

**Ascending the Stairway through the Stars:
The Way of Ascent in the Ancient Egyptian Temple
Ritual and Heavenly Lore**

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“With no less glorious an event than the Ascension of the Lord, Luke chose to begin his chronicle of the spread of the early Christian message of glad tidings (Acts 1:2-9) These glad tidings proclaimed the divine Sonship, atoning mission, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the prophesied Messiah, the Christ. ...The narrative of Acts continues by describing the ascent of Christ while the disciples watched him raised up, until a cloud received him from their sight. What wonder these disciples, followers of the Savior, must have felt as they witnessed His ascent. Surely feelings of inexpressible joy filled their hearts as they realized this was a triumphant culmination of his mission. (J. Hall, *New Testament Witnesses of Christ* [American Fork, UT: Covenant, 2002] 1-2)

All here are familiar with the aforementioned account and also with the continuing Christian hope for ascent, analogized by Paul as completing the race, and more comprehensively described in the Book of Revelation in reference to John’s ascent vision and throne theophany. Indeed, the promise made by the Christ to those who open the door to sup with him, that they might sit with him upon his throne (Rev. 3:20-21), is very much ascent related because coronation on the throne can only follow ascent, just as depicted in the Book of Revelation.

Before the Christian era, the pre-Deuteronomistic Hebrew religion and its theology similarly emphasized ascent. Dr. Barker informs us that “there are examples of this ascent in the Hebrew Scriptures often overlooked because of the way they are translated” , but that “the original understanding of resurrection had been *theosis*, becoming divine, becoming a son of God. It had been the high priestly state because the resurrected entered the holy of holies and so ascended into the presence of God.” (M. Barker, *The Hidden Tradition of the Kingdom of God* [London: SPCK, 2007] 75).

The place of the ascent in the Hebrew temple, its necessity to the individual salvation of man, and its emphatic position in the temple ritual of the Solomonic era, has been elucidated by Dr. Barker throughout her work and is thus familiar to everyone here. Ascent is similarly paramount to the purpose of the ancient Egyptian temple ceremonial which also existed to provide for the theosis and the heavenly reception of individuals, union with the dwellers of the heavens or in Egyptian terms, inclusion among the undying stars, thereby establishing a state of oneness or at-one-ment in the cosmos and so contributing individually to the renewal of the cosmic covenant elucidated in the Book of Enoch (I Enoch 69) and described by Dr. Barker as one of two focal points of the Book of Revelation, namely, how by the ascendant great high priest “creation would be renewed - ‘Behold I make all things anew.’” Rev. 21.5. (M. Barker, *Creation*, [London: T&T Clark, 2010] 127) “Mircea

Eliade, alludes to this process in his description of the purpose of ancient temple rites as being “to restore the primordial unity, that which existed before the creation.” (M. Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* [Princeton, New York, 1954] 78)

Receiving the knowledge of how to ascend and bring about such union, was essential to each and every person who desired to rise in a resurrection of rebirth and ascent. Several thousand years before allusion to ascent in the Hebrew temple and religious texts, ascent to the heavens was very much the object of instruction in the ceremonial rituals of the Egyptian temple, and also in texts designed to teach how to proceed in the ascent. Indeed, the entire Egyptian temple ceremony must be understood as an ongoing procession in various stages of which corresponding salvific knowledge is provided. To determine the instruction of the ascent process, examination can be made of the surviving religious documents such as Pyramid Texts of the Old Kingdom, and Coffin Texts of the Middle Kingdom, but also to even later documents like the Book of the Dead.

Egyptian religion existed with comparatively little change for more than three millennia. That is a very long time, indeed. Its minimal alteration in doctrine and practice is usually described as the result of the endurance and stability of the whole of Egyptian society. While that is undoubtedly an essential condition for maintaining the rites and tenets of a religion oriented culture, perhaps of greater import as relates to specific ritual, was the basic belief that whenever a rite was performed in this world, it must also be done simultaneously in the realm of the gods. For an earthly ritual to acquire validity in the heavens it must be performed properly so as to accord exactly with its concurrent performance in the realms above. Consequently, Egyptian religion was obsessed with exact observance of ritual in order to avoid variation or change in any manner. Because the gods did not change, nor did they alter the rituals and ceremonies they had given and because it was clear that man had no power to change what had been wrought in divine realms, doctrine and practice must transpire not as man but as the gods had dictated.

