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Author(s): James D. Tabor

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 108, No. 2 (Summer, 1989), pp. 225-238

Published by: [The Society of Biblical Literature](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3267295>

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## “RETURNING TO THE DIVINITY”: JOSEPHUS’S PORTRAYAL OF THE DISAPPEARANCES OF ENOCH, ELIJAH, AND MOSES

JAMES D. TABOR

The College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA 23185

In the Hebrew Bible there are three figures whose departures from the earthly scene are strikingly unusual. Enoch apparently does not die but is taken away by God (Gen 5:24). Moses retires alone to the land of Moab, dies, and is secretly buried by God himself in an unknown valley (Deut 34:5-6). Elijah is taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, riding in a chariot of fire (2 Kgs 2:11). As one might expect, the aura of mystery surrounding each account gives rise to a great deal of speculative interpretation among various Jewish and Christian groups in and around Second Temple times.<sup>1</sup> There is also the wider Hellenistic context in which tales of journeys to heaven, stories of apotheosis, and accounts of so-called divine men abound.<sup>2</sup> In the course of

<sup>1</sup> Enoch and Elijah, by virtue of their “translations,” are often paired together as heavenly figures, usually with an eschatological mission, e.g., *Apoc. Daniel* 14:1-3; *Apoc. Elijah* 5:32; *Apoc. Zephaniah* 9:4-5; *Greek Apoc. of Ezra* 5:20-22; Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 5.5.1; *Pseudo-Titus; Apoc. Pet.* 2; *Apoc. Paul* 20, 51; *Gospel of Bartholomew* 1.17 [MS CPV]. Elijah is often mentioned alone, e.g., Mal 4:5 (an enormously influential text); *Lives of the Prophets* 21; *Sib. Or.* 2:187-95; 8:169-70; *Greek Apoc. of Ezra* 6:5-7; Mark 9:11-13; *Kerygmata Petrou* H 2.17; *Acts of Pilate* 15.1; (*Descensus*) [9]25. On the Elijah cycle of materials, preserved in fragments in various languages, see J. H. Charlesworth, *The Pseudepigrapha in Modern Research With a Supplement* (SCS 7S; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1981) 95-98, 277-78; and M. E. Stone and J. Strugnell, *The Books of Elijah: Parts 1-2* (SBLIT, Pseudepigrapha Series 8; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979). On expansions of the Enoch materials see n. 5 below. As one would expect, less is made of Moses’ departure, since the Deuteronomy text mentions that he died and was buried, but see Ps.-Philo 19; *Orphica* 32-39 (may refer to Moses); and perhaps the lost “Assumption” of Moses.

<sup>2</sup> The literature on this subject is encyclopedic. On heavenly ascent, see the recent survey of texts and extensive bibliography by A. Segal, “Heavenly Ascent in Hellenistic Judaism, Early Christianity and their Environment,” in *ANRW* 2.23.2 (ed. W. Haase; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980) 1333-94; and I. Culianu, *Psychanodia I: A Survey of the Evidence Concerning the Ascension of the Soul and Its Relevance* (Leiden: Brill, 1983); and my typological discussion in *Things Unutterable: Paul’s Ascent to Paradise* (Lanham, MD, and London: University Press of America, 1986) 57-111. On deification, see E. R. Bevan, “Deification (Greek and Roman),” *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (ed. James Hastings; New York: Scribner, 1911) 4. 525-33; and, more recently, R. Turcan, “Apotheosis,” *Encyclopedia of Religion* 1 (1987) 359-61, both of which contain further bibliography. The classic study of the so-called Divine Man is L. Bieler, *THEIOS ANER* (2 vols.; Vienna: Oskar Hofels, 1935-36; reprint, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche

writing his *Antiquities*, Josephus, ever the apologist, carefully handled each scene in his own way and for his own purposes. This study attempts to uncover what issues were at stake for him in these texts, given his political and religious concerns as he addressed both his Jewish and Roman audiences.<sup>3</sup> In short, what “apologetic strategy” did Josephus employ in dealing with this notion of apotheosis, particularly in the case of Moses, the founder of his nation?

### I. The Texts

The only reference to Enoch in the Hebrew Bible is in the P source, which lists the generations from Adam to Noah (Genesis 5). There the total life-span of each figure is given with the concluding phrase “and he died.” Enoch is the exception. Instead of a reference to his death, we have the cryptic conclusion: “Enoch walked with God; and *he was not* (וַאִי־נִנְיָ), for God took (לָקַח) him” (v. 24).<sup>4</sup> The LXX reads: “And Enoch was well pleasing to God, and *was not found* (εὕρισκετο) because God took him away [up] (μετετέθηκεν).” This reference to Enoch’s strange disappearance becomes the focus of enormous speculative interest in subsequent literature.<sup>5</sup> The text is usually understood to mean that Enoch did not die. The NT reference in Heb 11:5 is fairly typical: “By faith Enoch was taken up [away] (μετετέθη) so that *he should not see death*; and he was not found because God had taken him.” The idea is that Enoch did not die as other humans but was bodily taken away, either to heaven or to some other realm “beyond.” Josephus follows this general line of interpretation:

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Buchgesellschaft, 1976); but see M. Smith, “On the History of the Divine Man,” in *Paganisme, Judaïsme, Christianisme* (Fest. Marcel Simon; ed. A. Benoit, M. Philonenko, and C. Vogel; Paris: Boccard, 1978) 335–45; and E. Gallagher, *Divine Man or Magician?: Celsus and Origen on Jesus* (SBLDS 64; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1982) 1–40, for a recent appraisal of the discussion.

