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## Heroes in the Midst of Gods: A Narratological Study of Heroes and the Divine in Mesopotamian, Greco-Roman, and Abrahamic Otherworldly Journeys

Zachary James Dey

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HEROES IN THE MIDST OF GODS: A NARRATOLOGICAL STUDY OF HEROES  
AND THE DIVINE IN MESOPOTAMIAN, GRECO-ROMAN, AND ABRAHAMIC  
OTHERWORLDLY JOURNEYS

SUBMITTED TO:

DR. DONALD BERRY, DR. ROBERT CANOY, AND DR. GERALD KEOWN

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE COURSE

RELI 695: THESIS

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## Abstract

The project at hand uncovers two dominant morals of Western otherworldly journeys: herocentrism and theocentrism. The former moral stresses the heroism of the protagonist; the latter stresses God's presence and power in the universe. Although otherworldly journeys from various traditions present certain similarities, the underlying morals provide profound differences that warrant consideration. Joseph Campbell's "monomyth" and this thesis' proposed *Otherworldly Paradigm* bring to light these underlying morals. This thesis demonstrates that Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman otherworldly journeys present a hero-centered moral, as shown through the monomyth, and the Abrahamic traditions present a Divine-centered moral, as shown through the proposed storyline.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Cosmic Curiosity

The cosmic surroundings of the ancient audience elicited a great deal of confusion. As the primitive society gazed at the stars or the vastness of the seas, a series of questions arose concerning these natural phenomena—questions concerning the origin, design, and purpose of the universe. Religious scholars addressed these concerns through the formation of orthodoxical beliefs, beliefs that were later detailed and recorded in sacred literature. For instance, the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Bible*, and the *Qur'an* provide religiously-based explanations to a wide array of cosmological concerns.

Sacred literature expounds upon a variety of cosmological concerns, such as the creation of the universe. For example, the *Enuma Elish*, an ancient Mesopotamian myth, attributes the inauguration of the divine pantheon to Apsu and Tiamat, the primordial gods who “mixed their waters” to create new deities.<sup>1</sup> The *Book of Genesis* provides another interpretation of cosmic origins. In *Gen.* 1-2:4, YHWH formulates the universe in seven days and fashions humanity to bear a resemblance to the creator.<sup>2</sup> Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* presents a Greco-Roman attempt at resolving this conundrum.

Religious works also report on humanity’s purpose and placement in the universe. Mesopotamian myths consider human beings subservient to the gods.<sup>3</sup> In addition to

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<sup>1</sup> All of the references and/or quotations from Mesopotamian literature in this thesis came from the following sources: Dalley, Stephanie, ed., *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*. Oxford World’s Classics. Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 1989.

<sup>2</sup> All of the biblical references and/or quotations in this thesis came from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

<sup>3</sup> Vincent Hale, ed., *Mesopotamian Gods & Goddesses* (NY: Britannica Educational Publishing, 2014), 50.

service, the *Gospel of Matthew* commands humanity to produce “disciples” in the name of YHWH and the Messiah (28:19-20).

Furthermore, sacred stories address death. An anxiety about death resulted in the development of realms outside of death’s immediate reach. For example, the Greco-Roman traditions spoke of Mount Olympus, Elysium, Hades, and Tartarus. Additionally, many Eastern religions believe that samsara and reincarnation explain what follows death.

### Otherworldly Journeys

Similarly, otherworldly journeys pedagogically assisted the ancient audience by providing a glimpse into divine and immortal realms. This pedagogical function remains true for the contemporary audience. Christopher Rowland supports this conclusion, stating: “the journey to heaven offered an opportunity to learn some of the answers to some of the perplexing features of human life and history.”<sup>4</sup> Similar stories, including the *Descent of Inanna* and the Zoroastrian *Book of Arda Viraf*, surface in many of the world’s major religions.<sup>5</sup> Otherworldly stories share a wide array of characteristics, despite varying religio-cultural influences.<sup>6</sup> At face value, one might become overly fascinated with these similarities. However, such a limiting investigation holds minimal value.

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<sup>4</sup> Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982), 56.

<sup>5</sup> All references and quotations from the *Book of Arda Viraf* came from the following source: Kassock, Zeke J.V., Trans. *The Book of Arda Viraf: Literary Edition*. Kassock Bros. Publishing Company, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion on the similarities among otherworldly journey literature, see: David Leeming, “Heroic Monomyth,” in *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 1937), 180 and Alan F. Segal, *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religions* (NY: Doubleday, 1989), 195-196.