Nevertheless, change did happen. Alteration was minute and typically limited to the interchange of divine personae as part of the ongoing process of syncretism among Egyptian heavenly beings. Despite the existence and approximate dating of a host of Egyptian religious documents spanning two thousand years, little analysis of these religious writings from successive eras has been performed to establish a chronology of change in ritual or in the alteration of the role of any god or goddess in those ceremonies. This no doubt derives in part from Egyptian religion being treated synchronically by the majority of scholars, that is - as a single whole.

Disciplines reconstructed from archaeology often receive the methodological treatment commonly exercised in archaeology. Archaeological analysis and reconstruction of a civilization is typically synchronic rather than diachronic. In short the civilization, or in this case Egyptian religion, is viewed as a single whole, devoid of time reference and without attention to processes of change. In contrast to such a synchronic method, diachronic analysis is historical, chronological, and seeks to examine by considering development or decline through time. In the instance of ancient Egypt it is almost always the case that decline occurs. The notion of progress or ever higher civilizational development is, of course, a fiction of the social sciences of the modern era. Consequently, I have instructed my classes that the best sense of Egyptian religion, at least as the Egyptians themselves

originally defined it, ought to be derived from the earliest documents which also happen to be the most complete and theologically profound.

The perspective of giving greater credence, the earlier the source, is rendered even more important for our purposes in view of the ancient Egyptian perspective that their teachings of ascent derive from theology handed down from the time of primordial union, the *zp.tpy*. This emphasis of returning to the earliest times to access the earliest, and therefore, the most extensive body of knowledge, was particularly important in reference to the temple ceremonial and ritual that was believed to constitute the profound knowledge actually imparted by the gods to man. The Egyptians believed that ritual elements of their own temple rites, which they claimed to stretch back in time to the first age of the ancient first fathers, derived directly from a heavenly being and a revealer of the eternal truths who established the temple ceremonial rituals and instruction. This was the god whose name has been adapted to English pronunciation via the intermediary Greek as Thoth, but known anciently in Egypt as Djehuti. From descriptions of him as founder of temple ritual, scribe of the gods, revealer of heavenly knowledge, including the way of ascent through the heavens, he appears to parallel closely the figure familiar from Judeo-Christian tradition and similarly a teacher of such information about temples, the heavenly spheres, and the ascent, the one whom we call Enoch, the same Enoch of Old Testament pseudepigraphic tradition. (H. Nibley, *Enoch the Prophet* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986] 47-48 and *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005] 330)

Spanning three millenia, from inscribed texts and a myriad of religious inscriptions, to the many surviving written papyri with religious significance, a vast number of religious documents constitute the circumstances for the study of Egyptian religion. Accordingly, in the present study, for purposes of examining the Egyptian theologies of ascent, from those surviving documents, particular recourse will be made to the earliest available documents, the Pyramid Texts, which were inscribed in the interior passages of the Saqqara pyramids of pharaohs of the fifth and sixth dynasties during the 24th and 23rd centuries B.C.E. The date of the information contained in the inscriptions may, however, be of considerably earlier origin than the mid third millennium B.C. In the preface to his translation of the Pyramid Texts, Faulkner takes note of the problem of dating, by observing that the Pyramid Texts “include very ancient texts among those which were nearly contemporary with the pyramids in which they were inscribed.” (R. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*. [Stilwell, KS: Digireads Reprints, 2007] v) In other words, texts from c. 2500 B.C.E. intermingle with accounts of ritual lore that possibly date as early as the 3000's or even before 4000 B.C.E. Dr. Jane Sellers describes the Pyramid Texts as based on earlier “religious hymns and fragments of already ancient myths” that “may be said to be the earliest record of mankind.” (J. Sellers, *The Death of Gods in Ancient Egypt* [London: Penguin, 1992] 69)

Moreover, the Pyramid Texts focus on the celestial realms and the ascent upward to and through them, while later second millennium writings such as the Coffin Texts or the Book of the Dead emphasize the subterranean realm of the Dead and the escape from it. They are designed to facilitate departure from earthly spheres rather than passage through and reception into the highest astral realms of the gods.

Before continuing, brief mention needs to be made concerning the use of the term “gods” in an Egyptian context. The convention is to employ the words god and goddess to refer to the Egyptian heavenly beings. It is perhaps appropriate to note that these were the terms by which the Egyptologists of the 19th and early 20th centuries identified the *neteru* as gods, initially rendering the Egyptian term *neter* as “god” and its plural *neteru* as “gods.” However, It might be preferable to think of those so designated, by a different translation such as “dwellers in the heavens” or “heavenly beings.”