<sup>3</sup> Josephus is living in Rome in a former palace of the emperor Vespasian, with rights of a Roman citizen, a client of the Flavians, supported by an imperial pension. He says he is writing for the public benefit, to refute widespread misconceptions regarding his nation, addressing “the whole Greek-speaking world” (*Ant.* Proem 1–2 §4–5). Yet at the same time he has his own Jewish nation in mind and claims to be expounding Scripture, “neither adding nor omitting anything” (*Ant.* Proem 3 §16–17). In general, see H. Attridge, *The Interpretation of Biblical History in the Antiquitates Judaicae of Flavius Josephus* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976); L. Feldman, “Flavius Josephus Revisited: The Man, His Writings, and His Significance,” in *ANRW* 2.21.2 (ed. W. Haase; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1984) 788–804; idem, *Josephus and Modern Scholarship (1937–1980)* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1984) 121–91; and S. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome: His Vita and Development as a Historian* (Leiden: Brill, 1979).

<sup>4</sup> Emphases within quotations of ancient texts are mine throughout. I have used the RSV for biblical quotations; the translations of the LXX are my own.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to the cycle of tradition behind 1 and 2 *Enoch*, see Wis 4:13, 16; *Jub.* 4:16–26; 4 Ezra 6:26; Heb 11:5; *Adam and Eve* 51:9; *T. Benj.* 10:6; *T. Sim.* 5:4; *Apoc. Elijah* 4:7–19; 5:32; *Apoc. Daniel* 14:1–3; 3 *Enoch* 48C; *Apoc. Zephaniah* 9:4–5; *Greek Apoc. of Ezra* 5:20–22; Pseudo-Eupolemus (in Eusebius *Praep. Ev.* 9.17.9); Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 5.5.1.

Enoch lived 365 years and then *returned to the divinity* (ἀναχώρησε πρὸς τὸ θεῖον), thus it happens that there is no record in the chronicles of his death. (*Ant.* 1.3.4. §85)<sup>6</sup>

He interprets the notion of God “taking” Enoch by the curious phrase “returned to the divinity.” The verb ἀναχωρέω occurs approximately 170 times in Josephus. The primary meanings are “to return home,” “to go back,” “to retreat” or “to withdraw.” For example, he says at one point that “Ptolemy forthwith *withdrew* to one of the fortresses above Jericho, called Dagon,” and, further, that “a certain Menahem, son of Judas surnamed the Galilean . . . took his intimate friends off (ἀνεχώρησεν) with him to Masada” (*J.W.* 1.2.3. §56; 2.17.8 §433). However, with the specific phrase πρὸς τὸ θεῖον, it occurs only two other times in Josephus; it is significant that both refer to Moses:

Then as time dragged on—for he was gone from them a full forty days—the Hebrews were afraid that something had happened to Moses. Of all the horrors they had encountered, nothing distressed them more than the thought that Moses had perished. There was a difference of opinions; some said that he had fallen victim to wild beasts (it was mainly those who were against him who had this view); others said that he had been *taken back to the divinity* (πρὸς τὸ θεῖον ἀνακεχωρημένοι). (*Ant.* 3.5.7 §96)

And while he said farewell to Eleazar and Joshua and was still communing with them, a cloud suddenly descended upon him and he disappeared (ἀφανίζεται) in a ravine. But he has written of himself in the sacred books that *he died*, for fear that any might say that by reason of his surpassing virtue he had *gone back to the divinity* (πρὸς τὸ θεῖον ἀναχωρησάσθαι) (*Ant.* 8.48 §326)

One can conclude from a comparison of these three texts that this phrase, “to return to the divinity,” has a technical meaning in Josephus. It refers to one who does not die but is bodily removed or taken away from the human realm. To go back to the divinity is to *escape a normal death and burial*. What he denies in the case of Moses he specifically affirms with regard to Enoch.

When Josephus comes to the Elijah account one might well expect him to speak also of a “return to the divinity.” After all, the biblical text makes it clear that Elijah is taken alive and bodily into heaven:

And as they still went on and talked [i.e., Elijah and Elisha], behold a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up (ἦλθε) by a whirlwind into heaven. (2 Kgs 2:11 MT)

And it came to pass as they were going, they went on talking; and behold a chariot of fire and horses of fire and it separated them both; and Elijah was taken up (ἀνελήφθη) in a whirlwind as it were, into heaven. (2 Kgs 2:11 LXX)

<sup>6</sup> I have used the translations of Thackeray and Feldman in the Loeb Classical Library edition of Josephus.

