DREAM GENRE IN THE MATTHEAN INFANCY NARRATIVES

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Scholarly evaluation of the Infancy Narratives\(^1\) has been undertaken in several critical studies, most recently the excellent work of George Soares Prabhu and Raymond Brown.\(^2\) In their exhaustive form-critical, redactional, and theological assessment they paid close attention to the dream reports found in those chapters. It would seem difficult to add to their insights, but a detailed study of the dream report formats in the ancient world and their subsequent adoption by authors in the Hebrew Bible indicates that the lines of development continue through New Testament materials also. Renewed form-critical observation of this literature may generate new insights and help us focus more clearly upon theological nuances in the Infancy Narratives of Matthew 1-2.

The suggestion by Soares Prabhu that the Matthean dream reports are derived from Genesis merits further consideration. Though he believes Matthean dreams depend upon Genesis 46:2-4, this author would argue for inclusion of all the patriarchal dreams in Genesis.\(^3\) His assessment was built upon an evaluation of linguistic style and content; this author seeks to undertake a form-critical assessment which emphasizes structure and overall genre. Furthermore, this study will address other questions about which a consensus has not been reached. For some there remains a reluc-

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\(^3\) Soares Prabhu, *Quotations*, 223-225.
tance to call the Matthean dreams a distinct literary genre, other scholars view the genre as the result of Hellenistic or contemporary Jewish dreams rather than having a direct connection with Genesis materials, and some look to the Joseph dreams in Genesis as the primary source of literary inspiration. In response this author believes the Matthean dreams take their inspiration from auditory message dreams in the Hebrew text, such as those received by Abimelech, Jacob, Laban, Balaam, and Solomon, rather than the symbolic visual dreams found in the Joseph novella and the book of Daniel. This essay shall seek to defend those observations as well as providing more nuanced insight into the significance of the dreams in the Matthean Infancy Narratives.

I. Dream Report Genres

The consideration of ancient near eastern dreams and dream reports has been undertaken by a number of scholars in the past generation. The discernment of type and structure for the various