

# THE DEATH OF MOSES, ACCORDING TO PHILO

LOUIS H. FELDMAN  
YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

## I. INTRODUCTION

The one figure in Jewish tradition who was well known to the pagan world was Moses<sup>1</sup>. His connection with Egypt, known for its antiquity and its wealth, undoubtedly gave him a certain notoriety, especially during the Hellenistic period. Philo, writing within the Alexandrian milieu and as the leader of the Jewish delegation to the Roman Emperor Caligula (Josephus, *Ant.* 18. 259) and in the defense of that community against anti-Semites, as we see in his *In Flaccum* and *Legatio ad Gaium*, is particularly interested in Moses not only because of Moses' paramount position in the Jewish tradition but also especially because of Moses' birth in and close connection with Egypt. He asserts that while the fame of Moses' laws had spread throughout the world, not many knew him as he really was, since Greek authors had not wanted to accord him honor, in part out of envy<sup>2</sup> and in part because the ordinances of local lawgivers were often opposed to his (*De Vita Mosis* 1.1.1-2). Though, to be sure, Galen (*De Usu Partium* 11.14) wrote a century after Philo, his criticism of Moses as a scientist and philosopher may well go back to an

---

<sup>1</sup> See J. G. GAGER, *Moses in Graeco-Roman Paganism* (Nashville 1972).

<sup>2</sup> We find a similar charge in Josephus (*Against Apion* 1.204), who ascribes the omission of reference to the Jews in some historians as due not to ignorance but to envy (ἔνεα, νόου) or some other disingenuous (οὐκ ὑγιεινῆς, "unhealthy", "unsound") reason. On envy as a conventional motif noted and refuted in encomiastic literature see D. R. STUART, *Epochs of Greek and Roman Biography* (Berkeley 1928) 55-56, 92-93, cited by W. J. ROBBINS, "A Study in Jewish and Hellenistic Legend with Special Reference to Philo's Life of Moses" (diss., Brown University, 1947) 47 n. 4.

earlier period, and Philo might well have been motivated to challenge such views.

Philo (*De Vita Mosis* 1.1.3) goes even further and asserts that these Greek writers had actually shown malice (baskani,an, "slander") toward him. He is thus tremendously concerned to correct the picture. We may see evidence of this malice in such remarks as that of Diodorus in the first century B.C.E. (*Bibliotheca Historica* 34-35.1.4), who sneers that Moses had ordained for the Jews their misanthropic and lawless customs. Josephus (*Against Apion* 2.145) declares that the renowned and extremely influential Apollonius Molon in the first century B.C.E. (who included Cicero and Caesar among his pupils)<sup>3</sup>, the historian Lysimachus in the first century C.E., and others, partly from ignorance and partly from ill will, had cast aspersions upon Moses and his code, maligning him as a charlatan (go,hta, "juggler", "cheat", "sorcerer") and an impostor (avpatew/na, "cheat", "rogue"). Philo (*Hypothetica* 6.2) similarly refers to some people, without naming them, who abused Moses as a charlatan (go,hta) and a man-monkey (ke,rkwpa). Philo sarcastically reduces these charges to absurdity: "Well, that was a fine kind of imposture and knavery which enabled him [Moses] to bring the whole people in complete safety amid drought and hunger and ignorance of the way and lack of everything as well, as if they had abundance of everything and supplies obtainable from the neighboring nations, and further to keep them free from internal factions and above all obedient to himself". Such Alexandrian non-Jewish writers as Manetho, Chaeremon, and Lysimachus, in their attack upon the Jews had focused, in particular, on denigrating the greatest Jewish leader, Moses, as a leader of polluted cripples and lepers (*Against Apion* 1.260-66, 289-90, 305-11) and as one who had been expelled from Egypt because of his leprosy (*Against Apion* 1.279).

The opponents of the Jews, according to Josephus, had apparently also reviled Moses as utterly unimportant (faulo,tatoj) (*Against Apion* 2.290). Braun<sup>4</sup> has pointed out the significance of the omission of Moses' name from the list of Oriental national heroes cited by Plutarch (*Isis and Osiris* 24.360P), otherwise a relatively impartial authority<sup>5</sup>. We may see a sample of this attempt to denigrate Moses in the remarkable comment of Alexander Polyhistor (*ap. Suidas, s.v. vAle,xandroj o` Milh,sioj*) that the laws of the

<sup>3</sup> CICERO, *Brutus* 316; PLUTARCH, *Cicero* 4; *Caesar* 3.

<sup>4</sup> M. BRAUN, *History and Romance in Graeco-Oriental Literature* (Oxford 1938) 68.

<sup>5</sup> See my "The Jews as Viewed by Plutarch", in my *Studies in Hellenistic Judaism* (Leiden 1998) 529-52.

Hebrews had been composed by a Hebrew woman, Moso<sup>6</sup>. In an age and place where grammarians and Homeric scholars were leaders of the intellectual community, one of the important figures of the intellectual scene in Alexandria in the first half of the first century C. E., Apion, known for his glosses on Homer<sup>7</sup> and Philo's counterpart as a leader of the Alexandrian anti-Jewish delegation to the Emperor Gaius Caligula, was a major advocate of such revisionist views of Moses, as we see in Josephus' reply (*Against Apion* 2.10-27) to these charges. Indeed, even Hecataeus of Abdera in the third century B. C. E. (*ap. Diodorus* 40.3.4), who otherwise praises the wisdom of Moses, asserts that Moses introduced a somewhat unsocial and intolerant mode of life (αἰσχρογνώμων τὴν καὶ μισοξενίαν).

## II. THE EXTRAORDINARY DEATHS OF EXTRAORDINARY PERSONS

Extraordinary persons, in the Hellenistic and Roman biographical traditions, were expected to experience an extraordinary death. The Bible reports the extraordinary deaths of Enoch (Gen. 5:24; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.85) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:1; Josephus, *Ant.* 9.28). Sophocles reports the extraordinary disappearance of Oedipus (*Oedipus at Colonus* 1586-1665), Dionysius of Halicarnassus reports the similar extraordinary disappearance of Aeneas (*Ant. Rom.* 1.64.4) and Romulus (*Ant. Rom.* 2.56.2; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 14.805-85; Ovid, *Fasti* 2.481-509; Livy 1.16), and Philostratus reports the extraordinary death of Apollonius of Tyana (*Apollonius* 8.30-31). That this was a common motif may be seen from the fact that Lucian wrote a parody on it in his *De Morte Peregrini*.

---

<sup>6</sup> I. HEINEMANN, "Moses": *Realencyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft* 31 (1935) 360, has described the tradition as malevolent and cites as parallels the transformation of the name Cleomenes to Cleomene in Aristophanes (*Clouds* 680) and Chrysippus to Chrysippa in Cicero (*De Natura Deorum* 1.34.93).

<sup>7</sup> Some of Apion's glosses on Homer have been found in a papyrus fragment (P. Rylands 1.26) dating from the first century C. E.; moreover, a few first-century scholia on Homer's *Odyssey* (P. Lit. London 30; British Museum inv. 271) mention his name among other commentators. It is not surprising, therefore, that Apion was apparently Philo's counterpart as a leader of the Alexandrian non-Jews, since he was a member of the three-man delegation sent by the Alexandrians to the Emperor Gaius Caligula (JOSEPHUS, *Ant.* 18.257). See further my "Pro-Jewish Intimations in Anti-Jewish Remarks Cited in Josephus' 'Against Apion'": *Jewish Quarterly Review* 78 (1987-88) 238-39.

There are two parallels in the Bible to the miraculous translation of Moses, those of Enoch (Gen. 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kings 1:11-12). Philo has in his extant writings very few references to the books of the Bible beyond the Pentateuch; and he refers to Elijah only twice (*Quod Deus Immutabilis Sit* 31.136 and 138), namely, in connection with the incident concerning the widow of Zarephath, but says nothing at all concerning the manner of Elijah's death.

In order to understand how Philo, however, looks upon the extraordinary death of Moses it is particularly apposite to consider how he views the extraordinary death of the other person, Enoch, who, according to the Pentateuch, experienced such a death. In the first place, one is struck with the amount of interest that Philo has in Enoch, about whom the Bible tells us only the name of his father, Jared, how many years he lived before he fathered Methuselah, how many years he lived in all, and, the one unusual detail (Gen. 5:24), that he "walked with G-d; and he was not, for G-d took him", which the Septuagint translates "was well pleasing (euvhresthsen) to G-d, and was not found (eu`ri,sketo), because G-d translated (mete,qhken, 'transferred', 'transposed') him". That Enoch was of particular interest to Philo may be seen from the fact that he is mentioned in no fewer than five of his works. In *De Posteritate Caini* 12.40 Philo raises the question whether the Enoch who was descended from Cain (Gen. 4:17) was the same as the one descended from Seth (Gen. 5:6-18), and he gives the etymology of the name, "your gift" (*De Posteritate Caini* 12.41). He understands the "translation" of Enoch as meaning that he had been removed from perishable (fqartw/n) to immortal (avqa,nata) status and indicates that Enoch was not unique in this translation, since he says that such a transference is true of all those who have been well pleasing to G-d and who are no longer found (eu`ri,skontai) among the multitude (polloi/j). Philo (*De Mutatione Nominum* 4.34-38) likewise generalizes in viewing Enoch as representing, allegorically, the *type* of those who are not found, that is, like the wise man who though actually existing is hidden from us and shuns our company. It is thus we who are evil and who fail to see him. In *De Abrahamo* (3.17) Philo understands Enoch's transference as turning and changing for the better because it is brought about by the thought of G-d; again Philo applies this to all (3.18, pa/n) such change. Such a rare person is said not to have been found because he secludes himself; this is true of all those who are truly repentant (4.26). The change of abode is representative of all those who repent and who stand above the passions (*De Praemiis et Poenis* 3.16-21) and seek solitude. In *Quaestiones in Genesis* 1.82-86 Philo devotes no fewer than five questions to Enoch. He again generalizes (1.82-85) that the

transference of Enoch is typical of those who repent. He explains that the phrase that “he was pleasing to G-d” demonstrates that the souls of all are immortal, “since when they become incorporeal they again become pleasing” (1.85). Philo specifically (1.86) asks “What is the meaning of the words, ‘And he was not found, for G-d had translated him’?”. Again, he applies this not merely to Enoch but to all worthy and holy men, and he explains that the translation is from a sensible and visible place to an incorporeal and intelligible form. He then compares Enoch’s transition to that of the “protoprophet”, that is Moses, and that of Elijah<sup>8</sup>.

