph acts to resolve the family tension. Full resolution to the narrative tension does not occur until the end of Genesis, when Joseph is reunited with his father and shows full reconciliation with his brothers. Joseph’s speech presents a conclusion that relates his entire narrative to God:

Joseph said to them, “Do not fear [ירא] for am I in the place of God? You planned evil against me; God planned it for good in order to preserve many people this day. So do not be afraid [ירא]; I will provide for you and your little ones.” So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. (Gn 50:19–21)

371 Waltke and Fredricks, Genesis, 499, note that throughout the story, the narrator omits Joseph’s emotions, perhaps to represent Joseph as a passive and helpless victim of his older brothers.
3.3.4.1 Commentary on the Dream Type-Scene (Genesis 37:1–11)

The brothers’ hostility establishes an initial situation of danger for Joseph. Being younger than his brothers sets Joseph at a disadvantage, and when he is sold into slavery later in the story, it proves he is powerless against their plans.

Joseph receives several dreams (חלום). The ones Joseph verbalizes consist of images. All characters seem to accept the dreams as true and present an immediate understanding of the meaning of the dream. For Joseph, the dreams present a divine promise and hope for his character. Yet, as a younger and favoured son who does not show maturity or leadership when he gives a bad report of his brothers, the foretelling of a great future seems unlikely to be fulfilled.

Nevertheless, Joseph shares his dreams with the family, and this intensifies the narrative tension by increasing the hostility of the brothers. Indeed, Joseph continues to share his dreams despite the increasing hostility. Although the narrative expectation in this dream type-scene is that the dreamer will respond to the dream and after a narrative delay will work to resolve the tension, this does not happen.

Other narrative expectations are not fulfilled. There is no reference to night (לילה), arising early (שכם) or fear (ירא). The narrative does not present a positive outcome for any of the characters. There are rescue attempts by Reuben and Judah, but although Joseph’s life is spared, he remains in a bad situation. As the story comes to a close, there is no mention of God. These gaps suggest that the dream type-scene is not completed in Genesis 37.

As the Joseph cycle continues, narrative expectations created by the presence of Joseph’s dream are gradually fulfilled. A long narrative delay is created when Joseph tests his brothers. After the delay, Joseph reveals himself to his brothers and works to resolve family tensions by requesting that his whole family join him in Egypt. Though seemingly unlikely at the outset, Joseph’s dreams are fulfilled when he rises to great power in Egypt. Although the characters demonstrate an understanding of the dream in Genesis 37, it may be argued that a full understanding of the dream does not occur until Genesis 42:9, when Joseph sees his brothers and remembers his dreams.\(^{372}\) This reference to Joseph’s “memory of the dream also serves to alert the reader to the

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\(^{372}\) Husser, Dreams and Dream Narratives, 113.
continuing significance which the dream, as a mystical determining force, may have for the ultimate outcome of the story.”

Joseph’s actions rescue not only his family, but also all of Egypt. The narrator specifically draws attention to Joseph’s deliverance of his family through Joseph’s speech: “God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth and to keep you alive by a great deliverance” (Gn 45:7). By the end of the Joseph cycle, he is reunited with his family in a peaceful relationship, demonstrating that the tensions created by his dreams have been fully resolved. The cycle concludes with the proclamation that everything had been orchestrated by God, and in the end, there is a positive outcome for all characters.

3.3.5 The Dreams of the Cupbearer and Baker (Genesis 40:1–23)

The narrative of Joseph’s dreams concludes with announcing that he was sold into slavery to Potiphar in Egypt (Gn 37:36). Though YHWH is with Joseph, events in Genesis 39 end with Joseph in prison. The divine promises in Joseph’s dreams remain unfulfilled.

Genesis 40 introduces two new characters into the biblical text: the cupbearer and the baker of Pharaoh’s court. An unspecified offense against Pharaoh lands them both in the same prison as Joseph, who serves them (Gn 40:1–4). With Pharaoh enraged at them, the cupbearer and baker are in a dangerous and powerless situation.

Sometime later, they each have a dream (חלום) at night (לילה); “Then they both dreamed a dream, each man his dream in the same night” (Gn 40:5). The text indicates each dream had its own interpretation (Gn 40:5). Rather than respond to the dream, the cupbearer and baker do not take action but seem listless. Joseph notices their depressed expression and asks them why they look so sad (Gn 40:7). They respond, “We dreamed a dream but there is no one to interpret it” (Gn 40:8). It is natural for these Egyptian officials to experience anxiety because there is no professional diviner in the prison to provide them with a dream interpretation, something required in ancient Egyptian culture when a person experienced a dream. Joseph replies, “Do interpretations not belong to God? Recount it to me, please” (Gn 40:8). Joseph’s statement

373 White, *Narration and Discourse*, 246.

374 Hamilton, *Genesis*, 483, comments that the lack of background information on the cupbearer and baker highlights Joseph as a central figure in the narrative.
declares that the meaning of the dreams is true and comes from God and suggests that he depends on God for the ability to interpret dreams. Whereas the Egyptians require a dream manual to decipher the meaning of dreams, Joseph relies on God. By interpreting their dreams, Joseph will deliver them from the source of their anxiety.

First, the cupbearer verbalizes his dream by telling it to Joseph:

In my dream, behold! a vine before me, and on the vine were three branches. And as it was budding its blossoms came out—its clusters produced ripe grapes. Then Pharaoh’s cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes and I pressed them into Pharaoh’s cup and I gave the cup to Pharaoh’s palm. (Gn 40:9–11)

The dream is of images; Joseph immediately understands the meaning of the images. Joseph states, “This is the interpretation of it: The three branches are three days. In yet three days Pharaoh will lift up your head, and you will be restored to your office, and you will give the cup of Pharaoh into his hand as was your former custom when you were his cupbearer” (Gn 40:12–13). Joseph’s interpretation is based on punning. The vine (גפן) represents a person, as it does in Deuteronomy 32:32, Psalm 128:3 and Job 15:33. Budding (פרחת) also signifies flourishing and is used to refer to a restored people in Hosea 14:6, Isaiah 27:6 and Psalm 72:7. The term used for Pharaoh’s palm has a second meaning that refers to a branch. Just as the cupbearer has the three branches (שריג) that are “like budded” (כפרח) in his dream, so he will have the Pharaoh’s palm/branch (כף) in his future.

The message provides the cupbearer with a divine promise that he will be released from prison and return to Pharaoh’s service. As such, it infuses hope into the narrative. Further, Joseph adds the request that the cupbearer remember him, perhaps as payment for the dream interpretation: “Only remember me when it goes well with you and please do me kindness and remember me to Pharaoh and bring me out of this house. For I was surely stolen from the land of the Hebrews and even here I have done nothing that they should put me in the dungeon” (Gn 40:14–15). Joseph’s additional comments present the hope that Joseph himself may be delivered from his imprisonment.

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375 Waltke and Fredricks, Genesis, 524.
376 See full discussion in Noegel, Nocturnal Ciphers, 128–132. In contrast, Westermann, Genesis 37–50, 75, perceives Joseph’s interpretative knowledge to be a gift rather than a skill.
377 Sarna, Genesis, 278, notes that ANE professional diviners expected to be paid for services.
The baker witnesses the dream report and interpretation and likely anticipates a similar positive interpretation for himself. He verbalizes the dream to Joseph: “I also was in my dream and behold! three white baskets on my head. And in the uppermost basket there was all types of baked food for Pharaoh but the birds were eating them from the basket from off my head” (Gn 40:16–17). His dream also consists of images. Joseph interprets the baker’s dream, but it only increases the tension surrounding his character. Instead of imprisonment, the dreamer now faces death: “Joseph answered and said, ‘This is its interpretation: Three baskets are three days. Yet, in three days Pharaoh will lift up your head from upon you and hang you upon a tree and the birds will eat your flesh off you’” (Gn 40:18–19). Joseph’s interpretation does not meet the baker’s probable expectation of a positive interpretation. Contrary to the cupbearer, the baker’s dream presents a divine warning that he will be beheaded.

Again, Joseph uses punning to decipher the meaning of the dream. The white bread or white basket (חרי סלי) is presumably associated with Pharaoh’s anger (חרי). Generally, the idiom of anger is used with the term nose (אף). This term is associated with the baker several times: in the title chief baker (שר־האפים), the verb baking (אפה), and, in his speech, the term indeed (אף). Also, the food (מאכל) that the baker refers to is associated with human corpses devoured by vultures (Dt 28:26, Jer 7:33, 16:4, Ps 79:2, and see Hb 1:16). Finally, just as the birds eat from off the baker’s head (העוף אכל על ראש המנהג), so his head will be cut off and the birds will eat his flesh (מעליך את־בשרך והעוף ואכל על־עץ אותך ותלה מעליך את־ראשך פרעה ישא, Gn 40:16–19).

The narrator reports a delay of three days before the dreams are fulfilled. Then,

On the third day, Pharaoh’s birthday, he made a feast for all his servants and he lifted the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. He restored the chief cupbearer to his office and he gave the cup into the hand of Pharaoh. But he hung the chief baker as Joseph had interpreted to them. (Gn 40:20–22)

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378 Lowenthal, *Joseph Narrative in Genesis*, 44, states, “the baker attempts to receive such a favourable interpretation.” Or, perhaps his delay is an indication of his guilt. Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 527, contrast the cupbearer and baker: “The willingness of the cupbearer to share his dream suggests his innocence; he has nothing to hide. By contrast, the guilty baker will not share his [dream] until he hears a favourable interpretation for the cupbearer.”

379 Sarna, *Genesis*, 280, associates “lift up your head” with the meaning “call to account” or “bring to justice.”

Events unfolded exactly according to Joseph’s interpretation, establishing his divinatory skill. Joseph’s statement that “Pharaoh will lift up your head” (ארֶנֶת פֶּרַע יִשָּׂא) did in fact mean exoneration for the cupbearer but beheading for the baker (Gn 40:13, 19, 20). Both dreamers are delivered from imprisonment, with a positive outcome for the cupbearer but a negative one for the baker. Tensions in the narrative concerning the dream interpretation and the future of the dreamers have been resolved. The narrative ends on a negative note: “But the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph but forgot him” (Gn 40:23). This last bit of information indicates that the nothing has changed in Joseph’s prospects and that the cupbearer has not worked to resolve the tension of the Joseph cycle. These themes will be taken up again in the following chapter.

3.3.5.1 Commentary on the Dream Type-Scene (Genesis 40:1–23)

In this dream type-scene, there are two dreamers. While most of the biblical dream type-scene characteristics are present in the narrative, Joseph’s character plays a key role in contributing to the type-scene.

Both dreamers are in a dangerous and powerless situation at the outset of the narrative. They each dream (חלום) at night (לילה). However, neither of them expresses fear (ירא) or rises early (שכם) to respond. Indeed, rather than respond in any way, they fall into depression. Their imprisoned state is intensified by these enigmatic dreams that produce further anxiety for the dreamers. This creates a narrative delay, until Joseph himself observes their mood and responds. Clearly, the dreamers’ depression indicates that they accept the dream as a true divine communication that requires an interpretation. Joseph also accepts the dreams as such.

