

# Concordia Theological Quarterly



Volume 79:3-4

July/October 2015

## Table of Contents

---

---

<b><i>The Lutheran Hymnal</i> after Seventy-Five Years: Its Role in the Shaping of <i>Lutheran Service Book</i></b> Paul J. Grime .....	195
<b>Ascending to God: The Cosmology of Worship in the Old Testament</b> Jeffrey H. Pulse .....	221
<b>Matthew as the Foundation for the New Testament Canon</b> David P. Scaer .....	233
<b>Luke's Canonical Criterion</b> Arthur A. Just Jr. ....	245
<b>The Role of the Book of Acts in the Recognition of the New Testament Canon</b> Peter J. Scaer .....	261
<b>The Relevance of the <i>Homologoumena</i> and <i>Antilegomena</i> Distinction for the New Testament Canon Today: Revelation as a Test Case</b> Charles A. Gieschen .....	279

<b>Taking War Captive: A Recommendation of Daniel Bell's <i>Just War as Christian Discipleship</i></b>	
Joel P. Meyer .....	301
<b>Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage: The Triumph of Culture?</b>	
Gifford A. Grobien .....	315
<b>Pastoral Care and Sex</b>	
Harold L. Senkbeil .....	329
<b>Theological Observer</b> .....	347
A Devotion on Luke 18:1–8	
A Statement by the Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, concerning the Communion of Infants	
<b>Book Reviews</b> .....	351
<b>Books Received</b> .....	379
<b>Indices for Volume 79 (2015)</b> .....	381

## Ascending to God: The Cosmology of Worship in the Old Testament

Jeffrey H. Pulse

You go up to heaven and you go down to hell . . . and here on earth you are stuck somewhere in between. The language of ascending to heaven/God and descending to hell/Satan is an Old Testament Hebrew understanding of the world and its arrangement. As John Davies writes: “Going upward and going downward implies a cosmology, a spatial and a moral division of the universe. In Hebrew cosmology the earth is located underneath heaven and above Sheol, Hades or hell—the underworld.”<sup>1</sup> With such an understanding of the world and its spatial division, one should expect it to have a profound effect on the worship of Israel, especially since worship takes place on earth, in between heaven and hell. Such a cosmology should even be expected to influence and inform the Israelite understanding of their relationship with God.

We first see evidence of this cosmology of the universe in the Tower of Babel account of Genesis 11: “And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower . . . ‘Come, let us go down and there confuse their language’” (11:5, 7). Obviously, the Lord must be up in order to come down. Also, “the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven” (Gen 19:24), “the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven” (Gen 21:17), “the angel of the Lord called to him [Abraham] from heaven” (Gen 22:11), and God is called “the Lord, the God of heaven” (Gen 24:7). There is also Jacob’s dream of a ladder (a solid object of some sort that anchors heaven to earth): “And, behold the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the Lord stood above it” (Gen 28:12-13).<sup>2</sup> All of these instances from the earlier Genesis accounts

---

<sup>1</sup> Jon Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth in the Religions of Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1999), 88.

<sup>2</sup> Luther identifies the ladder as the cross, probably in light of John 1:51. See Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav J. Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-1986), 5:243.

---

*Jeffrey H. Pulse is Associate Professor of Exegetical Theology and Director of Certification and Placement at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.*

indicate the presence of the particular aspect of ancient Israelite cosmology that understands God and heaven to be up above. This reality becomes even more apparent, for example, as the Hebrew Scriptures progress historically with Elijah being taken up into heaven (1 Kgs 2:1, 11).

The converse is also evidenced with the first appearance of the word שְׁאוֹל in Genesis 37. Jacob, in sorrow and distress at the apparent death of Joseph, lamented, “No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning” (Gen 37:35). And again, when Judah feared the loss of Benjamin, he said, “as soon as he [Jacob] sees the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol” (Gen 44:31).