### III. PHILO'S OPPOSITION TO THE APOTHEOSIS OF MOSES

And yet, great as Moses was as a leader, Philo takes pains to make sure that he will not be worshipped as a god. This was particularly necessary in view of the frequency among the Greeks of the apotheosis of heroes, such as Dionysus, Heracles (cf. Diodorus 4.38.3-5, 39.1-2), and Asclepius<sup>9</sup>. Even after death the hero was thought to have power to bring good fortune. Founders of cities were objects of religious devotion, as we see in Pausanias

---

<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere in Jewish tradition there is a difference of opinion as to Enoch. On the one hand, Ben Sira (44:16, 49:14-16) emphasizes that he had to die, and some of the rabbis (*Gen. Rabbah* 25.1) describe him as fluctuating between sin and repentance, whereupon G-d removed him so that he should not fall again into sin. On the other hand, the Pseudepigraphic 1 and 2 Enoch describe him as ascending to heaven during his lifetime. The New Testament (Hebrews 11:5) is explicit in stating that Enoch did not die: “By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found, because G-d had taken him”. According to *Jubilees* 4:23 and Enoch 70:3-4, Enoch’s abode is in paradise. According to rabbinic tradition in *Midrash Hagadol* 1.123 (ed. Margulies, p. 132), Enoch, Moses, and Elijah serve as angels in heaven. Concerning Enoch Josephus says enigmatically that he “returned to the divinity, wherefore they have not recorded his death”. R. A. KRAFT, “Philo (Josephus, Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon) on Enoch”: *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 1 (1978) 256 says that the summary treatment accorded Enoch by Josephus is somewhat startling and may reflect his hesitancy about commenting on eschatological themes. Josephus, he thinks, must have known various extrabiblical traditions about Enoch, since he knew them about so many other biblical figures. Josephus uses the expression “returned to the Divinity” in describing the disappearance of Moses when he went to get the tablets of the Law (*Ant.* 3.96) and in describing his death (*Ant.* 4.326). Josephus does not say that G-d took the initiative in translating him but rather that he escaped a normal death and burial.

<sup>9</sup> See LUCIAN (*Cynic* 13), where Heracles is called a divine man (qei/on a;ndra). Cf. F. PFISTER, *Der Requierkult im Altertum*, 2 vols. (Giessen 1909-12); and L. FARNELL, *Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality* (Oxford 1921).

(10.4.10)<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, stories were told of Alexander the Great's attempt to throw himself into the Euphrates River so that it would be thought that he had passed directly to the gods.

If Moses was so excellent a leader, we may well ask why G-d permitted him merely to view the Promised Land but not to enter it (Deut. 34:4). Philo (*De Migratione Abrahami* 9.44-46) is well aware of this objection and notes that some "unconsidering" (avperiske,ptwn, "thoughtless") people have supposed that G-d said this to demolish (kaqaire,sei, "diminish", "humiliate")<sup>11</sup> the stature of the "all-wise" (panso,fou) Moses. But, in a sharp reply, Philo specifically asserts that it is folly to imagine that ordinary people, that is, the Israelites generally, should take precedence over G-d's friends, that is, Moses, in receiving their portion in the Land of Israel; and he explains that the most beautiful (ka,llista) things in nature are to be seen (o`rata,) rather than possessed (kthta,). Since it is not possible, says Philo, to possess things that are located near G-d, all that is possible -and that not for everyone- is to see them.

#### IV. ATTACKS ON BIBLICAL ACCOUNTS AS MYTHS

Philo was well acquainted with Greek literature and traditions, and he was aware, probably from his own experience as the leader of the Alexandrian Jewish community, that there were Jews who cherished a dislike of the

---

<sup>10</sup> See Ch. BRADFORD WELLES, "The Hellenistic Orient", in: R. C. DENTAN (ed.), *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East* (New Haven 1955) 157; and CH. H. TALBERT, "The Concept of Immortals in Mediterranean Antiquity": *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (1975) 428. Likewise, it was told of the philosopher Empedocles that after an evening party he disappeared and was nowhere to be found, and that one of those present at the party claimed to have heard a voice from heaven declaring that he was now a god (Heracleides of Pontus, *ap.* Diogenes Laertius [8.68]). Apollonius of Tyana is depicted as a god-like man (qei/oj avnh,r), whose divinity is manifest in his wisdom and virtue (*ap.* PHILOSTRATUS, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 1.2, 2.17, 2.40, 5.24, 7.21, 7.38, 8.5, 8.7). Again, when speaking of the death of Apollonius, Philostratus adds (8.29), "if he did actually die", and then declares that no one ventured to dispute that he was immortal. Furthermore, a certain senator named Numerius Atticus swore that he had seen Augustus after his death ascend to heaven like Romulus and Proculus (*ap.* SUETONIUS, *Augustus* 94.4). Indeed, the motif of the apotheosis of rulers and philosophers became so widespread that it became the subject of satire in Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* and in Lucian's *Deorum Concilium* and *De Morte Peregrini*.

<sup>11</sup> G. H. WHITAKER, trans. and ed., *Philo*, vol. 4 (London 1932) 156, n. a, cites Mangey's comment on this word: "referring to the death of".

Jewish ancestral traditions and who went to the length of making it their constant study to denounce the laws in the Pentateuch and who insisted that what the Jews called “holy books” (i`eraî. bí,blói) also contain myths, precisely the sort that the Jews deride when they hear them related by others. He cites as an example Homer’s account (*Odyssey* 11.315, 318) of the story of the Aloeidae’s piling Pelion on Ossa on Olympus (*De Confusione Linguarum* 2.4-5), for which, he says, impious people (*ibid.*, 2.2, *dussebei/j*) declare that Moses substituted the story of the building of the Tower of Babel; and he notes a further parallel that these impious people cite with the Greek myth (though he does not cite the precise source) that at one time all the animals had a common language (*De Confusione Linguarum* 3.6). Quite clearly, as we can see from the contradictory views that he expresses in some essays about such figures as Joseph and Jethro, not all the treatises were addressed to the same audience, and we may conjecture that *De Confusione Linguarum*, with its attack on impious Jews, was addressed to deviant Jews.

The one instance where Philo himself (*De Praemiis et Poenis* 4.23) identifies a biblical personality with a non-biblical personality is his identification of Noah with the one whom the Greeks call Deucalion, in whose day, he says, the great deluge took place<sup>12</sup>. We may conjecture that *De Praemiis et Poenis*, like *De Vita Mosis*, was addressed to deviant Jews, since Philo (*De Praemiis et Poenis* 7.40) speaks of those who deny the existence of G-d and those who “hesitate and fluctuate as though unable to state whether G-d exists or not, as well as those who derive their knowledge of G-d from habit”. Likewise, the fact that he lists at length the rewards that are given to the righteous (*De Praemiis et Poenis* 14.79-20.126), as well as the punishments that are meted out to those who disobey the laws (*De Praemiis et Poenis* 21.127-26.151), indicates that this discussion is intended as a promise and warning to Jews. In identifying Noah with Deucalion, however, he is assuring the non-conformist Jews that the events in the Bible, and especially the chronology, are factual. Philo, however, since he had no doubt as to the historicity of the revelation of the Pentateuch (*De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini* 23.79, *De Vita Mosis* 2.35.188), apparently had no doubt as to the historicity of the Flood and consequently saw no need to cite external evidence to support its historicity. Moreover, Philo is not a historian, except incidentally as an apologist for the Jews in his *In Flaccum* and *Legatio ad Gaium*, and hence felt no need to buttress his facts concerning the Flood by

---

<sup>12</sup> To be sure, Philo (*De Somniis* 1.10.58) seems to equate Terah with Socrates, but he equates, rather, the characteristic of being concerned with one’s own self.

citing external sources. We may similarly conjecture that Philo felt no need to supply external evidence with regard to the historicity of Moses or the account of his death.

#### V. PHILO'S DESCRIPTION OF MOSES' LAST DAYS

A great leader must be able to encourage his people. The Book of Deuteronomy is, in effect, Moses' last sermon to his people. In the brief passage that parallels it Philo (*De Praemiis et Poenis* 1.4-6) summarizes Moses' style of leadership as one that educated (sunaskh,saj, "trained" "disciplined fully", "helped to practice") the people at once with rather gentle (malakwte,raij, "soft", "mild", "tender") guidance (u`fhgh,sesi, "leading", "instructions", "directions") and exhortation (protropai/j, "encouragement") and, on the other hand (pa,lin, "contrariwise", "in turn"), with more grave (evmbriqeste,raij, "more weighty") threats (evpanata,sesi) and warnings (nouqesi,aij, "admonitions"). He thus, says Philo, called upon his citizens (politeuome,nouj) to show what they had been educated in (evpaideu,qhsan). Whereas Josephus, who had been a general in Galilee in the war against the Romans and who often emphasized Moses' role as general<sup>13</sup>, has Moses, in his farewell remarks to the Israelites, address them as "fellow-soldiers" (sustratiw/tai,, *Ant.* 4.177), Philo addresses them as, in effect, "fellow-citizens" (politeuome,nouj), with the responsibilities of participating in the community. Using the analogy of preparing for a physical contest in sports, Moses, says Philo, through the laws of the Pentateuch, prepared them for the sacred contest in which their sincerity would be tested. The prizes, as in athletic contests, belong to the victors, whereas the losers are tainted with the stigma of defeat more than those who lose in gymnastic contests. Those who lose in athletics can easily rise again, but not so easily those who lose in the contests of life (*De Praemiis et Poenis* 1.6).

