

July 9, 2017 - Gen. 40:1-23 - Fast of Tammuz - The Cupbearer and the Baker
Torah Readings: Gen. 40:1-23 - The Cupbearer and the Baker
Psalm 32 again
Haftorah - Isaiah 55:11 – 56:8

Joseph interprets dreams

Why were the cupbearer and the baker in prison?

The Targum of Jonathan says, that they conspired to put poison into Pharaoh's drink and food. But another rabbinical source suggests that the one allowed a fly into his cup, and the other a little stone or sand into his bread.

Genesis 40:8 - "And they said to him, We have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter of it. And Joseph said to them, Do not interpretations belong to God? tell me them, I pray you."

In Egypt interpretation of dreams was the business of men trained for the purpose, called in Genesis 41:8 magicians and wise men. Joseph denies that art and training can really avail, and claims that the interpretation belongs to God.

Genesis 40:19 - "Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up your head from off you, and shall hang you on a tree; and the birds shall eat your flesh from off you."

The Onkelos Targum says "hang you on a tree" refers to crucifixion. But more probably, impalement on a stake. (**2 Samuel 21:9, Deuteronomy 21:23, Galatians 3:13**)

The decapitated corpse of the malefactor would be impaled, and allowed to hang exposed to public view, and to become the prey of wild animals and birds. This picture was terrible to the Egyptian mind, which attached great value to preservation of the body as the ultimate medium of the soul's (= *ka*) existence.

Like Jesus, Joseph was punished with two criminals, one of which he promised deliverance (**Luke 23:33, 43**). In Joseph's case, the cupbearer was spared and the baker decapitated.

A Word about Dream Interpretation

Joseph says "interpretations belong to God."

There was no rational or typological concurrence between "branches" and "days" in the cupbearer's dream, or "baskets" and "days" in the baker's dream. The same could be said of interpretations by Daniel, who was given both the dream AND its interpretation. Biblical dream interpretation did not use Jungian archetypes or Freudian theories about the unconscious.

The dream you had last night about being chased by a dog and turned into a butterfly has no divine significance, unless God grants through his Spirit an interpretation like that of Joseph, and it has some bearing on God's Gospel plan, as it does here with Joseph being released from prison.

A mark of the Days of Messiah

Joel 2:28 - "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions" (Acts 2:17)

The midrashim say the Joel passage refers to the latter days, when all Israel shall be prophets (Bemidbar R 15; Yalku 1 p. 220c)

"In this world only a few individuals have prophesied, but in the world to come all Israel will be made prophets; as it says, 'I will pour out my Spirit...'" (Numbers Rabbah 15:25 [on **Numbers 11:17**], quoting **Joel 2:28**)

Numbers 11:17 - "And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone."

The pouring out of the Spirit of prophecy on the Twelve (and the other disciples) is evidence that the Twelve represent Israel and that their eschatological message has been confirmed.

Peter said that Joel's prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost.

Acts 2:16 - "But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;"

Although no dreams were recorded then, lots of prophecy was.

But the content of prophecy, visions or dreams will concern itself exclusively with Torah, and therefore Jesus.

Like Jesus said of the prophets and writings that came before him:

John 5:9 - "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."

Or, as the Rabbis put it, genuine prophecy, dreams and visions are only about repentance and the Days of Messiah.

"What the prophets were destined to prophesy in subsequent generations they received from Mt. Sinai" (Exodus Rabbah 28:6).

“Every prophet only prophesied for the Days of Messiah and the penitent.” (Ber 34b)

Old Testament Examples

Visual dreams are symbolic and need an interpretation; they are found mainly in the story of Joseph (**Genesis 37:5-11, Genesis 40-41**) and in the narratives of the book of Daniel (**Daniel 2, Daniel 4, Daniel 7**).

Isaiah 6 is an example of a visionary visit to God’s realm—complete with the expected motifs. In the simplest version of this pattern, Moses, Nadab, Abihu, and the elders of Israel eat and drink in the presence of the deity, whose feet rest on a luminescent, lapis lazuli-like pavement (**Exodus 24:9-11**)

The prophets - Amos (**Amos 7:7-9, Amos 8:1-3**) and Jeremiah (**Jer 1:11-19, Jer 24**) all described prophetic dreams.

In **1 Kings 22:19-23**, Micaiah reports seeing in a vision the deity surrounded by his courtiers, “the host of heaven,” to his right and left, and he hears them plan the death of Ahab.

Auditory dreams convey a clear message from God; they are addressed to kings, such as Solomon (**1Kgs 3:15**) or Abimelech (**Gen 20:3-7**); or to patriarchs, such as Jacob (**Gen 28**); or to other important figures, such as Laban (**Gen 31:24**).

See the calling of Samuel (**1 Samuel 3:3-4**)

Numbers 12:6-8 - “And he said, “Hear my words: When there are prophets among you, I the Lord make myself known to them in visions; I speak to them in dreams. Not so with my servant Moses; he is entrusted with all my house. With him I speak face to face—clearly, not in riddles; and he beholds the form of the Lord.”

Job 33:14-18 - “For God speaks in one way, and in two, though people do not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on mortals, while they slumber on their beds, then he opens their ears, and terrifies them with warnings, that he may turn them aside from their deeds, and keep them from pride, to spare their souls from the Pit, their lives from traversing the River.”