Noticeable differences warrant consideration. Stories are a composite of religious, cultural, and/or theological beliefs that formulate unique morals. This narratological exposition exposes the underlying beliefs that distinguish a story and/or tradition apart from the rest. Thus, a study limited to common characteristics neglects the consideration of valuable content.

For example, in some fashion, all otherworldly journeys depict the interactions between heroes and gods. The main title of this thesis, *Heroes in the Midst of Gods*, reflects the common usage of these characters. However, a character's function depends on embedded beliefs that vary from tradition-to-tradition. In agreement, David Leeming states: "Our heroes reflect our priorities."<sup>7</sup> Reoccurring plot-points also deserve attention. Religions of the world—both ancient and contemporary, Eastern and Western—have reused patterns throughout sacred literature. However, plots receive meaning from underlying morals. Morals drive stories; schema and characters function according to literary morals.

In this thesis, thirteen otherworldly journeys from the Mesopotamian, Greco-Roman, and Abrahamic traditions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) receive attention in pursuit for the moral of each story. Characters and plot-points receive their literary purpose from underlying morals. To state differently, a character's progression throughout a narrative framework depends on embedded beliefs. Therefore, otherworldly texts assist in human rationalization through the promotion of dominant morals.

The present thesis discusses two morals frequently located in otherworldly stories. On the one hand, Abrahamic otherworldly journeys stress a *theocentric moral*—a God-

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<sup>7</sup> David Leeming, "Heroes," in *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 1937), 179.

centered pedagogy that shapes a story. The God of Abraham represents the entity-of-concern; the hero further reinforces God's role in the story. As one will notice, God alone enables the hero's survival, not his/her heroism, and the revelatory materials center on divinely-related matters.<sup>8</sup> YHWH and Allah represent religio-cultural interpretations of the God of Abraham, the foundation for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In these traditions, the biblical and qur'anic texts are the primary sacred sources used for studying God. However, otherworldly journeys also provide divinely-centered pedagogical insights.

On the other hand, Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman otherworldly tales stress a *herocentric moral*—the main thrust of the story concerns the quest of the protagonist (the hero) and the outcome of the quest. In this case, revelatory materials disclose hero-centered matters.<sup>9</sup> Heroes symbolize a wide array of topics (a culture, religion, movement); yet, in the world of the story, the heroes receive primary narratological attention.<sup>10</sup> Although deities and cosmic forces certainly play a role in heroic literature, a concern for the hero dominates the myth. Heroicism favors the hero over god(s).

Amid familiar characters and plot-points, this thesis uses two lenses—Joseph Campbell's "monomyth" and the proposed otherworldly paradigm—to discover a story's

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<sup>8</sup> As confirmed in James D. Tabor, *Things Unutterable: Paul's Ascent to Paradise in its Greco-Roman, Judaic, and Early Christian Context* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), 87. Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 10.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Campbell, *Pathway to Bliss: Mythology and Personal Transformation* (CA: New World Library, 2004), Xvi.

<sup>10</sup> For scholarly opinions on the wide array of symbolic meaning behind various heroes, see: Joseph Campbell, *The Inner Reaches of Outer Space: Metaphor as Myth and Religion* (CA: New World Library, 1986), 5 and Louis Markos, *From Achilles to Christ: Why Christians Should Read the Pagan Classics* (Downers Grove, ILL: IVP Academics, 2007), 217.

underlying moral.<sup>11</sup> The former exposes herocentrism; the latter exposes theocentrism. Specific concerns shaped the above frameworks. Thus, using the monomyth to read Abrahamic otherworldly literature produces an inaccurate understanding of these stories. As demonstrated in the forthcoming chapters, some lenses are more suitable than others in the investigation of morals.

### Scholarship and Abrahamic Otherworldly Journeys

Scholarly opinions vary on the exact function and purpose of otherworldly journeys. While many scholars recognize the importance of God's role in the story, other phenomena often receive primary attention. The lack of theocentric discussion drives this thesis. Hence, a brief review of recent scholarly opinions is in order.

As stated above, Rowland believes that heavenly journeys hold a pedagogical function.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, God holds a prominent role in his assessment of otherworldly journeys and apocalyptic literature, both of which stress "divine secrets" and God's role in the universe.<sup>13</sup> Hence, Rowland correctly identifies the theocentrism of these stories without using such terminology.