The dreamers verbalize their dreams to Joseph, and he provides them with an understanding of the meaning of each dream. In the dreams, there are images. For the cupbearer, the dream is a divine promise, but for the baker, it is a divine warning. Joseph discloses a potential future of restoration for the cupbearer and death for the baker. The full restoration for the cupbearer seems rather unlikely, as he is in prison, while the death of the baker may indeed be likely if he is guilty. Joseph is presented with the possibility that the cupbearer will remember Joseph after being released. But, the cupbearer forgets about Joseph and thus a future release from prison.

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381 Sarna, Genesis, 280: “The narration employs the very words of Joseph to indicate the precision with which his predictions were fulfilled.”
seems unlikely for Joseph. The interpretation of the baker’s dream is without hope but does resolve the tension of his need to interpret the enigmatic dream. For the cupbearer, the dream message provides the hope of being released from prison. Indeed, though the baker is executed, the cupbearer experiences the positive outcome of being delivered from his imprisonment and returned to his service. With the announcement of Pharaoh’s actions, the tension related to the dreams is resolved; both dreams are fulfilled.

The key player in this dream type-scene is Joseph. To some extent, Joseph’s character fulfills the role of the dreamer in this type-scene. Like the cupbearer and baker, he too is facing a crisis of imprisonment. Joseph is powerless to change his situation. In contrast to the inaction of the dreamers to resolve the anxiety created by the dream, Joseph addresses the anxiety directly and delivers the dreamers from their anxiety. He is the only character to understand the dreams, and while the dreamers verbalize the content of the dreams, Joseph verbalizes their meaning. In doing so, he both intensifies the narrative tension for the dreamers and the reader, who must wait to see if his prediction will come true, and works to resolve the tension by announcing how the story will end.

Narrative expectation leads the reader to anticipate that the cupbearer will act to resolve the tension in the plot. Joseph makes the needed resolution clear by explicitly asking the cupbearer to act on his behalf. This provides the narrative of Joseph with hope. Will Joseph, too, be delivered from prison? The narrative expectation is that indeed Joseph will be the other character to experience a positive outcome. However, the closure of the narrative unit dashes these expectations. The cupbearer forgets Joseph. As a result of the cupbearer’s lack of action, the future deliverance of Joseph seems unlikely and the tension with his family relationships remains unresolved. Joseph remains in prison. Thus, the expectations of resolution for Joseph are not fulfilled. Further, in the conclusion, the element of God is noticeably lacking. It may seem that God is not at work and that Joseph has been forgotten by God as well.

Although the narrative ends with Joseph still in prison, this dream type-scene plays a key role in his story. The first dream type-scene in the Joseph cycle led to events that resulted in his imprisonment; this dream type-scene puts elements into play that will deliver him from

\[^{382}\text{Of course, the interpretation that Joseph gives the baker introduces a new cause for anxiety.}\]
imprisonment. Though the tension in the Joseph cycle has not been resolved, Joseph’s encounter with the cupbearer has revealed his divinatory skill of dream interpretation and will contribute to the resolution of the narrative tension as the narrative progresses. In the subsequent chapter, the cupbearer will indeed work to resolve the tension in Joseph’s predicament and the reader will discover that God had not forgotten Joseph.

3.3.6 The Dreams of Pharaoh (Genesis 41:1–40)

In the previous chapter, Genesis 40, the narrator presents the narrative of the cupbearer and baker. The story ends with the cupbearer forgetting about Joseph and his imprisonment. Genesis 41 begins with the announcement that two years has passed. The narrative tension of Joseph’s imprisonment remains unresolved. In Genesis 41, narrative emphasis shifts away from Joseph and the prison to the court of Pharaoh.

Without providing any background, the narrator announces, “Pharaoh had a dream [חלום]” (Gn 41:1). Rather than placing the description of the dream in the mouth of the dreamer, the narrator describes the dream directly:

Behold! he was standing by the river and behold! from the river seven cows arose, attractive of appearance and fat of flesh, and they were grazing by the pasture. Then behold! seven other cows arose after them from the river, evil of appearance and withered of flesh, and the cows stood together on the edge of the river. Then the seven cows, evil of appearance and withered of flesh, ate the seven attractive of appearance and fat of flesh cows. (Gn 41:1–4)

This constitutes the first dream. Upon its completion, Pharaoh awakens.

Pharaoh falls asleep again and has a second dream (חלום). Again, the dream is made known to the reader by the narrator directly: “Behold! seven ears of grain arose on one stalk, fat and good. And behold! seven ears of grain withered and scorched by an east wind, sprouted after them. Then the withered ears of grain swallowed the seven fat and full ears of grain” (Gn 41:5–7). The scorched (שדפה) ears of grain represent produce that is dried up before it matures. An east

384 The river is the Nile. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 327, observes, “It is administration of the Nile which permits the king to generate and guarantee life. The failure of the Nile and its life system means that the empire does not have in itself the power of life (Ez 29:3).”
385 See *BDB*, 995; and 2 Kings 19:26.
wind (קדר) is often depicted in the biblical text as a violent wind.\textsuperscript{386} Such a wind in the Egyptian desert is hot and dry. Swallowed (בלע) is a term associated with sudden calamity and violence.\textsuperscript{387} This is important for understanding Joseph’s interpretation.

After the dreams, Pharaoh wakes up (יַקֵּץ). The details of Pharaoh’s waking and sleeping are typical of ancient Near Eastern dream texts, although not a common feature in OT dream type-scene narratives. In the morning (בָּקָר), Pharaoh is anxious because of the dreams.\textsuperscript{388} In ancient Egypt, the meaning of a dream needed to be divined so that the dreamer could understand the dream message and avoid a negative future.\textsuperscript{389} Pharaoh responds in the manner expected from an Egyptian—he calls for all the diviner-priests in Egypt and the wise men. It is natural for Pharaoh to expect the diviners to provide an interpretation when he describes his dreams to them, but no one is able to interpret the dreams (Gn 41:8).

Genesis 41:1–8 is only necessary background information, for the narrator’s report is very brief. The main narrative interest lies in the next action. A speech is given by the cupbearer. He summarizes the events of Genesis 40 in detail and apologizes for his offenses (Gn 41:9–13).\textsuperscript{390} The cupbearer’s actions in this passage provide a direct response to his dream in Genesis 40 and serve to resolve the narrative tension of Joseph’s imprisonment. Importantly, the cupbearer informs Pharaoh that Joseph can interpret dreams and wields great power, for his events unfolded exactly as Joseph foretold.

Joseph is summoned by Pharaoh, changes his attire, shaves and then appears before Pharaoh (Gn 41:14). Joseph’s status as a dream interpreter is reiterated by Pharaoh, who states, “I had a dream but there is no one to interpret it. I have heard it said about you—you hear a dream to interpret it.” (Gn 41:15).\textsuperscript{391} As he did in Genesis 40, Joseph positions the ability to interpret dreams in

\textsuperscript{386} BDB, 870.
\textsuperscript{387} BDB, 118.
\textsuperscript{388} Jacob also arose in the morning (בָּקָר, Gn 28:18), a common term in dream literature of the ANE.
\textsuperscript{389} See discussion in section 2.1.4.
\textsuperscript{390} Sarna, Genesis, 282, comments that when the cupbearer remembers (זָכַר) his offenses, it is “the same stem as used by Joseph in his plea in 40:14 and by the narrator in reporting the ingratitude of the cupbearer in 40:23. The similarity of language conveys a direct relationship between the events. Hence, he speaks of his ‘offenses’ in the plural, that is, against Pharaoh and against Joseph.”
\textsuperscript{391} For the importance of Joseph’s ability to interpret a dream based on hearing it, see section 2.1.6.
relation to God. Joseph tells Pharaoh, “It is not within me, but God will answer the welfare of Pharaoh” (Gn 41:16).

After this narrative delay between the dream and its interpretation, Pharaoh immediately verbalizes his description of the dreams:

In my dream, behold! I was standing by the edge of the river and behold! from the river seven cows arose, fat of flesh and attractive of form, and they were grazing by the pasture. Then behold! seven other cows arose after them, poor and exceedingly evil of form and weak of flesh. Behold! I never saw such evil in all the land of Egypt! Then the seven cows, weak and evil, ate the seven first fat cows. And when they entered into the inward parts no one would know that they had entered into the inward parts because they were evil of appearance as at the beginning and I awoke. And I saw in my dream, behold! seven ears of grain arose on one stalk, full and good. And behold! seven ears of grain, dried up, withered and scorched by an east wind, sprouted after them. Then the withered ears of grain swallowed the seven good ears of grain. (Gn 41:17–24)

Pharaoh complains that though he told the dream to the diviner-priests, no one could provide an interpretation (Gn 41:24). Joseph expresses an immediate understanding of the dream. Pharaoh presents both of his dreams as a single dream with two parts. Joseph also indicates the oneness of the dream message, telling Pharaoh that both dreams have the same meaning (Gn 41:24). Before providing the interpretation of the dream, Joseph acknowledges that God has given the dream and again attributes the understanding of the dream to God, stating, “God has revealed to Pharaoh what is imminent” (Gn 41:25). Later, Joseph comments, “God will do what he has shown Pharaoh” (Gn 41:28). Evidently, Joseph accepts the dream as truth from God.

Joseph then explains the dream. He draws a correlation between various elements of Pharaoh’s dream and its meaning:

The seven good cows are seven years behold! and the seven good ears of grain are seven years, behold! the dreams are one. The seven weak and evil cows that arose after them are seven years. Behold! the seven weak ears of grain scorched by an east wind are seven years of famine. (Gn 41:26–27)

Joseph describes both the cows and the stalks as good. Neither the narrator nor Pharaoh has called the cows good, and only Pharaoh calls the ears of grain good, but Joseph understands the

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392 This term () is often translated as thin, but throughout the OT text it refers to lowly economic status.

393 This term () is often associated with a full produce (BDB, 571).

394 Lowenthal, Joseph Narrative in Genesis, 48; and Sternberg, Poetics of Biblical Narrative, 399–400. Noegel, Nocturnal Ciphers, 48, notes that it is common for a dreamer to have two dreams in the ANE. Hamilton, Genesis, 487, notes the example of the two dreams of Gilgamesh. Gnuse, “The Jewish Dream Interpreter,” 37, suggests that the paired dreams ensured the accurate communication of the message.
meaning of both symbols to be the same and so he uses the same adjective to describe them, drawing attention to their oneness. Similarly, Joseph calls both the cows and grain weak, whereas Pharaoh calls only the cows weak. Again, Joseph takes the liberty to interpret one symbol by the other.

There is a pattern of numbers representing time in the dreams of the Joseph cycle. Joseph’s first dreams incorporate the numbers 13 and 22, which correlate with his 13 years of captivity and the 22 years before he was reunited with his family. In the dreams of the cupbearer and baker, the number 3 correlated with 3 days. There are also 2 dreams and 2 years before Joseph is released from prison. It is natural that Joseph would also relate the number in Pharaoh’s dream to a time span of either days or years. Joseph determines that 7 cows and 7 ears of grain both represent 7 years.

