Old Testament Dream Type-Scene: Structure and Significance

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Dreams are common to the human experience, and so it is no surprise that dreams have a noteworthy 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 reading. By creating a dream type-scene, the narrator is able to build additional layers of narrative tension and engage reader expectation.

While Robert Alter’s *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (1981, 2011) has drawn attention to several biblical type-scenes, the dream type-scene has yet to be identified.¹ 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. Once equipped with knowledge of how the type-scene functions, the

reader is able to gain a fuller understanding of narrative meaning within dream texts by observing how each type-scene fulfills or contradicts narrative expectations.

The present study contributes to biblical scholarship by identifying the OT dream type-scene, providing criteria to distinguish dream narratives within the OT and presenting insight derived from studying the dream passages as type-scene narratives. It builds on Alter’s work by using his methodological principles (in addition to those of other narrative critical scholars) and expands the work of Diane Lipton by identifying additional and more specific characteristics common to dream accounts. This work is influenced by (and indebted to) Leo Oppenheim’s research on ancient Near Eastern dream texts, Scott Noegel’s model for understanding ancient Near Eastern dream interpretation, and James Morris’ work on the dream type-scene in Homeric writings.

I begin with a definition of biblical type-scenes and description of OT dream type-scene characteristics. Next, I demonstrate how dream type-scene characteristics are rendered in Genesis 20 as an example of the narrative insight that emerges when reading the text from a type-scene perspective. I follow this analysis by offering commentary on how the type-scene functions in each of the remaining OT dream type-scene narratives. Finally, I present the implications of identifying the OT dream type-scene, the narrative significance of dream type-scene characteristics and potential areas for future study.

**Biblical Type-Scenes**

The narrative corpus of Genesis to 2 Kings utilizes many literary devices—one of these is type-scene. A biblical type-scene is a collection of similar narrative units that feature common literary characteristics. The characteristics of a well-developed type-scene

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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 present in other biblical texts, a type-scene highlights a collection of characteristics that distinguishes type-scene narratives from all other passages. Alter observes that there is no fixed form in biblical type-scenes; rather, in each scene, the type-scene characteristics are presented with key 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. 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. The presence of several distinguishing characteristics in a collection of narratives is no mere coincidence but suggests that the biblical narrator has intentionally created a type-scene and intends the set of passages to be understood both individually and as a collection.

Old Testament Dream Type-Scene Characteristics

Dream narratives are primarily selected based on the presence of the Hebrew root הָלַם in each passage. The dream type-scene passages 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 comparison of OT dream narratives to one another. The literary features that are generally present in all or almost all narratives are considered here. The defining characteristic is the presence of the term הָלַם (announcing that a dream is given to a character) in each narrative. There are other key words generally

6. Genesis 15, viewed by some scholars as a dream narrative, is omitted. Karl Gnuse, The Dream Theophany of Samuel (New York: University Press of America, 1984), 141, defends Genesis 15 as a dream passage by arguing, “If the experience has all the earmarks of a dream, the actual use of the word is not necessary.” This comment is certainly warranted; however, 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.
present in dream narratives: לילה (indicating the dream occurs at night), שׁכם (noting that the dreamer arises early after having the dream to respond to the dream) and איר (recording fear experienced by of 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 creating a narrative delay and second resolving narrative tension within the plot.

Dream narratives have several common characteristics concerning the dream-giver and the dream itself: God speaks and/or visual images are present, a divine promise or warning is given, a potential but seemingly unlikely future is disclosed, 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 narrative expectations. Consistencies and modifications in the presentation of dream type-scene characteristics point the reader toward the meaning of each narrative.

**Significance of Old Testament Dream Type-Scenes**

To illustrate how the dream type-scene increases our understanding of the meaning of the text, let’s consider in some detail Abimelech’s dream type-scene in Genesis 20. Following an examination of Abimelech’s dream narrative, I briefly note the significance of other dream type-scene narratives.
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. In the narrative of Abimelech’s dream, Abraham presents Sarah as his sister. Abimelech, the king of Gerar, takes Sarah into his court and by doing so, jeopardizes the divine promise.

God comes to Abimelech in a dream by night and 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). This dream message highlights the tension in the narrative. 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’s speech reveals his seemingly powerless situation—he did not know that Sarah was married and so he took her in ignorance. God assures Abimelech that justice will prevail and spares Abimelech from sinning.

At this point in the narrative, it is clear that the dream has disclosed a potential but seemingly unlikely future—Abimelech is guilty of a crime punishable by death, but is innocent. The dream message provides hope for the broader narrative in that God offers a course of action that will save Abimelech and return Sarah to Abraham.

Abimelech responds to the dream immediately. First, he rises early in the morning. Abimelech verbalizes the dream, and his servants are “exceedingly afraid.” He then confronts Abraham in a conversation 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. This is an early level of resolution to the tension in the larger plot. 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.