Indeed, it is well known that in ancient Hebrew religion there were many dwellers in heaven in addition to a father god. The extensive angelic system of the ancient Hebrews is perhaps analogous. Indeed, Dr. Barker has provided us much information on the most ancient Hebrew beliefs relating to the role and function of the hosts of heaven, the *saba* of the great angel, the Lord of Hosts, Yhwh Sabaoth.

Egyptologist Eric Hornung posits as deriving from the hieroglyph for *neter*, the sign of a flag at the top of a pole, the proper translation of *neter* as “one charged with power,” (E. Hornung, *Conception of God in Ancient Egypt, The One and the Many* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971] 38), while Dimitri Meeks (D. Meeks, ‘Notion de dieu et structure du pantheon dans l’Egypte ancienne,’ *Revue de l’Histoire des religions*, 205 (1988), 425-46) suggests that the meaning relates to one who has come to be, through ritual. The chief ritual of Egypt was, of course, the ancient temple ceremonial with emphasis placed upon preparing for and completing the ascent. The term *neter* is possibly best rendered to refer to one who has made the heavenly ascent, the precise theme of the temple ritual. Accordingly, the word *neteru* could readily be translated not by the term *gods* but more properly rendered *ascendant ones* or *those who have completed the heavenly ascent*.

Could this language of ascent be synonymous with the Christian usage in Matthew 5:48 where Jerome employed in his Vulgate translation, the Latin word *perfectus* to render the word *teleios* in the Greek New Testament text? Jerome was not in error in his translation since the Latin verb *perficio*, of which *perfectus* is a participle, shares meaning with the Greek verb *teleioo* from which *teleios* derives. The actual meaning is “completed, having come to the end,” and can be applied in relation to “completing” the ascent. Might we then translate the verse not as “be ye therefore perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect” but rather *complete the ascent just as your Father in Heaven completed the ascent*. (J. Hall, “Ancient Mediterranean Temple Ceremonies: Vestiges of the Rites of Enoch and Precursors to the Hebrew Temple Ceremonial” in *Mormonism and the Temple*, [Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2012] 51).

Thus, ancient Egyptian temple ritual provided for ascent and theosis. Indeed, perhaps the most important purpose of the temple ritual was to assist men in returning to and joining the company of the *neteru* in the heavens. Becoming a *neter* indicates theosis; ceremonial coronation marks theosis. Coronation follows the ascent and as part of the coronation sequence, the initiate is ceremonially received back to the Father Amun, or Amun-Re, where acceptance into the company of the *neteru* is confirmed by words recorded in an inscription upon an 18th dynasty temple stele “I am thy son O Great One ... I am crowned upon thy throne as a king and a god. (A. Gardner, “The Coronation of King Haremhab,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*,” 39(1953) 13-31)

Evidence that the Egyptians believed in the efficacy of their ceremonial instruction as

leading ultimately to the ascent and its resultant divinization, that this could transpire in actuality, is implicit in the examples of Imhotep and Amenhotep, neither of whom were pharaohs, but rather men of learning and wisdom, separated from one another in life by 1200 years. (Hall, *Mormonism and the Temple*, 51) The former, chief scribe and architect of the world's first cut stone building, the step pyramid of Djoser of the third dynasty, the latter a 15th century B.C. scribe, astronomer, mathematician, and designer of Karnak temples, are both said to have ascended through the heavens to become divinized "and though real men, historical figures beyond doubt, whose existence is attested in many monuments and documents... in time were hailed as gods and worshiped in their own temple" (H. Nibley, Abraham in Egypt [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981] 286)

Thus, ascent seems to have been viewed as a mystical experience sought by the living through the ceremonial instruction of the Egyptian temple and ascent texts. Abundant evidence found in Old Kingdom Pyramid Texts and other monuments demonstrates the mystical belief in the possibility of celestial elevation and of union with the *neteru*, emphasizing the heavens as a hoped for destination in resurrection or rebirth, in other words, theosis. Nevertheless, the concept of the mystical is too often ignored in traditional Egyptology which inclines toward refusal to take cognizance of anything bordering on mysticism among the ancient Egyptians. Modern scholarship similarly avoids recognizing mystical elements in early Hebrew religion or in early Christianity, dismissing with little consideration the testimony of Old Testament Pseudepigrapha or New Testament Apocrypha.