In contrast, what we get from Josephus is strikingly terse and, I will argue, purposely ambiguous:

Now about that time Elijah disappeared (*ἀφανίσθη*) from among men and to this day no one knows his end. (*Ant.* 9.2.2. §28)

It could well be that we encounter here Josephus's well-known "rationalizing tendency," whereby he takes a noncommittal attitude toward elements of the miraculous and fantastic.<sup>7</sup> However, he is perfectly willing to tell of such extraordinary supernatural feats as Elijah's raising of the widow's son from the dead and his dramatic contest with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel (*Ant.* 8.13.3 §325–27; 8.13.5 §337–45). I suspect that there is something more at work here. Josephus is likely aware of the problem created by 2 Chr 21:12–15. There Jehoram, king of Judah, receives a letter *written by Elijah*. If Kings and Chronicles are read as a single source, one would have to conclude that Elijah was carried off to heaven and then a number of years later sends a letter to warn Jehoram of impending punishment. Josephus is perfectly willing to include his version of this problematic harmonization of sources. In *Ant.* 9.5.2 §99 he writes: "While he [i.e., Jehoram] was acting in this fashion and completely disregarding his country's laws, a letter was brought to him from the prophet Elijah, which informed him that God would inflict severe punishment upon him." A variant found in only two MSS (SP) seeks to solve the problem by adding the explanation "for he was still on the earth." Yet even without this reading, the question of this "heavenly" letter does not present any serious problem for Josephus. He has only told us that Elijah "disappeared" and that no one knew where he went. He says nothing about a whirlwind, a heavenly chariot, or his being carried into heaven.

I am convinced that his reticence has nothing to do with an attempt to harmonize his sources, but rather relates to his account of Moses' death. He says that Moses was talking with his companions when a cloud descended upon him and he disappeared (*ἀφανίζεται*). His biblical text says something very similar about Elijah, but *not* about Moses. Elijah is talking with his companion Elisha when suddenly a whirlwind takes him to heaven. Josephus reports simply that he "disappeared" (*ἀφανίσθη*), omitting these details. In Moses' case his main concern seems to be to point out that although he was "taken away" (i.e., like Enoch), he still died and thus did not "return to the divinity." If he subsequently relates that Elijah was taken to heaven in a whirlwind and chariot of fire, which might very well imply that he did somehow escape death (i.e., "return to the divinity"), then he has a real problem. The founder of the nation, Moses, would appear to be of less stature than a later

<sup>7</sup> See his characteristic formula (perhaps drawn from Dionysius of Halicarnassus), "But on these matters [i.e., miraculous] let everyone decide according to his fancy," introduced in *Ant.* 1.3.9 §108 regarding the extraordinarily long lives of the antediluvian generations, but repeated throughout *Antiquities* (2.16.5 §348; 3.5.2 §81, et al.).

prophet, Elijah. Instead he makes the account of Elijah's disappearance as vague as possible, and by including the story about the letter during the reign of Jehoram (which he could have very well omitted), he remains faithful to his sacred text, while still allowing the reader to interpret the scene either way. Those who know the Hebrew Bible account can read the "disappearance" of Elijah as some kind of heavenly translation or apotheosis, while those who do not can interpret his "departure" as a retirement from office.

If this is correct, why does he tell his readers that Enoch *did* in fact "return to the divinity"? Certainly the Gen 5:24 text is more ambiguous than the account of Elijah's departure. He could have let it stand as it was and have avoided any implication that Enoch might have achieved a greater end than Moses. I suggest two possible reasons. First, as Louis Feldman has shown, Josephus treats the early chapters of Genesis as a somewhat typical "golden age," in which humans are in close and friendly contact with the gods, nature is less corrupt, human longevity is the norm, and mighty heroes abound. Various Mediterranean and ancient Near Eastern cultures had similar tales of ancient figures who had escaped the normal fate of death and had been "translated" to some region "beyond."<sup>8</sup> Further, I suspect that the many traditions developed around Enoch in Jewish circles were simply too widespread to be ignored. Josephus cannot just pass over this text; indeed, he heightens it a bit, reflecting the common interpretation of his time—namely, that Enoch did not die.

It is his account of Moses' death that is most puzzling. After all, it is Josephus himself who introduces the story about a cloud taking Moses away. The text of Deut 34:5–6 is straightforward—Moses *dies* and is *buried* in an unknown place:<sup>9</sup>

So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord, and he buried him in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Bethpeor; but no man knows the place of his burial to this day.

<sup>8</sup> L. Feldman, "Hellenizations in Josephus' Account of Man's Decline," in *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Honor of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough* (ed. Jacob Neusner; Supplements to *Numen* 14; Leiden: Brill, 1968) 336–53. Enoch is dwelling in Parwain, the site of Paradise, in 1QapGen 2. I have in mind such figures as Utnapishtim in the *Gilgamesh Epic* 10 and Menelaus, who is taken to Elysium or the Isles of the Blessed in *Odyssey* 4.561–69; Hesiod *Works and Days* 167–73. In general, see Erwin Rhode, *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks* (8th ed.; New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925); and Franz Cumont, *After Life in Roman Paganism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923).