For Abimelech, the tension of God’s impending judgment remains; thus, Abimelech acts to deter God’s judgment by bestowing gifts of sheep, oxen and male and female servants on Abraham and returning Sarah. A positive outcome occurs after Abraham prays to God: Abimelech and the barren women in his kingdom are healed. Further, the narrative presents hope for the resolution of Sarah’s infertility problems. With the healing of the nation, the narrative hints at a hope for Sarah’s own healing.
Indeed, we find the final resolution to the tension surrounding Abraham’s progeny in the first three verses of the next chapter when YHWH fulfills the divine promise and Sarah bears a son.

Thus, in Genesis 20, the type-scene characteristics are presented in typical fashion. The narrator confirms that the divine communication is a dream (חלום) that occurs at night (לילה). After the dream, the dreamer rises early (שכם) to respond. Abimelech’s servants experience fear (ירא) after Abimelech verbalizes the content of the dream. The dream discloses that Abimelech will die because he took Sarah. This is a potential but seemingly unlikely future if we consider God’s rescue of Pharaoh (Gn 12) in a similar situation. Initially, Abimelech is in danger, as he faces God’s wrath. The dream narrative introduces the tension surrounding Sarah and by the end of the type-scene, the tension is resolved. Abimelech’s life is no longer in peril, and shortly afterward, Sarah gives birth to a son. God is at the center of this conclusion. An effort to deliver the dreamer is accomplished by God when Abimelech is warned of his actions in the dream. There is a positive outcome for the dreamer, however, narrative emphasis 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.

The Abimelech 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. The dream also demonstrates that God communicates with a non-Israelite in the same way that God will next communicate to Jacob, a revered patriarch.

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. 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 characteristics are present without modification. The dream message reveals 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. Viewed as distinct narratives yet read together, Genesis 12 and 20 may serve to communicate that Abraham 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 flawed characters, even those who repeatedly show a lack of faith.

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

Now let’s turn briefly to the other dream type-scene narratives. At Bethel, Jacob has a dream of heaven during which YHWH affirms several promises to him (Gn 28:10–22). Jacob’s dream includes nearly all of the characteristics of the OT dream type-scene with few modifications. This suggests that Jacob will act to fulfil the expectations created by the dream announcement and the Jacob novella will have a positive outcome typical of dream narratives. Yet, with his earlier and ongoing characterization as a deceptive trickster, it seems unlikely that he will actually fulfil the grandiose narrative expectations. Before the dream type-scene, Jacob is characterized by deception and trickery, but the dream type-scene presents Jacob as a character of divine favour, chosen by God to receive a divine message. Thus, by setting up this scene as a dream type-scene, the narrator is indicating that Jacob will be a central agent in the fulfillment of the divine promises given to Abraham.

In the immediate context of Genesis 28, tension is created by the conflict between Jacob and Esau. This dream provides a direct response to these tensions. 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.

Yet, the tension is not completely resolved in this chapter. There is no concrete evidence that the brotherly relationship will be restored or that Jacob will fulfill a great
destiny. Thus, while the dream message brings resolution to a number of tensions in the plot, 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 a true revelation 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 privy to the dream only because of the narrator’s report. We must wait to see whether Jacob will actualize the dream and fulfill his vow. In this sense, by the lack of disclosure, the dream type-scene infuses hope and expectation into the narrative.

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

Genesis 31 is cast as one dream type-scene containing two dreams: Jacob claims to have a dream of flocks in which the 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). Whereas a biblical type-scene will often have two or three modifications of the typical type-scene characteristics, Jacob’s dream in Genesis 31 is filled with ambiguity and has numerous type-scene modifications. Exceptions in Jacob’s dream narrative include: a retelling of the dream from the perspective of first person rather than the usual third person, the narrator’s confirmation of the dream is suspiciously absent, rather than typically receiving the dream at night Jacob seems to “see” the dream during daylight, Jacob does not rise early, and rather than encounter God, Jacob encounters the angel of God.

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 are 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, I argue that it suggests Jacob has fabricated the dream to persuade his wives to side with him. 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. (The ambiguities might actually emphasize the meaning!)

In stark contrast, Laban’s dream to bring no harm to Jacob is presented as a real experience, and Laban’s dream narrative meets the expectations of the OT dream type-scene in that there are almost no modifications of the type-scene characteristics. This is important for Laban, who up to this point in the text is painted as a trickster and deceiver. The dream type-scene demonstrates that the Israelite dream-giver (God) 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. God’s communication to Laban may also serve to partially redeem his character from the harsh, exaggerated remarks of Jacob to his wives, particularly as the straightforwardness of Laban’s dream narrative contrasts the many modifications present in Jacob’s fabricated dream narrative.