The Bible records that before his death Moses characterized each of the twelve tribes and blessed them and predicted their future (Deut. 33). Philo (*De Vita Mosis* 2.51.288-89), like Josephus (*Ant.* 4.320), merely mentions that Moses blessed the tribes without giving the actual content of each of the blessings. He marvels at the appropriateness of the diverse predictions for

---

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Josephus' brief closing encomium for Moses (*Ant.* 4.329): "If, as a general he was in elite company, as a prophet he had no peer, so that in whatever he said he seemed, when he spoke, to be listening to G-d".



each of the tribes, though the tribes were so very different from one another, particularly on their descent on their mother's side, apparently, we may conjecture, an allusion to the fact that the Jews of Egypt were quite different from one another in their backgrounds and in their attitude toward life and faith. He adds, inspiring leader as he is, that some of these predictions have actually taken place and that the others will inevitably occur (*De Vita Mosis* 2.51.288), "since confidence in the future is assured by fulfillment in the past".

Most of all, Philo is impressed that Moses was able to prophesy the account of his own death and to state how he was buried with none present but by G-d Himself, how no one had seen his place of burial, and how the Israelites mourned for him for a whole month (*De Vita Mosis* 2.51.291). The Talmud (*Baba Batra* 15a, *Menahot* 30a) similarly is aware of the question as to how Moses could have written about his own death. One view, that of the second-century Rabbi Judah bar Ilai, or, according to others, the second-century Rabbi Nehemiah, is that the last eight verses of the Torah (Deut. 34:5-12), which give the account of Moses' death and burial, were written by Joshua. The statement of Philo here and of Josephus (*Ant.* 4.326) that Moses himself wrote these verses, is similar to the view of the second-century Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai, that G-d dictated these verses and that Moses wrote them in tears.

#### VI. THE TERM "G-D" AS APPLIED TO HUMANS IN THE HELLENISTIC AND ROMAN PERIODS

Nevertheless, Philo is reluctant to speak of Moses as divine (*qei/oj*), especially since this term was used of deified emperors, as we see in the reference to the divine Augustus (*qei,ou Sebastou/*) in Claudius' edict as quoted by Josephus (*Ant.* 19.289). However, that it was used in the more general sense of "godlike" or "more than human" as an epithet of honor may be seen in its numerous occurrences in Homer with reference to warriors of human mothers and fathers such as Odysseus (e.g., *Iliad* 2.335, *Odyssey* 1.65, etc.), human kings as holding their office from Zeus (e.g., *Odyssey* 4.621, etc.), human heralds as under the special protection of Zeus (e.g., *Iliad* 4.192, 10.315), bards as singing under divine inspiration (e.g., *Odyssey* 1.336, etc.), or even denoting a superlative degree of excellence (e.g., HOMER, *Odyssey*, 2.341, etc.). Likewise, Pindar (*Pythian Odes* 6.38) refers thus to the human Antilochus, the brave son of Nestor who bought with his own life the rescue of his father; Aeschylus (*Agamemnon* 1548) refers thus to the human king Agamemnon; Plato (*Republic* 1.331E) refers thus to the poet

Simonides; and Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics* 7.1145A29) notes that when the Spartans admire anyone highly they call him “godlike”. Aristotle (*Politics* 1284A3-11) says that if there should be a person, or more than one, whose virtue is so pre-eminent that he is beyond comparison with others, such a person may truly be deemed a G-d among men, but this would seem to indicate that he is to be regarded as supreme among men rather than that he is no longer a man.

Pagan kings had come to regard themselves as divine, but that Philo feels especially strongly revolted by the idea that a human being may be regarded as divine may be seen in the vehemence with which he attacks the claim to divinity of the emperor Gaius Caligula. The Jews, he says (*Legatio ad Gaium* 16.117), are unique in their opposition to his claim, based upon the principle that a man cannot become G-d, since man is mortal. Jews, he explains (*ibíd.*), are accustomed “to accept death as willingly as if it were immortality, to save them from submitting to the destruction of any of their ancestral traditions, even the smallest”. Caligula’s attempt, however, is the greatest possible challenge to the ancestral traditions of the Jews, since it makes the created and corruptible nature of man to appear uncreated and incorruptible “by a deification which our nation judged to be the most grievous impiety, since sooner could G-d change into a man than a man into G-d”. Moreover, he adds in further vehement language, it includes “the supremely evil vices of infidelity and ingratitude to the Benefactor of the whole world, who through His power bestows blessings poured in unstited abundance on every part of the All”. Having subscribed to this view in such unambiguous language, Philo could hardly have thought of Moses, the great role model of the Jews, as anything but mortal.

In his view advocating *imitatio Dei*, Philo seems to following in the tradition of his favorite philosopher, Plato (*Theaetetus* 176A-B, a treatise that Philo, *De Fuga et Inventione* 12.63, mentions by name and from which he quotes)<sup>14</sup>, in that one should “flee this world and become like god as much as one can”, thus attaining the height of virtue<sup>15</sup>. Indeed, the Middle Platonists, as Dillon<sup>16</sup> has pointed out, made this the goal of life.

---

<sup>14</sup> In *De Fuga et Inventione* 15.82, Philo does not mention Plato or the *Theaetetus* by name, but refers rather to “one of the wise men of old”, but the passage is a verbatim quotation from the *Theaetetus*.

<sup>15</sup> See W. E. HELLEMAN, “Philo of Alexandria on Deification and Assimilation to G-d”: *Studia Philonica Annual* 2 (1990) 52-53.

<sup>16</sup> J. DILLON, *The Middle Platonists* (London 1977), *passim*.

## VII. SINLESSNESS AND DIVINITY

Philo himself, though he uses the word *qei/oj* 555 times, employs it only once (*De Virtutibus* 33.177) with reference to a human when he says that absolute sinlessness (*mhde.n suno,lwj a`martei/n*) is proper (*i;dion*) to G-d or perhaps (*ta,ca*) also to a divine man (*qei,ou avndro,j*); but he is speaking here in theoretical terms and is not necessarily referring to Moses. That he is speaking in general terms may be deduced from the statement that follows, namely that conversion from sin to a blameless life shows a man of wisdom who has not been utterly ignorant of what is for his good. Among biblical figures there is a hierarchy of excellence, proceeding from Enosh, the man of hope (*De Abrahamo* 2.7-3.16), to Enoch, the man of repentance and improvement (*De Abrahamo* 3.17-4.26), to Noah, the man of justice, who was perfect in his generation (Gen. 6:9) but not absolutely perfect (*De Abrahamo* 5.27-9.47), to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who are wise men who are symbols of virtue acquired respectively by teaching, nature, and practice (*De Abrahamo* 11.52)<sup>17</sup>. Each of this last triad, he adds, married not women but virtues (*De Cherubim* 12.41).

Elsewhere (*Legum Allegoria* 3.46.134) Philo speaks of Moses as being perfect (*te,leioj*) and as going so far as to cut off all passions everywhere. In being perfect he is not, however, unique, since Philo says the same of Noah (*Legum Allegoria* 3.24.77). As to whether Moses was sinless, Philo appears to be ambivalent. On the one hand, he says (*Legum Allegoria* 3.46.135) that unlike others who acquire virtue by toil and thus fall short of full achievement, Moses received virtue easily and without toil from the hands of G-d. On the other hand, he says (*De Vita Mosis* 2.29.147) that sin is congenital to every created being, even the best, just because they are created; and this sin required prayers and sacrifices to propitiate G-d. Indeed, as Wolfson<sup>18</sup> has noted, there are conflicting views in rabbinic literature as to whether the patriarchs -Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob- did or did not sin. Moses specifically (*Yoma* 86b) is spoken of as having sinned and as begging that his sins be recorded, whereas elsewhere (*Shabbat* 55b), according to another tradition, he and Aaron are spoken of as having fulfilled the whole Torah and

---

<sup>17</sup> M. R. GRAF, *The Hellenization of Moses* (diss., Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati 1976) 115-16, notes that Philo's view, that it is the possession of *avretai*, moral virtues, by a wise man that qualifies a man as divine is in accord with the Stoic conceptual framework.

<sup>18</sup> H. A. WOLFSON, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, vol.1 (Cambridge 1947) 451, n. 85.

nevertheless as having died, though they were without sin. Indeed, rabbinic tradition (*Shabbat* 55b) records that there were four others - Benjamin the son of Jacob, Amram the father of Moses, Jesse the father of David, and Caleb the son of David- who were sinless and who died only because the serpent caused Adam and Eve to sin.

“Absolute sinlessness”, Philo (*De Virtutibus* 33.177) says, “belongs to no one but to G-d or perhaps (ta,ca, which expresses any contingency from a probability to a bare possibility) to a divine man (qei,ou avndro,j); conversion from sin to a blameless life shows a man of wisdom”. It would appear that Philo is here referring to Moses<sup>19</sup> since in the passage just before this (*De Virtutibus* 33.175) he speaks of the most holy (i`erw,tatoj) Moses, who loved virtue (fila,retoj) and loved goodness (filo,kaloj) and, above all, loved his fellow men (fila,nqrwpoj), and who urged everyone to become zealous for piety (euvsebei,aj) and justice (dikaïosu,nhj) and who offered to those who repent membership in the best commonwealth. Goodenough<sup>20</sup> says that the reference must be to Moses and notes (*De Virtutibus* 34.185) that although Moses was only a single individual, in power he was equal to a whole nation, and notes as an analogy (*De Virtutibus* 34.186), just as a pilot is equal to the whole crew and just as a general is equal to all his soldiers. And, in the passage immediately after the sentence containing the phrase “divine man”, he says, referring to those who convert from sin to a blameless life, “And therefore”, presumably as a consequence of the previous sentence, “when he [i.e. Moses] calls together such people and initiates them into his mysteries”, he exhorts them to embrace truth. Moreover, though Moses is not G-d he seems to have existed before he was born, since we read (PHILO, *De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini* 3.9) that G-d sent him as a loan.