<sup>9</sup> Gary Anderson has pointed out to me that the verb ויקבר ("and he [i.e., God] buried him" RSV) can also be translated as an impersonal passive, "and he was buried," leaving open the question of the agent. Still, the presence of the object, אֶת־מֹשֶׁה, seems to preclude the passive niph'al. The LXX has ἔθαψαν, "they buried." We find both interpretations among various Jewish circles in antiquity, and a whole body of literature develops around this question of Moses' burial and what happened to his body (e.g., Jude 9). It seems to me that the wider context of the MT implies that God is the one who buries Moses.

Why doesn't Josephus just stay with his text here? If he wants to stress that Moses did *not* "return to the divinity" but died a normal death, then why import this cloud/translation motif? I think what we have here is his own very carefully worked out way of dealing with traditions about the apotheosis of Moses and other such extraordinary figures. I turn now to that wider context.

## II. Apotheosis and Immortality

We encounter in this period two overlapping ideas regarding apotheosis: first, that a hero, ruler, or extraordinary individual can obtain immortal heavenly existence; second, the more general dualistic notion that the souls of all humankind, although bound by mortal conditions, can obtain an immortal heavenly life. The second should not be viewed merely as a chronological democratization of the first. The two exist side by side throughout the period. Both are related to a fundamental shift in the perception of the human "place," reflected in a host of texts from the fourth century BCE on, in which heaven rather than earth is seen as humankind's true "home," and immortality (or escape from mortal conditions) humankind's essential goal.<sup>10</sup>

The concept of divinity in the Greco-Roman period is complex and many-faceted. To distinguish ancient theory (much less legend or gossip) from cultic fact is often difficult (as any reading of writers such as Diodorus, Plutarch, Pausanias, or Diogenes Laertius will quickly demonstrate). At all times the historian must consider the various indigenous categories and points of reference that form the context in which discussions and debates about "divine" status make sense.<sup>11</sup> In keeping with W. Guthrie's general rubric (i.e., gods are immortal; humans are mortal), to be immortal (*ἀθάνατος*) in any sense *is* to be a god.<sup>12</sup> Drawing on popular legend, folklore, literature, and civic propaganda, one can compile a long list of figures who were said to have once been human but to have become immortal gods—whether from the legendary past (Enoch, Elijah, Moses, Osiris, Dionysus, Heracles, Aristaeus, Asclepius, Aeneas, Romulus, Empedocles) or closer to Josephus's own time (Alexander, various Roman emperors, Jesus, Apollonius). Often tales of such figures include the idea that they are taken up to heaven at the end of their careers. But this idea of special apotheosis needs to be seen in the context of the more general dualistic perception that all human souls are immortal, and thus divine, and that the proper goal of human life is to escape

<sup>10</sup> On this point in general, see M. Nilsson, "History of Greek Religion in the Hellenistic and Roman Age," *HTR* 36 (1943) 251–75; J. Z. Smith, "Hellenistic Religions," *The New Encyclopedia Britannica: Macropaedia* (15th. ed.) 8. 749–51.

<sup>11</sup> See Gallagher, *Divine Man or Magician*, 1–40. Particularly helpful in this regard is D. Aune's "The Problem of the Genre of the Gospels: A Critique of C. Talbert's *What Is a Gospel?*" in *Gospel Perspectives: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels* (ed. R. T. France and D. Wenham; 2 vols.; Sheffield: JSOT, 1981). 2. 20–34.

<sup>12</sup> W. Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods* (Boston: Beacon, 1950).

the bonds of mortality, whether earth or body, and ascend to heaven. Cicero's language in "Scipio's Dream" (*Republic* 6.9–26) typifies this popular dualism, illustrating the ambiguity between the particular and the general:

Surely all those are alive . . . who have escaped the bondage of the body as from a prison; but that life of yours [i.e., on earth], which men so call, is really death. (6.14)

Such a life [of virtue] is a road to the skies, to that gathering of those who have completed their earthly lives and have been relieved of the body and who now live in yonder place which you see now [among the stars]. (6.16)

Strive on indeed, and be sure that it is not you that is mortal, but only your body. For that man whom your outward form reveals is not yourself; the spirit is the true self, not that physical figure which can be pointed out by the finger. Know then, that *you are a god*. . . (6.24)

Dio's account of Augustus's funeral offers a more concrete example of this ambiguity.<sup>13</sup> He reports that Tiberius compared his father to Heracles and said, "It is fitting that we should not mourn for him, but while now *giving his body back to nature, should forever glorify his soul as a god*." When his body was consumed on the pyre, the senator Numerius Atticus swore that he had seen the emperor's soul ascending to heaven (for which Livia paid him a fee of one million sesterces!). After five days his *bones were placed in the tomb*. Here we have a clear recognition of bodily mortality, the idea of the immortal soul, and the notion of the apotheosis of an extraordinary individual—all lumped together.