Martha Himmelfarb also recognizes God's fundamental role in otherworldly journeys, placing particular emphasis on "the phenomena of nature as a source of

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<sup>11</sup> Tabor presents a similar paradigm of otherworldly journeys and uses the *Ascension and Martyrdom of Isaiah*, a text not considered for this study, to demonstrate his version of the template (Tabor, 87). Tabor's version comprises of ten plot-points (Tabor, 87). The similarities between Tabor's proposition and this thesis' proposed template are addressed in Chapter 2, in the form of footnotes, in the section "The Otherworldly Paradigm." Tabor provides no attempt at linking the paradigm to theocentrism.

<sup>12</sup> Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 56.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

knowledge of God.”<sup>14</sup> Himmelfarb’s main interest, however, is the idea that “the true temple [is] located in heaven”—according to ancient Judaism, the destruction of the earthly temples, God’s earthly dwelling place, and priestly malpractice provoked a conclusion that favored God’s heavenly placement.<sup>15</sup> Temple imagery underscores God’s holiness and supremacy.<sup>16</sup> Himmelfarb’s analysis, at times, prioritizes the heavenly realm over the Divine.

On a different note, John J. Collins refers to these tales as illustrations of “death-defying behavior.”<sup>17</sup> Additionally, he believes that hope-in-transformation represents a pivotal moment in otherworldly journeys, arguing that the motif of transformation expresses a desire to become a superior, cosmic figure in the afterlife.<sup>18</sup>

“Hellenistic piety,” according to James D. Tabor, serves as the driving force of otherworldly literature.<sup>19</sup> The ancient society once believed that the gods barred humankind from heaven; however, the adoption of a Greco-Roman geocentric worldview, which granted humanity an exemplary status, popularized these stories.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish & Christian Apocalypses* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 95.

<sup>15</sup> Himmelfarb, 12-13.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>17</sup> John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane, “Introduction,” in *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys*, ed. John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane (Albany, NY: University of New York Press, 1995), xxi.

<sup>18</sup> Collins and Fishbane, xxiii.

<sup>19</sup> Tabor, 58.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-63.

Therefore, Tabor promotes anthropocentrism; although God is not absent from his hypothesis, it certainly favors other phenomena over God.<sup>21</sup>

Regarding the *Mi'raj*, most of Islamic scholarship overlooks the theocentric moral in this myth. According to Brooke Olson Vuckovic, “the power of this story lies in its engagement with the cornerstones of faith: the nature of God, a religious community, and the afterlife.”<sup>22</sup> Although theocentrism arises in this perspective, it hardly represents the primary concern. Algis Uzdavinyas argues that Muhammad’s elevation and the supremacy of Islam serve as the driving forces of the *Mi'raj*.<sup>23</sup> Uzdavinyas also claims that the heavenly journey holds archetypal meaning—the journey reaches one’s “inner heart.”<sup>24</sup>

In conclusion, Campbell’s insights warrant consideration. In *The Inner Reaches of Outer Space*, Campbell offers a psychological spin to otherworldly stories:

...Jesus, Mary, Elijah are declared to have ascended physically. What is to be made today of such mythological (hence, metaphorical) folk ideas? Obviously, if anything of value is to be made of them at all (and I submit that the elementary original idea must have been something of this kind), *where those bodies went was not into outer space, but into inner space.*<sup>25</sup>

His psychologically-based view credits a myth’s meaning to “the collective unconscious” and equates a story’s hero and journey to, respectively, the reader and life experiences.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Tabor, 58.

<sup>22</sup> Brooke Olson Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys, Earthly Concerns: The Legacy of the Mi'raj in the Formation of Islam* (NY: Routledge, 2005), 1.

<sup>23</sup> Algis Uzdavinyas, *Ascent to Heaven in Islamic and Jewish Mysticism* (London: The Matheson Trust, 2011), 4. For a similar perspective, see: Segal, *Life After Death*, 656.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>25</sup> Campbell, *The Inner Reaches*, 5. Emphasis added.

<sup>26</sup> Campbell, *Pathway to Bliss*, 113. Moreover, Campbell was heavily influenced by Carl Jung’s psychological research; see: Christopher Vogler, *The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers* (Saline, MI: McNaughton & Gunn, Inc., 2007), 4.