#### VIII. MOSES' HUMAN FAILINGS AS DETRACTING FROM HIS POSSIBLE DIVINITY

It would seem to be embarrassing that Moses, who is so G-d-like and who, after all, had been given a complete code of law by G-d, did not know (Lev. 24:10-12) what penalty to inflict upon the son of the Israelite woman who had

---

<sup>19</sup> C. R. HOLLADAY, *Theios Aner in Hellenistic Judaism* (Missoula 1977) says that the “divine man” here must remain anonymous.

<sup>20</sup> E. R. GOODENOUGH, *By Light, Light: The Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism* (New Haven 1935) 232-33.

blasphemed the name of G-d. The biblical text says merely that the man was brought to Moses and that he was placed under guard so that the punishment might be clarified by G-d. We are then told (Lev 24:13-16) that G-d declares that the blasphemer is to be put to death by stoning. Philo (*De Vita Mosis* 2.37.197), however, aware that a critical reader would belittle Moses for his inability to determine what penalty to inflict upon the culprit, is careful to add the extra-biblical comment that Moses was astonished and most indignant at the culprit's madness and audacity and that he would have cut him off with his own hand but that, being human and not divine, to devise an appropriate punishment for such impiety was beyond human powers.

Since, we later learn (Num 25:12-13), G-d, through awarding Phinehas with the covenant of peace and the eternal priesthood, approved the zealotry of Phinehas in taking the law into his own hands in actually putting Zimri to death for having relations with a Midianite woman, one might well wonder why Moses did not show similar zealotry in putting the blasphemer to death. Philo (*De Vita Mosis* 2.37.197-202), apparently disturbed by such questions, adds the extra-biblical comment that Moses was indeed astonished at the madness of the blasphemer and, filled with noble but desperate courage, he was ready to dismember him with his own hand, but he was afraid that he would inflict too light a penalty. Whereas the biblical text (Lev 24:11) states that "they" brought the blasphemer to Moses and they placed him under guard, Philo (*De Vita Mosis* 2.37.201), apparently troubled that it was not Moses who took this initiative, says explicitly that it was Moses who ordered the man to be brought to prison and put in chains. Whereas in the Bible we hear nothing of what Moses' own thinking was and what he said to G-d in bringing the case before Him, Philo asserts that on the one hand Moses appealed to G-d's mercy and on the other hand stressed the impiousness and monstrosity of the man's crime.

The one great blot on Moses' reputation for piety is the incident (Num 20:7-12) in which, when the Israelites once again lacked water and complained bitterly to Moses, G-d commanded Moses and Aaron to speak to the rock in order to bring forth water, whereas Moses did not speak to the rock but struck it with his staff. Thereupon (Num 20:12) G-d told Moses and Aaron that because they did not believe in Him, therefore He would not bring them into the Promised Land. Philo (*De Vita Mosis* 1.38.210-13), in his account of this incident, says nothing about G-d's instructions to speak to the rock, states merely that Moses struck the rock, and then presents two theories to rationalize the miracle. He says nothing about G-d's anger with Moses and Aaron and the punishment that He promised to inflict upon them.

## IX. THE ALLEGED DIVINITY OF MOSES

Philo, however, does not make the point made by Josephus (*ibíd.*), that Moses wrote that he died because he was afraid that people would believe that because of his virtue he had not died but had gone up directly to G-d. Indeed, there is a rabbinic tradition (*Sotāh* 13b) that some declared that Moses had never died. Philo (*De Vita Mosis* 2.51.288), though he speaks cryptically of Moses making the pilgrimage from earth to heaven and of resolving his twofold nature of soul and body into a single unity, “transforming his whole being into mind, pure as the sunlight”, which sounds as if he was taken up bodily into heaven like Enoch and Elijah, nevertheless specifically (*De Vita Mosis* 2.51.291) says that Moses wrote about his own death<sup>21</sup>.

However, Philo does not have a statement, such as we find in Josephus (*Ant.* 4.326), reminiscent of the mysterious disappearance of Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*<sup>22</sup>, that while Moses was still conversing with Eleazar and Joshua a cloud stood over him and he disappeared into a ravine. Nor does Philo have a scene such as we find in Josephus (*Ant.* 4.320) of the Israelites bursting into tears, the women beating their breasts, and the children lamenting still more, being too feeble to suppress their grief, which is all the more dramatic, since it takes place after Moses has told the Israelites about his approaching death but while he is still alive. Moreover, in an extra-biblical addition that has no parallel in the Bible or in Philo, Josephus (*Ant.* 4.322) actually depicts Moses himself as overcome with weeping at what was being done by the Israelites.

---

<sup>21</sup> Josephus (*Ant.* 4.320) describes the weeping by the populace on the imminent death of Moses, and even adds (*Ant.* 4.322) that Moses himself, who had always been persuaded that one ought not to be dejected when the end was forthcoming, since one suffered this in accordance with the will of G-d and by a law of nature, was overcome by weeping when he saw how the people were affected.

<sup>22</sup> Josephus may be reacting to Sophocles' account of the mysterious disappearance of Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*, which bears a striking resemblance to that of Moses in his presentation. To the biblical account of Moses' death (Deut 34:1-6) Josephus has added lamenting people, a walk to the mountain, companions on Moses' final walk, and “disappearance”, details which are found in no other post-biblical source, though those sources recount Moses' last hours in far greater detail than does the Bible. See H. JACOBSON, “Josephus on Moses' Death”, in: *Tria Lustra* (Liverpool, 1993). And yet, it is precisely these details that are found in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*. On the parallels between Josephus' account of the death of Moses and Sophocles' account of the death of Oedipus in his *Oedipus at Colonus* see my *Flavius Josephus, Translation and Commentary*, vol. 3, in: *Judean Antiquities* 1-4 (Leiden 2000) 474 n. 1125.

Nor does Philo have a scene, such as we find in Pseudo-Philo (19:12), in which G-d tells Moses: "I will take you from here and lay you down to sleep with your fathers, and I will give you rest in your resting place and give you peace. All the angels will mourn over you, and the heavenly hosts will grieve. But no angel nor man will know your sepulchre in which you will be buried. You will rest in it until I visit the world. I will raise you up and your fathers from the earth in which you sleep, and you will come together and dwell in the immortal dwelling place that is not subject to time". Josephus (*Ant.* 4.323-24) very emotionally adds that all the Israelites followed Moses to the place where he was going to disappear and that Moses, like the director of an oratorio, signaled with his hand to those who were far off to remain quiet, while urging those who were closer not to make his departure tearful by following him. Philo, like Josephus, avoids the biblical statement (Deut 34:6) that no one knows Moses' burial place "to this day", which would imply that the account of Moses' death was written after he had died, a statement that would have confirmed the view of those Bible critics that the Pentateuch was not of divine authorship and that Moses was not the vehicle of its transmission. But whereas Josephus has no statement at all to this effect, Philo (*De Vita Mosis* 2.51.291) avoids the problem by writing from his own viewpoint, rather than quoting the Bible, that no one has ever, that is, until Philo's time, seen his burial place.

One of the passages that is most troublesome from a theological point of view is that in which G-d says to Moses (Exod 7:1): "See, I make you as G-d (~yqla, Septuagint qeo,n) to Pharaoh; and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet". It is true that the word here translated as "G-d" could mean "master" or "powerful", but the fact that Aaron is designated as his prophet would seem to indicate that the meaning is really "G-d". Philo (*Legum Allegoria* 1.13.40, *De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini* 3.9) is aware of the problem and resolves it by interpreting allegorically that the word "G-d" refers to the mind, which is, so to speak, the G-d of the unreasoning part. Elsewhere (*De Mutatione Nominum* 22.128, *Quod Deterius Potiori Insidiari Soleat* 44.162, *De Mutatione Nominum* 22.128) he explains that Moses is a god as compared with the Pharaoh in the sense that he is wise as compared with a fool. Still further, Philo (*De Mutatione Nominum* 22.129) asserts that Moses is compared to G-d in that he is like a merciful mediator making intercession in the Pharaoh's behalf<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> M. HIMMELFARB, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York 1993) 48-49, 70-71, says that Philo, in his description of the ascent of Moses (*Quaestiones in Exodum* 2:28), gives perhaps the most extended treatment in Jewish or Christian literature of the divination of a human being. So also P. BORGAN, *Philo of Alexandria: An Exegete for His Time*

Moses is thus one step higher than the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who represent the virtue acquired, respectively, by teaching, nature, and practice, and who are referred to as G-d-lovers (filoqe,ouj) and G-d-beloved (qeofilei/j); and G-d is, consequently, known as the G-d of Abraham, the G-d of Isaac, and the G-d of Jacob (*De Abrahamo* 10.50-11.52)<sup>24</sup>. The fact that Philo (*De Vita Mosis* 1.28.158) interprets the biblical verse (Exod 7:1) "See, I make you as G-d to Pharaoh" to mean that G-d appointed Moses to be both G-d and king, implying that the role of king was one aspect of G-d, leads Meeks<sup>25</sup> to note a similar connection in the rabbinic tradition (*Tanh□uma* [ed. Buber] 4.51-52), and he concludes that this connection is older than Philo. But Philo himself (*Quod Deterius Potiori Insidiari Soleat* 44.161) makes it clear that when G-d (Exod 7:1) declares to Moses that "I make you as G-d to Pharaoh", "he did not become such in reality but only in a manner of speaking" (mh. pro.j avlh,qeian( do,xh| de. mo,non). Lest there be any doubt about the matter, Philo (*Quod Deterius Potiori Insidiari Soleat* 44.162) draws an analogy: when we say that a wise man is a god to the foolish man, he is in reality not G-d, just as a counterfeit coin is not a genuine coin<sup>26</sup>. He emphasizes the same point in his comment (*De Mutatione Nominum* 34.181) on the question as to why Abraham showed a breath of unbelief when once he believed, that man is not G-d and that he can attain merely the images of G-d's excellence<sup>27</sup>.