It is within this context that we must try to understand Josephus's concerns in recounting the death of Moses. First, what does Josephus say about the more general question of the immortality of all human souls? Would he find the dualistic language of someone like Cicero compatible with his own understanding? I would argue both yes and no, because Josephus is quite crafty when he treats this subject. In his speech against suicide to the defenders of Jotapata he sounds like a Ciceronian mimic (*J.W.* 3.8.5 §362–82):<sup>14</sup>

All of us, it is true, have mortal bodies, composed of perishable matter, but the soul lives for ever, immortal: it is a portion of the Deity (θεοῦ μοῖρα) housed in our bodies. (372)

. . . Know you not that they who depart this life in accordance with the law of nature . . . that their souls [the righteous], remaining spotless and obedient, are allotted the most holy place in heaven, whence, in the *revolution*

<sup>13</sup> Dio 56.36.4–5; see E. Bickerman, "Die römische Kaiserapotheose," *ARW* 27 (1929) 1–27. I thank Robert M. Grant for these references.

<sup>14</sup> Compare the pro-suicide speech of Eleazar ben Ya'ir to the defenders of Masada, which Josephus seems to quote with approval (*J.W.* 7.8.6–9.1 §320–401). There Eleazar comes across as a popular Platonic philosopher arguing that the soul is dragged down by the body and longs for release to its proper heavenly sphere.



of the ages (περιτροπῆς αἰώνων), they return to find in chaste bodies a new habitation.<sup>9</sup> But as for those who have laid mad hands upon themselves, the darker regions of the nether world [Hades] receive their souls. (374)

And when he reports on the beliefs of the Essenes and the Pharisees he makes them sound like Orphic/Pythagorean cults:

For it is a fixed belief of theirs [the Essenes] that the body is corruptible and its constituent matter impermanent, but that the soul is immortal and imperishable. Emanating from the finest ether, these souls become entangled, as it were, in the prison-house of the body, to which they are dragged down by a sort of natural spell; but when once they are released from the bonds of flesh, then, as though liberated from a long servitude, they rejoice and are borne aloft. (*J.W.* 2.8.11 §154–55)

Every soul, they [the Pharisees] maintain is imperishable, but the soul of the good alone passes into another body, while the souls of the wicked suffer eternal punishment. (*J.W.* 2.8.14 §163)

They [the Pharisees] believe that souls have power to survive death and that there are rewards and punishments under the earth for those who have led lives of virtue or vice; eternal imprisonment is the lot of evil souls, while the good souls receive an easy passage to a new life. (*Ant.* 18.1.3. §14)

He further argues with Apion:

... that those who observe the laws and, if they must needs die for them, willingly meet death, God has granted a renewed existence and in the revolution of the ages the gift of a better life. (*Ag. Ap.* 2.30 §218)

Superficially read, this all sounds like some form of popular Platonic dualism—all souls are immortal; at death they suffer rewards and punishments; the good are taken above, while the evil remain below. But the phrases I have emphasized, about passing into a new body (life, habitation) “in the revolution of the ages” bear closer examination. A non-Jew reading such language might well take it as a reference to some notion of metempsychosis or the transmigration of the soul from one body to another in the journey to the highest realm. But I think what we really have here is Josephus the Pharisee’s (and former Essene—*Life* 10–12) rather thinly veiled reference to the Jewish idea of resurrection of the body, something foreign to non-Jewish dualistic systems.<sup>15</sup> Otherwise his carefully chosen language makes little

<sup>15</sup> Plato, in *Phaedo* 114C, specifically makes the point that those who live the life of the philosopher can rise up to their pure abode, released as from a prison, “altogether without bodies.” In this regard it is interesting that H. Thackeray (one of the translators of the Loeb edition of Josephus) argues on the basis of these passages that Josephus was indeed speaking of transmigration of the soul. Feldman, I think rightly, points out that despite his odd choice of language, Josephus likely has resurrection in mind. I am arguing that he means to obscure, or even reinterpret, a traditional Jewish way of expression which would clearly refer to resurrection in a literal fashion (see the footnotes of the Loeb edition at *Ant.* 18.1.2 §11).

sense. The reference to the “revolution of the ages” is eschatological.<sup>16</sup> The souls of the good rise up to God, while those of the wicked suffer in the netherworld; at the final judgment the good are resurrected (i.e., “pass into another body”) and the evil are eternally punished. Josephus is no systematic theologian, but the general outline of his thinking here is clear and consistent. He, like many Jews and Christians of the period, had to affirm at one and the same time the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body. Josephus’s main interest is to point out that unlike the Sadducees or Epicureans, both Pharisees (whom he likens to Stoics in *Life* 12) and Essenes (whom he compares to the Pythagoreans in *Ant.* 15.10.4 §371) believe in the immortality of the soul. Like many in the ancient world, he saw this as an indication of piety, the foundation of proper ethics. A denial of the immortality of the soul led to wickedness.<sup>17</sup> So we can conclude that Josephus would have had no problem in speaking of all humans as immortal, and thus “divine” or “gods” in the sense used by someone like Cicero.

But what would Josephus have said about the more specific notion of a prophet, philosopher, or ruler, who is considered to be a *thēios anēr*, being taken to heaven and made a god?<sup>18</sup> Why does he seem to rule out specifically the apotheosis of Moses, founder of his nation?