Interpreting a dream, especially someone else’s, as coming from God should be approached with **extreme caution**:

Jeremiah 23:28 - “The prophet who has a dream may relate his dream, but let him who has My word speak My word in truth. What does straw have in common with grain?” declares the LORD.”

Jeremiah 23:32 - “Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness;

yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD."

Deuteronomy 13:1-3 - "If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul."

Deuteronomy 13:5 - "But those prophets or those who divine by dreams shall be put to death for having spoken treason against the Lord your God—who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery—to turn you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from your midst."

Zechariah 10:2 - "For the *teraphim* speak iniquity, And the diviners see lying visions And tell false dreams; They comfort in vain. Therefore the people wander like sheep, They are afflicted, because there is no shepherd."

From the second century B.C.E., when prophecy was thought to have ended, this form of inspiration took over and was expressed in the visionary style of apocalyptic writings. In these writings, the difference between dreams and visions to all intents and purposes disappears, as in Daniel 7-12 or in 1 Enoch.

Later rabbis believed that revelatory dreams could be secured through fasting (e.g. Ketub 12.3) or their ill pronouncement revoked through fasting (Pesiqta de Rab Kahana 28:2)

Usually dreams "mean" nothing

Wisdom of Sirach 34:1-8 (also called Ecclesiasticus, circa 200 to 175 B.C.)- "The senseless have vain and false hopes, and dreams give wings to fools. As one who catches at a shadow and pursues the wind, so is anyone who believes in dreams. What is seen in dreams is but a reflection, the likeness of a face looking at itself. From an unclean thing what can be clean? And from something false what can be true? Divinations and omens and dreams are unreal, and like a woman in labor, the mind has fantasies. Unless they are sent by intervention from the Most High, pay no attention to them. For dreams have deceived many, and those who put their hope in them have perished. Without such deceptions the law will be fulfilled, and wisdom is complete in the mouth of the faithful."

Ecclesiastes 5:3 - "For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words."

The Ecclesiastes verse sums up one theory of why we dream: that the brain uses sleep to arrange the thoughts, emotions, incidents and circumstances of the day into a narrative that might make sense, storing away memories and consolidating learning. It helps the mind learn complicated tasks. It also helps people recover knowledge they

thought they had forgotten over the course of a day. In REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, a dreamer's brain becomes highly active while the body's muscles are paralyzed, and breathing and heart rate become erratic. But the purpose of REM sleep still remains a mystery, despite a growing understanding of its biochemistry and neurobiology.

According to the Babylonian Talmud, in the Roman period there were 24 rabbinic dream-interpreters practicing in Jerusalem for a fee (b. Berakot 55a-b).

Dreams in the Gospels

Four dreams came to Joseph:

- His first dream: In **Matthew 1:20-21**, Joseph is told not be afraid to take Mary as his wife, because she has conceived by the Holy Spirit.

(See also the Annunciation in **Luke 1:26-38**, when an angel visits Mary and she agrees to conceive "through the power of the Most High". This was not a dream or a vision)

- Second dream: In **Matthew 2:13**, Joseph is warned to leave Bethlehem and flee to Egypt.

- Third dream: In **Matthew 2:19-20**, while in Egypt, Joseph is told that it is safe to go back to Israel.

- Fourth dream: In **Matthew 2:22**, because he had been warned in a dream, he departed for the region of Galilee instead of going to Judea.

Compare Joseph's dream about the safety of the child with the biblical narrative of Moses' birth. The story had undergone substantial expansion by the first century AD, as can be seen in the writings of Josephus (Ant 2.205, 206). In the expanded narrative Pharaoh was warned by his scribes that a child was about to be born who would threaten his crown, and he and his advisers decided to kill all the Hebrew male children. At the same time Moses' father had a divine revelation in a dream that his pregnant wife would bear a child who would save Israel – the child who escaped Pharaoh's massacre.

Because of a dream, the wise men did not return to Herod who intended to harm the child (**Matthew 2:12**).

Pilate's wife had a dream about Jesus:

"While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: 'Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him'" (**Matthew 27:19**).

A More Sure Word

Paul had a dramatic visual and auditory confrontation with Jesus on the road to Damascus that left him temporarily blind:

Acts 9:3-4 - "And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there

shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?”

Hebrews 1:1-2 - “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.”

Peter and the other disciples had personally seen Jesus transfigured in a wondrous display of light. They were “eyewitnesses of his majesty” and heard the Father say to him, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Still, Peter says the presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling in believers is more sure:

2 Peter 1:19 - “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts. Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.”

This seems to indicate that dreams and visions would be an extremely rare vehicle for divine communication to believers, if they’re needed at all.

On the other hand, a growing body of evidence shows that among many new Muslim converts in closed countries, their first call to Christ came not through a personal encounter with a Christian, but through a dream in which Christ appeared to them.

See Also

Dreams in the Hebrew Bible

<https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/people/related-articles/dreams-in-the-hebrew-bible>

Prophetic Dreams and Visions in the Hebrew Bible

<http://buff.ly/2uhWQMh>

The significance of dreams and the star in Matthew’s infancy narrative

<https://www.ajol.info/index.php/hts/article/viewFile/41304/8684>