In the modern era too many students of religion refuse to take cognizance of the mystical, for they fail to remember that the words "mystic" and "mystical" derive ultimately from the Greek *mysteria*. The *mysteria* or mysteries were, in fact, the ceremonial rituals of temple and ascent, as in the ancient Greek Eleusinian mysteries. Such rites were primarily intended to effect interaction between heaven and earth, between man and god, and as such, certainly qualify as mystical. The mystical must absolutely be acknowledged in temple studies. To be sure, the mystical was what ancient man hoped for; it is what modern man with his devotion to rationalism, disparages. Nevertheless, it was integral to ancient temple rituals of ascent.

In respect to a mystical Egyptian ascent theology, Dr. Jeremy Naydler of Oxford is convincing in his argument:

...the case for the existence of mysticism in Old Kingdom Egypt is overwhelming and its denial requires ignoring all the evidence ... Those arguing against mysticism can do so only by doggedly maintaining that the Pyramid Texts were exclusively funerary texts. Their argument then rests on the presumption that only dead Egyptians were mystical: Living Egyptians were practical and down-to-earth. Were we to accept such a view, the ancient Egyptians and their religion would remain an oddity of world history: the only culture that we know of in which mysticism did not exist, or if it did exist, then it existed in a curious postmortem form. Throughout this present study, the aim has been to show that this unfortunate characterization of Egyptians is palpably and demonstrably false. (J. Naydler, *Shamanic Wisdom in the Pyramid Texts* [Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2005] 319)

The trend in traditional Egyptology somehow to avoid the mystical and treat the early

era Pyramid Texts in much the same manner as the late period Books of the Dead, in other words, as dealing with only the hope of life after death and other mortuary concerns, was firmly established after the appearance of Breasted's 1912 study, *The Development of Egyptian Religion and Thought*. Naydler maintains that "while Breasted refers to a great many utterances from the Pyramid Texts, his interpretation of them is always within the framework of this funerary interpretation of the Osiris myth. ... Within the Pyramid Texts, however, there are great many references to the supposedly dead king as Horus." (Naydler, 59)

The ascendant kings in the Pyramid Texts, as ceremonial initiates are associated with and addressed as a Horus. Horus, is the living god of the final stages of ascent to the stars. It is his eye placed in the skies of earth that is the point where the final ascent begins. Occasionally, however, the recipient of the ceremony is addressed as Osiris, the god whose life was renewed and so the ruler of the Duat or realm of the Dead. Again Naydler is instructive on this point,

Given the abundance of references to the "dead" king as Horus, it is indeed surprising to find it stated so categorically by those who uphold the funerary interpretation that the "dead" king is always an Osiris. Perhaps, though, it is not so surprising, for if the "dead" king is sometimes – indeed frequently – a Horus, the implication is that he may not in fact be literally "dead." And if he is not literally dead, then the texts may not be simply funerary texts. (Naydler, 59)

In support of this notion that the ceremonial was for the living, the Pyramid Texts themselves refer to their purpose as the ascent of the living. “You have not departed dead, you have departed alive to sit upon the throne, scepter in hand, to give order with those whose seats are hidden.” (PT, Utt. 213) The ascendant *neteru* are referred to not only as undying stars, but also as “hidden ones” and the god of gods Amun, is identified by the epithet “the one hidden in the deep” signifying the great deep of the heavens known to the Egyptians as the Waters of Nun. Therefore, an ascendant living one, just as in the cases of Imhotep and Amenhotep mentioned above, would rise to join the *neteru* in their maintaining of order over chaos. To achieve such an ascent preparatory ceremonial instruction was contained in the Pyramid Texts. Prof. Hugh Nibley divided this knowledge into several main categories. First, their authority and importance as a “primordial written document on which the rites are based” handed down from the earliest time or *zp.tpy*; second, preliminary purification rituals including lustration, anointing, and clothing texts; next, texts relating to creation, the garden, and preparation for ascent; finally “what Faulkner calls ascent texts (including victory, coronation, admission to the heavenly company, and Horus texts”). (Nibley, *Message*, xxvi) The Horus texts relate to Horus’ assistance to those making the higher stages of ascent, living as well as dead.