The narrator and Pharaoh describe the second set of cows as evil (רע). Joseph also utilizes this descriptive. He associates the seven evil cows and ears of grain with famine (רעב), a word that has the same initial letters and sound as evil (רע) and the same ending letter and sound as inward parts (קרב), connecting it to the seven evil cows that enter the inward parts (קרב, Gn 41:21). The concept of a famine also incorporates the meaning of the descriptives fat, full and withered, key terms that Joseph does not use in his interpretation. Famine perfectly captures the idea of that which was fat and full becoming withered. The result of a famine is poverty, which incorporates Pharaoh’s description of the bad cows as poor. Further, Joseph also omits the phrase grazing (רעה) by the pasture (באחרון), used by the narrator and Pharaoh (Gn 41:2, 18). Joseph employs the letters of these two terms by using the word famine (רעב).

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395 See discussion in Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 138–39. Noegel comments, “Though the exact significance of these numbers escapes us today, it is possible that Joseph’s paronomastic use of numbers constitutes the Northwest Semitic reflex of number punning that we find elsewhere in the Near East.”


397 It should not go unnoticed that this phrase is similar to several phrases in Genesis 37, though nowhere else in the biblical text: Joseph was pasturing with his brothers (רעה אחיו, Gn 37:2), his brothers went to pasture (אחים רעים, Gn 37:12), his brothers were pasturing (אחים רעים, Gn 37:13). The term grazing will be used one more time in Genesis when Jacob blesses Joseph and calls God the one who has been his shepherd (ריעה, Gn 48:15).
Joseph’s interpretation implies that the cows and ears of grain represent people. A clue to this association is in Pharaoh’s own interpretation. Instead of referring to the fat cows being eaten as the narrator does, he states they have entered into the inward parts. The word for inward parts (כִּבְרָם) typically refers to a human body, either physical or emotional/intellectual.398 Joseph understood the evil-looking cows as representing humans. Another addition is that Pharaoh describes the evil-looking cows as poor (יֵשָׂך, Gn 41:19). It indicates something that has become weakened, reduced, poor. This would suggest that the evil cows are a weakened, reduced version of the fat cows. So, both the fat and the thin cows represent humans.

Joseph continues his speech to Pharaoh:

Behold, seven years of great abundance are entering in all the land of Egypt; and after them seven years of famine will arise, and all the abundance in the land of Egypt will be forgotten, and the famine will complete the land. And the abundance in the land will not be known because of the famine afterwards; for it will be exceedingly severe. On account of the telling of the dream twice to Pharaoh, the matter is arranged by God, and God will quickly do it. (Gn 41:29–32)

This statement also demonstrates a punning hermeneutic. Abundance (שבע) uses the same root as seven (שבע). Rather than employing the term עָלָה for arise, as the narrator and Pharaoh did, Joseph uses the synonym קוֹם, which carries the meaning of rising up in a hostile sense, often with the idea of suddenness.399 Joseph’s reference to forgotten (שָׂכָה) is new to the passage but is an allusion to the cupbearer forgetting (שָׂכָה) about Joseph in Genesis 40:23 and also has the meaning of destruction, consumption and annihilation.400 There is a reference to not knowing (ידע), which is a direct interpretation of Pharaoh’s statement that the evil cows looked so bad even after eating the good cows that no one knew (ידע) what they had done (Gn 41:21).401 Just as Pharaoh described the poor cows as exceedingly (מאָד) evil, Joseph describes the famine as exceedingly (מאָד) severe.

Joseph communicates the tension of an oncoming natural disaster introduced by Pharaoh’s dream. Egypt is about to enjoy seven years of abundance, and a natural disaster seems unlikely, yet Joseph reveals the divine warning of a forthcoming famine. Until the dream is given, Pharaoh

398 The emotional and intellectual aspects of humanity are closely related in Hebrew.
399 BDB, 878.
400 BDB, 478.
401 The term ידוע is later used by Pharaoh to ascribe Joseph’s knowledge (ידע) to the enabling of God (Gn 41:39).
is unaware of the looming crisis that he and his nation are facing. Once he receives Joseph’s interpretation, he realizes the danger of the coming famine and his powerlessness to prevent the natural disaster.

The interpretation reveals that the dream message infuses hope into the narrative. It foretells not only the famine but also the abundance of produce before the famine. Joseph’s suggestion that Pharaoh collect and store produce during the years of abundance for the years of famine provides further hope of a resolution. Indeed, Joseph all but presents himself as the solution to the problem posed by the famine: “Now Pharaoh will see a discerning and wise man and put him over the land of Egypt. Pharaoh will do and appoint appointees in charge of the land and exact one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during seven years of abundance” (Gn 41:33–34). Joseph suggests that food be gathered and stored to be a reserve for the years of famine (Gn 41:3–36). Pharaoh accepts Joseph’s proposal and gives him the authority to execute the plan.

Joseph’s speech and Pharaoh’s acceptance of Joseph’s advice along with the actions in the remainder of the narrative bring resolution to the layers of tension in the story. Joseph resolved the early tension with regard to Pharaoh’s need to have his dream interpreted. He then suggested the resolution to the tension surrounding the oncoming famine. Pharaoh resolved the tension surrounding the famine by putting Joseph in charge of a plan to store food for future use. Moreover, Pharaoh’s promotion of Joseph resolves the tension in the broader narrative concerning Joseph’s unfulfilled dreams. The only tension yet to be resolved is family relations between Joseph and his father and brothers. This dream narrative makes it possible for the tensions in Joseph’s family to be resolved as well. The plan that Joseph executes is the impetus for the reunion of Joseph’s family and the complete fulfillment of his dreams.

In Genesis 40, the portrayal of Joseph as a leader and a successful dream interpreter is reinforced. Indeed, the narrator emphasizes the correlation between the interpretation and how events unfolded by using the key terms of Joseph’s interpretation: the seven (שבע) years of abundance (שבע) in the land of Egypt were forgotten (שכח) and the seven years of famine (רעב)

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402 Harris, *Studies in Jewish Dream Interpretation*, 2, comments that Joseph’s “unsolicited astute counsel to Pharaoh (Gn 41:33–36) was also his interpretation of his own two dreams.”
arrived ( הגה, Gn 41:53–54). Moreover, the narrator states this point explicitly by declaring that events occurred just as Joseph had predicted (Gn 41:54). However, Joseph’s naming of his children as Manasseh (God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s house) and Ephraim (God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering) demonstrates that Joseph is content to leave his family tensions in the past. It is not until after this dream type-scene that he works to resolve his personal tensions.

The narrative indicates that Joseph successfully executed the plan. By doing so, Joseph rescues the dreamer, the kingdom of Egypt and indeed the “people from all the earth” who come to Joseph to buy grain (Gn 41:57). It is a positive outcome for the dreamer, Joseph, the Egyptians and all of the other people who are able to buy grain during the famine.

Indirectly, the conclusion points to God. Joseph has established that the dream was given by God as a warning (Gn 41:28). Pharaoh attributes the discernment and wisdom expressed by Joseph to the spirit of God (Gn 41:38–39). Thus, when Joseph successfully resolves the tension of the famine it is ultimately because God has brought it about. The narrator also emphasizes God’s action by repeated association between God and the verb “to do” (עשה, Gn 41:25, 28, 32, 34, 47, 55).

3.3.6.1 Commentary on the Dream Type-Scene (Genesis 41:1–40)

In many senses, the dream type-scene is presented as expected. There is a reference to dream (הָיָה) and night (לָיְלָה). Pharaoh, the dreamer, verbalizes the dream, which consists of images. Before Pharaoh responds to the dream message, there is a narrative delay created while the Egyptian diviners fail to interpret the dream and Joseph is brought out of the prison.

When Joseph enters the narrative, he reveals an understanding of the dream and then communicates it to Pharaoh. The interpretation introduces the tension of the divine warning of the forthcoming famine. Pharaoh’s situation is powerlessness against the natural disaster. He realizes that all of Egypt is in danger and faces a crisis. With no sign of the oncoming famine, this seems an unlikely future.

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403 Later passages confirm that the famine was severe (גְּדוּל), just as Joseph had predicted (Gn 41:31; 43:1; 47:4, 13).
Yet, the dream infuses hope into the narrative by foretelling seven years of abundance during which the Egyptians can prepare for the famine. Joseph acknowledges that the dream is true and from God. Indeed, God gives Pharaoh the dream so that Pharaoh, the Egyptians and all of the people of the land may be rescued from the famine.

Joseph presents the solution to the famine by proposing a plan to store food during the years of abundance. Pharaoh’s acceptance of Joseph’s plan and Joseph’s successful execution together resolve the tension foretold by the dream. This allows for a positive outcome for Pharaoh and all of the people in the land. For Joseph specifically, the dream type-scene leads to the resolution of tension within his own family and enables his own dreams to be fulfilled. In the end, all of this comes about because God has given the dream to Pharaoh and the ability to interpret the dream to Joseph and because the spirit of God is within Joseph to execute the plan of salvation for all of Egypt.

One unique element of this dream type-scene is that the content of the dream is announced to the reader by the narrator, then the dreamer, then the interpreter. This creates the opportunity to evaluate the dream from three different perspectives and to observe the progression from dream to meaning to interpretation. There is also no mention of rising early (שכם) or fear (ירא), and the reference to night (לילה) is in connection with the cupbearer, not the dreamer Pharaoh. The lack of the characteristics usually associated with the dreamer and the central role of Joseph in resolving the narrative tension draw the reader’s attention away from the dreamer and toward Joseph. As we trace the tension in Joseph’s family, it becomes clear that this dream type-scene contributes to the resolution of reunited Joseph and his family. In this narrative, the role of YHWH is subtle. The reader must continue to observe the unfolding of Joseph’s story before complete resolution is accomplished and God’s divine plan is fully revealed.

3.3.7 The Midianite Soldier’s Dream (Judges 7:8–23)

The nation of Israel is suffering under the oppression of the Midianites when God calls Gideon in Judges 6. The tension reaches a climatic point when the narrator announces that an army of Midianites is camped against a weak Israelite army. At the beginning of Judges 7, Gideon rises early (שכם) to camp at a distance from the Midianite army. That day, YHWH reduces the Israelite army to an assembly of only 300 men.
YHWH assures Gideon,

Now, it happened that same night (ليل) that YHWH said to him, “Arise, go to the camp for I have given it into your hand. If you fear (ירא) to go down, go down with your servant Purah to the camp. You will hear what they say, and afterward your hands will be strengthened to go down to the camp.” (Jdg 7:9–11)

Gideon obeys YHWH and goes down into the Midianite camp. He takes Purah, his servant, with him, affirming his fear. The narrator summarizes the dangerous situation that Gideon faces:

“Now the Midianites and Amalekites and all the children of the east were lying in the valley like a multitude of grasshoppers and their camels were without number, as numerous as the sand on the sea” (Jdg 7:12). This comparison of the Midianite army to a vast number of locusts offers a foul counterfeit of the progeny promised to Abraham (Gn 22:17, 32:12). With only 300 men to fight for him, Gideon seems powerless against Midian. The repetition of the size of the Midianite army heightens the danger and the motif of fear.