It is possible that Josephus models his *Antiquities*, at least in part, on Dionysius of Halicarnassus’s *Roman Antiquities*, written a century earlier.<sup>19</sup> He seems specifically aware of Dionysius’s treatment of the passing of the founders of the Roman state, Aeneas and Romulus. Of the former, Dionysius reports: “But the body of Aeneas could nowhere be found and some conjectured that he had been translated to the gods” (*Rom. Ant.* 1.64.4). Of Romulus he writes that “the more mythical writers say that as he was holding an assembly in the camp darkness descended upon him from a clear sky and . . . he disappeared, and they believe that he was caught up by his father Ares” (*Rom. Ant.* 2.56.2). Ovid offers us one such “mythical” account:

<sup>16</sup> It might superficially remind one of Plato’s “Great Year” (see *Timaeus* 39; Cicero *De Nat. Deor.* 2.51; *Republic* 6.22) but none of these writers would speak of finding a new habitation in “chaste bodies” or passing “into another body” in connection with such a revolution.

<sup>17</sup> This argument runs through Plato’s *Phaedo*. It is pointedly stated in *Wis* 2:1–3:9.

<sup>18</sup> I am using *thēios anēr* here in its most general and qualified sense. See the literature cited in n. 2 above and the discussion by C. Holladay, *Theios Aner in Hellenistic Judaism* (SBLDS 40; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977).

<sup>19</sup> Dionysius, likewise from the east, migrated west to Rome. He titled his history *Romaikē Archaialogia*, and it was divided into twenty books. Josephus divided his *Ioudaikē Archaialogia* also into twenty books. There are places where he even echoes the language of Dionysius; compare, e.g., *Ant.* 1.3.9 §108; 2.16.5 §348; 3.5.2 §81 with *Rom. Ant.* 1.48, where Josephus follows Dionysius’s noncommittal approach to reports of miracles. For further discussion, see L. Feldman, *Josephus and Modern Scholarship*, 407–8. Still, Josephus’s direct use of Dionysius is not entirely certain. D. Ladouceur has shown that some of the alleged instances of influence are actually from earlier writers who influenced Dionysius, so Josephus might well have known these writers (“The Language of Josephus,” *JSJ* 14 [1983] 18–38).

The time is here, Father, because the Roman state stands firm on great foundations and does not depend on one person's power to give the gift promised to me and your noble grandson and to take him from earth and to place him in Heaven. In the assembled council of the gods, you said to me (for I have remembered and have marked your pious words in my mind), "One there will be whom you shall lift up into the blue heaven." Fulfill now the promise you made. The Almighty nodded, and he hid the sky with dark clouds and he terrified the earth with thunder and lightning . . . he leapt into his bloodstained chariot. Gliding down through the air he came to rest on top of the wooded Palatine hill where Romulus gave just laws and caught him up. His mortal body became thin, dissolving in the air. . . . Suddenly he had a beautiful form more worthy of the heavenly couches. . . . (*Metamorphoses* 14.805–85)<sup>20</sup>

Ovid tells a similar tale in *Fasti* 2.481–509. The sun disappears, clouds come with heavy rain, and Romulus flies to the stars. There is much grieving and some senators were even charged with murder. However, Proculus Julius, while coming from the Alba Longa that same dark night, meets Romulus, "beautiful and more than human and clothed in a sacred robe." He is told to "stop them from mourning; do not let them violate my divinity with their tears; order the pious crowd to bring incense and worship the new Quirinius. . . ." This latter account has more details, including the "witness" to Romulus's divine epiphany. Livy relates a similarly vivid story (1.16). While Romulus was reviewing the army, a cloud came and veiled him; the soldiers were terrified when they saw the empty royal seat when the cloud lifted. Senators standing by said that Romulus had been taken up on high. "Then at first a few, then all, joyfully declared Romulus, the king and father of the city of Rome, to be a God, the son of a God." But rumors said that Romulus had been torn apart by enemy senators. Then Julius Proculus, a man well respected, told how Romulus had descended from heaven and appeared to him. We have many other similar tales of such disappearances. Diodorus Siculus relates that Heracles climbed onto a pyre and was struck by lightning, but no bones or trace of him could be found. It was thus declared that he had become a god (*Lib. of Hist.* 4.38.3–5; 39:1–2). Lucian uses this story to parody the whole idea of apotheosis when he relates the passing of the charlatan Peregrinus. There are stories of Empedocles, who disappears in the night and his body is not found, but a voice is heard saying that he is no longer mortal, but now goes about as a god (Diogenes Laertius *Lives* 7.66–68).<sup>21</sup> Luke relates that Jesus' tomb was found empty, that he appeared alive to

<sup>20</sup> The translation here is my own. Later Romulus's wife Hersilia is shown a bright star which glides down and takes her to heaven as well, changing her mortal body as well and giving her the new name Hora.