As Campbell asserts in his book, *Pathway to Bliss*, the hero's acquisition of "bliss" serves as the end-goal of any journey.<sup>27</sup> Self-revelation on the hero's (or the reader's) part represents the focal point of any quest, as Kristen Møllegaard and Robin K. Belcher observe: "the journey according to Campbell functions narratively as the frame within which the hero achieves wisdom about himself and the world around him."<sup>28</sup> Therefore, otherworldly journeys hold internal and external meaning.<sup>29</sup> Campbell reiterates this internal emphasis in a discussion on the *Divine Comedy*: "for although our voyage is to be outward, it is also to be inward, to the source of all great acts, which are not out there, but in here, in all of us..."<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, these opinions manifest in the monomyth—a reoccurring narrative that depicts a hero (the reader) and the journey he/she undergoes (life experiences).<sup>31</sup> Thus, Campbell's comprehension of otherworldly literature results in herocentrism. As one will notice in the proceeding chapters, Campbell's literary insights do not adequately describe the moral of Abrahamic otherworldly journeys.

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<sup>27</sup> Campbell, *Pathway to Bliss*, xvi, xxiii.

<sup>28</sup> Kirsten Møllegaard and Robin K. Belcher, "Death, Madness, and the Hero's Journey: Edgar Allan Poe's Antarctic Adventures," *International Journal of Arts & Sciences* 6, no. 1 (2013): 422.

<sup>29</sup> Campbell, *Inner Reaches*, 5. For a similar perspective, see: David Leeming, "Descent to the Underworld," in *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 1937), 98.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Campbell, *Myths to Live By* (NY: The Viking Press, 1972), 233.

<sup>31</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (CA: New World Library, 2008), 1. For a similar perspective, see: David Adams Leeming, *Mythology: The Voyage of the Hero* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 6. In this book, Leeming states: "the monomyth itself is an expression of the journey of the hero figure, of our own journey through physical and psychic life" (Leeming, *Mythology*, 6).

## The Purpose of this Thesis

As seen above, theocentrism remains fairly absent from scholarship. Humanistic interests and/or other phenomena often receive primary attention. Thus, scholarship devalues God's role in otherworldly tales. Furthermore, Campbell's interpretation of metaphysical literature proscribes theocentrism. The project at hand provides in-depth reviews of Abrahamic otherworldly literature to expose the theocentric emphasis.

Similarly, in *The Quran: Epic and Apocalypse*, Todd Lawson says the Qur'an contains two dominant literary genres: "epic" and "apocalypse."<sup>32</sup> Concerning the former, Lawson describes the qur'anic text

as a harbinger of a specific modernity in its reworking and critique of epic as it had been transmitted to an audience of the Nile to Oxus region since pre-antiquity through the poems of Homer, Gilgamesh, or Alexandrian Romance, among others. The Quran tacitly critiques such epics because they are, in the first place, not centered on the oneness of God, and God's plan for humanity. Earlier epics are, by comparison, ethnocentric, limited in vision.<sup>33</sup>

Here, Lawson reaches a similar conclusion. The Qur'an transforms traditional epic literature into a "monotheistic and God-centered" epic, in which both Allah and Muhammad serve as the dominant heroes.<sup>34</sup> This thesis applies Lawson's understanding of literary morphology to otherworldly literature. Abrahamic otherworldly stories hold a theocentric concern. Muhammad's *Mi'raj* serves as an exception to this rule; yet, Allah remains the myth's primary concern.

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<sup>32</sup> Todd Lawson, *The Quran: Epic and Apocalypse* (London, England: Oneworld Academic, 2017), xiii.

<sup>33</sup> Lawson, xv.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

## Methodology

### **The Rationale for Chosen Religions**

Most of the world's major religions, both Eastern and Western, have otherworldly journeys. However, this thesis holds a Western focus, paying close attention to the Mesopotamian, Greco-Roman, and Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions. Although Eastern traditions wrote similar stories, Western traditions produced a more extensive collection of otherworldly literature.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, the larger sample size results in a Western focus. Additionally, Zoroastrianism receives minimal attention due to a limited sample size of otherworldly texts. The *Book of Arda Viraf*, a Zoroastrian ascension myth, receives some attention for educational and comparative purposes.

### **The Rationale for Chosen Sacred Stories**

All of the thirteen stories under consideration depict an otherworldly journey. The project at hand underscores theocentrism and how the Abrahamic myths describe the God of Abraham. Hence, in Chapters 4 and 5, this thesis reviews three texts per Abrahamic religion, while in Chapter 3, two Mesopotamian and two Greco-Roman stories receive attention. The larger sample size of the former enables a more elaborative discussion on theocentrism.