While much has been written concerning Sheol, Reed Lessing, in an excursus in his *Jonah Commentary*, provides a clear and concise explanation of its meaning in the Old Testament:

The KJV frequently translates Sheol as “hell” because it is portrayed so often as the destination of the wicked. Theologically, Sheol is the opposite of Yahweh’s presence. It is the lowest point, the cosmological opposite of the highest heavens. “Sheol” is characteristically “the land of forgetfulness” (Ps 88:13 [ET 88:12]), where people are cut off from Yahweh and forgotten. Sheol is a fitting place for the wicked, who in life forgot God.<sup>3</sup>

In the Old Testament, when a man was in distress or sorrow, or when he was evil and ungodly, he faced the reality of descending to Sheol. However, when a man died a noble, faithful, and peaceful death, he rested with his ancestors or was “gathered to his people” (Gen 25:8, 17). Once again, heaven was above and hell, or Sheol, was beneath.

This cosmology, which is implied by going down and going up, is also evident in the early journeys of the patriarchs and, later, of young Israel. Earthly movement frequently reflects spiritual realities. In the Torah, we observe this movement in the downward and upward language of going down to Egypt and up to the Promised Land. This wording is not a geographical reference to north and south positions on a map, nor is it a geological comment concerning the highlands and the lowlands.<sup>4</sup> This

---

<sup>3</sup> R. Reed Lessing, *Jonah*, Concordia Commentary Series (St. Louis: Concordia, 2007), 251.

<sup>4</sup> Nahum Sarna disagrees, concluding that the language of going down and going up is standard for describing the journey from hilly Canaan to low-lying Egypt. Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 93.

language begins early in the patriarchal narratives with Abram in Genesis 12 and 13. From this point on in Genesis, the reference is always a downward movement to Egypt and an upward movement to Canaan. In Genesis 12:10, Abram went down to Egypt due to a famine. When the famine was over in Genesis 13:1, Abram went up from Egypt. Once this pattern was established early in Abram's life, we see it repeated again and again. The patriarch Isaac is never recorded as going down to Egypt, but at the time of another famine God clearly instructed him, "Do not go down to Egypt" (Gen 26:2).

This movement is immediately established in the Joseph narratives when the older brothers of Joseph looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites going down to Egypt. The result was Joseph's descent into the land of Egypt.<sup>5</sup> This language is used repeatedly because of the three trips of Joseph's brothers from Canaan to Egypt. Also, in God's only speaking role in these narratives, he reiterated this theme. When Jacob stopped at Beersheba on his way to be reunited with Joseph, God spoke to him in a vision saying, "I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will bring you up again, and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes" (Gen 46:3-4). Thus, when Jacob died in Egypt with Joseph by his side, Joseph carried out the promise to bury Jacob in Canaan. The language is repetitive in the extreme as Joseph approached Pharaoh, "'Now therefore, let me please go up and bury my father. Then I will return.' And Pharaoh answered, 'Go up, and bury your father, as he made you swear.' So Joseph went up to bury his father. With him went up all the servants of Pharaoh . . . and there went up with him both chariots and horsemen" (Gen 50:5-9). Finally, Joseph gathered his brothers as he was about to die and told them, "I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.' Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, 'God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here'" (50:24-25).

Later, when the Lord called Moses and tasked him with leading his people out of Egypt, he told Moses, "I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exod 3:8). What is it, then, that distinguishes Egypt as a place to which one goes down? Throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, Egypt is referred to in a

---

<sup>5</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 4; George W. Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt* (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1976), 92.

negative way. King after king was warned not to turn to Egypt for help against other nations (Isa 19; 20:2–6; Jer 2; 43–44; Hos 7:11; 12:2; Ezek 29–32). The prophet Ezekiel called Egypt a broken reed of a staff that pierces the hand (Ezek 29:6–8). Egypt was spoken of as the worst of the foreign nations, the most evil until the time it was replaced by the whore of Babylon (Revelation 17–18). Perhaps this is due to the multiplicity of gods worshiped or the highly developed cult of the dead; whatever the reason, nothing good could come from making an alliance with this nation, and a journey there was a trip down into the depths of the pit.

