

DREAMS OF JOSEPH AND THEIR REVELATORY ROLE

Paul Kunjanayil, MCBS♦

Abstract

In general, the dreams in the Bible function as a means of communication of the divine will. The dreams of Joseph narrated in Mt 1:18–2:23 are of special importance in this regard. The OT dreams together with the Greco-Roman dream narratives provide a general background to them. Matthew employs the Greek phrase *kat' onar* to introduce the dream references in his Gospel. They are theophanic since they contain messages revealing the will of God, and sometimes the presence of an angel of God. Joseph perfectly obeys to the divine will revealed in his dreams. The evangelist depicts his obedience making use of the same vocabulary from the commands. These dreams are closely related to the Emmanuel theme and Kingdom of heaven theme in the Gospel. They act as proofs for God's providence in the birth of Jesus and the events following it, as well as his concern for salvation of humanity.

Keywords: Dreams; Gospel of Matthew; Joseph; Obedience; Theophany

Introduction

The most vivid picture of Joseph in the New Testament is given in Mt 1:18–2:23. This biblical passage narrates his role in the birth and protection of the child Jesus. At every crucial moment when the child and his mother is in danger, the Lord guides him giving him instructions in his dreams. Joseph prompted by his dreams acts cautiously and safeguards the child and his mother. This paper/chapter begins with a general treatment of dreams in the OT

♦Paul Kunjanayil belongs to the MCBS Congregation. He secured Doctorate in Biblical Science and Archaeology from *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum*, Jerusalem in 2018. At present he teaches New Testament, Biblical Geek, and Biblical Hebrew at Sanathana Institute of Theology, Thamarassery, and in several other institutes. Email: Joypaul.paul@gmail.com

and NT, which provides a background to the dreams Mt 1:18–2:23. The analysis of Joseph’s dreams includes a discussion on their theophanic nature and the traits of the dreamer. The chapter concludes disclosing the relationship between the dream narratives in Mt 1–2 and the rest of the Gospel.

1. Dreams in the Old Testament

Dreams are relatively common in the written records of the civilizations of the ancient Near East.¹ They provide a background to the OT the dream narratives, which appear primarily in the books of Genesis and Daniel, and occasionally in the books of Judges, 1 Kings, 2 Chronicles, etc.² The Hebrew Bible uses the root *hqlm* with its derivatives to describe different kinds of dreams. *Hqlm* primarily means “to dream,” but in different contexts it can also have other meaning such as “to become strong,” or “to restore to health.”³ Sometimes the visions are similar to the dream narratives and it is very difficult to distinguish among them. More or less synonymous expressions are used for them, such as “night vision” (*hqlazon lailah*: Isa 29:7; Joel 3:1 [2:28]; Job 4:13; Dan 1:17; etc.), “vision” (*mar’ah*: Gen. 46:2; Nu. 12:6; etc.), or the Lord speaking (Judg 7:9; 1 Sam 3:10; Dan 10:11; etc.). In such cases it is hard to distinguish dreams from dreamlike states. Yet the equation of dreams with prophetic visions is actually quite rare in the Hebrew Bible, occurring only three times (Num 12:6–8; Jer 23:25–28; Dan 7:1).⁴ The auditory element appears frequently, in both dreams and visions.⁵ Normally the verb *hqlm* is followed by the noun *hqlalom*, meaning “to dream (have) a dream.” Here the emphasis is on the dream itself. On occasions the Aramaic verb *hqlzi* (“to see”) is used for seeing dreams. In such cases the stress is on the specific content of what is dreamed.⁶

Though Israel was forbidden to use many of the divining practices of her neighbours, dreams are utilized as a regular means of

¹For a study of the dreams in the the ancient Near East literature, cf. Jean-Marie Husser, *Dreams and Dream Narratives in the Biblical World*, Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press 1999, 16–85; A. Leo Oppenheim, “The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 46 (1956) 179–373.

²For a table of dream references, Laura Quick, “Dream Accounts in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Jewish Literature,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 17 (2018) 8–32, at 11; F. Flannery-Dailey, *Dreamers, Scribes, and Priests*, (SJSJ 90), Leiden: Brill 2004, 42–44.

³“הלם,” *HALOT* I, 320.

⁴Laura Quick, “Dream Accounts in the Hebrew Bible...,” 10.

⁵Magnus Ottosson–J. Bergman–G. Johannes Botterweck, “הלום, הלם,” *TDOT* IV, 421–432, at 427.