There is one exception in Laban’s dream narrative. Generally in OT dream type-scene narratives, the dream discloses a potential but seemingly unlikely future. 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 narrative interest. This omission diminishes the importance of Laban’s future role and highlights the priority and promise of Jacob’s future.

*The Dreams of Joseph (Genesis 37:1–11)*

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). Joseph’s dream type-scene begins in typical fashion. As the narrative progresses, though, 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. These modifications of the dream type-scene characteristics serve to highlight 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.

Despite Joseph’s initial characterization as naive and undiscerning, 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, unrealized narrative expectations beckon the reader to “stay tuned” as several characteristics remain unfulfilled 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 he has 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, thus providing, in the end, a positive outcome for all characters.

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

In Genesis 40, an Egyptian cupbearer dreams of a grapevine and an Egyptian baker dreams of three baskets of bread (Gn 40:1–23). The cupbearer and baker dream type-scene is unique in several ways. First, there are two dreamers. While the dream type-scene usually has a good outcome for the dreamer, in this passage, 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 or work to resolve the narrative tension. Further, in a significant variation, Joseph, rather than the dreamers, fulfills the role of the dreamer.

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7. Eric Lowenthal, The Joseph Narrative in Genesis (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1973), 44, states, “the baker attempts to receive such a favourable interpretation.” Or, perhaps his delay is an indication of his guilt. Bruce Waltke and Cathi Fredricks, Genesis (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 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.”
Like the cupbearer and baker, he too is facing the 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.\textsuperscript{8} 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 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? 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 inaction, the future deliverance of Joseph seems unlikely, and the tension with his family relationships remains unresolved. At the end of the chapter, Joseph is still 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 the elements that will deliver him from imprisonment into play.\textsuperscript{9} 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 narrative tension as the narrative progresses. In the subsequent chapter, the cupbearer will indeed work to end the tension of Joseph’s imprisonment, and the reader will discover that God has not forgotten Joseph.

From the perspective of the OT dream type-scene, this detail encourages the reader to observe how Joseph will solve the dreamers’ tension. Moreover, Genesis 40 presents Joseph with an opportunity to act to end the ongoing tension in his own

\textsuperscript{8} Of course, the interpretation that Joseph gives the baker introduces a new cause for anxiety. \\
\textsuperscript{9} Waltke and Fredricks, Genesis, 524.
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, who unexpectedly fulfills various aspects of the dreamer’s role in the OT dream type-scene.

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

Pharaoh has a dream of cows followed by a dream of ears of grain (Gn 41:1–40). The central modification in Genesis 41 is that *Joseph* fulfills the expectations of the dreamer in several important ways. 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, Egypt would not know about the impending danger, and the people would remain powerless to overcome the drought crisis. In this, it is Joseph—rather than Pharaoh—who brings hope to the narrative and works to resolve the tension, both of the immediate narrative and of his own novella, creating an ultimately positive outcome.

Genesis 41 also presents the resolution to multiple layers of tension remaining 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 with anticipate for the tension in Joseph’s family to end and the conclusion to relate to God.

In this dream type-scene narrative there is no mention of rising early (שנם) or fear (ירא), and the reference to night (לילה) is in connection with the cupbearer, not the dreamer Pharaoh. The lack of these three characteristics usually associated with the dreamer coupled with the central role of Joseph in resolving narrative tension draw the reader’s attention away from the dreamer and bring Joseph into focus. As we trace the tension in Joseph’s family, it becomes clear that this dream type-scene contributes to reuniting Joseph and his family. In this narrative, the role of YHWH is subtle. The

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reader must continue to observe the unfolding of Joseph’s story before complete resolution is accomplished and God’s divine plan is fully revealed.

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

The next OT dream type-scene occurs when Gideon overhears the dream of the Midianite soldier (Jdg 7:8–23). 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 unnecessary—it merely reiterates what God has already promised. Daniel 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 whereby Gideon, in contrast to the Midianite, receives a positive military outcome.

Modifications of the Midianite soldier’s dream type-scene direct the reader’s attention to the character of Gideon. At the outset, Gideon’s situation is one of danger, and he is powerless before the Midianite army. Gideon rises early (שכם); Gideon experiences fear (ירא); and YHWH speaks to Gideon at night (לילה). 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 OT dream type-scene, the dreamer’s initial situation seems safe because he is in a powerful position, being a soldier in the stronger army.

After the dream, narrative expectations of the dreamer are met by Gideon. First, he creates a delay 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 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.

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Judges 7 begins with YHWH’s promise to strengthen Gideon. 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.

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. A break in the typical narrative pattern of the OT 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. Finally, one may argue that modifications within the dream type-scene serve to illustrate God’s faithfulness to Gideon in the midst of impossible circumstances.