The confusion of viewing Pyramid Texts in the same light as later Coffin Texts and Book of the Dead Texts which address the departure from this world after death with the aid of Osiris, stems from confusion regarding the identities of Osiris and Horus over the three thousand years of Egyptian religion. Though the bewilderment increases in later times, it seems to arise from multiple personae of Horus, an elder Horus and a younger Horus, with the further perplexity of whether Osiris is son of one and father of the other. Sellers attributes this identity syncretism to changes in the rising and setting of star fields and constellations connected to the gods, that resulted in the reinterpretation of sacred lore. (Sellers, 125), and Professor Rundle Clark relates it to early theological inconsistencies in the *Memphite Theology* writings that portray a protecting Horus directing Isis in the recovery of the body of Osiris only after which she received from Osiris’ body the seed to conceive an heir for Osiris, identified in later texts as another Horus, the younger Horus. Clearly two separate Horus personae figure in the account. (R.T. Rundle Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt* [New York: Grove Press (Thames and Hudson, 1959)1960] 104-106) The younger Horus, son of Isis, is prominent in later stages of Egyptian religion, while Naydler notes that Pyramid Texts (PT, Utt. 303) reference the elder Horus as the great god, the eldest one, the son of Hathor, a title sometimes later employed for Osiris.

Here I have noted a complex problem which has not received the attention it deserves in Egyptological circles. Admittedly, the scope of a serious investigation into the perplexities of such identity syncretism is vast and the available evidence partial at best. For our purposes, however, the roles of Osiris and Horus are central to the theology of ascent. Perhaps the situation can begin to be sorted out if we abandon modern name transliterations and usages, and instead employ the ancient Egyptian name *Wsr/Wr* (that is Osiris/ Horus) which designates these beings as one and the same, different personae for different spheres of endeavor and stages of existence. Indeed, the distinction between Horus and Osiris may correlate to that between

Yahweh and Christ, a mere difference of name, one heavenly, the other employed on earth in connection with the fulfilment of his soteriological mission. The accounts characterize Horus in earthly guise as the incarnated Osiris, who is killed by Set, but through the assistance of his wife Isis, is resurrected, thus overcoming death in behalf of mankind, while Horus assumes the psychagogical mission of facilitating ascent through the heavens to the undying stars of the *neteru*.

When Osiris rose from death to life, remarkably he rose not as Osiris but in his other persona as Horus, and it is as Horus that the heavenly ascent was accomplished. The ceremonial initiate as Osiris is told that Horus is his *ka*, and that Horus has come and is present to join himself to Osiris, the reunion of the *ba* and *ka* of not two but only one individual, components of the soul not to be separated again in their permanently fused form of *akh*. Many references to the fusion of the *ba* of Osiris with its double, the *ka* of Horus, are found in the Pyramid Texts (e.g. PT, Utt. 173, 215, 600, 644) and have been noted by several scholars who suggest this to be the fusion of Horus and Osiris. (Naydler, 69-74; Sellers, 283; R. Witt, *Isis in the Ancient World*, [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1971] 39). *Wsr/Wr*, the being who is Osiris/Horus exists as the exemplar and facilitator of ascent and theosis. Naydler aptly refers to the final process of ascent as transcendence from incarnate to celestial through fusion of *ba* and *ka*, and appropriately described as the mystical embrace of Osiris and Horus. (Naydler, 65)

In his two personae *Wsr/Wr* acts as opener and protector of the Way in two stages of ascent, one to escape this sphere, the other to rise through the heavens to his throne above the stars of the sky (PT, Utt. 248, 256, 301) He is preeminently the guide of souls, a role perhaps best described by the Greek term psychagogus. In this guise Horus is given the title of “Opener of the Way.” This role of Horus as the heavenly being who leads the way to the highest realms of the undying stars is attested throughout three thousand years of Egyptian theology and ritual. From the very ancient Pyramid Texts multiple passages proclaim Horus as opener of the way, opener of the sky, and opener of the gates of the sky (e.g. PT, Utt. 304, 305, 479, 505). A stela of the Middle Kingdom (Louvre, C 15) is inscribed with the prayer “Would that I see the Opener of the Ways in his first procession when he gleams as a god ... Horus the vigorous who gladdens the people as he passes along canals leading to the great hall.” (Rundle Clark, 133). Also from the same era, Middle Kingdom Coffin Texts announce that for Horus “the gates of the sky are opened, the gates of the bows are flung wide,” (Coffin Texts, spell 335, cited in Rundle Clark, 113). Finally, from the later era of the New Kingdom, a Book of the Dead text announces the initiate as Horus who has “opened the way of the souls,” so that the recipient of ceremony can “reach the heaven of everlastingness” and “be joined with the shining ones.” (Sellers, 335)

This route of ascent, with conveyance in Horus’ *sokar* or *neshmet* barque, is sometimes represented as the Nile with its transition to the star waterway we today call the Milky Way, but anciently was called the Winding Waterway or the Winding Way through the stars, or much more often, known by the Egyptians as simply “the Way”. The term is evocative of the early Christians’ name for themselves - Followers of the Way, and also of their belief in Christ’s declarations that he prepared places for them in the heavenly realms (John 14: 2-3) and, therefore, was “the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:16).