⁶Holger Gzella, “הררה, הלם,” *TDOT* XVI, 278–283, at 279.

revelation from the Lord. They formed a legitimate part of the OT religion (Num 12:16).⁷ Through them God communicates with men including Israelites (1 King 3:5) and non-Israelites (Gen 20:3).⁸ In general they can be divided into message dreams and symbolic dreams. While message dreams are auditory and need no interpretation (Gen 20:3-7; 31:24; etc.), the symbolic dreams are visual and need interpretation (Gen 37:5-7; 40:9-15, 16-19; etc.).⁹ Dreams normally take place at night (Gen 20:3; 31:24; 40:5; 41:11; 1 King 3:5). The dreamer is usually passive: he sees and hears (Gen 31:10; 41:22). On the contrary, God is active: he “came” in a dream (Gen 20:3; 31:24), “he appeared” (1 King 3:5; 2 Chron 1:7), “he made himself known” (Num 12:6), “spoke” to the dreamer (Gen 20:3; 31:11), or he “stood beside” him (Gen 28:13; 1 Sam 3:10). Sometimes the dreams in the OT are associated with incubation, in which a king or popular leader visits a sanctuary and sleeps there in order to obtain an oracle. For example, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night at Gibeon while sleeping in the tent of meeting after offering the sacrifices in the altar (1 King 3:5-15; 2 Chro 1:6-12). The dreams of Jacob in Gen 28:10-22; 46:1-5 appear to be of similar kind. Dreams are considered a vehicle of divine revelation, even if incubation is not involved. In dreams God opens the ears of men and gives them his warnings (Job 33:15-16). The same view is conveyed to Aaron and Miriam in Lord’s warning to them (Num 12:6-8).¹⁰

A survey of biblical dreams reveals that most of them have a standard format being composed of several fixed elements. This suggests that the biblical authors used dreams for their own purposes, fitting the details into the familiar paradigm.¹¹ The OT dream reports that may have structural parallelism with the dream references in Mt 1–2 include Gen 20:3-8 (Abimelech); 28:12-16 (Jacob); 31:10-13 (Jacob); 31:24 (Laban); 46:2-4 (Jacob/Israel); Num 22:8-13 (Balaam); 22:20-21 (Balaam); and I Kings 3:5-15 (Solomon). These dream reports have the following pattern in general:

⁷A. Oepke, “ὄναρ,” *TDNT* V, 220-238, at 230.

⁸J.G.S.S. Thomson—J.S. Wright, “Dream,” in J.D. Douglas, ed., *New Bible Dictionary*, Leicester, Inter-Varsity Press 1996, 281-282, at 281. The Lord conveyed his will to the people also by Urim, and prophets and visions (1 Sam 28:6; Joel 2:28 LXX).

⁹This categorization is proposed by Oppenheim based on his study on the Ancient Near Eastern dream literature; cf. A. Leo Oppenheim, “The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East,” 184-225.

¹⁰Magnus Ottosson—J. Bergman—G. Johannes Botterweck, “הַלֹּאִים, הֶלֶם,” 427-429.

¹¹Shaul Bar, *A Letter That Has Not Been Read: Dreams in the Hebrew Bible*, Lenn J. Schramm, tran., Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2001, 3.

I. Theophany which is expressed by the phrase, "God/angel of God/Lord came/stood/spoke/appeared."

II. Recipient, a human dreamer, is usually listed by name.

III. Dream reference which in most cases is the noun *halom* ("dream").¹²

IV. Time of the dreams is usually night (Gen 20:3, 31:24, 46:2; Num 22:20; 1 Kings 3:5).

V. An auditory address formula *wayyo'mer* ("and he said") which clearly indicates that God spoke.

VI. A message that begins either with the particle *hinneh* ("behold") or a vocative. It contains assurance of divine presence and promise (Gen 28:13-15; 46:2-4; 1 Kings 3:5-15), directions (Gen 31:12-13; 46:2-3; Num 22:20), or orders (Gen 20:3, 31:24). Sometimes, it may be a dialogue (Gen 20:4-5; 31:11; 46:2; Num 22:10-11; 1 Kings 3:5-15).

VII. Fulfilment which usually follows in subsequent narrative. Formal termination of the dream is provided in Gen 20:8, 28:16; and 1 Kings 3:15 with the expression that the recipient "awoke." 1 Kings 3:15 adds the formula, "it was a dream."¹³

The source criticism has attributed almost all the dream accounts in the Pentateuch to the Elohist document.¹⁴ It seems that according to the Elohist dreams open up the possibility of the intervention of the transcendent into the world.¹⁵ In other words, dreams make possible a direct relationship between God and human being without compromising the distance that separates them, and without having recourse to the over anthropomorphic theophanies characteristic of the Yahwist document.¹⁶

2. Dreams in the New Testament

In comparison with the OT, the NT gives only less importance to dreams. Jesus in the canonical gospels neither dreams nor refers to them anywhere. At the same time, dreams continue to be a means of divine revelation. Dream references in the NT is limited to the Gospel

¹²It is *mar'oth* ("vision") in Gen 46:2.

¹³The proposal of this structure is taken from Robert Gnuse, "Dream Genre in the Matthean Infancy Narratives," 101-102.

¹⁴Jean-Marie Husser, *Dreams and Dream Narratives in the Biblical World*, (Biblical Seminar 63), Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1999, 93-94.

¹⁵For a study of the Elohist source on dreams, cf. Karl Jaroš, *Die Stellung des Elohisten zur kanaänischen Religion*, (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 4); Freiburg Schweiz, Universitätsverlag, 1974, 69-98.