Gideon arrives at the camp and hears a Midianite soldier verbalizing a dream (חלום). The Midianite states the image-based dream: “Behold! I had a dream. A loaf of barley bread was tumbling into the Midianite camp against the tent. It struck it and it fell and it turned upside down and the tent fell” (Jdg 7:13). Various comments have been made about the loaf of barley bread. It is small and stale, like the small Israelite army. For such a small item, the result of its encounter with the tent is unexpected and disproportionate. Arthur Cundall and Leon Morris observe that the piece of bread “represented the poor yeoman farmer of Israel, whose staple crop was barley, whilst the tent was the natural symbol for a nomadic community like the Midianites.”

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Immediately upon hearing the dream message, the Midianite soldier’s companion understands the dream and expresses its meaning: “This is nothing other than the sword of Gideon, the son of Joash, a man of Israel. God has given Midian and all the camp into his hand” (Jdg 7:14). The interpretation is based on punning.409 Alternate meanings for mouldy (עַלָּחָי) suggest terrifying news, darkness and death.410 The root for loaf (לחם) may equally mean bread or war.411 Judges 5:8 contains the phrase הָלָם יָשְׁרִים (Jdg 7:13). Just as the loaf turns (הָלָם יָשְׁרִים) into the camp in the dream, so it overturns (הָלָם יָשְׁרִים) the camp in the dream. The injured party is the Midianite army. The image of the loaf striking (נכה) the tent is a fulfillment of God’s promise that Gideon will strike Midian (נכה, Jdg 6:16), and the narrator confirms that Gideon did strike (נכה) the army (Jdg 8:11). Midianites and Amalekites are lying (נפל) in the valley (Jdg 7:12). The dream foretells that they will fall (נפל) and lie fallen (נפל, Jdg 7:13), and the narrator confirms that many soldiers were felled (נפל, Jdg 8:10). Gideon’s army is in Harod (חרד, Jdg 7:1), and in the interpretation Gideon’s sword (חרב) attacks the Midianites. They cry out, “A sword (חרב) for YHWH and for Gideon” (Jdg 7:20), and the Midianites attack each other by the sword (חרב, Jdg 7:22). Felled soldiers are called swordsmen (חרב). Gideon hears the interpretation (שבר); Israelite men smash (שבר) their jars. Finally, just as Midianites invaded Israel with tents (אהלי, Jdg 6:5), so their tent (אהלי) is attacked in the dream. Further, Gideon had previously sent most of the army to their tents (אהלי, Jdg 7:8) and he will successfully ambush the dwellers of tents (אהלי, Jdg 8:11).

Clearly, the Midianite interprets the dream in a military context413 and reveals a faith in God’s power that seems to be sorely lacking among the Israelites.414 With the Midianite army vastly outnumbering Israel, the dream message declaring the Midianite’s defeat seems highly unlikely. Yet it changes the situation of the Midianites from perceived safety to one of danger, from powerful to powerless.

409 Noegel, Nocturnal Ciphers, 141–46.
410 Daniel I. Block, Judges, Ruth, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman, 1999), 290; and BDB, 852–53.
412 Boling, Judges, 146.
413 Martin, Judges, 98.
Further, the dream message introduces a narrative tension for the dreamer’s character. Surely the dreamer has assumed victory is imminent due to the size differential between the two armies, yet the dream presents a divine warning that the Midianites will lose the battle. For the dreamer, the dream message is hopeless.

Nothing else is stated about the Midianite soldier or his friend. Therefore, the dreamer’s reaction to the dream is unknown. Instead, it is Gideon’s reaction that is made known. The narrator repeats the relation of Gideon to the dream and its interpretation (Jdg 7:15). For Gideon, the dream is a divine promise, however unlikely it may seem, and infuses hope into the narrative by confirming the promise of deliverance.

Gideon’s first reaction creates a narrative delay when he praises God (Jdg 7:15). Gideon then returns to the Israelite camp and utters his acceptance of the dream as a message from YHWH and his understanding of the dream message: “Arise ( קוֹם) for YHWH has given the Midianite camp into your hands” (Jdg 7:15). Gideon’s next actions are a direct response to the dream message. He musters the Israelite army and attacks the Midianites, yelling, “A sword for YHWH and for Gideon!” (Jdg 7:20). In the conclusion of the dream type-scene, the narrator allocates victory to God. The Midianite army flees before the Israelite army, and “YHWH caused the Midianites to attack one another with their swords throughout the camp” (Jdg 7:22).

Just as the loaf of bread tumbled out of nowhere in the Midianite’s dream, so there is an unexpected turn of events in the Midianite camp. In the end, the Midianite army acts to fulfill the dream. The dreamer is not rescued, but rather Gideon and the Israelite army are rescued. There is no positive outcome for any of the Midianites, but there is a positive outcome for Gideon and the Israelite army. With the announcement of the Midianite defeat, tension in the narrative is resolved. Finally, the passage began with Gideon going down to the enemy camp and it ends with his returning from it.

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A narrative scene that includes a dream and a dream interpretation is appropriate to a cycle in which the hero is seeking divine signs. The dream message itself seems rather unneeded—it merely reiterates what God has already promised. Block suggests that the whole dream is a detour that delays Gideon’s act of obedience. Yet, the narrator uses this dream type-scene to demonstrate that God reveals divine messages to non-Israelites and to emphasize the faith of the non-Israelite in contrast to the doubts of Gideon. Of note, in this dream type-scene, it is not the Midianite dreamer but Gideon who fills the central role. The dream message is given for the benefit of Gideon, and Gideon’s character fulfills the narrative expectation of the dreamer’s role in the type-scene. Rather than a positive outcome for the Midianite dreamer, Gideon has a positive outcome. This modification of this dream type-scene characteristic serves to illustrate God’s faithfulness to Gideon in the midst of impossible circumstances.

At the outset, Gideon’s situation is one of danger, and he is powerless before the Midianite army. Gideon rises early and experiences fear, and YHWH speaks to him at night. These three characteristics occur before the dream is given and are an early indication that the dream type-scene will have other significant modifications. In contrast to the typical biblical dream type-scene, the dreamer’s initial situation seems safe because he is in a powerful situation, being a soldier in the stronger army.

When the dream occurs, the type-scene fulfills several narrative expectations. The dreamer verbalizes the dream message. It is an image-based dream that presents a divine warning and introduces the tension of a potential Midianite defeat. Another character, the dreamer’s friend, understands the dream and provides an interpretation. In light of the size of the Midianite army, the dream message presents a potential future that seems unlikely.

After the dream, the narrative expectations of the dreamer are met by Gideon. First, he delays by praising God. Next, he directly responds to the dream message by mustering the Israelite army and attacking the Midianites. This demonstrates that Gideon accepts the dream as a true message.

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417 Block, Judges, Ruth, 274.
418 Soggin, Judges, 141, comments that the dream is meant for Israel.
from God. His actions serve to bring resolution to the narrative tension. For Gideon, the dream provides a divine promise and thereby infuses hope into the narrative.

Ironically, the Midianite army also works to resolve the narrative tension and fulfill the dream when the soldiers slaughter one another. The Midianites experience the negative outcome of defeat, but Gideon experiences the positive outcome of victory. Ultimately, though, the narrator is firm in attributing victory to God.

Judges 7 begins with YHWH’s promise to strengthen Gideon. This dream type-scene accomplishes this and places Gideon at the centre of the action. With Gideon’s character meeting the narrative expectations of the dreamer, it seems clear that the dream message is indeed intended for Gideon’s strengthening. Throughout the Gideon cycle, Gideon tests God and demonstrates a lack of faith. When this dream is given, however, Gideon immediately responds in faith and trusts in God. The dream message, then, is also at the centre of Gideon’s character development and gives him the courage to obey God. However, as Barry Webb observes, “the irony is stunning: hearing the promise directly from the Lord did not convince Gideon, but hearing it from the Midianite soldier did.”419 The dream, then, has a central role—it not only confirms YHWH’s message but it is the impetus for Gideon to move forward and obey.420 Yet, it seems that Gideon’s character is not permanently transformed by this experience, for after worshiping God as the result of this final sign, Gideon will not worship God again. Rather than having a wonderful song of Yahweh’s glorification after the battle (cf. ch 5), there will only be Gideon’s increasing usurpation of God’s glory for the victory in the battle and its outcomes.421

3.3.8 Solomon’s Dream (1 Kings 3:5–15)

First Kings 3 is set in the context of the establishment of Solomon’s reign. David exits the text in 1 Kings 2 with a speech to Solomon. His speech instructs Solomon to follow the commandments of YHWH so that Solomon will succeed in all he does and his descendants will continue to reign over Israel. David reminds Solomon about those who did disservice to him and those who showed kindness to him. After David’s speech is given and he dies the narrator describes how

[420] Further, Matthews, Judges & Ruth, 93, argues “the subsequent battle is almost an afterthought in the narrative.”
Solomon secures his throne and eliminates his enemies within Israel through violent means. Solomon’s actions secure the kingdom by adhering to the human wisdom of his father and set the stage for the second form of wisdom espoused by God.⁴²²

After announcing that the kingdom of Israel is in Solomon’s control, the narrator makes three remarks. First, Solomon’s initial action is to make a forbidden political alliance with Pharaoh by marriage to his daughter (1 Kgs 3:1).⁴²³ Second, the narrator reports, “the people sacrificed in high places because there was no house built unto the name of YHWH” (1 Kgs 3:2). Third, the text states, “Solomon loved YHWH, walking in the statutes of David his father, only he sacrificed and made offerings at high places” (1 Kgs 3:3).