Canaan, on the other hand, was the Promised Land spoken of in the Abrahamic covenant. This Promised Land also became a euphemism for the courts of heaven, so it makes perfect sense in light of Hebrew cosmology that one should go up to the Promised Land. In many ways, going up to the Promised Land of Canaan was only the first step of this upward movement. One also went up to Jerusalem and then up to the temple, and finally, up to heaven itself—the ultimate Promised Land. The idea was a step-by-step ascension to the dwelling place and presence of God.

It is important to note briefly at this point the presence of God. In order for God to be present with man, in order for him to walk with man, in order for him to dwell with, commune with, and be in relationship with man, God must come down. God must descend from heaven to walk in the Garden of Eden. He came down to look at the Tower of Babel. He descended in cloud and fire to take up residence in the tabernacle and temple, which became the dwelling place of God on earth.

From the perspective of the New Testament and the Christian church, we see this movement best explained by the creed as it shows the path of Christ. As Arthur Just writes:

This movement from heaven to earth to heaven is described in the transfiguration as Jesus' "exodus" He is about to fulfill in Jerusalem (Luke 9:31) as He dies on the cross, descends into the earth in the tomb, rises out of the earth and ascends back to heaven. This is the new exodus, where Jesus does what Israel did not and could not do throughout the Old Testament. Jesus' journey from heaven to earth to heaven may be pictured as a divine invasion from one world into another world that knew Him not and then back to the world from which He came.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Arthur A. Just Jr., *Heaven on Earth* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2008), 151.

Christ's incarnation was God descending to be with his people on this earth, his death was a descent into the grave. His descent continued into hell. His resurrection was a return to the earth. His journey was completed with his ascension back to heaven. From heaven to earth to hell to earth to heaven—Christ's journey demonstrates further with language and movement the Old Testament cosmology and the location of God and the evil one.

Before Christ's incarnation, this threefold, three-stage movement acted itself out in various ways that are no less meaningful for instilling knowledge and understanding of God's relationship with his chosen people, how God comes to man, and how one approaches God in worship. For instance, the use of three days as a time period of separation culminating in a restoration has early beginnings in the Scriptures. In the account of Abraham's call to offer up his son Isaac (the Akedah), the journey from their home to the place of sacrifice was a three-day journey, and Abraham had faith that the Lord would provide and restore his son to him (Heb 11:17-19). And so it happened as God stayed Abraham's hand and provided a ram for the sacrifice (Genesis 22). Joshua, as he prepared to lead the people into the Promised Land of Canaan, waited three days before the priests were commanded to carry the Ark of the Covenant into the Jordan. The waters heaped up (Josh 3:13), and at the end of three days the people were standing in the Promised Land, restored to their covenantal heritage. The prophet Jonah, in an attempt to flee his God-given task, ended up in the belly of a great fish for three days and three nights before he was restored to dry ground as the fish regurgitated him upon the shore (Jonah 1:17).

All of these three-day separation and restoration texts intersected in the life of Christ as he was laid in the tomb for three days before rising from the dead, restored to life. Christ himself made reference to these intersections when he told the people, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19), and when asked for a sign he declared that the only sign they would receive was the "sign of Jonah" (Matt 12:38-40).

Perhaps even more important for the life of the Old Testament people, certainly more important for their worship life, were the three stages of separation. The first important occurrence of this is found in Genesis 12, where Abram is called by God. The text clearly speaks of a threefold separation: "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land I will show you'" (Gen 12:1). These three degrees or stages of separation were later mirrored in the life of Joseph as he was taken from his country, his kindred, and his father's

house to the land of Egypt. Another significant example of the three stages of separation (as well as the “ascending to God” movement) is in the Mount Sinai account of Exodus 24. The people of Israel were instructed to remain at the foot of the mountain while Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders went to banquet with God. In Exodus 24:12, however, God instructed Moses to come up further, for, as we read in Exodus 24:2, “Moses alone shall come near to the Lord, but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him.”