¹⁶Jean-Marie Husser, *Dreams and Dream Narratives in the Biblical World*, 95.

of Matthew and Acts.¹⁷ Different terms are used to refer to dreams in the NT. Most important among them is *onar*, meaning “dream.” This is found only in the Gospel of Matthew in the expression *kat’ onar*, “in a dream” (Mt 1:20; 2:12, 13, 19, 22; 27:19).¹⁸ The noun *enyption* (“dream”) is the usual LXX translation of the Hebrew noun *halom* (Gen 37:5; 41:1; Judg 7:13; 1 King 3:15; Ps 72:20; Joel 2:28; etc.).¹⁹ The prophetic promise of dream mentioned in Joel 2:28, *oi presbyteroi humon enyptionois enyptioniasthesontai* (“your old men shall dream dreams”) is stated as fulfilled in Acts 2:17. A reference to dreamers (*enyptioniazomenoi*) appear in Jude 8, but it is used negatively as “those defile the flesh, reject authority, and slander the glorious ones.” There are some who consider night visions (*orama tes nyktos*) as dreams.²⁰ The examples include the account of Paul’s night visions at Troas, which launched the mission to Europe (Acts 16:9-10), and at Corinth (Acts 18:9).²¹

3. The Dreams in Mt 1-2

Mt 1:1-2:23 deals with the history of Israel until the birth of Jesus, namely the genealogy (Mt 1,1-17), the events surrounding the birth of Jesus (Mt 1:18-25) and the events after the birth of Jesus (Mt 2:1-23). Five of the six references to dreams in Matthew appear in these two chapters (Mt 1:20-25; 2:12, 13-15, 19-21, 22). Two among them give only a short reference to a dream with the expression “having been warned in a dream” (Mt 2:12, 22b).²² The other three dreams are special, each having a quite stereotypic pattern (Mt 1:20-25; 2:13-15, 19-21): 1) An introductory genitive absolute with the presentative particle *idou* (“behold”); 2) A description of the dream event which

¹⁷Oepke comments about the paucity of dream narratives in the NT. This may be so because primitive Christianity was probably critical of dreams. Even when significance was accorded to a dream, it remained peripheral, limited to individual instances of divine leading. For example, Paul in his letters mentions none of the notable dreams which he had in the Acts of the Apostles; cf. A. Oepke, “ὄναρ,” 235.

¹⁸The LXX almost always translates *bahalom* (“in a dream”) as either *kat’hupnon* or *en to hupno* (Gen 20:3; 31:10.11; 40:9; Num 12:6; etc.).

¹⁹A. Oepke, “ὄναρ,” 221.

²⁰A. Oepke, “ὄναρ,” 234.

²¹Other mentions of visions using the term *orama* (“vision”) are found in Mt 17:9; Acts 7:31; 9:10; 9:12; 10:3, 17; 11:5; 12:9. None of these cases seems to refer to dreams.

²²This two dream references are made using the aorist passive participle of *chrematizo* (“warn”) and *kat’ onar*, (“in a dream”). Even in these two instances wherein the actual dream report is lacking, the reader could hypothetically construct rather easily a dream report which would conform to the fuller pattern; Robert Gnuse, “Dream Genre in the Matthean Infancy Narratives,” *Novum Testamentum* 32 (1990) 97-120, at 104.

includes the appearance of an angel of the Lord and a reference to dream (*kat' onar*); 3) A message containing command and explanation following the particle *gar*, "for"; 4) An account of the execution of the command; and 5) A formula quotation.²³ The termination of the dreams is formal with a mention of waking up of Joseph and the fulfilment of the command given him in the dream.

Matthew's report of the dreams shares some elements of the typical dream pattern found in the Graeco-Roman literature, which is different from the dream pattern of the OT.²⁴ While the OT dream pattern first states that "x dreamed a dream," and then gives the content of the dream,²⁵ the Graeco-Roman dream materials usually give the content of the dream concurrently with dreaming.²⁶ Further, these are never in need of interpretation like the OT dreams. Thus, content of Joseph's dream is given concurrently with the mention of his dream (Mt 1:20-21; 2:13, 20). The evangelist's sparse style and theocentric simplicity, that demands a human response of absolute trust and silent submission, distinguishes his dream narratives from many of their counterparts in both the OT and the Graeco-Roman literature, however.²⁷ The Matthean dreams in the Infancy Narratives appear to be oral messages rather than visual apparitions.²⁸ On the

²³G.M. Soares Prabhu, *The Formula Quotations in the Infancy Narrative of Matthew: An Enquiry into the Tradition History of Mt 1-2* (AnBib 63), Roma: Biblical Institute Press 1976, 235-236. A more detailed form-critical analysis of the structure of these three dream narratives is proposed by Gnuse. He relies significantly on Soares Prabhu's analysis; cf. Robert Gnuse, "Dream Genre in the Matthean Infancy Narratives," 110-111. Some other proposals for the structure can be found in Edgar Conrad, "The Annunciation of Birth and the Birth of the Messiah," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (1985) 656-663; Bruce Malina, "Matthew 2 and Is 41:2-3," *Liber Annus* 17 (1967), 290-302, at 291; Robert E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, New York: Doubleday 1993, 108.

²⁴J.S. Hanson, "Dreams and Visions in the Graeco-Roman World and Early Christianity," in W. Haase (ed.), *Principat* (ANRW II.23.2), Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1980, 1395-1427, at 1421.