Each theme—alliance with Egypt, delay of building the temple and worship on the high places—reveals the narrator’s strategy of characterizing Solomon in positive terms on the surface but subtly suggesting a more negative view.⁴²⁴ Solomon makes an alliance with Egypt, a place with strong negative connotations throughout the OT.⁴²⁵ His marriages to foreign women were a practice that was to be his eventual undoing (1 Kings 11).⁴²⁶ The narrative notes that people sacrificed at high places, which “anticipated the crucial role that high places, corrupted by

⁴²³ Deuteronomy 7:3 and Joshua 23:12 warn against marriage between Israelite men and non-Israelite women.
⁴²⁴ For a comprehensive assessment of the characterization of Solomon in 1 Kings 3, see Jerome T. Walsh, 1 Kings, BO (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 69–77. The tension in the ongoing characterization of Solomon may indicate various layers of redaction in the Solomonic cycle. At times Solomon is viewed positively, in the wisdom tradition of Israel. At other times, the Deuteronomic redaction appears critical of Solomon in light of the debacles of the kings throughout the Deuteronomic History. This tension presents a challenge to a strictly narrative reading of the text. The ambiguities and tensions surrounding Solomon’s characterization are evident in the present assessment.
⁴²⁵ Provan, Kings, 44, states, “First Kings 3:1a cannot, therefore, represent anything other than a criticism of Solomon...the very root of his later apostasy.” Also, Richard Nelson, First and Second Kings, Interpretation (Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox, 1987), 34. Note 1 Kings 11:7–8, 12:31; 2 Kings 16:7–20, 21:3 and 23:26. Walsh, 1 Kings, 70, notes that the wording clearly indicates that the union is a political alliance between Solomon and the king of Egypt.
Canaanite influence, would play in Israel’s eventual apostasy and destruction.” Iain Provan notes, “Solomon was to blame for the people’s continued worship at these places because of his delay in building the temple.” Although Solomon loved YHWH, his love was not entirely wholehearted. His love (AbsolutePath) for God found a darker side in 1 Kings 11:1–2, where the narrator reports Solomon’s love (AbsolutePath) for other women. Solomon walking in YHWH’s statues would be ideal; however, the narrator states that Solomon walked in David’s statutes—another subtle indication that Solomon’s character is dubious. Finally, Solomon offers sacrifices on high places. Jerome Walsh and Donald Wiseman perceive this as an allusion to the idolatry that the high places became synonymous with in later years. Other scholars perceive Solomon’s sacrifices on high places as acceptable in the absence of the temple. This opening context highlights the crisis that Solomon faces. Provan describes Solomon as “divided, conflicted, sinful...with only a very partial grasp of God’s dealings with his house.”

In a positive sense, as king of Israel Solomon is certainly not in a seemingly powerless situation—the very opposite. The narrative is full of the promise of political and national security and worship of YHWH. With the power and control he has procured, Solomon is free to fully obey God going forward. The association of Solomon with a love for God and David’s relationship to God is also a positive statement that indicates Solomon’s obedience and worship of YHWH.

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427 Hubbard, *Kings*, 32. Cogan, *Kings*, 184, comments, “The overwhelming majority of references to גְּבָרָה associate them with the illicit worship of YHWH.”
The narrative continues the report of the establishment of Solomon’s kingdom. Background information announces the habitual practice of Solomon: “The king walked to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place. Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar” (1 Kgs 3:4). This statement is two-fold. Solomon’s sacrifice to YHWH demonstrates his worship of YHWH, but at the same time, he sacrifices at the great high place (בֵּית הַמִּדְנָה), which cannot be read separately from the narrator’s rebuke of Solomon for sacrificing in the high places (בֵּית הַמִּדְנָה) in the previous verse. However, one might explain Solomon’s actions due to the absence of the temple. In the midst of this dubious characterization of Solomon, the reader might anticipate that the subsequent dream type-scene will provide a sense of clarity.

The narrator informs the reader “YHWH appeared to Solomon in a dream at night” (1 Kgs 3:5). This statement establishes this passage as a dream (חלום) type-scene that occurs at night (לילה). God is the speaker and initiates a dialogue. “God said, ‘Ask what I should give you’” (1 Kgs 3:5). Typically, God’s speech in dream type-scene narratives consists of a divine promise or warning. In this narrative, it appears that God is testing Solomon to see what he will ask for. Solomon responds,

\[
\text{You have done great loving-kindness to Your servant David, my father, as he walked before You in truth and in righteousness and in uprightness of heart toward You; and You have kept for him this great loving-kindness, and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. Now, YHWH, my God, You have made Your servant king in place of David, my father, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a burdensome people who cannot be numbered or counted for abundance. (1 Kgs 3:6–8)}
\]

After the acknowledgement of all that God did for him and his nation, Solomon asks for discernment: “Give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?” (1 Kgs 3:9). Solomon’s response seems to pass God’s test, for “it was good in the eyes of the Lord that Solomon had requested this thing” (1 Kgs 3:10). God perceives Solomon’s request as sensible and responds,

434 August H. Konkel, 1 & 2 Kings (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 78, notes, “Gibeonite territory was one of the first areas to become a part of Saul’s kingdom and the new king would need to renew the connection with the Gibeonites, possibly through a treaty, in order to become recognized as their ruler.” Marvin A. Sweeney, I & II Kings: A Commentary, OTL (Westminster John Knox, 2007), 80–81, basing his reading of Gibeon on the larger narrative, comments, “Solomon’s worship at Gibeon presages his tolerance of foreign religious practice.”
Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have you asked for yourself riches, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice. Behold! I have done according to your word. Behold! I have given you a wise and discerning heart for judgment, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor will one like you arise after you. Also, that which you have not asked I have given to you, both riches and honour, so that there will not be anyone among the kings like you all your days. (1 Kgs 3:11–13)

God’s speech employs key terms from Solomon’s speech. Solomon asked for a heart (לב), and God grants him a heart (לב). Solomon requests that his heart be understanding (שמע) so that he may discern (בְּ). God notes his request for understanding (שמע) but grants him a heart that is wise (חכם) and discerning (בְּ). Solomon makes the request so he can judge the people (שפט). God acknowledges Solomon’s desired purpose of judgment (שפט), but the purpose of God’s gift is that there will not be anyone among kings like him (אשה מכל אחראים לא יאהרך לא יאמר כיום). God does not mention discerning between good and evil (לרע בין טוב), although the narrator notes that Solomon’s response seemed good (טוב) in the eyes of (בעיני) God. Additionally, God grants Solomon riches (עשר) and honour (כבד).

God’s gifts come with an expectation of obedience: “If you walk in my paths to keep my statutes and my commandments as David, your father, walked, then I will lengthen your days” (1 Kgs 3:14). Just as Solomon referred to David’s walking (הלך) in verse 6. God instructs Solomon to walk (הלך). By including this condition and reminder to be obedient, is God making an effort to save Solomon from apostasy? Will Solomon follow in David’s ways? First Kings 3:3 has already indicated Solomon’s limited faithfulness following in the footsteps of David.

Through the dream message, God reveals the potential of an incredible future for Solomon if he will obey God. However, Solomon’s characterization up to this point is of a king who secures his throne by killing his enemies, even those clinging to the horns of YHWH’s altar (1 Kgs 2:28), who then makes an alliance with Egypt by marrying an Egyptian princess, and who offers sacrifices and burns incense on the high places. The reader may doubt if Solomon will indeed follow God’s rules and regulations. In this, it may seem that the dream message presents an unlikely potential future.

Yet, the narrator has informed us that Solomon loved YHWH and walked in David’s statues. Indeed, the dream message is hopeful and presents Solomon in a positive light because it demonstrates God’s interest in Solomon’s welfare and desire to bless him and to engage in a
close, personal relationship with him. If God continues to bless Solomon in this way, Solomon must surely succeed.

After God appears, “Solomon awoke (יקץ) and behold! a dream!” (1 Kgs 3:15). There is no indication that Solomon rises early (שכם) after the dream to respond. It would seem that Solomon did not realize the need to respond with urgency to the divine warning amid the divine promise.

After Solomon awakes, the narrator reports, “He went out to Jerusalem and he stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord and he offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings and made a feast for all his servants” (1 Kgs 3:15). The immediate reaction to stand before the ark in Jerusalem indicates that Solomon accepts the dream as truly from God. John Olley perceives that this action demonstrates Solomon’s obedience, submission to YHWH’s rule and acceptance of his obligations. However, Provan argues,

> The significance of this second set of sacrifices is unclear. Does Solomon now realize where he should have been worshiping all along (before the ark, rather than at the high place)? If so, the first effect of his newly received wisdom is to help him to distinguish in himself between right and wrong (3:9). 435

The reader may perceive in the note that Solomon offered up burnt sacrifices (עלה) and peace offerings (שלם) a narrative allusion to Solomon’s sin of sacrificing (זבח) and making offerings (קר) at high places (במה, 1 Kgs 3:3). Different roots are used to describe Solomon’s actions, even though the meaning is similar. Again, the narrator’s message is an ambiguous nod to the tension between Solomon’s sinful inclinations and his love for God. Solomon’s offering is to the Lord (אדני), not YHWH or Elohim. Does this concluding statement qualify as a conclusion related to God? Again, the text presents a complexity that can be viewed from various perspectives.

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435 Walsh, *Kings*, 74, argues that the repeated statement that Solomon is having a dream in verse 15 is “intended to reflect Solomon’s points of view and to assure us that Solomon realizes that he has experienced a divine visitation.”


Notably, while Solomon is hosting a feast, there is no record of him verbalizing the dream.\textsuperscript{438} Further, Solomon’s actions of offering sacrifices and hosting a feast create a narrative delay before he responds directly to the dream message by demonstrating the gifts he has been given.

The remainder of 1 Kings 3 demonstrates Solomon’s judicial wisdom by the well-known story of two prostitutes who each claim maternity of a baby. When Solomon threatens to kill the baby, the real mother is revealed. This story is a direct response to the dream. His wise approach to the women’s case confirms that God has fulfilled the promise of the gift of wisdom. God promised Solomon wisdom (חכם), and then Solomon demonstrated wisdom (חכם) by a tactful judicial decision (1 Kgs 3:28).

In this dream type-scene, the overarching narrative tension concerns Solomon’s character. God’s appearance and divine promises to Solomon suggest that everything will go well for Solomon and he will be blessed but the dream message casts a negative portent by the divine warning. This tension is partially resolved when the divine promise of wisdom becomes a reality in the second part of the chapter. Thus Solomon’s exhibition of judicial wisdom provides an early indication that the promises of discernment, riches, honour and long life will follow.

When word of Solomon’s actions spread throughout Israel, the people express fear (ירא): “All of Israel heard the judgment that the king judged and they feared before the king for they saw that the wisdom (חכם) of God dwelt in him to do justice (משפט)” (1 Kgs 3:28). A. Graeme Auld questions what Israel hears—the wisdom or the verdict (i.e., his justice); “The Hebrew word [משפט] comprehends both the abstract principle and the concrete decisions which give it practical expression.”\textsuperscript{439} The people’s response of fear contrasts with Solomon’s response because Solomon expresses no fear after his divine encounter.

Later in the text, the narrative confirms that Solomon obtained the gifts promised by God in the dream.\textsuperscript{440} The speech of the queen of Sheba confirms Solomon’s wisdom (חכם) and “good” (טוב).

\textsuperscript{438} John Gray, \textit{I and II Kings: A Commentary}, OTL, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 127, suggests that the feast has a practical purpose of communicating to the people the blessing which the king had been given; however, this is not stated in the text.


\textsuperscript{440} Cogan, \textit{Kings}, 187, comments, “Solomon attained all, except a particularly long life.”
that his men are happy (אשר) who understand (שמע) his wisdom (חכם), and that he has been made king to do justice (משפט וצדק). The narrator directly confirms Solomon’s ability to execute justice (משפט), the wisdom (חכם) God gave to his heart (לב), and his discernment (בין) understanding (שמע) and riches (עשר, 1 Kgs 3:28, 4:29–34, 10:23–24, 11:41). Solomon’s honour (כבד) is not confirmed, but after his reign, the people complain that Solomon laid a burdensome (כבד) yoke on them (1 Kgs 12:4).