The diverse beliefs of the Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman traditions require a brief note. Abrahamic otherworldly tales reflect monotheism, while the Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman tales reflect polytheism. These beliefs manifest in a variety of ways, such as the status of the hero. On the one hand, Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman texts

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<sup>35</sup> Also confirmed in David Leeming, "Descent to the Underworld," in *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 1937), 98.

portray the heroes as mortals, demigods, or deities. In the ascent narrative of *Adapa*, the hero is a human named Adapa; in the *Descent of Inanna*, a goddess by the name of Inanna holds the heroic role.

On the other hand, Abrahamic stories rely on divine-human interplay. The Judeo-Christian-Islamic stories promote monotheism by limiting the hero's status to a member of the human race. It becomes difficult to distinguish herocentrism from theocentrism when the protagonist holds complete divinity.

Therefore, to make a clean comparison, divine-human interplay serves as foundational criteria. A human being, in other words, serves as the hero in all of the considered texts. Human heroes may hold a degree of divinity; yet, these heroes remain mortal beings. Thus, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and *Etana* receive consideration over the *Descent of Inanna* and the *Descent of Ishtar*.

Some otherworldly texts do not receive attention due to a lack of detail and/or completeness. Therefore, the Mesopotamian ascent of *Etana* receives consideration over the ascent of *Adapa*. The incomplete nature of the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* and *Bakri's "Total and Complete" Ascension* eliminates these texts from consideration, in favor of the *Greek Apocalypse of Ezra* and *Ibn 'Abbas Ascension Narrative*.

Regarding the otherworldly journeys a part of the Abrahamic traditions, the present thesis only reviews stories from noncanonical literary corpora, resulting in the elimination of Elijah's ascension in *2 Kings* and John of Patmos' ascension in the *Book of Revelation*. Furthermore, Judeo-Christian otherworldly journeys from the Pseudepigrapha receive attention over other noncanonical collections for the sake of

consistency. References to canonical scripture occur sparingly, only for educational and comparative purposes.

### **The Narratological Focus**

Narratology inspects and interprets a wide array of literary characteristics. Studying the use of characters, plot-structures, and underlying morals are imperative for literary comprehension. The original author chose literary features that best fit his/her argument; therefore, an evaluation of these features necessitates a narratological analysis. The present project reviews how characters, plot-points, and morals exist in a narrative. In other words, the world of the story—or the world as described in the narrative—receives primary consideration.

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell contends that his rendition of the monomyth, which pays particular attention to the hero, represents a universal myth.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, he believes that a shared meaning stems from the wide array of literary commonalities.<sup>37</sup> According to Marc Ladewig: “Joseph Campbell was an electric comparativist and popularizer who believed that the similarities between myths far outweighed their differences.”<sup>38</sup> Campbell’s view devalues the art of story. Calling attention to the multiplicity of otherworldly literature represents a dominant concern of this thesis. The proceeding chapters assert that a single story does not capture all

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<sup>36</sup> Campbell, *The Hero*, 1. For other interpretations of the monomyth, see: Rank, Otto. *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero and Other Writings*. NY: Vintage Books, 1959, Vogler, Christopher. *The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*. Saline, MI: McNaughton & Gunn, Inc., 2007, and Leeming, David Adams. *Mythology: The Voyage of the Hero* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>37</sup> Marc Ladewig, *Orion’s Guiding Stars: The Myth of the Hero and the Human Instinct of Story* (NY: Algora Publishing, 2017), 168.

<sup>38</sup> Ladewig, 67.

accounts, despite similar characteristics.<sup>39</sup> As previously stated, a moral provides a story with meaning and purpose. Hence, a single narrative cannot exist due to the existence of several morals. The distinctive characteristics of a story merit reflection.

Otherworldly myths evince this point, for these stories change from tradition-to-tradition. Campbell's monomythic opinions accurately capture some otherworldly stories, but not all. The monomyth uncovers the heroic interests of Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman storytellers. Abrahamic storytellers, however, used similar features to promote theocentric values. Despite similar characteristics, otherworldly stories do not voice the same concern.

