

„BABEȘ-BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY CLUJ-NAPOCA
FACULTY OF PROTESTANT THEOLOGY

Ecumenical Doctoral School

THESIS

ABSTRACT

DREAM IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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CLUJ-NAPOCA 2020

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Keywords

revelation, dream, medicine, dream interpretation, dream interpreter, Old Testament, psychology, prophet, religion history, high school students

INTRODUCTION

The dream is an integral part of our lives. The dream has always been considered a kind of secret for human beings, different peoples and cultures have been trying to interpret and explain them in different ways throughout the years. Each culture attributed a great importance to dreams.

They searched an answer to the question why one dreams, what the meaning and message of the dream are. Many have researched the secret of the dream over the centuries, looking for an answer to the relationship between dream and wakefulness. Is there any difference between waking and dreaming, which one can be considered to be real, or can these two be separated at all?

In the Old Testament, the dream was one of the possible means of the revelation of God, by which he declared his will and gave an answer either to the actual life situation or to the future.

On the contrary to the pagan thinking of the ancient peoples, who considered the dreams as message of gods, the man of the Old Testament speaks of a personal God, who can reveal himself to his chosen people by dreams. This divine revelation sends a message, highlights man's current problems, and even has a deep thought for the future. We can see this in the lives of numerous people from the Old Testament, to whom God spoke by dream and revealed his will by dream. It can be seen in the lives of Jacob, Joseph, Solomon, Daniel, who could learn the dream as form of divine revelation.

Dream interpretation is still an area that people are interested in, they research them, try to understand, interpret them, yet it still involves many mysteries, secrets.

Many can be learnt about all cultures and about the image of man from the ways they interpreted and explained dreams. But they have been dealing with the dream not only in the past but also in our days. Today's medicine is looking for the answer what the dreams is, why people dream, what is the proper function of the dream. This is not a very simple question, it is still unclear, although various researches have tried giving an answer to it.

Medicine attributes great importance to dreaming, dreams that are in close relations with the human body, the organism and the health condition as well, as they strive for harmony. Psychology also plays an essential role in the problem of dreams. It is also important to mention the results of various psychological researches, the dreams has been explained as a spiritual phenomenon since the beginning of history. They have searched and are still searching for the

answer to why dream images are „born” night after night, how they affect affect people and what these images project, what their purpose is regarding the human psyche.

According to psychology, the dream has a function, it plays an important role in the human soul, as it ensures the balance of the body and soul.

According to the Old Testament, God determines the destiny of man and provides guidance for the future, but the interpretation of dreams is exclusively the responsibility of God, who made his will clear for the people through his chosen men, dream interpreters.

Examining the dreams in the Old Testament, I felt the need to provide insight , both in terms of religious history and science, medicine and psychology, what a dream is, what its role is in our lives and to find out if, the man of today can observe and see the same revelation of God, similar to the people of The Old Testament.

THE AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The dreams is considered as the revelation of God in the Old Testament.

The aim of my research is to find out what was God's purpose in the Old Testament through dreams, dreamers and dream interpreters, what the dream meant in the age of the patriarchs, in the age of the Kingdom and the babylonian captivity.

I have tried, throughout my research, to highlight those personalities of the Old Testament, in whose lives the dream played an important role, causing remarkable changes in their lives.

I was curious what a dream means to someone living in our days, how they interpret them. I considered relevant examining dreams from a different perspective, therefore I examined different sciences apart from theology, to see what they believe about dreams. Thus, part of my research are religious-historical, medical and psychological explanations of the dreams.

I analysed from religious historical point of view what ancient peoples- from Egypt and Mesopotamia – thought about dreams, and if their vision about dreams might be related to the Old Testament. I also searched what sciences, as medicine and psychology- say about dreams and their relationship with the dreams in the Old Testament.

Moreover, the research part of my thesis contained a questionnaire to high school students, asking them whether they were preoccupied with their dreams, if they knew Old Testament dreams, dreamers and if they consider dreams as divine revelations today.

THE STRUCTURE OF MY THESIS

The thesis contains 4 main chapters:

1. The religious historical approach of the dream

In this chapter I tried to find an answer to the question how the ancient peoples-Egypt and Mesopotamia- considered dreams, how they interpreted, explained them, what kind of techniques they used for interpretation, who interpreted them and what kind of literature- dream books- were elaborated by them.

The dream was considered the entrance of transcendence in the ancient world. Ancient peoples thought dreams hold the message of divine wisdom for future, therefore dream interpreters were surrounded by great respect in each era. They believed that dreams are sent by gods to people, in order to find solution and guidance for their lives or for healing their illnesses.

Considering all these, I compared the confessions about Old Testament dreams with the dream interpretation, dream concept of ancient peoples.

2. The medical and psychological approach of the dream

In this chapter I examined how medicine thinks about dreams, how it explains dream images. I analysed why one dreams, what the function, the reason and purpose of dreams are. I wrote about different types of dreams, the stages of dreams, when these dream images „are born” and the oblivion of dreams.

In light of all these, I examined how the explanation of medicine relates to the dreams of the Old Testament.

