

A Sleep of Prisoners:

Christopher Fry's Lyrical Meditation on Life, Death, Violence, and Purgatory

	Dream #1	Dream #2	Dream #3	Dream #4	Additional References
Private David King	Cain	David	Abraham	Shadrach	The three blind mice
Private Peter Able	Abel	Absalom	Isaac	Meshac(h)	Peter Abelard
Private Tim Meadows	God	[The one awake]	The mule driver (God?)	The 4 th Man in the Fire	Christ?
Corporal Joe Adams	Adam	Joab	God's Messenger	Abednego	Everyman
Character Motivations	Abel looks for the existential justification to human existence, while Cain distrusts the world and God. Adam is torn by his love for both boys, but he looks initially more to Cain for making the world livable.	David wants Joab to make a soldier and a man out of Absalom, while Absalom would rather indulge in a little evil among friends in the world.	Abraham has immense love for his son and is overwhelmed by the cost that is being asked of him, while Isaac is a youth in love with the material goodness of the creation. The mule driver represents the physical normalcy of existence.	The three Hebrew youths are held in captivity by Nebuchadnezzar and await inspection, then the monster of the furnace. The 4 th Man in the fire offers wisdom and hope as to the purpose of the fiery purging.	
Violence	Brother against brother	Generation against generation	Sacrifice and substitution	Suffering and Hope in the Powers that Bless	

Discussion Questions

- Is there any logic or development to the opening scene in the prison-church and the sequence of four dreams? Explain.
- How much biblical literacy does an audience need to appreciate this play?
- What does the play conclude about the meaning of violence in the world, especially in the light of war?
- Does the play have any relationship to Dorothy Sayers' *The Just Vengeance*?