If Solomon chooses to obey God, the promises God gives Solomon in the dream will have a positive outcome for Solomon that the reader can expect to extend to his nation. However, it may be that the additional gifts God gives Solomon—riches (עשר) and honour (כבד)—present more of a second test than a beneficial gift. Whereas, according to Solomon, David was upright (ישר), Solomon will be rich (עשר). Whereas Solomon describes the people as burdensome (כבד), he is given honour (כבד).

To describe the end of Solomon’s reign the narrator uses the terms from Solomon’s dream to report that Solomon’s heart (לב) was turned away from God (1 Kgs 11:3, 9). Solomon walked (לך) after the Ashtoreth (עשתרת), a term very similar to riches (עשר, 1 Kgs 11:5). Though Solomon’s request for discernment of good and evil in the dream type-scene was good (טוב) in the eyes (בעיני) of the Lord (יהוה), he eventually does the very evil (רע) in the eyes (בעיני) of YHWH that he wanted to discern (1 Kgs 11:6). At the introduction of the dream type-scene, Solomon worshipped at a high place (במה; 1 Kgs 11:7). Finally, as noted above, though Solomon is given honour (כבד), the people complain that Solomon laid a burdensome (כבד) yoke on them (1 Kgs 12:4).

Understood as such the divine dream message intensifies the narrative tension by raising questions about Solomon’s future. Because of his “gift” of wealth will Solomon accumulate gold and silver for himself in disobedience of the instructions to future kings in Deuteronomy 17:17? When God makes him the greatest king of his generation, is it a test to see if he will exalt himself above his fellow citizens as Deuteronomy 17:20 warns against?

441 Although this translation is most common, clearly the two terms are to be understood in relationship to one another, hinting that perhaps the people are honourable and that Solomon is given a heavy burden.
The preceding discussion highlights the complexity of Solomon’s characterization in the biblical text. This dream type-scene is at the centre of the complexity of his characterization. Gene Rice comments, “All that happens in chs. 1 and 2 is preliminary. The real beginning of Solomon’s reign was a spiritual experience at Gibeon that empowered him for the proper exercise of his kingship. All the achievements for which Solomon is so famous are rooted in this occasion.”

Richard Nelson perceives this scene in very positive terms: “in Solomon’s dream at Gibeon, the nations’ most important high place, two competing patterns of kingship are set before the reader: a kingship of glory and a kingship of the spirit of Deuteronomy. Solomon chooses the second pattern.” However the reader perceives the text, the narrator’s commentary on Solomon’s kingship in 1 Kings 11 from the perspective of the dream type-scene may not be as positive as Rice and Nelson suggest. At minimum, the narrator’s commentary on Solomon’s kingship is certainly ambiguous.

The passage began with Solomon sacrificing at Gibeon and finishes with Solomon sacrificing in Jerusalem. Solomon’s reaction is to worship God and he chooses to go to Jerusalem, the location of God’s future house. In this immediate context, the dream has a positive impact on Solomon.

In the larger context, Solomon’s characterization is not as positive. Before the dream type-scene, Solomon marries a foreign woman, delays the building of the temple and sacrifices at the high places. By the end of his cycle, Solomon’s downfall is his love for foreign women, his worship of foreign gods (even building a high place for them) and a heart turned away from God. Regardless of how special or powerful the dream type-scene is for Solomon, one might argue that Solomon did not truly understand the divine message embedded in dream message. If he did understand the divine warning, he certainly did not heed its warning in the end.

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443 Nelson, Kings, 31.
444 Nelson, Kings, 32.
3.3.8.1 Commentary on Dream Type-Scene (1 Kings 3:5–15)

There are immediate connections between 1 Kings 3:5–15 and ancient Near Eastern dream texts. Like other dream texts from the ANE, the narrative is distinguished by a lack of other characters. Also, the biblical dream type-scene serves the typical ancient Near Eastern purpose of propagating the royal figure, though the biblical narrator is not as generous toward Solomon as other ancient Near Eastern dream literature that tends to exaggerate the royalty’s positive features. Like other dreams of the ANE, God’s dream message to Solomon serves to legitimize his succession. Solomon’s dream reinforces the king’s enthronement and rulership. It confirms the authority and divine election of the king. It is a special privilege to receive a divine communication in the form of a dream early in one’s royal career, and the text notes Solomon’s reference to being a young boy (though this may not be historically accurate). Similar to Keret in the Ugaritic epic (KTU 1.14), Solomon is offered a gift in his dream and receives more than he asked for. Also, in the ancient Near Eastern dream reports, the divine being usually appears to the dreamer as God does here. In this, the dream type-scene is positive for Solomon.

Some scholars argue that 1 Kings 3 is an example of incubation. The narrative of Solomon at Gibeon might be understood to have a very vague indication of incubation, but the argument is weak. Solomon offers sacrifices at a high place but does not ask the divine being for a dream or cry out to the divine being for rescue or deliverance, and there is no record of Solomon practicing any particular ritual or magic to obtain a dream. Contrary to other ancient Near Eastern dream texts, the divine being does not put Solomon into a sleep. At best, the narrative may demonstrate ancient Near Eastern influences, but the narrator is not intentionally presenting an incubation scene.

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446 Ehrlich, *Der Traum im Alten Testament*, 13–55, argues that Solomon’s dream is indisputably an incubation. Gnuse, *Dreams and Dream Reports*, 234, also perceives Solomon’s dream as an incubation.

447 Husser, *Dreams and Dream Narratives*, 173, argues, “Greek, the syntax of v 4b indicates that the evocation of ‘a thousand burnt offerings’ is introduced in parenthesis, and that the yqtl form of the verb is to be understood frequentatively: ‘Solomon will offer a thousand burnt offerings on this altar.’ There is not even in Greek, therefore, any direct relationship between the sacrifices and the dream. Seen in this light, the question of incubation does not make much sense here, on the one hand because reference is
As a type-scene, the narrative has most of the expected characteristics. It is a dream (רְאוּת) experienced at night (לִבְיוֹ). The dreamer’s opening situation is one of crisis, if the points of negative characterization in 1 Kings 3:1-3 are taken as a warning, but Solomon seems unaware of the danger. In the dream, God speaks and presents both a divine promise and a divine warning. Based on the negative signs in Solomon’s characterization before the dream, the divine promise of a grandiose reign that eventually does see fulfillment seems initially unlikely. God’s warning to Solomon in the dream infuses a narrative hope that Solomon will avoid the pitfalls of disobedience that threaten the kingdom. By this warning, God himself seeks to rescue the dreamer from a future of disobedience. Whether or not Solomon truly understands the dream message and the weight of the divine warning is uncertain, but his immediate response indicates that he accepts the dream as truth from God. His first response is to delay by his celebratory offerings and feast. His second response is to publically demonstrate his gift of wisdom, a direct response to the dream message.

The dream type-scene intensifies the narrative tension. God’s divine warning presents the prospect that Solomon may not walk according to God’s statutes and commands. The terminology surrounding the divine gifts may be perceived as an allusion to the Deuteronomistic warning to kings, thereby creating a narrative tension in that the gifts may be more of a curse than a blessing.

In the immediate narrative context, it seems that the tension within the dream is resolved. Solomon demonstrates his wisdom, and the reader can expect the divine promise of the dream message to be fulfilled. Subsequent narratives indicate that Solomon displayed wisdom and discernment and that he obtained great wealth. In this sense, the divine promise is indeed fulfilled. Ultimately, though, the tension within Solomon’s character is resolved only by the reader’s perspective of Solomon at the end of his life—whether Solomon is praised for his accomplishments made possible by the divine gifts or whether Solomon is criticized for his personal failures despite the divine warning within the dream message.
The modifications of the dream type-scene are significant. Solomon does not verbalize the dream message or rise early (ษาם) to respond to the dream. When Solomon receives the weighty message of the dream, he does not respond in fear, but when he displays his gift of wisdom and judgment, the people are afraid (ירא). The dream narrative does not conclude with an explicit reference to God. The broader narrative reveals that although Solomon is not a powerless figure, he does not respond to the divine warning later in the narrative. These modifications of the dream type-scene are indications that the narrative expectations may not be fulfilled.

The remaining dream type-scene characteristic is the positive outcome for the dreamer that extends to other characters. On this point, the narrator seems to be intentionally ambiguous. God grants Solomon gifts that would enable a king to accomplish great things for the people. Certainly, Solomon’s reign brought great prosperity and power to the nation of Israel. However, the gifts Solomon received may have also contributed to his personal failures and, according to the nation’s outcry after his death, were used to burden his people. While the queen of Sheba exclaims about Solomon’s display of God’s gifts, such praise of Solomon’s gifts is not found in the mouth of the Israelites. Thus, while the narrative expectation of a positive outcome in this dream message of promise and gifts is high, in the end, Solomon’s life also reveals negative elements, suggesting that the expected positive outcome is not entirely fulfilled.
Chapter 4

Significance, Implications and Summary

The key contribution of this dissertation is the identification of the biblical dream type-scene, which has several major implications for biblical and narrative studies as outlined directly below. This study also identifies the characteristics of the biblical dream type-scene; the significance of each of these characteristics is noted in section 4.2. Key narrative observations from chapter 3 are highlighted in section 4.3. Following this, section 4.4 draws attention to the significance of OT dream literature in its ancient context, specifically in terms of the relationship between OT dream texts and those of the ANE and Homer. The present work concludes with suggestions for future study related to the dream texts of the OT.

4.1 Implications of Identifying the Biblical Dream Type-Scene

The identification of the biblical dream type-scene has several general implications for biblical and narrative studies. First, the identification of the dream type-scene contributes to biblical and narrative studies by presenting another type-scene for consideration and providing criteria that enable the reader to identify dream narratives as a particular type-scene with particular type-scene characteristics. The type-scene characteristics presented in this dissertation provide criteria to clearly distinguish dream type-scene narratives from all other biblical narratives. This is helpful, for example, in establishing Jacob’s dreams (Gen 28 and 31) as separate dreams.

A second implication of identifying a type-scene is that it positions each dream narrative as an intentional, independent and unique passage, rather than as a duplicate of an earlier story. It encourages the reader to perceive previously considered duplicate passages as independent literary units and the repetitious elements as intentional. There is no need to consider dream narratives as mere replications of each other or other narratives, though numerous features are common. Thus, Genesis 12 and 20 are considered distinct accounts.

Third, identifying type-scene features at work within a particular scene enables the reader to find additional meaning in the passage by observing how each feature is presented. In most dream type-scenes there are subtle modifications of the type-scene characteristics. These modifications draw attention to elements of the narrative that are intentionally emphasized by the narrator. By
noting type-scene characteristics and how they are modified, the reader may observe the
highlighted elements of the text and thereby unveil the narrator’s intended meaning.