What purpose do these three stages of separation serve and where does one find the restoration? The answer lies in the priesthood and the structure of the tabernacle and temple. When God established the priesthood from the tribe of Levi, there was a clear distinction between the priests and the rest of the Israelites. The priests were set apart/separated in order to accomplish the tasks that lead to reunion and restoration.<sup>7</sup> Note, however, the three degrees or stages: not only concerning the people—Israel, the priests, and the high priest—but even the floor plan of the tabernacle and temple with the court, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. Each stage brought one closer to the presence of the Holy One and required greater degrees of purification and atonement. John Kleinig uses the language of holiness, explaining that the unholy cannot come into the presence of God who is holy.<sup>8</sup> So, the separation was a result of being profane, or unholy. The various rituals associated with Old Testament worship centered around the restoration of the unholy with the Holy. Michael Morales, in regard to the tabernacle, notes that “[i]ts three zones of intensifying holiness (outer courtyard, holy Place, holy of holies) corresponded respectively to the mountain of God’s base, midsection, and peak, a symbolism naturally generating the question of who may approach (ascend).”<sup>9</sup> Then, in regards to the priesthood, he writes:

[T]hat the priest is defined as one who stands before the divine Presence appears plausible. This is, of course, especially the case with the high priest whose “special status” emerges from the entire structure of the priestly cult according to which only the High Priest may minister inside the tent of meeting, before the ark, whereas ordinary priests may officiate only outside the tent, that is, his special status

---

<sup>7</sup> The entire sacrificial system was about reunion and restoration; this is seen most clearly in the institution of the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16.

<sup>8</sup> See John Kleinig, *The Glory and the Service* (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2004), 32–47.

<sup>9</sup> L. Michael Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-figured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus* (Leuven: Peters, 2012), 261–262.



emerges from his being the sole ascender to the (typological) mount's summit, the "who" in the question: "Who may ascend the mount of YHWH?"<sup>10</sup>

Even in the materials used to construct the tabernacle and the temple we witness three stages, each bringing one closer to God. Menahem Haran goes into great detail concerning grades of sanctity as one approaches the Holy One as well as the materials used to construct the tabernacle and temple. He even divides the prohibitions of this holy place into three; touch, sight, and approach.<sup>11</sup> We note briefly the metals of bronze, silver, and gold and the curtains dyed scarlet, purple, and blue and how they showed the stages of holiness by means of the costliness of the materials. The closer to the Holy One, the more expensive the materials used.

Later, when the people were established in the Promised Land and Solomon had completed construction of the temple, we see three stages represented by the land of Israel, Jerusalem, and the temple. The closer one came to the Holy City and the shining jewel of its temple, the closer one came to the Holy One of Israel. This progression continued as one entered the temple itself, where the Holy of Holies was off limits to everyone but the high priest and then only once a year on the Day of Atonement. It is important to remember that it was the rituals that took place in the temple, and especially those carried out behind the veil of the Holy of Holies, that served to restore the Israelites in the eyes of God. Every step of the journey to the Holy of Holies was an ascent; thus, the Israelites viewed the journey as ascending to the Holy One of Israel.

They went up to the Promised Land . . . and up to Jerusalem . . . and up to the temple. They ascended the steps to the court into the Holy Place and looked upon the Holy of Holies. In the relationship with the Holy One, there is almost always movement involved. Although God descended to dwell with His people, the people went up to worship God and be in his presence. Morales writes insightfully concerning this movement:

At the heart of the theology of the Bible is the kernel of its principle theme: dwelling in the divine Presence, a theme that sprouts up and branches out in various directions yet is never severed from its root. This theme is given historical movement and literary expression through a particular pattern of approaching God: through the

---

<sup>10</sup> Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-figured*, 262–263.