²⁵Cf. the dream narratives in Gen 37:5-7, 9; 40:5, 8-19; Dan 2:7; etc.

²⁶Some examples of Graeco-Roman dream materials can be found in Philostratus, *Vita Apo* 4:34; Plutarch, *Luc* 12:1-2. These texts are available in J.S. Hanson, "Dreams and Visions in the Graeco-Roman World and Early Christianity," 1401-1405. Cf. also 1QapGen 19:14-19. Cf. W.D. Davies—D.C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (ICC), vol. I, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988, 207.

²⁷A. Oepke, "ὄναρ," 236.

²⁸For a study of the similarities of Matthean dream narrative with Ancient Near Eastern dream narratives, cf. A. Leo Oppenheim, "The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East," 179-255.

form-critical grounds Matthean dreams depends upon the Elohist dreams in Genesis.²⁹ The Matthean dreams have some points of continuity with them, such as reference to the recipient, appearance of divine figure, dream message, formal termination, and fulfilment. Both ancient near eastern dreams and Matthean dreams would be expected to share common form by virtue of being generic divine theophanies which commission the human recipient.³⁰ There also exists an opinion that the Infancy Narratives were modelled extensively upon the accounts of Moses in Exodus and Joseph in Genesis.³¹ A background to Joseph's dream may be traced also in the Moses legends, where the prophesies about the coming deliverer are given in dreams (*LAB* 9,10; Josephus, *Ant* 2:212-17; *Targum PsJ Ex* 1,15).³²

3.1. Matthean Dreams as Theophanies

The dreams in Mt 1–2 can be called dream theophanies since each of them has a message revealing the will of God. The messages include: 1) Joseph's encouragement to take Mary as his wife, 2) the warning for the wise men to return home directly, 3) Joseph's command to go to Egypt, 4) Joseph's command to return to Israel, and 5) Joseph's command to live in Galilee.³³ The theophanic nature of these dreams is further augmented by a reference to an angel of the Lord in three of them (Mt 1:20, 24; 2:13, 19). The evangelist introduces the angel with the presentative particle *idou* ("behold"), a standard element in the theophanies.³⁴ Unlike in the Gospel of Luke (Lk 1:19, 26), here the angel is not specified by name. Matthean use of the phrase *angelos kyriou* ("an angel of the Lord") is equivalent to the

²⁹Robert Gnuse, "Dream Genre in the Matthean Infancy Narratives," 106, 112.

³⁰Robert Gnuse, "Dream Genre in the Matthean Infancy Narratives," 100.

³¹Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 104-119.

³²Davies – Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* I, 207; J. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC), Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 2005, 98; H. Hendrickx, *The Infancy Narratives*(SSG), London: East Asian Pastoral Institute 1984, 15-16.

³³Robert Gnuse, "Dream Genre in the Matthean Infancy Narratives," 104.

³⁴Cf. Gen 18:2; 22:13; Ezek 1:4; Dan 7:13; Acts 1:10; Rev 19:11 (cf. 1 *Enoch* 1:9), and Annunciation Narratives in Gen 16:11; Judg 13:7; Is 7:14; Lk 1:31 (cf. *LAB* 42:3); Davies – Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* I, 206. *Idou* is Matthew's favourite device for calling attention to something extraordinary that is occurring. It is found 62 times in Matthew of which 34 are insertions into parallel materials and nine are in material unique to Matthew; cf. D.A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (WBC 33A), Dallas: Word Books, 1993, 18; F. Rienecker, *Das Evangelium des Matthäus*, 34 n. 12; A. Landi, "La ἐξουσία del Figlio dell'Uomo di rimettere i peccati e la comunità mattea (Mt 9,1-8)," *Rivista Biblica* 59 (2011), 205-222, at 209; A. Vargias-Machuca, "(καὶ) ἰδοὺ en el estilo narrativo de Mateo," *Biblica* 50 (1969) 233-244.

Hebrew expression *mal'ak Yahweh*.³⁵ In the OT, this is often a way of speaking of Lord's angel, but occasionally refers also to the Lord himself.³⁶ At times it can stand for a human messenger of God, such as a prophet (for example, Hag 1:13). The angel of the Lord appears at decisive moments for Lord's people and makes known the will of God in their particular situations.³⁷ In the case of Joseph the angel first appeared in a dream when he was confused about the pregnancy of Mary, and the child in Mary's womb was about to lose the paternal protection and the incorporation into the Davidic lineage (Mt 1:20). The next appearances of the angel took place when the life of the child was in danger (2:13). The third intervention of the angel was to bring back the child Jesus into the protection of the promised (2:19). In the Gospel of Matthew, the angel of the Lord has a special role not only in the infancy narrative, but also in the resurrection narratives (28;2, 5).³⁸ This reveals that the dreams are considered as a vehicle of revelation and supernatural messages, which trigger human action.³⁹ The evangelist seems to follow the books of Genesis and Daniel, as well as the intertestamental literature where dreams are frequently vehicles of divine revelation.⁴⁰ Divine revelation in dreams indicates that the evangelist feels free to inform us not only about the objective information, but also about what is regarded as subjective experience.⁴¹

3.2. Joseph the Dreamer

³⁵The LXX uses *angelos* to translate the Hebrew *mal'ak* that stands for either a human or an angelic messenger; D.N. Freedman – B.E. Willoughby, “מַלְאָכִים,” *TDOT* VIII, 308-325, at 311.