The psychological research, having a scientific approach towards dreams, has tried to answer many questions over the past two centuries. According to psychology, dreams are related to our daily lives, feelings, thoughts, desires, fears. Dreams confront us with things that we encounter during the day or that we might not want to deal with. Old Testament dreams come closer to us when we learn about the results of psychological research on dreams.

Based on psychology, I examined what a dream is, the dream vision, what the sources of dreams are, what kind of dream theories exist. I mentioned the categories of dreams, oblivion

of dreams, dream interpretation and dream explanation. I highlighted the work of Sigmund Freud and C. G. Jung connected to dream interpretation. I compared the Old Testament dreams with all that psychology affirms about dreams.

3. The term of the dream in the Old Testament

This chapter is the title part of my thesis „Dreams in the Old Testament”. I examined the etymological meaning of the „dream” and shed light on where and in what context it occurs. In the category of dream types, present in the Old Testament, I mentioned revelation, salvation, historical, influencing, prophetic and symbolic dreams and even false dreams of false prophets. I have also examined where we can encounter dreams in the books of the wisdom literature and in what context they occur.

The second part of this chapter presents in chronological order those stories where we can meet dreams, dreamers or dream interpreters from the age of the patriarchs to the babylonian captivity period. I put special emphasis on the personality of Jacob, Joseph, Solomon and Daniel, who were chosen people of God, to whom he addressed by dream and endowed them with the ability of dream interpretation.

4. The role of dreams according to high school students from Kölcsey Ferenc National College

The last part of my research includes a survey conducted among high school students. I questioned a total of 269 students, taking into consideration the students`gender, class, profile and place of residence when evaluating the questionnaires.

The questionnaire included 24 questions, aiming to find out how they interpreted dreams, what their personal opinion and experience were.

Questions 1-6 assessed students` religious-faith orientation, what God, prayers and personal faith meant to them. Questions 7-12 targeted their dreams, if they remembered their dreams and what types of dreams they had. Questions 18-20 were intended to find out whether they were preoccupied with their dreams, strived to understand them. Questions 21-23 focused on their subjective faith life. We could learn if they consider that dreams might be God`s revelations in our days, if they have ever felt that God addressed them through their dreams.

Question 24 evaluated their knowledge about the Old Testament, whether they knew dreams, dreamers and dream interpreters from the Old Testament.

HYPOTHESES OF THE THESIS

The dream is considered to be exclusively God's revelation in the Old Testament. To get a holistic picture of dreams, I examined also other sciences apart from theology in relation to dreams.

1. My first assumption was that if the dream had such a great significance in the life of the Old Testament man, it must have been significant in the lives of ancient peoples as well, playing a great role in their culture, beliefs. Therefore, I examined dreams from religious-historical point of view.

2. I assumed that medicine, as an exact science dealing with the human physique- placing the soul in the background- does not consider dreams as a divine revelation.

3. What regards psychology, I assumed that this science, dealing with the processes of the human soul, puts a greater emphasis on the dream, the dream image. I hypothesized that even though psychology does not necessarily consider the dream as a divine revelation, there might be connections, research, theories that turn to a transcendent in terms of dreams, interpret dreams related to God.

4. Through the questionnaire among the high school students, I assumed that they were interested in dreams, dreams were important to them, dreams had an impact on their lives, they were interested in dreams and their interpretation. At the same time, I considered that they were less familiar with dreams and dreamers of the Old Testament.

CONCLUSIONS

A vast material about dreams can be found in the Old Testament. We read about dreams, dream interpreters, explainers in many places. Dealing with dreams was an important part of daily life for the man of The Old Testament. He considered dreams as a divine revelation, a sort of channel of information between man and God, a means of revelation, guidance and prophecy for man. God gives guidance and prophecy to people through dreams, some are chosen to see the dreams, while others are chosen to interpret dreams through revelation.

From religious-historical perspective, ancient peoples saw divine revelation in their dreams as well, but that was rather different from the dreams of the Old Testament man. Dreams were anthropocentric for the ancient peoples, while theocentric for the people in the Old Testament. Ancient peoples believed dreams transmit the message of the gods, whereas the people of Israel interpreted them as revelation of the one and only God, a message that could determine their future lives.

Medicine emphasizes the importance of dreams and sleep, it speaks of the physiological role and importance of dreams, which lack the terms of the soul, the subconscious, therefore they do not regard dreams as divine revelations.

On the other hand, psychology, by analyzing the depth of subconsciousness, of the soul shows connection with the Old Testament dreams, which are important as they lead to self-knowledge.

Taking into consideration the views of these two disciplines, we can affirm that the dream helps to maintain harmony, mental stability for man, the balance between the body and soul. The research plan carried out among high school students highlighted many things. My hypotheses have been partially, completely or not at all proved to be true.

To sum up, we can say that the dream in the Old Testament is the revelation of God and we cannot exclude that He is able to transmit his revelations through dreams even nowadays. His revelations have not disappeared today, what is more, they claim more and more validity. Despite the fact that the Scripture is considered the primary means of God's revelation today, He can also speak by dream, He is able to reveal His will through these forms. Whenever we talk about dreams and dream interpreters today, we have to be careful that all we do is in lines with the Scripture. The dream is an opportunity in the Old Testament, in which one can see all that could not understand while being awoken. The circumstances are shaped by God, which means that He can communicate to us His will in various forms, even by dreams.

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