<sup>21</sup> Compare fragment 112 in Diels, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (ed. Walter Kranz; 10th ed.; 3 vols.; Berlin: Weidmann, 1960–61): "All hail, O friends! But to you I walk as god immortal now, no more as man."

various people, remained on earth for forty days, then disappeared into heaven in a cloud (Luke 24; Acts 1). We can assume that Josephus was familiar with this motif in a general way, and in the case of Aeneas and Romulus he might well have known the account of Dionysius of Halicarnassus. We should include here also Sophocles' account of the mysterious disappearance of Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*, which bears a striking resemblance to that of Moses. This is particularly significant since Josephus is definitely indebted to Sophocles elsewhere.<sup>22</sup>

But we must consider whether he might also be aware of evaluations of Moses within Jewish circles which portray him as a "divine man" or a "god."<sup>23</sup> Philo is our best source for this development. He writes of Moses' departure:<sup>24</sup>

After a long time, when he was about to be sent to Heaven, and abandoning mortal life, was to be immortalized, at the call of the Father, with his dual being of body and soul finally transformed into a monadic nature, wholly and completely transformed into a sun-bright mind. . . . For when he was ready to be taken up and standing like a runner on the mark, in order that he might fly straight up the race course to Heaven, the divine spirit inspired and possessed him so that while still living he prophesied concerning his own death; how he was buried, while no one was present—not by mortal hand but by immortal powers, how he was not buried in a tomb of his forefathers but in a special grave that no one has ever seen. . . . (*De vita Mosis* 2.290–91)

This scene is elaborated in a most remarkable way in *De virt.* 73–75. While still in the body Moses sings a final song of praise with absolute perfection:<sup>25</sup>

He gathered together a divine company, that is the elements of the universe and the most important parts of the cosmos, namely earth and heaven. . . . In the midst of these he composed hymns in every type of mode and interval, in order that men and ministering angels might hear, men as learners that he might teach them a similarly grateful attitude, and the angels as critics to watch how, judged by their own technique, he made

<sup>22</sup> I thank Louis Feldman for this point. See his article "Josephus as an Apologist to the Greco-Roman World: His Portrait of Solomon," in *Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity* (ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza; Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976) 69–98; and H. Thackeray, *Josephus the Man and the Historian* (New York: Ktav, 1967) 116–17.

<sup>23</sup> Two of the more striking texts are: Ezekiel the Tragedian's *Exagoge* 68–82, in which Moses dreams that he is taken to heaven and seated on God's throne, ruling over all creation below; and *Orphica* 25–39, where Moses (Abraham?) is taken to heaven, placed on a golden throne, and shown all mysteries. See W. Meeks, "Moses as God and King," in *Religions in Antiquity*, 354–71; and, more generally, J. Z. Smith, "The Prayer of Joseph," in *Map Is Not Territory* (SJLA 23; Leiden: Brill, 1978) 253–94.

<sup>24</sup> For the following quotations from Philo I have adapted the excellent translations of E. R. Goodenough in *By Light, Light* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935) 196–97, 224–25.

<sup>25</sup> On this matter of singing a hymn in connection with heavenly ascent, see *Corp. Herm.* ("Poimandres") 1.31 and *Hekhalot Rabbati* 22:2.

not a single false note. The angels would also be strengthened in their faith if a man clothed in his mortal body could have a power of song like the sun, the moon, and the sacred choir of the other stars, and could attune his soul to the divine musical instrument, namely the heaven and the whole cosmos. But Moses the hierophant, when he had taken his place in the aether, mingled, along with the choral hymns of praise to God, true emotions of good will to the Nation. He reproved them for their past sins, gave them warnings and corrections for the present, and advice for the future based upon good hopes which were bound to be fulfilled.

Moses finishes his song and begins to be transformed:

. . . from mortal existence into immortal life, and noticed that he was gradually being disengaged from the elements with which he had been mixed. He shed his body which grew around him like the shell of an oyster;<sup>26</sup> while his soul which was thus laid bare desired its migration thence. (*De virt.* 76)

In a further passage dealing with the patriarchs, he singles Moses out as the greatest of all:

But there are some whom He has advanced higher, and has made able to soar beyond all form and generation, and has stationed beside Himself. Such is Moses to whom He says, "stand here with me." [Deut 5:31] So when Moses was about to die he did not "leave" in order to be "added" like the others [i.e., Abel, Abraham, Jacob, Isaac], for there was no room in him for either adding or subtraction. But he was translated by the Word ( $\rho\eta\mu\alpha$ ) of that Cause by which the whole universe was created. Thus you may learn that God regards the Sophos as of equal honor with the world, for by the same Word ( $\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ ) He both made the universe and takes the perfect man from earthly things up into Himself. But by no means, when God gave him as a loan to earthly things and suffered him to dwell with them, did God attach to him any common virtue of a ruler or king, the type of virtue by which one gains forcible control over the passions of the soul. Rather God ordained him as deity ( $\epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \theta\epsilon\acute{o}\nu$ ), and decreed that all the region of the body and its dominant mind should be subject and slave to him. "For I give you," He says, "as a god to Pharaoh" [Exod 7:1]; but a deity [here Moses] is not susceptible of subtraction or addition, for deity is a plenum and is perfectly balanced in Himself. Therefore it is said that no one knows his tomb, for who would be competent to apprehend the perfect soul's translation over to Being. Nor do I think that the soul itself which had the experience was conscious of its being improved, because at that moment it was in a state of inspired frenzy. (*Sac.* 8–10)

For Philo, Moses is "the most holy man who ever lived" (*De vita Mosis* 2.192), but more than that, in a properly qualified sense, he is an incarnate deity, a god.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> On this image, see *Phaedrus* 250C.