Solomon’s Dream (1 Kings 3:5–15)

YHWH appears to Solomon in a dream and grants him a discerning mind, along with riches and honor in the final OT dream type-scene narrative (1 Kgs 3:5–15). The outset of 1 Kings 3 holds great promise for the young monarch Solomon. Atypically for the dreamer, Solomon’s situation is not one of powerlessness. Coupled with the significant gifts that God bestows on Solomon in the dream narrative this may lead the reader to develop high expectations for Solomon’s character.

As a type-scene, the narrative has most of the expected characteristics. It is a dream ((CGNA) experienced at night (‘M|H). 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.12 In the dream, God speaks and presents both a

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12. Solomon makes an alliance with Pharaoh, takes an Egyptian wife, and sacrifices at an open shrine alongside the people—all of these actions have negative connotations in the text. For a close
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 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 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 this tension 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 (שָׁכָם) 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 Solomon does not respond to the divine warning later in the narrative. These modifications of the dream type-scene are indications that narrative expectations

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text continues here...
may not be fulfilled. Could these modifications also indicate that the dream narrative presents a test for Solomon? 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 narrative type-scene expectations for Solomon will be fulfilled.

As for a positive outcome for the dreamer that extends to other characters, 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. In light of the powerful and gifted position of Solomon in the dream narrative, 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.

The above overview of OT dream type-scene narratives notes key modifications and their importance. Examining how the narrator presents the dream type-scene characteristics illuminates much subtle narrative commentary in dream type-scene narratives. It demonstrates the biblical narrator’s use of the dream type-scene expands our understanding of the meaning of the texts by providing a particular narrative perspective. The type-scene perspective illustrates how the biblical narrator has transformed simple dream reports into complex narratives imbued with multiple layers of meaning by creatively modifying various type-scene characteristics to highlight specific narrative elements.

**Significance, Implications and Future Study**

The key contribution of this paper is the identification of the OT dream type-scene, which has several major implications for biblical and narrative studies as outlined below. This study also identifies the characteristics of the OT dream type-scene. What
follows is a discussion of the significance of each of these characteristics and some suggestions for future studies.

*Implications of Identifying the Old Testament Dream Type-Scene*

The identification of the OT 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 paper provide criteria to clearly distinguish dream type-scene narratives from all other biblical narratives. This is helpful, for example, in establishing Jacob’s dreams (Gn 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. It encourages the reader to perceive “duplicate” passages as independent literary units and the repetitious elements as intentional. There is no need to consider dream narratives merely as 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. Once the common characteristics are identified, the reader may then distinguish between common elements of the passage and modified elements. 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, particularly in the areas of plot and characterization. 13

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-

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13. Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 67 states: “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.” This comment applies equally to the dream type-scene.
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. Meaning is often determined by the degree to which this expectation is met.

Finally, 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 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.

Significance of Old Testament 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. 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 understanding the dream points directly to the character who will respond in some way to the dream. In the OT 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. 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 in some way. When narrative expectations are not fully realized in a dream narrative, it suggests that resolution of narrative tension and the relationship of the situation to God are yet to come, as particularly exemplified in the Joseph cycle.

There is also a rescue attempt in every dream scene 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), the ultimate resolution to narrative tension and a positive outcome draws dream type-scene narratives together on a fundamental narrative level.

A significant unifying thematic element to dream type-scene narratives surrounds narrative tension. In the OT dream type-scene, narrative tension is introduced or intensified by the dream message. Every narrative includes a response and, on some level, resolution to the tension related to the dream message. Even in Genesis 37, the problem created by Joseph’s dreams seems to be solved when the brothers sell Joseph. A crucial feature of the dream type-scene surrounds how the narrative tension is resolved. We expect the dreamer to resolve the tension, and when the dreamer fails to meet this expectation, the focus of the narrative turns to the character who will successfully do so. We see this play out when both the Midianite and
Pharaoh fail to respond to their dreams, and Gideon and Joseph assume the spotlight as the plot moves forward. Thus, variations in the type-scene help to drive the narrative and provide clues to how the narrative will unfold.

**Future Study**

The present work concludes with two suggestions for future study related to the OT dream type-scene. First, one might explore the existence of a dream type-scene in ancient Near Eastern texts outside of ancient Israel. A dream type-scene has been identified in Homeric literature and one may examine similarities and differences between Homeric and OT dream type-scene narratives.

Second, it seems that there is at least a narrative allusion to the OT dream type-scene in Matthew 1:18–25. 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 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, whom Joseph marries, and Joseph, who demonstrates obedience to God, and for all people who will be saved from sin through the promised Messiah. A detailed examination of this text might reveal that the author of Matthew has utilized the dream type-scene present in OT narratives.