

CHAPTER TWENTY The Egyptian Book of Life

In preceding discussions I attempted to show that our planet, in the distant past, had a high spiritual influence. That influence was lifting this world from primitive existence to more exalted life. Contact and intercourse with divine beings brought more devout social practices and attitudes. Names and language habits showed great respect for God, for the gods, for social relationships, and for conduct toward more noble lives.

Then a great fault occurred. Something went wrong. The planetary regime was disrupted. As a consequence a gradual decline ensued. Men forgot, although many groups here and there attempted to cling to the old respect and old devotion. But the heart was out of it. Where men once felt a deep desire, they now turned to rote religious and social practices. The reasons became debased. Knowledge of the past deteriorated. Heavenly contact was gone; the spiritual influence was gone.

Wherever we look across this world we find evidence for this sad failure. Hope springs eternal within man, but he was left on his own. He has no divine counselors, or means for reclaiming the spiritual richness of those old planetary eras. While the work of Melchizedek at the time of Abraham helped to crystallize a closer relationship with God, it was done without the benefit of certain knowledge of the heavenly realms. It was directed toward a specific program of planetary uplift, but without the benefit of open explanation. The work with Moses, the use of the Hebrew prophets, the life of Jesus, and the work of Paul left a tremendous impact upon the world, but did not cause it to return to the devout social practices of ancient yesteryear. Jesus began a new planetary regime but it was not designed to immediately reclaim the world. Rather, the result was even greater divorce from the planetary past. While he gave hope to individual man, the planetary isolation, and new attitudes based on purely mechanistic understanding, led to the godless attitudes of modern times.

As further example of ancient knowledge of God I shall now consider evidence from Egypt. Those people preserved much of the old knowledge, but modern scholarship, caught in their godless attitudes, were unable to discern the value of their discoveries.

We may have been fortunate because of the meteorological climate of that land. Extremely dry conditions over millennia helped preserve many texts. From them we gain better insight into the attitudes of people from days of old.

Inscribed on walls of the tombs of kings and on papyri in numerous burials were a group of religious writings that the ancient Egyptian called *The Coming Forth Into Light*. The texts were compilations of religious themes concerning the

life of the individual who had died, praises to the gods, his aspirations for a life after death, his preparation for travel among the houses of heaven, and supplication that he be guided safely in his journeys above. His appeals were intended to assure him of a new life in a glorified body in heaven^{EBD}.

The modern scholarly designation for this writing is most unfortunate. These texts were found with burial remains and on the walls of tombs. They thus acquired the title *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*. But in fact, the texts were an appeal for eternal life. They should properly be called *The Egyptian Book of Life*.

The origin is unknown. Prehistoric inhabitants of the Nile valley may have composed the texts or early immigrants may have brought them into Egypt from the Asiatic continent. The texts offer no evidence of authorship; certain chapters of later versions are stated to be the work of the god Thoth, the Egyptian equivalent of the Greek Hermes, herald and messenger of the gods. In the Egyptian texts Thoth was Lord of the divine books, scribe of the company of the gods, and Lord of divine speech. Clement of Alexandria, circa 200 AD, wrote that the texts were part of a group of works which constituted the sacred books of the Egyptians.

Records from the XIth dynasty around 2,000 BC show that portions of the book were buried beneath building foundation stones as early as the First dynasty, circa 3,000 BC. The writings were being used in a symbolic manner at that early date. Other texts dating from that early period show that they are older than the first historic Egyptian king Menes. The texts bear evidence that they were revised and edited long before his reign.

Texts on the walls of the pyramid of Unas of the Vth dynasty, and other kings of the VIth dynasty, show that the work was originally a collection of individual religious compositions. At that early date, approximately 2,500 BC, the writings were already extensive. The kings selected only portions as part of their burial compositions. The textual evidence from those dynasties indicates that the scribes were perplexed concerning the significance of the writings and did not fully understand the passages they used. They served merely as copyists at the king's request.

In texts of later dynasties, from around 1,200 BC down to the Christian era, the writings became ever more corrupt. Vignettes at the beginning of each chapter, which do not appear in early dynasties, were emphasized at the expense of actual text. Considerable artistic skill was employed in the preparation of the vignettes but the texts were left to ignorant and careless scribes. Neither the artists nor the scribes understood the material upon which they were engaged; they composed the texts in a highly rigid and mechanical manner^{EBD}.

Devolution of the sacred texts shows that earlier Nile dwellers were more devout, their faith was more genuine, than that of later generations. Later people maintained the texts mostly out of habit and not out of belief. This decline is an example of religious decline witnessed all over the world.