As in the Genesis (28:12) account of Jacob's dream, in Egypt as well, the Way was compared to a ladder or a stairway to the stars. In Pyramid Texts, it is described as a ladder or stairway named "ascent to the sky" so that Horus that may ascend on it to the imperishable stars. (PT, Utt. 568) The stairway reaches to the Father, Amun-Re, and the Mother, Hathor (PT, Utt. 271); it links heaven and earth (Naydler, 274) to the gods who are in the heavens, who make supports for you with their arms and you ascend to the sky." (PT, Utt. 306) The ladder is said to have been knotted by Horus, who provides for ascent upon it. (PT, Utt. 305) Invocation is offered to the stairway or ladder and its praises sung by the earliest Egyptians as the ladder of the *neteru* (PT, Utt. 478), a ladder they themselves must employ with the assistance of Horus to join the *neteru* among the undying stars.

To ascend in the Way was the very purpose of the instruction and learning of the ancient temples - to teach followers of the Way, in other words followers of Horus, to prepare for the ascent and attain theosis. (Nibley, *Message*, 133-134) Temples also functioned as observatories to keep watch on the cosmos and thereby perceive any alteration of the all important Way as marked by the never ending movement of stars in precessional rotation which occasioned ever so slight displacement. Observation occurred best on special sacred parcels of ground called nexus points where heaven and earth mystically intersect. Anciently such places were marked by stones to establish forever the proper orientation of observation, such as remains of a massive circle of stone pillars found at Heliopolis, the Biblical On, or a smaller circle of stones mentioned by Eusebius as ringing an altar in Jerusalem, or the perplexing discoveries of Egyptian artifacts at European stone circles such as Stonehenge. (Nibley, *Message*, 257-258)

The Pyramid Texts allude to marking celestial movement by apertures of buildings, "the sky is opened, ... the apertures of the celestial windows are opened, the movements of the great abyss are revealed." (PT, Utt.503) The ancient temple itself functioned as an observatory of the movement of the sun and moon sometimes marked by the windows or apertures of the structure itself, or in earlier times, by the motion of shadows cast by tall upright stones or obelisks, placed as sunstones and moonstones. (Nibley, *Message*, 259) The Pyramid Texts (e.g. PT, Utt. 217) "definitely associate standing stone pillars with the observation of heavenly bodies and their motions... The place where the heavens are observed is the place where they are closest to earth, where heaven and earth touch; the stone pillars of the shrine are the pillars and ladders of heaven." (Nibley, *Message*, 256-257)

In this connection it is perhaps helpful for contextual background to recall from the pseudepigrapha the *Apocalypse of Abraham* account of Abraham's anointing of stone pillars in the place of his ascension at Shechem, later site of the first temple post-exodus temple erected by Joshua (Joshua 10), and so too the anointed stone of Jacob mentioned even in current versions of Genesis. Clearly, these accounts establish a tradition in pre-Deuteronomistic Hebrew religion of astronomy as a religious rather than a secular pursuit that, according to Dr. Barker, "agrees that the sciences of the stars were first revealed to Enoch and then passed on to Abraham" commemorated with "a map of the heavens on the ceiling of the great hall of the {Solomonic} temple since Enoch saw one in his vision." (M. Barker, *The Mother of the Lord*,

[London: Bloomsbury, 2012] 51).

In respect to Egyptian temples as observatories charting the Way millennia before Hebrew temples at Shechem or Jerusalem, Professor Nibley concludes, “to acquire and display the knowledge of the spheres meant anticipating their every move. The Egyptian Temple was no mere shelter or dwelling place, but a structure built with the greatest precision in which every dimension was meticulously measured. To possess secrets of the powers of the heavens without a knowledge of the sources of that power was impossible.” (Nibley, *Message*, 258) That knowledge was the knowledge of how to make the ascent. The Way, that is the way of ascent, was charted in temple observatories and marked by openings in buildings or stones delineating the bounds and pathways of the stars, the ascendant *neteru*.