---

(Leiden 1997) 202-4. Borgen (203) cites *De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini* 3.9, where Philo says that G-d sent Moses as a loan to the earthly sphere and suffered him to dwell therein, appointing him as "G-d". But Philo here understands "G-d" in a figurative sense, since he explains that G-d placed all the bodily region and the mind that rules it in subjection to him. However, Moses' entry into the darkness where G-d is does not indicate that he is actually divine. Moreover, it is clear that Philo did not regard Moses as divine, since immediately after the passage, *De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini* 3.9, in which Philo says that G-d appointed Moses as god, we read (*De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini* 3.10) that G-d is not susceptible of addition or diminution, clearly implying that G-d does not have the power to give up divinity to someone else. "And therefore", he adds, "no one is said to know his grave", a clear indication that Moses died, and hence could not have been G-d.

<sup>24</sup> See D. L. TIEDE, *The Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker* (Missoula 1972) 109-12.

<sup>25</sup> W. A. MEEKS, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (Leiden 1967) 192-95.

<sup>26</sup> See W. E. HELLEMAN, "Philo of Alexandria on Deification and Assimilation to G-d": *Studia Philonica Annual* 2 (1990) 68.

<sup>27</sup> In the most recent discussion of Exodus 7:1, J. KÜGLER, "Spüren Ägyptisch-Hellenistischer Königstheologie bei Philo von Alexandria", in: M. GÖRG-G. HÖLBL (eds.), *Ägypten und der östliche Mittelmeerraum im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.: Akten des Interdisziplinären Symposions am Institut für Ägyptologie der Universität München 25.-27.10.1996* (Wiesbaden 2000) 234,



Indeed, Philo (*De Somniis* 2.35.234) calls Moses the perfect (te,leion)man, *neither G-d nor man*, on the borderline between the uncreated and the perishing form of being. He is different from those who preceded him (*De Posteritate Caini* 50.173) in that they are in the circle outside the holy places of G-d like one seeking initiation into the mysteries, whereas he is spending his time in the inner sanctuary as a hierophant.

On the other hand, at one point, when Philo is discussing the qualifications of Moses to be the leader of the Israelites, he remarks (*De Vita Mosis* 1.28.158) that the joy of his partnership with the Father and Maker of all was also magnified by his being deemed worthy to be addressed in the same way (prosrh,sewj th/j auwth/j). Philo then actually and explicitly says that Moses was named god and king of the whole nation and entered into the darkness where G-d was, so that he beheld what ordinary mortals do not see. Indeed, Moses in the Bible is depicted as having a very special relationship to G-d so that he is even referred to as "man of G-d" (Deut 33:1, Josh 14:6, *Ezra* 3:2, Ps 90:1). Since, says Philo, a ruler is a model for his people, who emulate their leader, Moses, he says, in effect, by becoming the reasonable and living impersonation of law and by adopting a more severe and more serious rule of life, converted even the licentious to continence. Inasmuch as, according to the Bible (Exod 7:1) G-d appointed Moses to be G-d to Pharaoh, Philo remarks (*De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini* 3.9) that G-d is not susceptible to addition or diminution; and consequently no one knows Moses' grave (Deut 34:6), for no human being has the power to perceive the passing of a perfect soul to G-d.

Commenting on the verse (Exod 24:2) "Moses alone shall come near to the L-rd, but the others shall not come near", Philo (*Quaestiones in Exodum* 2.29) explains that "when the prophetic mind becomes divinely inspired and filled with G-d, it becomes like a monad, not being at all mixed with any of those things associated with duality. But he who is resolved into the nature of unity is said to come near G-d in a kind of family relation, for having given up and left behind all mortal kinds, he is changed into the divine, so that such men become kin to G-d and truly divine". This is very similar to Philo's statement (*De Vita Mosis* 2.51.288) that when it came time for Moses to leave his mortal life for immortality, he was summoned by G-d, "Who resolved his twofold nature of soul and body into a single unity (eivj mona,doj

---

concludes that from Philo's understanding of Exodus 7:1 we may deduce that Moses was G-d's representative on earth and that the boundaries between G-d and man were not eradicated.

avnesteiceiou fu,sin, “resolved the matter into the nature of a single element”), transforming his whole being into mind”.

However, the fact that Philo says that when a prophet becomes inspired he becomes *like* a monad indicates that he is not a monad but only similar to a monad. In such a state he comes *near* to G-d. That he is *truly* divine indicates that he is not *actually* divine, since he is only *akin* to G-d. When a person dies his matter is dissolved and he becomes all mind and thus is immortal, but there is no indication that he actually becomes G-d. Commenting on the verse (Exod 24:12) “The L-rd said to Moses, ‘Come up to Me on the mountain, and wait there’”, Philo (*Quaestiones in Exodum* 2.40) says that this signifies that the holy soul is divinized<sup>28</sup> by ascending ... to (a region) above the heavens. And beyond the world there is no place but G-d... But those who do not return from the holy and divine city, to which they have migrated, have G-d as their chief leader in the migration”. Again, the divinization that is spoken of here cannot refer to one’s becoming G-d, since the passage refers to G-d as a separate entity, namely, as the *leader* in the migration. Elsewhere Philo (*Quaestiones in Genesin* 1.86) compares the translation of Moses, “for no one knew his burial-place”, to that of Enoch and Elijah. He describes this as a movement “from a sensible and visible place to an incorporeal and intelligible form”. This is Philo’s way of describing the immortality of the soul; there is no indication that the soul becomes identified with G-d.

If Moses is not regarded by Philo as G-d, he is, nevertheless, spoken of by Philo as a friend of G-d. The biblical passage (Exod 33:11, Deut 34:10) reads that “the L-rd used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend”. Philo (*De Vita Mosis* 1.28.156) elaborates: “If, according to the proverb<sup>29</sup>, the possessions of friends are in common, and the prophet [i.e. Moses] has been called a friend of G-d, according to what follows, he would share His possessions, so far as is necessary, and would, in effect, be a world citizen. Moses speaks with frankness to G-d; and Philo (*Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres* 5.21) explains that since frankness of speech is akin to friendship, Moses is called the friend of G-d. Furthermore, Philo states (*Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit* 7.44), though Moses was not deemed worthy of divine rank in his own right -here Philo clearly says that Moses is not to be regarded as G-d-, he was bound to be happy (euvdaimonei/n) because he

---

<sup>28</sup> Aucher translates the Armenian here by the Latin *deificari*.

<sup>29</sup> The proverb that Philo cites is also quoted by Diogenes Laertius (6.72) in his life of Diogenes the Cynic and is consonant with the Stoic view of the sage as the possessor of all.

had G-d as his friend. One is reminded that the title “friend” was bestowed by the emperor upon those who were nearest and dearest; thus it was bestowed by Caligula on Agrippa (*Legatio ad Gaium* 268, *In Flaccum* 40)<sup>30</sup>. As the friend of G-d, Moses (*De Vita Mosis* 1.28.155-57) was judged by G-d to be worthy to be a partner in His possessions and to be rewarded by being given the greatest and most perfect wealth so that all the elements should obey him and change their natural properties and submit to his command. This will explain why Moses was able to perform miracles<sup>31</sup>.

Moses as king must also necessarily be high priest, since he must supervise divine matters (PHILO, *De Vita Mosis* 2.5); and this is the case in Hellenistic kings generally, as we see in Diotogenes (*ap. Stobaeus* 4.7.61)<sup>32</sup>. Philo (*De Vita Mosis* 2.6.31), in his account of the translation of the Pentateuch into Greek, states that Ptolemy Philadelphus dispatched envoys to the high priest and king of Judaea, “both offices being held by the same person”, though actually there was no king of Judaea at this time, approximately 270 B.C.E., so that we must suppose that Philo was misled by his assumption that such was the norm. Elsewhere (*De Virtutibus* 9.54) Philo points out that Moses did not bequeath his leadership to his sons or nephews perhaps either because he did not think it advisable to withdraw them from the service of G-d or because he considered it impossible for a person to do justice to both offices, the priesthood in service to G-d and sovereignty over men. Moreover, he may have had in mind the historic example of John Hyrcanus, whom, according to Josephus (*Ant.* 13.288-92), the Pharisee Eleazar told to give up the high priesthood and to be content with the kingship. As for the connection of prophecy and kingship, there is no precedent in Hellenistic kingship; and the connection is to be sought in biblical and post-biblical Judaism<sup>33</sup>.

Moreover, inasmuch as one of the four capacities in which Moses is praised in *De Vita Mosis* as ideal is as king, when Philo (*De Specialibus Legibus* 4.35.186-87) enumerates the qualities that the ideal ruler, who for

---

<sup>30</sup> TIEDE (above, n. 24) 125, n. 43, cites a similar concept, attributed by Diogenes Laertius (6.72) to Diogenes the Cynic: “All things belong to the gods. The gods are friends of the wise, and friends share all property in common; therefore, all things are the property of the wise”.

<sup>31</sup> See B. BLACKBURN, *Theios Anēr and the Markan Miracle Traditions: A Critique of the Theios Anēr Concept as an Interpretive Background of the Miracle Traditions Used by Mark* (Tübingen 1991) 68-69.

<sup>32</sup> Cited by GOODENOUGH (above, n. 20) 190.

<sup>33</sup> So MEEKS (above, n. 25) 116.

Philo is clearly Moses, must have, he remarks that he should be like a physician in relation to his subjects and that in so doing he must follow G-d as his model. He concludes by saying (*De Specialibus Legibus* 4.36.188) that good rulers must imitate (mimei/sqai) these qualities if they have any aspiration to be likened (evxomoiw,sewj, “made quite like”, “assimilated”) to G-d. But to be made quite like unto G-d is definitely different from being made G-d. In this connection, Helleman<sup>34</sup> calls attention to *De Opificio Mundi* 50.144, which describes the ideal state as one in which people regard it as their goal to be fully conformed (evxomoi,wsin) to G-d.

Moreover, inasmuch as Philo stresses that Moses was human, we must also note, as Helleman<sup>35</sup> does, that Philo (*Quaestiones in Genesis* 2.62), in commenting on the verse in G-d’s covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:6) that “in the image of G-d He made man”, makes the remarkable statement that nothing mortal can be made in the likeness of G-d but only in that of the second G-d, that is, the Logos. Moses, as a mortal, would, then, not only not be G-d but would be further removed from G-d, being an image of an image.