³⁶Kittel identifies Gen 16:7; 21:17; 22:11; 31:11; Ex 3:2 and Judg 2:1, where *mal'ak Yahweh* occurs, as the passages in which it is impossible to differentiate between the angel of the Lord and the Lord himself. According to him, the One who speaks or acts here, i.e., the Lord, or the angel of the Lord, is obviously one and the same person; G. Kittel, “ἄγγελος, ἀρχάγγελος, κτλ.,” *TDNT* I, 74-87, at 77; cf. also S.F. Noll, “מַלְאָכִים,” *NIDOTTE* II, 941-943, at 942; A.H.I. Lee, *From Messiah to Preexistent Son: Jesus' Self-consciousness and Early Christian Exegesis of Messianic Psalms* (WUNT 2.192), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2005, 86-87.

³⁷For example, Gen 16:7-13; Num 22:31-35; Judg 6:11-24. Cf. D.J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (SPS 1), Collegeville: Liturgical Press 1991, 37.

³⁸Cf. also the mention of angels in Mt 4:6, 11; 11:10; 13:39, 41, 49; 16:27; 18:10; 22:30; 24:31, 36; 25:31, 41; 26:53.

³⁹Dreams in Matthew show specific people what they have to do. They represent the entrance of the supernatural into the human world; cf. A. Destro – M. Pesce, “The Cultural Structure of the Infancy Narrative in the Gospel of Matthew,” in C. Clivaz – A. Dettwiller et alii (eds.), *Infancy Gospel: Stories and Identities* (WUNT 281), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2011, 94-115, at 108.

⁴⁰Robert E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 111-112, 559.

⁴¹Davies – Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* I, 205.

Joseph is the protagonist in Mt 1:18–2:23.⁴² The birth of Jesus is presented from his perspective.⁴³ He is part of the genealogy of Jesus, having been introduced as the husband of Mary (1:16). The angel of Lord addresses him as “son of David” (1:19).⁴⁴ This refers back to the “son of David theme” in the genealogy (Mt 1:1). It maintains the interest in the theme of the Davidic Messiah, renews the emphasis on Jesus’ belonging to a Davidic family, and highlights the importance of Joseph in the incorporation of Jesus into the Davidic line.⁴⁵ By returning to the son of David motif, the evangelist makes clear that the Davidic sonship of Jesus is highly important for his Christology.⁴⁶ From Joseph’s perspective, this address alerts him to the significance of the role he has to play.⁴⁷

The evangelist uses the adjective *dikaios* (“righteous”) to describe Joseph’s personality. This is one of the rare pieces of information about Joseph in the NT.⁴⁸ The signification of this word in Mt 1:18 is not so evident.⁴⁹ In ancient Judaism, the whole sphere of righteousness was

⁴²Mt 1:18–2:23 is one of the most important sources of information about Joseph in the NT.

⁴³This differs from Luke, who presents the birth of Jesus from the perspective of Mary (cf. Lk 1:26–2:7).

⁴⁴In the rest of the Gospel of Matthew, the title son of David is reserved for Jesus; cf. Mt 1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30, 31; 21:9, 15. Cf. Davies – Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew I*, 208; D.J. Versepunt, “The Role and Meaning of the ‘Son of God’ Title in Matthew’s Gospel,” *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987), 532–556, at 533–537.

⁴⁵Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 97; R.H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994, 23. The infancy account in Mt 2 continues this distinctive interest in royal Davidic Messiahship. The inquiry of the wise men about the birth of the King of Jews (v. 2), the birth of Christ in Bethlehem (vv. 4–5) and the coming of the messianic shepherd from Bethlehem (v. 6) are all references to this point; D.J. Versepunt, “The Role and Meaning of the ‘Son of God’ Title in Matthew’s Gospel,” 533–534.

⁴⁶T. Nicklas, “Der matthäische Davidsson und das Römische Reich,” in G.V. Belle – J. Verheyden (eds.), *Christ and the Emperor: The Gospel Evidence*, (BTS 20), Leuven: Peeters 2014, 229–248, at 235; Versepunt, “The Role and Meaning of the ‘Son of God’ Title in Matthew’s Gospel,” 533; R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT), Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 2007, 35. For a recapitulation of the title ‘son of David’ in Matthew, cf. C. Burger, *Jesus als Davidsson. Eine traditions-geschichtliche Untersuchung* (FRLANT 98), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1970, 72–106.

⁴⁷D.A. Carson, “Matthew,” in Gaebelin, F.E. – Douglas, J.D. (eds.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary. With the New International Version of the Holy Bible*, VIII. *Matthew, Mark, Luke*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House 1984, 3–599, at 75.

⁴⁸Matthew also mentions that Joseph was a carpenter (Mt 13,55).