<sup>11</sup> Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into the Character of Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 149–174.

waters→to the mountain of God→for “worship”—that is, for the abundant life of the divine Presence.<sup>12</sup>

Reed Lessing notes that Sheol represents separation from Yahweh, a deplorable destiny, and that since the essence of life to an Israelite is the ability to worship Yahweh in his presence, one must ascend from the depths into the divine presence or be excluded from his blessings of grace and mercy.<sup>13</sup> How this ascension takes place is addressed by Morales. The journey he describes is definitely an upward movement, but what distinguishes his work is the identification of a pattern with water:

Throughout this work we will develop a particular pattern in the Hebrew Bible of going through the waters to the mountain of God for worship: the earth is delivered through the primal waters and Adam is brought to the Eden mount (Gen 1-3); Noah is delivered through the deluge waters and brought to the Ararat mount (Gen 6-9); Israel is delivered through the sea waters and brought to Sinai’s mount (Exod 14-24, etc.). This significant pattern may also be traced in Exodus 2-3, where Moses, foreshadowing the exodus of Israel, is delivered through the waters of the Nile and brought to Mount Horeb; in the cosmic journey portrayed in the Song of the Sea (Exod 15); and, more broadly, in the general ensuing history of Israel: brought through the waters of the Jordan River to Mount Zion/Jerusalem for worship (Solomon’s temple). Furthermore, the *todah* and lament psalms, often describing the individual’s deliverance via the archetypal geography of being rescued from the death of *Sheol* and brought to the heights of the divine Presence at the temple, may also be said to conform to this pattern.<sup>14</sup>

This extended quotation points to a strong pattern, not to mention vivid imagery, that is present in the pages of the Scriptures. We could add Elijah’s parting of the Jordan River to be taken up into the divine presence as well as Elisha returning through the waters back to the Promised Land, its Mount Zion, and God’s dwelling presence there.

This “cosmic mountain ideology” is important in both Old and New Testament Scriptures and has been examined by several scholars.<sup>15</sup> It is

---

<sup>12</sup> Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-figured*, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Lessing, *Jonah*, 251.

<sup>14</sup> Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-figured*, 4-5.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Gary A. Anderson, “The Cosmic Mountain: Eden and Its Early Interpreters in Syriac Christianity,” in *Genesis 1-3 in the History of Exegesis: Intrigue in the Garden*, ed. Gregory A. Robins (Lewton, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1988): 187-224.

usually viewed as a subset of the theology of the divine presence and as overlapping temple theology.<sup>16</sup> The cosmic mountain concept involves, broadly, the ideas that the mountain is sacred, the dwelling place of God, the intersection between heaven and earth, and the central and highest place of the world.<sup>17</sup>

This prompts questions. Who may ascend the mountain of God? Who is worthy? Who is holy enough to ascend? As David puts it, “Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully” (Ps 24:4). Again, Morales: “Given the assumed cosmic geography, surviving the ‘river ordeal . . . may perhaps be seen as a prerequisite for the ascent of worship—while the wicked are judged via the waters and consigned to *Sheol*, the righteous are brought safely through the waters to the mount of the divine Presence.”<sup>18</sup>

As John Walton points out, “[a] culture’s cosmic geography plays a significant role in shaping its worldview and offers explanations for the things we observe and experience.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, Israel’s cosmology should affect their worldview and, thereby, their worship. Because the Lord has provided this unique movement as the way in which his people may approach his presence, worship reflects this cosmology. This can be seen in God’s tabernacle instructions to Moses on Mount Sinai, and the temple and temple worship likewise reflect this. Even before Sinai there is evidence that the patriarchs and early Israelites carried out communication with God in a manner that reflects this cosmology.

Separation from God could have deadly consequences, and in the patriarchal narratives, this separation was intimately tied to the Promised Land. As W.D. Davies suggests, to be separated from the land was to be removed from the covenant, which could result in a removal from the presence of God. So, to go down to Egypt was to abandon the Promised Land. Thus, Jacob sought God’s assurance that the Lord goes with him, as did Jacob when he ran from Esau and journeyed to his Uncle Laban. He received God’s promise that the Lord would journey with him, that there would be no separation. Davies writes, “Of all the promises made to the patriarchs, it was that of The Land that was most prominent and decisive.

<sup>16</sup> Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-figured*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-figured*, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-figured*, 36.