Philo (*De Ebrietate* 23.94, *De Vita Mosis* 1.1.1) refers to Moses as most perfect (teleio,tatoj) of men and most perfect of the prophets (*Decalogo* 33.175, tou/ teleiota,tou tw/n profhtw/n). Josephus (*Ant.* 3.180), in vehemently refuting the canard that Jews slight the divinity whom the pagans profess to venerate, maintains that if one looks at the construction of the tabernacle in the wilderness and the vessels used in the sacrificial system he will discover that every one of these objects symbolically represents the universe and that “our lawgiver was a man of G-d (qeï/on a;ndra) and that the slanders that we hear from the others are unfounded”<sup>36</sup>.

---

<sup>34</sup> HELLEMAN (above, n. 26) 56-59.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-61.

<sup>36</sup> As D. GEORGI, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia 1986) 126) notes, Josephus proves the divine quality of Moses with the cosmic character of the laws given by him, the implication being that he is not actually divine. The nature of the lawgiver was thus able to capture the order of the process of nature and thereby the will of G-d as expressed in G-d’s works. That Josephus has no intention of asserting Moses’ divinity is clear from the proof that he gives of Moses being a “man of G-d”, namely that the construction of the tabernacle and the appearance of the vestments and vessels of the priests show his concern for piety. See GEORGI, 204, n.304. Elsewhere Josephus (*Ant.* 10.35) refers to the prophet Isaiah as acknowledged to be divine (qeï/oj) and marvelously possessed of truth. Again, after King Solomon, in the dispute between the two harlots about their infants, discovers the real mother, he is regarded by the multitude as possessed of a divine (qeï,añ) understanding (*Ant.* 8.34). Likewise Daniel, through the auspiciousness of his predictions, wins the esteem of the multitude for his nature especially endowed by G-d (qeïo,thtoï, *Ant.* 10.268). Josephus himself (*Against*

The mind of the wise man, says Philo (*De Somniis* 2.34.229), is actually superior to men but less than G-d. Indeed, the good man is on the borderline between divinity and humanity. The high priest (*De Somniis* 2.28.188) is less than G-d but superior to man. He is not a G-d because that name is assigned to Moses, who is called the G-d of Pharaoh (Exod 7:1). In *Quaestiones in Exodum* 2.29 Philo, commenting on Exodus 24:2, "Moses alone shall come near to the L-rd, but the others shall not come near", remarks that the statement that Moses alone shall go up is said "most naturally" (*fusiw,tata*), "for when the prophetic mind becomes divinely inspired and filled with G-d, it becomes like the monad, not being at all mixed with any of those things associated with duality. But he [i.e. Moses] who is resolved into the nature of unity is said to come near to G-d in a kind of family relation, for having given up and left behind all mortal kinds, he is changed into the divine, so that such men become akin to G-d and truly divine"<sup>37</sup>.

The status of Moses as the wise man who possesses all the virtues differs from the patriarchs in degree rather than in kind<sup>38</sup>. He is higher in that he stands beside G-d Himself (Deut 5:31; *De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini* 3.8). Like the patriarchs, he, too, married not a woman but a virtue (*De Cherubim* 12.41), as the very name, Zipporah, meaning "bird", of his wife indicates, "speeding upwards from earth to heaven and contemplating there the nature of things divine and blessed". The fact that Philo (*De Praemiis et Poenis* 2.13-4.24) applies the imagery of athletic contests in viewing these virtuous men supplies a link with the Cynic and Stoic traditions, where life is similarly viewed through the eyes of an athletic contest<sup>39</sup>.

---

*Apion* 1.279), in his refutation of Manetho, notes that the Egyptians regard Moses as remarkable (*qaumasto,n*) and divine (*qei/on*) and wish to claim him as one of their own; but the fact that he asserts this as an Egyptian claim indicates that he does not identify with it. In answer to the question as to why Josephus refers to Moses as *qei/on a;ndra* (*Ant.* 3.180), rather than as *a;nqrwpoj qeou/*, Holladay (above, n. 19) 89-100, suggests that perhaps he did so because of his anti-Samaritan sentiments, since the Samaritans identified Moses as the man of G-d. For Josephus, he states, the word *qei/oj* here shades off into *i`ero,j* or *a[gioj* or *euvsebh,j* and does not mean divine in the most literal sense, as we may see from his recasting of other biblical personalities. L. BIELER, *Das Bild des "göttlichen Menschen" in Spätantike und Frühchristentum*, vol. 2 (Vienna 1935-36) 33-36, notes that the characteristics of Philo's Moses closely parallel those of the typical Hellenistic "divine man". But there is, he says, a major difference in that Philo does not stress the aspect of Moses as a miracle worker.

<sup>37</sup> Cited by HOLLADAY (above, n. 19) 160-61.

<sup>38</sup> See TIEDE (above, n. 24) 120-34.

<sup>39</sup> See *ibid.*, 108-9.

In the Bible (Exod 25:8-9) G-d tells Moses that the Israelites are to make a sanctuary for Him like everything that He will show him concerning the form of the tabernacle<sup>40</sup>. Later (Exod 31:2) G-d tells Moses that He has appointed Bezalel as the architect of the tabernacle to be constructed in the wilderness and that He has endowed him and Oholiab with the wisdom to do all the work. Philo (*Legum Allegoria* 3.31.95) adds the extra-biblical remark that G-d made this appointment despite the fact that Bezalel had done no work that would have qualified him for such a task. Elsewhere (*De Somniis* 1.35.206) Philo explains that whereas Bezalel was the chief builder it was Moses who built the patterns, in effect, we may suggest, Platonic-like Forms or Ideas. Philo (*De Vita Mosis* 2.15.71, 74) explains that it was G-d Himself who set forth to Moses, while the latter was with Him on Mount Sinai, the principles of the construction of this tabernacle, that is, as Philo says, the immaterial forms of the material objects of the Tent about to be made<sup>41</sup>. Consequently, if Moses was not actually G-d, he was second to G-d, at least from a Platonic point of view, in that he built the Forms or Ideas of the tabernacle in the wilderness. Moses, says Philo (*Legum Allegoria* 3.33.102), is the artificer of the archetypes, whereas Bezalel is the artificer merely of the copies of these, since Moses' instructor is G-d Himself (Exod 25:40), whereas Bezalel is instructed by Moses. With reference to the way in which he adorned the ark (*Quaestiones in Exodum* 2.54) he is termed "the divine (and) holy Moses".

Moses, according to Philo (*De Gigantibus* 12.54) is the one who has learned the secrets of the most holy mysteries (teleta,j) and who has become the hierophant and teacher of the divine secret rites (ovrgi,wn), which he will teach to those who have been purified in their ears. He is the one (*De Mutatione Nominum* 2.7) who entered into the darkness (Exod. 20:18), which Philo interprets to mean invisible and incorporeal existence,

---

<sup>40</sup> JOSEPHUS (*Ant.* 3.137), in an unparalleled addition to the Bible, says that Moses actually saw the Cherubim adhering to the throne of G-d.

<sup>41</sup> In JOSEPHUS (*Ant.* 3.104), however, it is Moses, not G-d, who appoints the construction supervisors for the tabernacle, in accordance with the instruction of G-d; and he says (*Ant.* 3.107) that Moses, in accordance with G-d's direction, instructed them in all the details. Josephus further diminishes the supernatural element in the choice of the architects by adding the extra-biblical detail that the multitude also would have selected them if the authority had been in their power. The third-century Rabbi Isaac (*Berakot* 36a), citing Exodus 35:30, referring to G-d's choice of Bezalel, remarks that we must not appoint a leader over a community without first consulting it. He cites a tradition that G-d asked Moses whether he considered Bezalel suitable to be the architect of the tabernacle, whereupon Moses said that if G-d considered him suitable, surely he also should, whereupon G-d told him to consult the people of Israel. When Moses did so, their reply was that if G-d and Moses considered him suitable, surely they should too.

whereupon he searched everywhere in his desire to see G-d clearly. To be sure, Moses is referred to in the Bible (Deut 33.1) as a man of G-d, which Philo (*De Mutatione Nominum* 22.125) says refers to Moses as praying and blessing the people.

Runia<sup>42</sup> has raised the interesting question as to how Philo, if he had seen the performance of Ezekiel's tragedy, *The Exodus*, might have reacted to the scene (ap. EUSEBIUS, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.29.5) in which Moses recounts his dream that on the summit of Mount Sinai there was a throne on which there sat a man who wore a crown and who beckoned to him to give him his crown and sceptre and told him to sit on the throne, whereupon Moses beheld the stars of heaven and earth. Holladay<sup>43</sup> suggests that the dream and its interpretation sketch the eventual fall of Pharaoh and the consequent rise of Moses, but the mention of the person on the throne beholding the stars of heaven and earth seems to indicate a more than human king, and Goodenough<sup>44</sup> uses this passage to support his view that Moses was the central figure in a Jewish mystery religion influenced by Orphism. This view is rightly contested by Jacobson<sup>45</sup>, but there are similar scenes in Jewish apocalyptic literature, where Enoch (see especially 3 Enoch) or Moses ascends to a throne; and if Philo, indeed, as seems likely, knew and used the play by Ezekiel<sup>46</sup>, and consequently thought in such terms he would not be unique.

This would seem to fit in with the extraordinary description of Moses (*De Vita Mosis* 1.28.15) as a partner (κοινωνο,ς) of G-d who was honored "by being deemed worthy to bear the same title. For he was named god and king of the whole nation, and entered, we are told, into the darkness where G-d was.... Thus he beheld what is hidden from the sight of mortal nature" (*De Vita Mosis* 1.28.158). This relationship between Moses and G-d, as Borgen<sup>47</sup> has remarked, is also used for persons who are partners of emperors, such as was the case with Gaius Caligula and his cousin, Tiberius Gemellus

---

<sup>42</sup> D. T. RUNIA, "G-d and Man in Philo of Alexandria": *Journal of Theological Studies* 39 (1988) 48-75.