<sup>27</sup> See E. Goodenough's discussion of this difficult area in *By Light, Light: The Mystic Gospel*

## III. The Disappearance of Moses

What are we to make of Josephus's version of the departure of Moses in the light of such evaluations? I think there are a number of factors at work.

First, the Deuteronomy 34 text itself was seen as quite an extraordinary account in antiquity, since Moses, the presumed author, describes (i.e., predicts like a prophet, v. 10) his own death. Josephus includes this, if little else, in his version of the scene: "But he [Moses] has *written of himself* in the sacred books that he died, for fear lest they should venture to say that by reason of his surpassing virtue he had gone back to the Deity" (*Ant.* 4.8.48 §326). Second, he does not include the line from Deut 34:6 about God himself *burying* Moses and no one knowing to this day his grave site. Yet this is really the most striking element in the text. Third, he adds to his account the reference to a cloud suddenly descending upon Moses and his mysterious disappearance in a ravine. Finally, the account as a whole is given a heightened drama with Moses touchingly bidding the weeping people farewell, withdrawing from them, telling them not to weep (compare Socrates in the *Phaedo*), facing his final moment alone.

Josephus clearly thinks of Moses as the greatest of the great. In the departure scene he says directly that he "surpassed in understanding all men that ever lived" (*Ant.* 4.8.49 §327). But he is not willing to describe him as a "divine man," as one who returned to heaven, escaping death and becoming a god. True, he does use the designation *theion andra* of Moses (*Ant.* 3.7.7 §180; see also *Ag. Ap.* 1.3 §279), but only once, where the context makes clear that he means a "man of God," one full of virtue (cf. Deut 33:1). I think we must take his line about Moses not "returning to the divinity" (in contrast to Enoch) as a conscious resistance to such contemporary evaluations of other extraordinary figures, whether that of Philo of Moses, the Christians of Jesus or Dionysius of Aeneas and Romulus.<sup>28</sup> But Josephus really wants to have it

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*of Hellenistic Judaism* (1935; reprint, Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1969) 223–29. I find his argument balanced and convincing, but also see D. Tiede, *The Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker* (SBLDS 1; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1972) 101–37; and especially C. Holladay, *Theios Aner*, 103–94. Philo nonetheless remains a "monotheist." His language reflects a general style of discourse which was understood in certain Hellenistic Jewish circles in a qualified sense. God here is a relational category (Aristotle) and the scriptural data are seen in this light.

<sup>28</sup> André Paul argues that Josephus's account of Noah is shaped by his desire to dissociate himself from the NT emphasis on the doctrine of the "new covenant" ("Flavius Josephus' 'Antiquities of the Jews': An Anti-Christian Manifesto," *NTS* 31 [1985] 473–80). More to the point is P. Fornaro's argument that Josephus's accounts of the passing of Moses and Elijah are an indirect polemic against the idea of the early Christians regarding the death and resurrection of Jesus ("Il Cristianesimo oggetto di polemica indiretta in Flavio Giuseppe [Ant. Jud. IV 326]," *Rivista di Studi Classici* 27 [1979] 431–60). Whether Christian evaluations of Jesus are directly countered by Josephus here or not, such evaluations of Jesus are part of the general picture and furnish further evidence of the tendency to evaluate extraordinary figures in this way. I am indebted again to Prof. Feldman for these references.

both ways. He somehow manages to recast his account so that it *sounds like* just such a scene—the tears and weeping, the withdrawal, the cloud descending upon Moses and his disappearance, with nothing said of his *burial*. Dionysius had said of Aeneas that his *body could not be found* (*Rom. Ant.* 1.64.4; cf. Diogenes Laertius on Empedocles, *Lives* 8.68). Josephus implies as much with Moses. He is gone, but where? At the same time he records that Moses “died,” since Moses, remarkably, had written this of himself while still living.

It seems, then, that this scene, like his descriptions of Jewish views of the afterlife, is purposely left ambiguous. On one level it “sounds” like other standard Hellenistic materials, while at the same time it reflects a particularly “Jewish” understanding of God, who, for Josephus, must remain separate from the human realm.

Josephus writes as a historian, not a theologian, yet he clearly reflects a version of “Judaism” which is thoroughly at home in a generally Hellenistic perception of the cosmos—with its doctrines of dualism, the immortal soul, and eternal life in heaven—and this provides the framework for evaluations of extraordinary figures. Like various others who recast what are essentially eastern, archaic, and native traditions in this new context, he has to deal with both persistence and change. As a Jew who might have taken his tradition quite seriously, he is caught between two worlds, but as an apologist he is concerned with the flavor and tone of his presentation, and in the case of Moses, these nuances are as important as its literal content.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> The preliminary research for this article was done in a 1985 National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Summer Seminar directed by Louis Feldman at Yeshiva University in New York. I acknowledge my appreciation to the NEH and express my thanks to Prof. Feldman for his tireless and invaluable help then and since.