⁴⁹*Dikaio*s originates from the noun *dike*, meaning “right” or “justice.” It can be used either in a wider sense (“upright,” “righteous,” “virtuous” or “keeping the

contained in Torah. In other words, being just before God (*tsaddiq*) implied walking blamelessly in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord.⁵⁰ A number of occurrences of the term *dikaïos* in the gospels are very near to this sense of *tsaddiq* in the OT.⁵¹ The manuscripts of Qumran (CD 4:7-8; 4Q171 ii:13-15, 22-23)⁵² and the rabbinic literature (*Sifra* Lev 18:5; 20:26)⁵³ present us with basically the same understanding: those who are properly religious observe the law of God, and are called the righteous.⁵⁴ The adjective *dikaïos* in the Gospel of Matthew is closely connected to the noun *dikaïosyne* (“righteousness”).⁵⁵ From the different contexts in which *dikaïosyne* appears in the Gospel, it can be assumed that this indicates the correspondence between the actions of man and the will of God.⁵⁶ It implies that conformity to the will of God would be the key factor in Joseph’s being just. The will of God for Joseph is contained in Torah. The Gospel presents the gradual elaboration of the

commands of God”) or in a narrower sense (“rendering to each his due” or “passing just judgment on others”); *Thayer*, 148-149; *BDAG*, 246. The adjective *dikaïos* appears 17 times in Matthew (Mt 1:19; 5:45; 9:13; 10:41; 13:17, 43, 49; 20:4; 23:28-29, 35; 25:37, 46; 27:19), often without a Synoptic parallel, and it shows that this is a favourite term for the evangelist.

⁵⁰According to Schrenk, the idea of being just in the Greek world is akin to the corresponding concept in the Biblical world. If in the rest of the Greek world a man is just when he satisfies ordinary legal norms, in the Biblical usage, a just man is the one who fulfils his duties toward God and the theocratic society; cf. G. Schrenk, “δικη, δικαίος, κτλ.,” *TDNT* II, 174-225, at 185-186.

⁵¹For example, Zechariah and Elizabeth were just before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord (Lk 1:6. Cf. also Mt 23:35; Mk 6:20; Lk 2:25; 23:50). For the OT models, cf. Gen 4:8; 26:5; Num 36:13; Deut 4:40. For a brief discussion, cf. J. Reumann, “Righteousness (NT),” *ABD* V, 745-773, at 749-750; Schrenk, “δικη, δικαίος, κτλ.,” 188-191.

⁵²For a detailed discussion on the concept of righteousness in the Qumran Scrolls, cf. B. Przybylski, *Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1980, 13-38.

⁵³For a brief discussion on the concept of righteousness as obedience to the will of God in the rabbinic literature, cf. R. Mach, *Der Zaddik in Talmud und Midrasch*, Leiden: E.J. Brill 1957, 14-19.

⁵⁴Davies – Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* I, 202.

⁵⁵This noun appears only ten times in the gospels (7 times in Matthew, once in Luke and twice in John). Of the seven occurrences of this noun in the Gospel of Matthew, five are in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 3:15; 5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, 33; 21:32).

⁵⁶For a discussion, cf. M. Munari, *Il compimento della Torah: Gesù e la Scrittura in Mt 5,17-48* (SBF.A 81), Milano: Edizioni Terra Santa 2013, 80-83; Przybylski, *Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought*, 78-99; D.A. Hagner, “Righteousness in Matthew’s Theology” (WBC 33A), Dallas: Word Books 1993 107-118; B. Estrada, “La giustizia in Matteo: Presenza del regno,” *Rivista Biblica* 59 (2011), 373-403, at 377-402.

meaning of Torah and its practice in the teaching of Jesus, especially in the Sermon on the Mount. Therefore, the description of Joseph as just in Mt 1:19 is connected to his fidelity to Torah in which the will of God is manifested.⁵⁷

3.3. Joseph's Obedience to the Divine Will

Joseph's response to the will of God revealed through the dreams is unique. He is quick in carrying out the commands given to him. As soon as he awakes from the sleep, he acts in accordance with the directions given in the dreams. Joseph's obedience is perfect. He carries out the command of the angel to the letter. The evangelist employs special narrative techniques in order to make this obvious to his community. Firstly, he makes use of the elements of the "command and execution" pattern in the first dream narrative (Mt 1:20-25). "Command and execution" is a stereotyped pattern modelled after the texts of the OT.⁵⁸ The Lord commands the people