In spite of their corrupt condition the Egyptian religious writings are highly informative about the beliefs of those ancient people. The long history of Egypt, with its conservative cultural climate, provides opportunity to trace pagan beliefs back to more original forms.

The religious writings also offer unique insight into knowledge of a divine Son who would visit this world. His experience on this earth, and his position in the heavenly realms, was known before historic times, long before the existence of a unique Hebrew people. Ancient people knew of the advent of Jesus but the corrupt nature of the surviving records led to speculative theories by modern scholarship. It also led to effective burial of this knowledge in recent times, and rejection by both Jews and Christians.

For convenience I shall use the texts compiled and published by E. A. Wallis Budge^{EBD,EHD}. He provided transliteration and translation of a papyrus written by a scribe named Ani, with additional material from other versions of the religious work. Most of these date from 1,800 BC. Together the various writings cast light on four important aspects of our current religious belief:

- a) the Father,
- b) the Son and his incarnation experience,
- c) the beings of the celestial realms, and
- d) the hope for resurrection in a glorified body in heaven.

These aspects of historical religion are reflected in the Jewish and Christian theological issues of monotheism, salvation history, polytheism, and life after death.

In the Egyptian writings a monotheistic theme is interwoven with a polytheistic family of gods. This caused considerable confusion and controversy among modern students, some claiming the Egyptians believed in one God, while others denied such belief because of the numerous deities found in the texts. The monotheistic phraseology and tone is strikingly similar to the Bible and raised much adverse reaction among scholars. Even a brief review shows that monotheistic concepts and ideas were not original with the Hebrew people. Such beliefs came long before public proclamation of monotheism by Aknaton about 1,400 BC. Aknaton's efforts show as attempts to retrieve the ancient faith from control by a degenerate priesthood. Aknaton tried, but the social forces were too great for him.

Furthermore, the effective burial of knowledge of the gods of the heavenly realms by both Judaism and Christianity prevented modern people from recognizing the value of the Egyptian texts. Refer to Psalm 82 and Paul's remarks in I Cor 8:5 and II Cor 4:4.

Here I list phrases and statements from the ancient text.

God is one and alone, and none other exists with him. God is the One, the One who has made all things. God is a spirit, a hidden spirit, the spirit of spirits, the great spirit of the Egyptians, the divine spirit. God is from the beginning; he existed from of old and was when nothing else had being. He existed when nothing else existed, and what exists he created after he had come into being. He is the Father of beginnings. God is the

eternal One; he is eternal and infinite and endures forever and ever. God is hidden and no man knows his form. No man has been able to seek out his likeness. He is hidden to gods and to men; he is a mystery to his creatures. No man knows how to know him. His name remains hidden; his name is a mystery to his children. His names are innumerable; they are manifold and none knows their number.

God is truth and he lives by truth and feeds thereon. He is the king of truth and he has established the earth thereon.

God is life and man lives through him only. He gives life to man; he breathes the breath of life into his nostrils. God is father and mother, the father of fathers and the mother of mothers. He begets but never was begotten. He produces but was never produced. He begat himself and produced himself. He creates but was never created. He is the maker of his own form and the fashioner of his own body.

God himself is existence; he endures without increase or diminution. He multiplies himself millions of times and he is manifold in form and in members. God made the Universe; he created all that is in it. He is the Creator of what is in the world, of what was, of what is, and of what shall be. He is the Creator of the heavens and of the earth, of the deep, of the waters, and of the mountains. God stretched out the heavens and founded the earth. What his heart conceived straightway came to pass, and when he has spoken it comes to pass and endures forever.

God is the father of the gods; he fashioned men and formed the gods. God is merciful unto those who reverence him, and he hears him that calls upon him. God knows him that acknowledges him. He rewards him that serves him, and protects him that follows him.

The Egyptian writing shows that God is one and alone and that none other exists with him; he existed when nothing else had being. Yet he is hidden from both gods and men. He is father of the gods and men.

This passage has many phrases parallel to those in the Bible; Old Testament and New, the words occur again and again:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, Gen 1:1.
All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made, John 1:3.

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork, Ps 19:1.

Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand, where he does work, but I cannot behold him; he hides himself on the right hand that I cannot see him, Job 23:8-9.

Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the universe, even from everlasting to everlasting you are God, Ps 90:1-2.

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods, Ps 96:4.

Lo, these are parts of his ways; but how little a portion is heard of him? And the thunder of his power, who can understand? Job 26:14.

The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty has given me life, Job 33:4.

Another important religious teaching of the ancient Egyptians was that of eternal life, and the advent of a god who came down to earth to offer eternal life to all earth people.