Fourth, identifying a type-scene provides a context in which the narrative may be understood by
creating particular narrative expectations. By the inclusion of a type-scene, the biblical narrator
creates the expectation that the features of a type-scene will be present in each narrative. Thus,
once the type-scene characteristics are identified, the reader is presented with a number of
expectations that may (or to the reader’s surprise may only partially or even may not) be fulfilled
within the narrative. Through the process of observing the dream type-scene characteristics, the
reader becomes aware of the nuances of dream narratives and the significance of narrative details
and is thus a better reader of the text. Of particular importance to the dream type-scene is the
expectation that the dreamer will work to resolve the tension introduced or intensified by the
dream message and the expectation of a positive outcome for the dreamer that extends to other
characters.

Identifying a type-scene illuminates the literary complexities of the narratives, elevating the
artistic value of the text. A close reading of OT dream type-scene narratives reveals great literary
artistry. Every detail is carefully crafted to convey the individual meaning of each passage and to
connect the passages with one another. It should be noted that in any given narrative, subtle
literary elements contribute to the impact of the story on the reader. Type-scenes create
anticipation for specific elements to come, demonstrate the advanced skills of the narrator, bring
a sense of unity to the type-scene narratives and provide subtle messages to the reader through
allusion. Thus, while the identification of a type-scene may not always provide major theological
contributions, it is helpful in understanding the narrator’s intentions in employing a type-scene
and the effect that the presence of a type-scene is meant to generate upon the reader.

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448 The sensitivity to type that results in a reading of the text (as demonstrated in chapter 3) is similar to
identifying genres within the Psalms.
4.2  Significance of Biblical Dream Type-Scene Characteristics

Observing the presence, function and modifications of dream type-scene characteristics is fundamental to perceiving the meaning of dream type-scene narratives. Each of the characteristics has significance. In particular, the report of the dreamer rising early may seem a trivial narrative detail, but its omission is an indication that the dreamer will not respond to the dream and does not perceive the urgency of the message, as with Joseph in Genesis 37. Fear is present in most dream type-scene narratives; characters who demonstrate fear generally reveal an understanding of the seriousness of the divine dream message, such as Abimelech’s servants. The characteristic of verbalizing the content of the dream is often followed by an understanding of the dream by one or more characters. The understanding of the dream points directly to the character who will respond in some way to the dream. In the biblical dream type-scene, the dreamers’ response to the dreams and their effort or lack of effort to resolve the narrative tension points to the meaning of the text and often dictates the future development of the narrative. This narrative expectation is subverted in Judges 7, where Gideon rather than the dreamer acts to resolve the tension. Though dream messages tend to vary in content, length and style, they characteristically disclose a divine promise or warning and a potential but seemingly unlikely future. An example is when Jacob is given a divine promise for a grandiose future in a narrative following his characterization as a deceptive trickster. Despite their variety, dream messages consistently infuse hope into the narrative, as in Solomon’s dream. This is remarkable in light of the dreamers’ initial crises and sense of powerlessness. Hope for a positive outcome creates a narrative expectation that also points to the meaning of the text based on the degree to which narrative expectations are fulfilled. The extent to which narrative expectations are met within each passage challenges the reader to anticipate a conclusion that relates to God. When narrative expectations are not fully realized in a dream narrative, it suggests that the resolution to the narrative tension and the relationship of the situation to God are yet to come, as particularly exemplified in the Joseph cycle.

4.3  Summary of the Narrative Meaning Indicated by Old Testament Dream Type-Scene Narratives

The biblical narrator’s use of the dream type-scene expands our understanding of the meaning of the biblical text by providing another narrative perspective of the text. The present work
demonstrates that the biblical narrator has transformed simple dream reports into complex narratives that are imbued with multiple layers of meaning by creatively modifying various type-scene characteristics to highlight specific elements in the narratives. Examining how the narrator presents the dream type-scene characteristics illuminates much subtle narrative commentary in the dream type-scene narratives, as noted throughout chapter 3. Key modifications and their importance are now summarized.

Reading Genesis 20 as a dream type-scene encourages the reader to accept YHWH’s initial statement not as a death sentence but as a warning that may or may not be fulfilled depending on Abimelech’s response. Indeed, the episode elevates our view of Abimelech, who immediately responds to the divine warning in a narrative in which all of the dream type-scene characters are perfectly laid out. Abimelech’s actions not only resolve the immediate tension but also lead to events that result in the birth of Isaac narrative, resolving the tension within the greater narrative and powerfully connecting the two literary units. The dream message exposes the dream-giver YHWH’s personal care for the non-Israelite, while providing much needed hope for Abraham and Sarah’s struggle for a biological heir. An examination of Genesis 20 in the context of a dream type-scene differentiates the narrative from the parallel story in Genesis 12, draws attention to the distinct elements of Genesis 20 and establishes a framework in which the two narratives may be compared and contrasted. Similarly, the identification of Genesis 20 as a dream type-scene distinguishes the passage from Genesis 26, where Isaac also presents his wife as his sister to Abimelech. This may have a number of implications. For example, viewed as distinct narratives yet read together, Genesis 12 and 20 may serve to communicate that Abraham is far from perfect, demonstrating that he showed the same mistrust of God’s protection not once but twice. Moreover, Genesis 26 reveals that Isaac follows in the path of his father, repeating the same mistake. This repetition contributes to the humanizing of Abraham’s character and the theological message that God uses less-than-perfect beings, even those who repeatedly show a lack of faith. If the passages are considered to be one story with three versions, then the nuances of the passages when viewed as three distinct stories are missed.

Rather than a simple declarative statement, the dream type-scene of Genesis 28 provides a platform for God to communicate the plan for Jacob’s life in a personal yet dramatic setting. Jacob is established as a character of great expectations; the dream type-scene beckons the reader
to look to Jacob to carry on the legacy of his father rather than his older brother, Esau. Before the
dream type-scene, Jacob is characterized by deception and trickery, but the dream type-scene
presents him as a character of hope and promise. Despite his history, Jacob is presented as a
character of divine favour, being chosen by God to receive a divine message. As with the
Abimelech dream type-scene, the tension surrounding divine promises to Abraham find
fulfillment in this passage. The dream message and Jacob’s response indicate that the divine
promises will be fulfilled and thus provide narrative hope.

A study of the biblical dream type-scene characteristics may prompt the reader to suspect that
Jacob’s dream report in Genesis 31 is a fabrication of the truth. Whereas a biblical type-scene
will often have two or three modifications of the typical type-scene characteristics, Jacob’s
dream in Genesis 31 has many modifications and the text presents several ambiguities. Without
identifying the characteristics of the biblical dream type-scene, the reader would not have reason
to view Jacob’s dream as a false account. Perceiving Jacob’s dream as a fabrication promotes his
characterization as a deceiver. It also provides a way of explaining the ambiguity in the text
without the need to emend the text or suggest textual errors.

Laban’s dream type-scene meets the expectations of the biblical dream type-scene in that there
are almost no modifications of the type-scene characteristics. This demonstrates that the Israelite
dream-giver communicates even to dishonest outsiders and gives attention to their
circumstances. Laban is a minor character in the biblical text, but receiving a dream places him
on par with royalty like Abimelech and patriarchs like Jacob. This suggests that the God of Israel
relates to humanity with an equal regard for all persons. The lack of a seemingly unlikely future
(or any future at all) for Laban’s character in the biblical text serves to highlight the priority and
promise of Jacob’s future. God’s communication to Laban may also serve to redeem somewhat
his character from the harsh, exaggerated remarks of Jacob to his wives, particularly as the
straightforwardness of Laban’s dream narrative contrasts the modifications present in Jacob’s
fabricated dream narrative.

The Genesis 37 dream type-scene featuring Joseph’s dreams begins in a typical fashion. As the
narrative progresses, key characteristics are absent. Typically, the dreamer rises early and
immediately responds to the dream, retelling the dream to others and then acting to resolve the
tension in the story. But in the narrative of Joseph’s dreams, there is no mention of Joseph rising
early, and instead of resolving the tension, his action of repeating the dream actually serves to increase the tension. The identification of the biblical dream type-scene highlights this variation. The modifications of the dream type-scene characteristics serve to present Joseph’s character as naive and undiscerning of his situation. Throughout Genesis 37 Joseph is unaware of the crisis he faces and does not act to resolve the tension. The narrative expectation created by the dream type-scene encourages the reader to view Joseph’s character with hope and anticipation and to pay close attention to the continuing storyline. Indeed, the unrealized narrative expectations beckon the reader to “stay tuned” as several characteristics find fulfillment as the narrative gradually builds up until the end of Genesis 50, where the conclusion related to God is finally revealed. Ultimately, Joseph does act to resolve the tension with his family by reuniting with them and forgiving them. The familial tension introduced in Genesis 37 reaches a powerful final resolution in Genesis 50. Though his brothers fear Joseph’s reprisal for what they did, Joseph assures his brothers that there is no animosity. The declarative moment (Gn 50:19–22) confirms God’s hand on all that has happened and clarifies God’s saving work that extended to many people.

The baker and cupbearer dream type-scene in Genesis 40 is unique in several ways. First, there are two dreamers. While the expectation of a dream type-scene is a good outcome for the dreamer, only the cupbearer receives a good outcome. It is natural that the baker would anticipate a good outcome as well, which might well explain why he is quick to tell Joseph his dream after the cupbearer. The narrative is presented as though the baker himself is aware of the type-scene and what to expect. However, the pattern changes and the baker does not have a good outcome. A second unique element of Genesis 40 is that the dreamers do not immediately respond to their dreams. Further, in a significant change of roles, Joseph, rather than the dreamers, plays the central role in the text. From the perspective of the biblical dream type-scene, this detail encourages the reader to observe how Joseph will resolve the dreamers’ tension. Moreover, Genesis 40 presents Joseph with an opportunity to act to resolve the ongoing tension in his own storyline. His actions contribute to the resolution of his imprisonment and lead to events that bring about restoration to his relationship with his brothers and father. The central role of Joseph may remind the reader of the hope and divine promise for his character even though he is not the dreamer in this passage.
There are several omitted characteristics in Pharaoh’s dream type-scene. In Genesis 41, the omission of characteristics that are usually associated with the dreamer draws attention away from the role of the dreamer and brings Joseph into focus. Indeed, Joseph has a key role in resolving the tension surrounding Pharaoh’s dream message. Without Joseph’s skill and wise counsel, Pharaoh’s dream would not be interpreted and the people would not be saved. Genesis 41 also presents the resolution to multiple layers of tension left unresolved in the Joseph dream type-scene and the cupbearer and baker dream type-scene. As Genesis 41 progresses and reaches a conclusion, it is atypical that God is not central at the end of the dream type-scene passage. This may encourage the reader to watch for the final resolution of the tension in Joseph’s family and to anticipate a conclusion that relates to God.