The Egyptian temple ceremonial and instruction performed rituals to prepare for the ascent including purificatory washings, to which ancient Hebrew *miqveh* and Christian baptism are akin and perhaps derivative; followed by anointing, a topic examined in my two previous addresses to this assemblage. The anointing was performed by goddesses under direction of Hathor and using seven fiery oils to enable higher ascent through the seven celestial realms after passage through the fiery eye of Horus. The *Brooklyn Papyrus* (2.36) entones in chant form the protective ceremonial spell for the ascending Horus “see the fiery oil exalts the skin, see the protection comes, which to the son of Hathor belongs.” After the preparatory rituals, there follows instruction about the rebellion of Set and the events of creation, elucidation of Set’s interference in the primordial garden and efforts to appropriate for nefarious purposes the tree of life. Such instruction was to provide knowledge about the heavens, the cosmic conflict, which knowledge was necessary to enable the ascent in face of the opposition of Set.

As noted above the ascent occurred in two phases, one superintended by the Osiris persona of the god and more emphasized in later periods of Egyptian religion, and the other, the higher ascent through the heavens to the undying stars, under the tutelage of Horus as protector of the ascent and opener of the ways. It is Horus who proclaims what could be considered the great dictum of ancient Egyptian cult “**I am not for the earth, I am for the sky.**” (PT, Utt. 467).

Indeed, the first stage of ascent consisted of escaping the bonds of earth. Osiris performed that task of escaping those earthly bonds of death in his own resurrection or rebirth as Horus. The process of escape is recounted in later era ceremonial as reported by, for example, *The Book of the Dead* or *The Book of the Day and the Night*, or *the Book of the Netherworld*. The instruction entails the weighing of the heart and emerging from death before the throne of Osiris in the great judgement hall of the Duat, or nether realm. The process of escape consisted of passing through twelve hours of night or darkness, negotiating gates and overcoming hidden chaos gods to emerge into light with the rising sun. The mode of conveyance was in some accounts on the solar barque representing the underworld nocturnal voyage of the sun. Whether in company with Re, the sun, or Osiris, lord of the Duat, this so-called barque of millions provided the one escaping, with protections against underworld demons and pitfalls, in order to rise in company with the barque’s divine occupants to greet the dawn, and the sun rising on the horizon.

It is at the horizon, typically the horizon in the west, where the higher stage of ascent to the stars commences. The horizon, in Egyptian the *akhet* or *aht*, is the nexus point of communion, of interaction between gods and men. Its hieroglyph is the sun rising or setting between two parallel pylons or columns, similar to the pylons marking the entrance of sacred spaces or of the Egyptian temple complex, and on which the Solomonic temple columns called Boaz and Jachin are modeled.

The glyph is similar to the symbol for the *ka*, two parallel upraised arms. Perhaps implicit in the similarity of the signs is that the *akhet* or *aht* represents the starting place of an ascent which terminates in the fusion of *ba* and *ka*, marking individual resurrection in theosis. In later Book of The Dead texts, a specialized word for entering the horizon, *hnm* signifies “join or fuse with.” (Nibley, *Message*, 111) A Pyramid Text seems to confirm that connection, “O Osiris, this is Horus in your embrace, and he protects you. He has become *akh* through you in your identity within the *akhet* from which the sun emerges.” (PT, Utt. 368).

Moreover, Horus is described as dwelling at the horizon (PT, Utt. 264, 265, 266) for the horizon is cleansed or purified by light for Horus, (PT, Utt. 255) The Way begins at the horizon, and it is at the horizon where Horus opens the Way. (PT, Utt. 220) Each and every aspirant of ascent must also become an opener of the Way and so open the gates of the Way for himself, in the same manner that Horus opened them. (PT Utt. 246). A Pyramid Text instructs this obligation as follows, “You have ascended to the portal and gone on high.” (PT, Utt. 594) The necessary light to open the Way from the horizon is the chief object of an important stage of temple ritual where passage through the higher heavens is elucidated. Prof. Nibley likens the ceremonial route of ascent to a “variety of gates, pylons, and passageways in Egyptian temples ... designated as horizons, such being the symbol of the boundary between this world and other worlds.” (Nibley, *Message*, 107) “The passage from world to world (or sphere to sphere) and from horizon to horizon was dramatized in the ordinances of the temple which itself represented a horizon.” (Nibley, *Message*, 109)