As Budge wrote:

The doctrine of eternal life and the resurrection of a glorified or transformed body, based upon the ancient story of the resurrection of Osiris after a cruel death and horrible mutilation, inflicted by the powers of evil, was the same in all periods; the legends of the most ancient times were accepted without material alteration or addition in the texts of later dynasties. The story of Osiris is nowhere found in connected form in Egyptian literature, but everywhere, and in texts of all periods, the life, sufferings, death and resurrection of Osiris are accepted as facts universally admitted. Set was the name of the evil one, the one who plotted the death of Osiris. Osiris was in his 28th year when death occurred. Osiris was the god who conquered death and became King of heaven. The Egyptians appealed to him for eternal life through his victory and power.

The parallels with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus are obvious. Set (Nak) plotted the death of Osiris; the devil worked with Judas and the Sanhedrin to condemn Jesus to death. Osiris was killed in his 28th year; Jesus in his 33rd year. The body of Osiris was mutilated and the pieces scattered; Jesus was hung on a cross and his body pierced. Osiris rose from the dead; Jesus rose from the dead. Osiris became King of heaven; Jesus become King of heaven. The Egyptians appealed to Osiris for eternal life; Christians appeal to Jesus for eternal life. Resurrected Egyptians traveled among the mansions of heaven; Jesus went to prepare a place among the many mansions of heaven.

The Egyptian beliefs not only were corrupted with the passage of time; they also were corrupted by influence from outside people. Through conquest, the Egyptian gods multiplied. Khephera was the King and Creator of the gods; he was also Lord of day and night. As god of the day he was Ra; as god of the night he was Tmu. He came forth from Nu, the primeval water of creation. He was the son of Ptah. In his heart was Thoth (Truth) and Maat (Righteousness). He had a son named Horus, who then became confused with his father. (Horus plays the

same role as Melchizedek in the Old Testament.) The high power of Ra is shown by a long proclamation of praise to the sun god who rises in the eastern part of heaven.

Odes to Ra . . . King of the gods . . . Lord of the gods . . . Only One . . . Mighty One . . . Growing One . . . Lord of heaven . . . Lord of the earth... One God who came into being in the beginning of time . . . unknown and cannot be searched out . . ., who passes through eternity and whose being is everlasting. . . . God of life, Lord of life, Lord of love . . . God of heaven, the Lord of the earth, the King of right and truth, the God of eternity, the everlasting Ruler, the Prince of all the gods, the Creator of eternity, the Maker of heaven by whom is established all that is therein The mighty man-child, the heir of eternity, self-begotten and self-born, King of the earth . . . beautiful and beloved man-child. When he rises mortals live. The nations rejoice in him, and the spirits of Annu (the holy mount of heaven) sing unto him songs of joy. . . . Lord of the world and the inhabitants thereof . . . The starry deities also adore you. O firstborn, who does lie without movement, arise, your mother shows loving kindness unto you every day. Ra lives and the fiend Nak is dead; you endure forever and the fiend has fallen. All the company of the gods rejoice at your rising, the earth is glad when it beholds your rays; the peoples that have been long dead come forth with cries of joy to see your beauties. . . . The enemy has fallen, his arms are cut off You are the ruler of the gods and you have joy of heart in your shrine; for the serpent Nak is condemned to the fire, and your heart shall be joyful forever . . .

Again we find many parallels with Jesus and with Judeo-Christian beliefs. In the dawn of creation the Morning Stars sang together and all the Sons of God shouted for joy, Job 38:7. Jesus is the Lord of heaven and the Lord of the earth. He is the Mighty One, the Lord of lords, and the God of gods. He passes through eternity; his being is everlasting. He is the king of right and truth. He is the beloved child who grew to become a man. When he rose from the dead he gave assurance of eternal life to all those who call on his name. He conquered death and he condemned the devil to fire.

The sun became symbolic of the power of Osiris. The sun rises every morning and lights up the world. Osiris rose from the dead and lights the world. Jesus rose from the dead and lights the world. It was natural for old people to seek a symbol of their beloved god who promised them eternal life. *The earth is glad when it beholds your rays.*

As Peter phrased it many years ago:

We have the prophetic word made more sure. You would do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. 2nd Peter 1:19.

It is important to note that the resurrection of Osiris, the Creator, is confused with that of Dumuzi/Adonis/Attis. Osiris/Jesus conquered death but Dumuzi/Adonis/Attis was forever doomed to death and resurrection in the annual cycles of time. Adam brought regeneration of the earth each spring but Jesus brought eternal life. Scholars do not distinguish among these two aspects of the resurrection myths, mostly because of confusion in the folk sources, and their godless attitudes.