⁵⁷Cf. D. Hill, "A Note on Matthew I,19," *Expository Times* 76 (1965) 133-134; cf. also D. Hill, "Δίκαιος as a Quasi-Technical Term," *New Testament Studies* 11 (1965) 296-302; L. Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, (PC), Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1992, 27; Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 34; S.T. Lachs, *A Rabbinic Commentary on the New Testament*, 6; Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 18; Przybylski, *Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought*, 101-104. There are two other important theories about the righteousness of Joseph. The first theory considers "kindness" or "mercy" as the key factor in Joseph's uprightness. Joseph showed himself upright, being merciful in his unwillingness to enforce the law against adultery rigorously and in his desire to get Mary off as easily as possible. Such an understanding of uprightness is foreshadowed in Ps 112[111]:4, which joins justice to graciousness and mercy (cf. also Ps 37[36]:21; Wis 12:19). An example of this view about Joseph's righteousness can be found in Pesch who considers that Joseph practices not only the "exceeding righteousness" of Mt 5:20, but also the mercy of Mt 9:13; 12:7; cf. R. Pesch, "Eine alttestamentliche Ausführungsformel im Matthäus-Evangelium," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 10 (1966) 220-245, 91. The second theory takes it as "the respect or awe for God's plan of salvation"; cf. X. Léon-Dufour, "L'annonce à Joseph," in *Mélanges bibliques. Rédigés en l'honneur de André Robert* (TICP 4), Paris: Bloud & Gay 1955, 390-397, at 396-397; M. Krämer, "Die Menschwerdung Jesu Christi nach Matthäus (Mt 1). Sein Anliegen und sein literarisches Verfahren," *Biblica* 45 (1964), 1-50, at 26-33; A. Tosato, "Joseph, Being a Just Man (Mt 1:19)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 41 (1979) 547-551, at 547-548. This theory presupposes that Joseph had already known about the divine intervention in Mary's pregnancy; and because of typical Jewish awe for God, he drew back. For a description of the different theories concerning the righteousness of Joseph, cf. Robert E. Brown—K.P. Donfried et alii, *Maria nel Nuovo Testamento*, Assisi: Cittadella Editrice 1985, 99-100; Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 125-129.

⁵⁸Pesch, in two successive articles published in 1966-1967, presents his study on the pattern of command and execution in the OT and its application in the NT. He names this pattern *Ausführungsschema*; R. Pesch, "Eine alttestamentliche

of Israel through Moses to ask their Egyptian neighbours for the objects of silver and gold (Ex 3:21-22; 11:2). The people obeyed this command and their obedience is described as, “the Israelites did (*‘asu/epoiesan*) as Moses ordered (*kidvar/synetaxen*) them” (Ex 12:35). Several times the obedience of Moses and Aaron to the Lord in liberating the people is expressed as, “Moses and Aaron did (*wayya‘asu/epoiesan*) just as the Lord had commanded (*tsiwwa/eneteilato*) them” (Ex 7:6, 10, 20; etc.). Moses’ obedience to the Lord in the construction of the Tent of Meeting is described as “Moses did (*wayya‘as/epoiesan*) this; he did exactly as Lord had commanded (*tsiwwa/eneteilato*) him” (Ex 40:16).⁵⁹

Together with Mt 1:20-25, Jesus’ entry to Jerusalem in Mt 21:1-7 contains elements of the command and execution pattern (cf. also 26:19; 28:15).⁶⁰ These elements comprise of: 1) a brief mention of the reaction of Joseph on receiving the divine command, *egertheis*, “getting up,” in 1:24a (cf. 21:6a; 26:19; 28:15); 2) the explicit affirmation that the command has been punctiliously executed, expressed in a set formula, he did (*epoiesen*) as the angel of the Lord had commanded (*prosetaxen*) him (1:24b; cf. 21:6b; 26:19b; 28:15); and 3) a description of the execution itself, which uses the very words of the command, “and he took his wife, and he did not know her until she gave birth to a son; and he called his name Jesus” (1:24b-25; cf. 21:7).⁶¹ Borrowing the command and execution pattern, the evangelist seems to exhibit the prompt obedience of Joseph to the will of God expressed in the message of the angel.⁶² In addition to the command and execution pattern, in both Mt 1:18-25 and 21:1-7, the OT quotations are inserted between the command and its execution (1:22-23; 21:4-5). This may indicate not only the loyal execution of the

Ausführungsformel im Matthäus-Evangelium,” “Eine alttestamentliche Ausführungsformel im Matthäus-Evangelium,” *Biblische Zeitschrift* 10 (1966) 220-245; R. Pesch, “Eine alttestamentliche Ausführungsformel im Matthäus-Evangelium,” “Eine alttestamentliche Ausführungsformel im Matthäus-Evangelium,” *Biblische Zeitschrift* 11 (1967) 79-95.

⁵⁹For a list of the texts following the command and execution pattern, cf. Pesch, “Eine alttestamentliche Ausführungsformel im Matthäus-Evangelium,” 225.

⁶⁰For a comparison of Mt 1:20-25 and 21:1-7, cf. Pesch, “Eine alttestamentliche Ausführungsformel im Matthäus-Evangelium,” 79-80.

⁶¹Pesch, “Eine alttestamentliche Ausführungsformel im Matthäus-Evangelium,” 222-225.