<sup>43</sup> C. R. HOLLADAY, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors*, vol. 2: *Poets* (Atlanta 1989) 442.

<sup>44</sup> GOODENOUGH (above, n. 20) 290.

<sup>45</sup> H. JACOBSON, "Mysticism and Apocalyptic in Ezechiel's Exagoge": *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 6 (1981) 272-93.

<sup>46</sup> See H. JACOBSON, *The Exagoge of Ezechiel* (Cambridge 1983) 38-39.

<sup>47</sup> BORGEN (above, n. 23) 201.

(*Legatio ad Gaium* 23, 25, 28). There (*De Vita Mosis* 1.28.158) Moses entered into the darkness where G-d was, “that is, into the unseen, invisible, incorporeal, and archetypal essence of existing things”. Here Philo is combining the Septuagint’s (Exod 20:21) reference to the darkness where G-d was with the Platonic archetype or form. Elsewhere (*De Mutatione Nominum* 2.7) Philo states that Moses, the explorer of nature that lies beyond our vision, entered into darkness, that is the invisible and incorporeal existence of G-d, and searched everywhere in order to see Him clearly but was unsuccessful in his quest. However, Philo (*De Posteritate Caini* 5.14-15) remarks that the quest is not really in vain, in that Moses came to the realization that G-d is apprehensible by no one.

Meeks<sup>48</sup>, noting that the Bible (Exod 7:1) states that G-d told Moses that He had made him as G-d to Pharaoh, asks whence Philo came to connect this with Moses’ kingship, and asks whence Philo derived the extra-biblical mystic ascent of Moses into heaven. In reply, Meeks points to a rabbinic tradition (*Tanh□uma* [ed. Solomon Buber] 4.51-52) that depicts Moses as sharing G-d’s kingship, before whom, as with G-d, silver trumpets are blown. As to Moses’ ascent to heaven, Meeks points to the rabbinic tradition (*Pesiqta Rabbati* 32.198b) that, commenting on the verse (Deut 33:1) that refers to Moses as the “man of G-d”, states that when he ascended on high he was a man, but that when he descended below he was “G-d”. He notes a similar tradition in the Samaritan *Memar Marqah* (2.12) that speaks of Moses as dwelling in the mysteries, that is, in heaven, and crowned with light. He further notes that the Samaritan tradition<sup>49</sup> describes him as clothed in a robe of light, as we find the Messiah is to be. The Samaritan tradition (*Memar Marqah* 2.12) likewise stresses the significance of the fact that the biblical statement (Exod 7:1) in which G-d tells Moses that He has made him as G-d to Pharaoh employs the word ~yqla for G-d, the name by which G-d revealed Himself to Moses and the name by which Moses is known as “the man of G-d” (~yqlah vya) (Deut 33:1). Furthermore, as Meeks<sup>50</sup> points out, the radiant skin of Moses’ face as he descended from Mount Sinai (Exod 34:29) is identified as

---

<sup>48</sup> W. A. MEEKS, “Moses as G-d and King”, in: J. NEUSNER (ed.), *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough* (Studies in the History of Religions 14; Leiden 1968) 355.

<sup>49</sup> The sixth hymn of the Durran cycle by Amram Darah, cited by MEEKS (above, n. 48) 358.

<sup>50</sup> MEEKS (above, n. 48) 361-62. Meeks calls attention to Philo’s description of the mad Roman emperor Caligula dressed as the sun-god Apollo, his head encircled with garlands of the rays of the sun.



a crown of light, signifying divinity in some sense in rabbinic and Samaritan tradition. Indeed, Meeks suggests that the stories of Moses' heavenly enthronement may have laid the foundation for an eschatological ideology. He notes that in the apocalyptic genre the ascension of the prophet in whose name the book is written is an almost invariable introduction to the description of the secrets that he saw<sup>51</sup>. In effect, as Meeks<sup>52</sup> has suggested, Moses attains an intermediate status as G-d's vice-regent between G-d and the rest of men. Runia<sup>53</sup> objects that Philo depicts Moses not as G-d's cosmic vice-regent but rather as a Platonic-like philosopher-king and a Stoic-like citizen of the world (*De Vita Mosis* 1.28.157). In disagreeing with Runia, Borgen<sup>54</sup> notes that Philo goes so far as to say that G-d sent Moses as a loan to the earthly sphere and appointed him as G-d, subjecting the bodily region to him (*De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini* 3.9). In effect, Philo implies a contrast between Moses as the legitimate G-d-like king, the living and reasonable law (*De Vita Mosis* 1.28.162) and the Emperor Gaius Caligula as the counterfeit G-d, who regarded himself as the law but practiced lawlessness (*Legatio ad Gaium* 17.119)<sup>55</sup>.

However, in his discussions (*De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini* 8-10, *De Mutatione Nominum* 125-29) of Exodus 7:1 ("I am giving you as a god to Pharaoh"), Philo explains that Moses had control of his passions, that is, he had divine ruling power (*basilikh. du,namij*); hence, Moses is like G-d in that he reflects divine virtue. But even Moses was limited in his understanding of G-d (*Quod Deterius Potiori Insidiari Soleat* 44.159-62); he says of G-d, "only as best he may in human speech", "I am He that is" (Exod 3:14)<sup>56</sup>. Only G-d, says Philo (*De Mutatione Nominum* 34.183-84), possesses a single nature, whereas man's excellences are mixed.

---

<sup>51</sup> MEEKS (above, n. 48) 366-67.

<sup>52</sup> MEEKS (above, n. 25) 110-11; MEEKS (above, n. 48) 354-59. HIMMELFARB (above, n. 23) 48-49, 70-71, cited by BORGEN (above, n. 23) 202, suggests that Philo, in this description of the ascent of Moses, has given perhaps the most extended treatment in Jewish or Christian literature of the divination of a human being.

<sup>53</sup> RUNIA (above, n. 42) 49-75.

<sup>54</sup> BORGEN (above, n. 23) 203.

<sup>55</sup> So W. A. MEEKS, "The Divine Agent and His Counterfeit in Philo and the Fourth Gospel", in: E. SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA (ed.), *Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity* (Notre Dame 1976) 43-67.

<sup>56</sup> See HELLEMAN (above, n. 26) 67-70.

## X. JOSEPHUS' VIEW OF MOSES' ALLEGED DIVINITY

Josephus notes that Moses was held in such great admiration for his virtues and his charismatic ability to inspire faith in all his utterances that his words are alive to this day (*Ant.* 3.317). He remarks that Moses' legislation, being believed to come from G-d, has caused him to be ranked higher than his own human nature (*Ant.* 3.320). Even a pagan such as Celsus (*ap. ORIGEN, Contra Celsum* 1.21) says that Moses acquired a reputation for divine power, presumably through his abilities as a magician. But in the very passages where Josephus refers to Moses as so inspiring and as ranking higher than his own nature he is careful to refer to him as a man (αὐτῆς) (*Ant.* 3.317, 320). He omits G-d's statements that Moses was to be to Aaron as G-d (Exod 4:16) and that G-d was making him as G-d to Pharaoh (Exod 7:1). He is careful to dispel the view held by some that when Moses tarried on Mount Sinai for forty days it was because he had been taken back to the Divinity (*Ant.* 3.95-96). If he refers to Moses, as he does, as a "man of G-d" (ἄνθρωπος) (*Ant.* 3.180), it is not to assert Moses' divinity but rather to refute those enemies of the Jews who had charged them with slighting the divinity whom they themselves professed to venerate (*Ant.* 3.179). That Josephus has no intention of asserting here that Moses was actually divine is clear from the proof that he gives of Moses being a "man of G-d", namely that the construction of the tabernacle and the appearance of the vestments and vessels of the priests show his concern for piety.

Josephus is explicit in stressing that Moses died and in refuting the notion that he was somehow elevated to divine status (*Ant.* 4.326). Thus, whereas the Bible says simply that Moses died in the land of Moab (Deut 34:5), Josephus explains why Scripture mentions this, stressing that Moses "has written of himself in the sacred books that he died, for fear lest they [the Israelites] should venture to say that by reason of his surpassing virtue he had gone back to the D-ity" (*Ant.* 4.326)<sup>57</sup>. Very significantly, Josephus does not include the biblical remarks that G-d Himself had buried Moses and that no one knows to this day where he is buried (Deut 34:6), presumably because he realized that his skeptical readers might have considerable difficulty accepting such statements<sup>58</sup>. He also attempts, more or less

---

<sup>57</sup> Similarly, PSEUDO-PHILO, *Biblical Antiquities* (19.16), and the *Assumption of Moses* (1.15) affirm that Moses' death took place in public and that G-d buried him.

<sup>58</sup> See J. D. TABOR, "'Returning to the Divinity': Josephus's Portrayal of the Disappearances of Enoch, Elijah, and Moses": *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 (1989) 237.

naturalistically, to give further details of Moses' disappearance, noting that while Moses was bidding farewell to Eleazar the high priest and Joshua his successor, a cloud suddenly descended upon him and he disappeared into a ravine. Such an account might well have reminded Gentile readers of the traditional version of the deaths of the two founders of the Romans, Aeneas and Romulus, as described by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, for example<sup>59</sup>. In the case of Aeneas, Dionysius says that his body could nowhere be found, and some conjectured that he had been translated to the gods (*Ant. Rom.* 1.64.4). As to Romulus, he remarks that "the more mythical writers<sup>60</sup> 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" (*Ant. Rom.* 2.56.2). Josephus would thus seem to be underscoring the difference, to some degree, between Moses and these Roman forefathers in the way their lives ended.

To be sure, in Josephus' account of Moses' ascent on Mount Sinai, he hints that Moses ate heavenly food (*Ant.* 3.99), inasmuch as, whereas the biblical narrative states that Moses neither ate bread nor drank water during the forty days that he was on the mountain (*Exod* 34:28), Josephus says that he tasted no food of the kinds designated for men (*Ant.* 3.99). The implication, according to Meeks<sup>61</sup>, is that Moses partook of heavenly food, that is, that he drank nectar and ate ambrosia; but we may suggest that Josephus' concern was that his skeptical readers would wonder how a human being could subsist without any food or drink at all for forty days, and so he says, rationalizing, that Moses did partake of heavenly food. He does not specify what kind of food that was, and certainly he does not indicate that it was nectar and ambrosia, which was the food of the pagan gods, nor does he suggest that having eaten heavenly food he became divine.