Modifications of the Midianite soldier’s dream type-scene direct the reader’s attention to the character of Gideon in Judges 7. In contrast to other dream type-scene narratives, the Midianite dreamer fulfills few narrative expectations. Indeed, the entire episode seems to subvert the narrative expectations of a dream type-scene. Observing the modified role of the dreamer in the type-scene enables the reader to positively evaluate Gideon’s actions in light of the responses of other OT dreamers. The break in the typical narrative pattern of the biblical dream type-scene also adds to the suspense of the story by exploiting narrative expectation. Despite the modifications, though, one characteristic remains strongly intact. The outcome of the dream type-scene is good for Israel. God is at work bringing deliverance to the Israelites, and their victory is attributed to God’s intervention.

The outset of 1 Kings 3 holds great promise for the young monarch Solomon. Atypically, Solomon’s situation is not powerlessness. In the dream message, God bestows upon him significant gifts. This may lead the reader to develop high expectations for Solomon’s character. Though the dream type-scene is full of promise and hope for Solomon’s character, ambiguities of the text provide reason to question to what extent the narrative expectations for Solomon will be fulfilled. Solomon does not rise early to respond to the dream or verbalize the dream message, and the conclusion of the type-scene does not directly relate to God. Could these modifications indicate that the dream narrative presents a test for Solomon? Based on Solomon’s response to the dream message, it is not certain that he understood the divine warning amid the divine promise. Coupled with the powerful and gifted position of Solomon, the announcement of
Solomon’s personal failures at the ending of the Solomon cycle is particularly disappointing. The Solomon cycle ultimately demonstrates that the narrative expectation of a positive outcome for the dreamer and other characters is not entirely fulfilled.

A significant unifying thematic element to the dream type-scene narratives surrounds the narrative tension. In every dream type-scene narrative, there is a tension introduced or intensified by the dream message. Every narrative includes a response to the tension. On some level, the tension related to the dream message is resolved. Even in the story of Joseph, there is a sense of resolution when the brothers successfully rid themselves of Joseph, and later in the story Joseph brings true resolution to the tension by resolving the conflict with his brothers. There is also a rescue attempt in every dream type-scene narrative that leads to some positive outcome. Though the narrator modifies the characteristics (notably, the reader must wait for Joseph’s dream to be fulfilled and Gideon fulfils the expectations of the dreamer), a resolution to the narrative tension and a positive outcome draws the dream type-scene narratives together on a fundamental narrative level.
4.4 Significance of Old Testament Dream Literature in Its Ancient Context

A comparison between dream narratives of the OT and dream texts of the ANE and Homer has implications for our understanding of ancient Israel and highlights the uniqueness of the ancient Israelite text.

In OT dream type-scene narratives, dreams are consistently given by a divine being as a means of divine communication to humans, as was thought throughout the ANE. As such, the dream message was not a result of the dreamer’s psyche. To be consistent with the ancient Israelite culture, present-day studies of OT dream texts should not suggest that the dream message reflects the character’s inner being.

While dream texts come in various forms throughout the ANE, the bulk of OT dream texts are in narrative form. Other ancient texts provide many details about events leading up to the dream, such as details of the dreamer’s sleep chamber. However, such details were of little concern to the OT narrator unless they directly contributed to the dream type-scene.

Contrary to the surrounding ANE, incubation was not necessary for receiving divine communication in ancient Israel. Old Testament dreamers did not request a divine communication; it was freely given at God’s discretion. Unlike dream texts of the ANE, OT dreamers were often unaware of the dangerous situation they faced.

Contrary to dream-givers in the ANE, the dream-giver God of Israel does not give dreams that are intended to deceive the dreamer or are imbued with hazardous qualities. The divine dream-giver sends a clear message directly to the Israelites, who themselves could understand the dream and respond appropriately without a mediator. Thus, unlike the gods of the ANE, the Israelite God does not send an evil fate upon the people but rather lets them determine their future by responding to the divine warning. The OT dream type-scene narratives reveal God as merciful by warning the dreamer of a potential crisis and working out a positive resolution (except in the case of the baker who is executed). An element of hope in many of the dream messages is the presentation of God as one who makes favourable promises and intends good for the dreamer.
The lack of evil imbued in dream messages is an important divergence from other ANE texts. Magic and ritual practices were not required to dispel evil in ancient Israel. The biblical Israelite dreamers did not fear that evil portents from their dreams would be fulfilled. If the dream message foretold a potential evil future, it was for the purpose of warning the dreamer directly and in plain language. There was no need for the dreamer to pay a professional to decipher the meaning of the dream message from lengthy omen lists either. Further, the dreamer was not required to seek out what ritual practice was required in response to the dream. There was not an association, then, between ritual purification practices and healing. Though healing is a key element in the passage of Abimelech’s dream, it is an act of God’s mercy, not a result of supposed medicinal properties associated with dream interpretation.

Throughout the ANE, to differing extents, dream interpretation was conducted by professional diviners and writers. In OT dream type-scene narratives, the clarity of God’s communication to the Israelite dreamers did not require professional dream interpreters. Joseph qualifies as a professional dream interpreter, but his interpretations are for non-Israelites. Moreover, he is presented as far superior to the other dream interpreters of the ANE; God enables him to simply hear the dream to interpret it. His success points directly to the superiority of the ancient Israelite God, sharply contrasting the ancient Near Eastern exaltation of human diviners who sought to be the source of great knowledge themselves. Commoners in the ANE were compelled to trust the expertise of professional diviners for understanding their dreams, but the ancient Israelites were to trust the dream-giver directly as the ultimate source of knowledge. No matter how highly the written word was esteemed, the God of Israel was superior.

Unlike available dream messages from the surrounding ANE, dreams of non-royalty are preserved from ancient Israel, not only those of royalty. The biblical text demonstrates that divine communication is available to non-royalty and that the record of such a divine message is worth preserving. God communicates to both Israelite and non-Israelite, important leaders and commoners, those secure and those fleeing their home.

The purpose of biblical dream accounts is not primarily aggrandizement of the royal leader and propaganda of succession and military achievement. In a sense, ancient Israelite texts are the very opposite. Old Testament dream texts display the humanity of the dreamer and the superiority of the divine dream-giver. Even so, the superiority of the Israelite dream-giver is not
made explicit in grandiose statements like those typical of the ANE, but rather is made known by the subtle way God orchestrates events in favour of the dreamer and for the good of all the characters involved.

Of all ancient dream texts, Homeric dream writings bear the greatest resemblance to OT dream narratives. There is a distinct dream type-scene with distinct characteristics in both Homer and the OT. Some of these characteristics are similar, namely the motif of night and the inclusion of the dreamer’s reaction to the dream. A key difference is that Homeric type-scenes conform to a standard pattern whereas OT type-scene characteristics are modified within each passage. Generally, the situations of all dreamers in Homeric and biblical narratives are negative when they receive the dream. The dream messages seem to indicate some degree of instruction for the future. While the instruction is direct in all accounts, Homer alone may include background information into the objectives and reasoning that motivate the directives of the divine being. There may or may not be dialogue. Dreamers usually respond and act upon the dream message. Old Testament dream narratives provide only the basic setting of the dream, whereas Homer may provide details of the dreamer’s sleeping chamber, sleeping practices and how the sleeper is awakened, in addition to descriptions of the dream-givers, their entrances and exits. In both OT and Homeric dream texts, incubation does not seem to play a major role, and the practice of oneiromancy is also generally absent.

Yet, the presentation of the biblical divine dream-giver is distinct from those of Homeric dream narratives. Homeric dream-givers are all divine beings, as in the biblical text, but they cannot always be trusted. Whereas Homeric dream-givers often question how they might give a dream and what message it should contain, the God of Israel communicates with certainty, which induces confidence in God as a reliable dream-giver. The reader learns very little of the dream-giver in the OT, and there is no physical description offered, but Homer reveals the thoughts, motivations and even weaknesses of various dream-givers, who appear to the dreamer in the likeness of a recognized being. In OT dream type-scene narratives, God speaks plainly and confidently and is not self-focused. God is portrayed as truthful and does not appear in disguise. The OT refers to falsehood and deception in relation to dreams, but the deception is from false dreamers and dream interpreters, not from the God of Israel. Indeed, such deception angers YHWH. Old Testament dream type-scene narratives assume the omniscience of YHWH, in
contrast to the portrayal of divinity in Homeric dreams. In short, the biblical divine dream-giver is one the dreamer (and reader) can trust. These distinctions reveal fundamental differences between OT and Homeric view of divine beings.

4.5 Future Study

General comparative work between dream texts of ancient Israel and the surrounding ANE already exists. A dream type-scene in ancient Near Eastern texts outside of ancient Israel has not yet been identified. The Epic of Gilgamesh, for example, does have a repeating dream scene and this could provide a starting point for the consideration of a type-scene in ancient Near Eastern literature. In light of the present work, ancient Near Eastern narratives that contain dream reports could be examined as a specific subsection of ancient Near Eastern dream texts and compared to the dream type-scene of ancient Israel. Several questions might be considered: Are the biblical dream type-scene characteristics present in ancient Near Eastern dream texts? How do other ancient dreamers respond to the dream message—do they work to resolve the narrative tension? Does the dream narrative develop a narrative expectation of promise, hope and a positive outcome for the dreamer and other characters? Particularly, the dream type-scene of Jacob at Bethel has various literary elements common to ancient Near Eastern (and Homeric) dream texts. A more detailed comparison between Genesis 28 and other ancient dream texts might reveal more similarities than discussed in the present work.

One might further explore similarities and differences between Homeric and OT dream type-scene narratives. The present work has observed a preliminary comparison between Homer’s Nausikaa dream type-scene and the Joseph dream type-scene. A more detailed comparison of these two passages might reveal key similarities and differences between Homeric and ancient Israelite concepts of dreams, dream interpretation and the dreamer-giver. A comparison between the Homeric and biblical dream-giver would highlight differences and similarities in how each perceives the divine dream-giver. Further, a closer examination of the type-scene characteristics in Homeric literature may reveal that there are more modifications in Homeric type-scenes than is generally considered.

Notably, OT prophets are not opposed to (true) dreams, yet they tend to report visions and oracles rather than dreams. Why is this so? How are dreams related to visions and oracles? A
comparative study that examines similarities and differences between dreams, visions and oracles, and other forms of divine communication in the biblical text might shed light on these areas of interest.

It seems that there is at least a narrative allusion to the OT dream type-scene in Matthew 1:18-25. A detailed examination of this text might reveal that the narrator has utilized the biblical dream type-scene present in OT narratives. Joseph faces an initial crisis and powerless situation because his betrothed is pregnant. This creates a narrative tension that the dream message confirms when the angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream. The dream message intensifies the narrative tension by instructing Joseph to wed Mary. An angel speaks in the dream, tells Joseph not to fear and gives Joseph a divine promise that the child will be a son and will save his people from their sins. This potential future infuses great hope into the narrative. Joseph’s response is to obey the divine instruction and reveals that he understands the dream and accepts the message as truth from God. The narrative presents a positive outcome for Mary, who Joseph marries, and Joseph, who demonstrates obedience to God, and for all people who will be saved from sin through the promised Jesus.
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