⁶²Some others who discerned the command-execution pattern in Matthew include Soares Prabhu, *The Formula Quotations in the Infancy Narrative of Matthew*, 185; J.D. Crossan, “From Moses to Jesus,” *Bible Review* 2 (1986) 18-27, at 26; and Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 103.

divine command, but also the exact fulfilment of the prophecy that this brings about.⁶³

Though the dream in Mt 2 does not strictly follow the command and execution pattern as in 1:20-25, Joseph's obedience to the directions given in the dream is very evident. In the second dream to Joseph, the angel of the Lord commands: "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you. For Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him" (2:13b-c). His response to this is as follows: "Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod" (2:14-15a). The quintessential obedience of Joseph is evident from the evangelist's selection of the vocabulary of both the command and execution. This obedience too leads to the fulfilment of prophecy (2:15b-c) as in the first dream (1:22-23). The third dream of Joseph in 2:19-21 too comply with the features of the second dream. The literal fulfilment of commands given in this dream is expressed using the corresponding vocabulary in these verses. The fourth dream makes it evident that Joseph went to the district of Galilee in obedience to warning given to him (2:22-23a). This results in the fulfilment of another prophecy according to the evangelist (2:23b). In short by means of the dream narratives Matthew shows Joseph's perfect obedience and the fulfilment of Scripture. Joseph was an exemplary righteous person by virtue of his obedience.⁶⁴

4. The Dreams in Mt 1-2 and the Rest of the Gospel

The dream narratives in Mt 1 and 2 are closely related to the Emmanuel theme and Kingdom of heaven theme in the Gospel. It is generally accepted that the Emmanuel theme, namely the theme of the presence of God in the person of Jesus Christ, runs throughout the Gospel of Matthew. The Gospel in its entirety can be called a gospel of divine presence.⁶⁵ The first dream of Joseph discloses that the presence of God is concretized in the person of Jesus. From the

⁶³Pesch, "Eine alttestamentliche Ausführungsformel im Matthäus-Evangelium," 244-245.

⁶⁴U. Luz, *Matthew 1-7. A Commentary* (Hermeneia), Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2001, 122.

⁶⁵For an elaboration of this theme, cf. Paul Kunjanayil, "The Extension of Jesus' Presence in the Disciples Sent on Mission (Mt 10,40)," *JeevaDarshana* 7 (2020) 29-50; Idem, "The Interconnection between the Emmanuel Theme and the Forgiveness of Sins Theme in the Gospel of Matthew," *Studia Biblica Slovaca* 13 (2021) 20-48.

time of his conception, he is *met' hemon ho theos*, "God with us" (Mt 1:23). This dream confirms the fulfilment of the Emmanuel prophecy (Isa 7:14) in the birth of Jesus. All the five dream references in Mt 1-2 describe human participation in God's plan of salvation of the world. Joseph and the magi, through their obedience to the will of God revealed in the dreams, gained Emmanuel experience and became instrumental in sharing it to the world. Their openness to and the faith in the revelation in the mere phenomena of dreams became pivotal in this process. In a later phase in the Gospel, Jesus exhorts the disciples about the importance of faith in the experience of his presence with them and in performing the mission entrusted to them (Mt 17:19-20; 21:20-22).⁶⁶ Joseph who completely trusted in the Lord, obeyed his will, and thereby made possible the birth and protection of Emmanuel, becomes role model for the disciples whose faith is inadequate (Mt 17:20).

The kingdom of heaven theme is one of the fundamental themes in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus born of Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit is incorporated into the Davidic family through his naming by Joseph (1:16, 18, 25). He is king of the Jews (2:2), whose life is sought by Herod. Joseph prompted by dreams takes care of Child Jesus and his mother. His role is very crucial in protecting the life of Jesus, in whom the eschatological rule of God has drawn near to humankind (Mt 3:2; 4:17; 10:7).⁶⁷ Manifestation of the presence of God in Jesus (Mt 1:23) marks a new phase in the history of salvation, inaugurating the kingdom of heaven on earth. The church becomes the place of the presence of Jesus and the visible sign of the kingdom of heaven on earth (Mt 18:20). Jesus' presence is always with the disciples that they may be strengthened, assisted and made effective in the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom (Mt 28:20). The disciples should aim at imparting the experience of the kingdom of heaven to those who are outside of the church. The evangelist, by means of the dream narratives, describes the human participation in God's plan of salvation and his indwelling among us.

Conclusion

⁶⁶For the evangelist's focus on the faith, cf. R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 658; Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 405.

⁶⁷For a discussion, cf. J.D. Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1989, 137-149.

The dreams in the Bible, both in the OT and in the NT, function as a means of God's intervention in human realm. First and foremost, they reveal divine will to the human beings. The OT dreams provide a general background to the dreams in Mt 1:18-2:23. At the same time, the influence of the Graeco-Roman dream materials on them cannot be dismissed completely. The Matthean dreams follow a fixed pattern. Their chief function is the revelation of divine will in specific human circumstances. Their recipients, Joseph and the magi, act unfailingly as per the directions given in them and become instrumental in the plan of salvation of the world. Joseph's obedience to the guidance of the angel of the Lord in his dreams is remarkable. His deep faith and trust in the Lord is seen in his prompt responses to the dreams. He obeys the commands of the angel to the letter. In order to exhibit uniqueness of his obedience, the evangelist employs the command and execution pattern in the first dream narrative (Mt 1:20-25). Joseph's obedience facilitated the fulfilment of the prophecies in the Scripture and also the advent of the kingdom of heaven inaugurated in the person of Jesus Christ. In this way, the dreams in Mt 1-2 are connected to the Emmanuel theme and Kingdom of heaven theme in the Gospel.