The mode of ascent is described by the use of various metaphors. Most basic is the notion of rising through the skies as a bird, the hawk or the falcon of Osiris/Horus. The flight metaphor appears in many texts. (eg. PT, Utt. 214, 217, 245, 251) Other texts portray the conveyance in the *sokar* or *neshmet* sky barque of Horus. This is described in very early terminology as a reed float of the sky that the Horakhti, or Ascendant Horuses, can use to cross the sky. From Nile to Milky Way, the reed barques are serviceable. (e.g. PT, Utt. 472, 263-266) Horus and his court, often sail in the neshment bark to accompany the one ascending. The hope for that companionship, and with it, the protection of Horus is the subject of Pyramid Text prayers. (e.g. PT, Utt. 260, 264) Pleas uttered are as simple as “Take me with you, O Horus,” (PT, Utt. 566) or as complex as “I will be in company of the gods of the sky. Those who are in the celestial expanses assemble. For those who are in the celestial expanses flash in transmitting your light from above. (PT, Utt. 574)

The notion of light and fire is a common motif in ascent texts. Ascent through the upper heavens can only take place through ascent in the whirlwind of fire after which one can truly become ascendant as a falcon that has become a flash of lightning (PT, Utt. 259) The rising to

the stars is also described as passing through the greatest furnace heat. (PT, Utt. 313) Indeed, to make the transit from the heavens surrounding the earth, one must pass Horus' own fiery eye, to pass through to further ascent through celestial realms. The Eye of Horus regulates admitting the indescribable cosmic light to lower earthly spheres, and is itself a place of fire and intense heat. As mentioned above, the fiery oils of the goddesses were used in order to anoint as a protection against the heat and light of the Eye. The Eye of Horus is variously characterized as the point of transition between worlds and spheres (Assman, 50), the source of light from the heavens, indescribable light brighter than fire, which is found on the other side of the winding waterway (Sellers, 64, 333-334) and the place of convergence of the fiery column. (Rundle Clark, 225) This column of light and fire has sometimes been characterized as a root of Hathor's tree of life, the light entity that spans the cosmos, which the Egyptians portrayed as a system light tunnels, a branch of which descends to enable ascent. Such ascent is described in the Pyramid Texts of one king as the phenomenon in which "I have ascended in a blast of fire." The process is not unfamiliar in that the ascent of certain Hebrew prophets in fiery chariots may denote the very same process. Those who had thus ascended as a symbol of their rebirth in light and fire were entitled to wear the golden collar, the *queni* or *wesekh*, the mark of the ascendant ones, sometimes even called "those of the gold collar." (PT, Utt. 321, 322, 326) It is evident that the collar is analogous to the breastplate of the Hebrew high priest, that also marks him as resurrected, ascendant in the holy of holies. Of course, in cases of both Egyptian royalty and high priests, the ascent has been ceremonial rather than actual. However, that does not invalidate the theological hope of attaining actual ascent and resurrection in a state of theosis.

From surviving texts it can be known that the destination of ascent is the undying stars, the abode of the *neteru*, and the place of the origin of gods through the process of theosis. (PT, Utt. 264, 265, 266). The imagery of being seated on a throne for purposes of coronation to the *neteru* is another way of describing the terminus of the ascent. (PT, Utt. 264) For the Egyptian, as for Hebrew and later for the earliest Christian, the end of the process of ascent, mystical transformation to permit union with the stars or with the heaven dwellers above, whether they are called *neteru*, or *saba* or the angelic hosts, was symbolized by a throne theophany or even a seating upon the divine throne, in Egypt clearly marked with all the accoutrements of investiture or coronation. (PT, Utt. 264) After the hosts proclaim "Here comes the Ascender. (PT, Utt. 269), the ascendant one addresses the great god Amun declaring "I come to you for I am your son. I come to you for I am become Horus. I set ... your scepter at the head of the imperishable stars" (PT, Utt. 264) those who have already ascended to become undying stars, beings of light and glory. (PT, Utt. 248, 273-4, 328, 329, 442) In another version, in ceremony to Amun, the newly enthroned *neter*, offers the cosmic oath of fealty "I am thy son, O Great One. I am crowned upon thy throne as a king and a god, I shall not die." And, in response with words of acceptance, Amun proclaims "Thou art my son, thou shalt not die." (Gardiner, 13-31.)

The ascent is complete. A *neter* is admitted to the company of ascendant ones and placed among the imperishable stars.

Thank you.