By contrast, the elevation of Moses to divine status seems to be implied in Philo, who remarks that Moses' associates, struck by his total asceticism and by the fact that he was so utterly unlike all men, pondered whether he was human or divine or a mixture of both (*De Vita Mosis* 1.6.27; cf. 2.51.291). Quite clearly, Josephus wished to have it both ways<sup>62</sup>: on the one hand, he strongly resisted such contemporary tendencies that deified Moses or Jesus

---

<sup>59</sup> H. ST. JOHN THACKERAY, *Josephus the Man and the Historian* (New York 1929) 57.

<sup>60</sup> One of these is Ovid, who describes a scene in which Jupiter fulfills his promise to lift up Romulus to heaven (*Metamorphoses* 14.805-85). Cf. OVID, *Fasti* 2.481-509 and Livy 1.16.

<sup>61</sup> MEEKS (above, n. 25) 141.

<sup>62</sup> See TABOR (above, n. 58) 237-38.

or Aeneas or Romulus; but, on the other hand, the actual scene that he describes -the tears and the weeping, the withdrawal, the cloud descending upon Moses and his disappearance, with nothing said of the burial itself- is strikingly reminiscent of the parallels cited above regarding these figures' departure from the earth<sup>63</sup>.

In particular, we may note that to the biblical account of Moses' death (Deut 34:1-6) Josephus has added lamenting people, a walk to the mountain,

---

<sup>63</sup> According to the rabbinic tradition Moses did not die but rather continued to guide the people from above (*Sotāh* 13b, *Sifre Deuteronomy* 357, *Midrash Tannaim* 224). See L. GINZBERG, *The Legends of the Jews*, vol. 6 (Philadelphia 1928) 163-64, n. 452. The *Palaea Historia* (A. VASSILIEV, *Anecdota Graeco-Byzantina* [Moscow 1893] 257-58); see D. FLUSSER, "Palaea Historica: An Unknown Source of Biblical Legends": *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 22 [1971] 72) recounts a tradition that when Moses died alone on the mountain, Samael the devil tried to bring his body down to the people so that they might worship him as a god. G-d then commanded the archangel Michael to take Moses' body away. Samael objected and they quarreled, whereupon Michael was vexed and rebuked the devil. The Samaritans looked upon Moses as the most perfect of men, without any blemish at all, whether physical or moral, a priest among angels, one for whose sake the very world had been created. See M. GASTER, *The Asatir: The Samaritan Book of the 'Secrets of Moses' together with the Pitron or Samaritan Commentary and the Samaritan Story of the Death of Moses* (London 1927) 75. Far from being the amanuensis that he seems to be in the rabbinic tradition, Moses is termed by the Samaritans the light of knowledge and understanding, whose ascent to Mount Sinai is said to have taken him to the very heart of heaven (see J. MACDONALD, "The Samaritan Doctrine of Moses", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 13 [1960] 153-54). In addition to the laws intended for ordinary mankind he received esoteric knowledge to be transmitted solely to men of deep spiritual insight. It is Moses who, on G-d's behalf or acting as spokesman for G-d, pronounced the creative words, "Let there be light". He, unlike all other creatures, is said to have been in existence prior to the initial creation process; and, indeed, like the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel, he was created in order to function as G-d's creative agent. He is the great intercessor, and only through him can prayer be accepted. Moreover, for the Samaritans Moses is the Taheb ("Restorer"), the expected Messiah-like eschatological figure who will bring about a golden age and will pray for the guilty and save them. The Samaritans alone give prominence to the title "man of G-d" for Moses; and, indeed, their depiction of Moses is highly reminiscent of the New Testament's description of Jesus as the first begotten being, whose pre-existent bodiless state subsequently takes on matter. Moses is a second G-d, G-d's vice-regent upon earth (*Memar Marqah* 1.2), whose very name includes the title "Elokim" (G-d) (*Memar Marqah* 5.4), so that he who believes in him believes in his L-rd (*Memar Marqah* 4.7). See HOLLADAY (above, n. 19) 101, n. 344, who cites the Samaritan *Memar Marqah* 6.6. So prominent is Moses for the Samaritans that we hear that an unnamed man was able to gather a large following by promising that he would show them the sacred implements buried on Mount Gerizim by Moses (*Ant.* 18.85). What is particularly striking in this connection is that Moses could not possibly have buried the vessels there, inasmuch as he never entered the Land of Israel, as Meeks (above, n. 25) 248, remarks. Indeed, this exaltation of Moses, as MacDonald, 149-62, has remarked, is a unique Samaritan doctrine, without parallel in Jewish, Christian, or Moslem belief.

companions on Moses' final walk, and "disappearance" (*Ant.* 4.323-26), details which are found in no other post-biblical source, though those sources recount Moses' last hours in far greater detail than does the Bible. Josephus may also be reacting to Sophocles' account of the mysterious disappearance of Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*, which bears a striking resemblance to that of Moses in his presentation<sup>64</sup>.

## XI. SUMMARY

Extraordinary persons in antiquity were expected to experience an extraordinary death. A clue to Philo's view of Moses' death may be seen in his view of the "translation" of Enoch as indicating that he had been removed from perishable to immortal status and that he was not unique in this translation. As we see from his version of the Aloeidae's piling Pelion on Ossa, Philo was particularly concerned with the charge that the Bible contained myths, and so he took pains to dispel the alleged myth of Moses' bodily ascension to heaven.

---

<sup>64</sup> This is particularly significant, inasmuch as Josephus is definitely indebted to Sophocles elsewhere. It is also just possible that Josephus is reacting against the Christian tradition of the apotheosis of Jesus (Luke 24; Acts 1). See P. FORNARO, "Il Cristianesimo Oggetto di Polemica Indiretta in Flavio Giuseppe (*Ant. Jud.* IV 326)": *Rivista di Studi Classici* 27 (1979) 431-60; and A. PAUL, "Flavius Josephus' 'Antiquities of the Jews': An Anti-Christian Manifesto": *New Testament Studies* 31 (1975) 473-80. In the play by Ezekiel (verses 68-89) Moses says that he dreamt about a great throne on top of Mount Sinai on which a noble man (i.e. G-d) was seated with a crown and a sceptre, which he gave to Moses. JACOBSON (above, n. 46 [89-97]) interprets this scene as a polemic against the notion of the apotheosis of Moses, inasmuch as Ezekiel chose to portray his ascension as an imaginary event. However, inasmuch as even the Epicureans gave credence to dreams, the import of such a dream would intimate the divinization of Moses. If this were really a polemic against the apotheosis of Moses, Ezekiel should have had the noble man explicitly declare that while Moses is destined to be recognized as a king he should realize that he is mortal. See JACOBSON (above, n. 22) and more briefly TABOR (above, n. 58) 225. Ch. BEGG, "Josephus' Portrayal of the Disappearances of Enoch, Elijah, and Moses: Some Observations": *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109 (1990) 692, objects that in the end Josephus negates the whole impression of Moses' disappearance with his closing affirmation that in reality Moses did not "return to the divinity" but simply died. This does not, however, detract from the point that prior to this "correction" Josephus has described the disappearance of Moses in terms closely parallel to those used by Sophocles. There are several other touches in Josephus' extra-biblical modifications of the account of Solomon that indicate that he had Oedipus in mind. See my *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley 1998) 174-75.

Philo is most reluctant to speak of Moses as divine, since this term was used of deified emperors. In particular, he was revolted by the case of the emperor Gaius Caligula's claim to divinity.

Philo seems to be ambivalent in his view of Moses' possible divinity. On the one hand, he speaks of Moses as being perfect, though in this respect he is not unique. Moses is described as a divine man, but he explains that the reason why he did not punish the blasphemer was that to devise an adequate punishment for such impiety was literally beyond human powers. Furthermore, in the famous instance where Moses disobeyed G-d in striking the rock rather than speaking to it, Philo says nothing about G-d's instructions to speak to the rock.

Philo, significantly, unlike Josephus, does not have a scene of the mysterious disappearance of Moses, nor, as in Pseudo-Philo, in which G-d tells Moses that He will take him to his resting place. He specifically states that no human being has the power to perceive the passing of a perfect soul to G-d. As to the seemingly explicit statement in which G-d tells Moses that He will make him as G-d to Pharaoh, Philo interprets the word G-d allegorically as referring to the mind. Moses' prophetic mind, divinely inspired, is like a monad, and thus comes near to G-d like a friend but is not actually divine. This is Philo's description of the immortality of the soul. Since nothing mortal can be made in the likeness of G-d but only in that of the second G-d, that is, the Logos, Moses, as a mortal, is only an image of an image.

Philo depicts Moses as a partner of G-d. He entered into darkness, that is the invisible existence of G-d, and searched everywhere to see Him clearly but was unsuccessful in his quest.

**Resumen.**- A pesar de que él describe a Moisés como un hombre perfecto y divino, Filón está particularmente ansioso de refutar el alegado mito de la corpórea ascensión de Moisés al cielo. En cuanto a la declaración bíblica en la que Dios le dice a Moisés que Él hará como Dios a Faraón, Filón interpreta la palabra "Dios" alegóricamente. Él dice que la mente profética de Moisés está inspirada divinamente, pero que en realidad no es divina. Como un Moisés mortal, él tiene la semejanza del segundo Dios, es decir, del Logos.

**Summary.**- Though he describes Moses as perfect and as a divine man, Philo is particularly eager to refute the alleged myth of Moses' bodily ascension to heaven. As to the biblical statement in which G-d tells Moses that He will make him as G-d to Pharaoh, Philo interprets the word "G-d" allegorically. He says that Moses' prophetic mind is divinely inspired but is not actually divine. As a mortal Moses is in the likeness of the second G-d, that is, of the Logos.