<sup>19</sup> John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 166.

It is the linking together of the promise to the patriarchs *with* the fulfillment of its settlement that gives the Hexateuch its distinctive theological character."<sup>20</sup> In reality, this connection of the Promised Land with being in the presence of God never ends. Instead, it took on fuller dimension with the addition of the Holy City of Jerusalem and the temple therein. This was the struggle faced by the people when they were in exile. The apocalyptic prophecies of Ezekiel, for example, resulted from the visions God gave him of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple as he sat in exile in Babylon. Psalm 137, a lament of the Israelites in Babylonian exile, demonstrates the pain and confusion of the people. Where is the God of Israel? How can we sing his song in a foreign land? How long will we be separated from his presence? Indeed, these are painful questions.

The Scriptures are replete with passages concerning "high places" as places of worship. Long before Moses and Mount Sinai, the patriarchs sought visions, dreams, and revelation from God at holy high spots. Two that are most familiar are Bethel and Beersheba. These appear to be acceptable and encouraged places to seek the Lord, and the patriarchs do just that. Jacob went to a certain place—Luz/Bethel—to spend the night in hope that the Lord will visit him and there experienced his dream concerning the ladder. Later, when summoned to Egypt to be reunited with his son Joseph, he sought out Beersheba to receive the Lord's permission and promise.

There were, however, rules, laws, and mandates against other high places—mandates that were violated by the people on a regular basis. The Lord told Moses, "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you pass over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land before you and destroy all their figured stones and destroy all their metal images and demolish all their high places" (Num 33:51-52). Likewise, Moses addressed the people before they entered the Promised Land and told them, "You shall surely destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree" (Deut 12:2). Obviously, having these instructions did not guarantee that they would be followed. Even the great and wise King Solomon, early in his career, failed to avoid the high places:

The people were sacrificing at the high places, however, because no house had yet been built for the name of the Lord. Solomon loved the

---

<sup>20</sup> W.D. Davies, *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 13.

Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father, only he sacrificed and made offerings at the high places. And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place. (1 Kgs 3:2-3)

Israel was not the only nation to share the cosmology of God being “up,” but there is one interesting and very significant difference: the other nations had gods both up and down. The distinguishing feature for Israel is summed up in Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” One God, and he dwells on the heights! Therefore, psalms are sung as the Israelites process to the holy mountain. “I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth” (Ps 121:1-2). “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord!’ Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem! Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together, to which the tribes go up” (Ps 122:1-4). “To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!” (Ps 123:1). “Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord!” (Ps 130:1). “For the Lord has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his dwelling place” (Ps 132:13). “Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord! May the Lord bless you from Zion, he who made heaven and earth!” (Ps 134:2-3). All these quotations are from the Psalms of Ascent (120-134) and were the prescribed chants for ascending to the presence of God.

In worship, hands were lifted up to the Lord as the people sought his grace and mercy. Incense and sacrifices were burned, and the smoke and aroma carried up to the nostrils of God, as apparent in several texts. “Let my prayers be counted as incense before you and the lifting up my hands as the evening sacrifice” (Ps 141:2). “And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel” (Rev 8:4). “Answer me quickly, O Lord! My spirit fails! Hide not your face from me, lest I be like those who go down to the pit. Let me hear in the morning of your steadfast love, for in you I trust. Make me know the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul” (Ps 143:7-8).

And so it is to the heights that one ascended to seek the face of the Lord and dwell in the divine presence of the Most High God. “Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights! . . . Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his majesty is above earth and heaven” (Ps 148:1, 13). The movement was up to the Promised Land, up to the Holy City of Jerusalem, and up to the Temple Mount. Then the priests ascended to the sacrificial altar, and the people ascended to the courts of the temple proper. This upward movement focused their attention toward the Holy of Holies, where the Lord God had

descended to dwell with his people. The temple became that place suspended between heaven and earth, where man encountered the Divine and where the Holy One bestowed his gracious presence upon man. "O Lord, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells" (Ps 26:8).