### Chapter Outline and Thesis

The forthcoming chapters expose the herocentric and theocentric morals of otherworldly journeys. In Chapter 2, the genres of Abrahamic otherworldly literature—"myth" and "apocalyptic literature"—receive attention to highlight how these genres shape and purpose the considered stories. Additionally, Chapter 2 defines Campbell's monomythic pattern and the otherworldly paradigm, the lenses that expose, respectively, the herocentric and theocentric morals. Chapter 3 offers a review of Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman otherworldly journeys. This chapter calls attention to herocentrism and the accuracy of Campbell's monomyth in detecting this moral. Chapters 4 and 5, respectively, address the Judeo-Christian and the Islamic otherworldly stories. These chapters expose the heroes' secondary role and the underlying theocentric pedagogy

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<sup>39</sup> For a similar perspective, see: Robert Alan Segal, *Myth: A Very Short Introduction* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 85. In this book, the author provides the following conclusion: "Myths collectively are too varied to share a plot, but common plots have been proposed for specific kinds of myths, most often for hero myths. Other categories of myths, such as creation myths, flood myths, myths of paradise, and myths of the future, have proved too disparate for all but the broadest commonalities" (Segal, *Myth*, 85).

through the otherworldly paradigm. Chapter 6 concludes this thesis with a discussion on the pedagogical function of theocentrism. Furthermore, Chapter 6 expounds upon the four prominent otherworldly portrayals of the Abrahamic God: God as relational, God as creator, God as judge, and God as fate.

The present thesis analyzes the underlying morals found in otherworldly journeys from the Mesopotamian, Greco-Roman, and Abrahamic traditions, and argues that the former two traditions promote herocentrism, while the latter traditions promote theocentrism. This task was accomplished by reading the Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman myths through the lens of the monomyth and by reading the Abrahamic myths through the lens of the otherworldly paradigm.

## Chapter 2: Heroicism vs. Theocentrism

### The Genres of Abrahamic Otherworldly Journeys

A narratological analysis necessitates a thorough engagement of the literary genres of which a story aligns. Genres offer clarity in assessing and understanding literature.

Therefore, otherworldly journeys demand a thorough assessment and comprehension of *myth* and *apocalyptic literature*.

Contrary to popular belief, all of the Abrahamic otherworldly journeys considered for this study are examples of myth. Campbell and Vuckovic support this hypothesis: the former classifies the heavenly ascensions of Jesus and Dante as mythical stories; the latter proposes a similar opinion regarding Muhammad's *Mi'raj*.<sup>40</sup> Collins shows a degree of hesitation in classifying apocalyptic literature as myth:

A case can be made, I believe, for using “myth” as a genre label (on a broader level than apocalypse) in any of the number of senses—for example, as a paradigmatic narrative (à la M. Eliade) or as a story that obscures or mediates the contradictions of experience (à la Lévi-Strauss). In view of the ambiguity of the word, however, such a generic use of “myth” is scarcely helpful. The word is used in biblical studies primarily to refer to the religious stories of the ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman world.<sup>41</sup>

However, Collins shows no hesitation in calling attention to the “mythological allusions” of apocalyptic literature.<sup>42</sup> A discussion on the nature of mythology could ease this tension.

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<sup>40</sup> Campbell, *The Inner Reaches*, xxiv and Vuckovic, 41.

<sup>41</sup> John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), n.p.

<sup>42</sup> Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, n.p.

The second genre of consideration, apocalyptic literature, captures the Greco-Roman and Abrahamic otherworldly journeys considered for this study.<sup>43</sup> An affinity exists between mythology and apocalyptic literature. R.S. Russell confirms the union between myth and apocalyptic literature:

To demythologize is difficult at the best of times. To do so with apocalyptic is to attempt the impossible. Content and form belong together; message and myth are of the same stuff. To separate them is to bid farewell to a dream; and apocalyptic is made up of dreams.<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, to reinforce this conclusion, apocalyptic literature's derivation from mythology merits consideration.<sup>45</sup> Apocalyptic thought evolved from a wide array of Mesopotamian myths, such as prophetic myths and "combat myths"—the former myth stresses "*ex eventu*" prophecy, while the latter stresses cosmic chaos and the gods' ability to reestablish order.<sup>46</sup> The section below provides a brief review of mythology and apocalyptic literature in order to arrive at a revised understanding of these genres.

## Mythology

Misconceptions have caused much of the disdain towards myth. Mythology's content often receives a pseudo-label—untrue and fallacious.<sup>47</sup> However, the ancient Greek term *μῦθος*, or "myth," translates to "word, speech" or "tale, story, narrative."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> John J. Collins, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre," in *The Morphology of a Genre*, Semeia, vol. 14, ed. John J. Collins (United States: The Society of Biblical Literature, 1979), 18.

<sup>44</sup> R.S. Russell, *Apocalyptic: Ancient and Modern* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1978), 1-2.

<sup>45</sup> Richard J. Clifford, "The Roots of Apocalypticism in Near Eastern Myth," in *The Origin of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity*, The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism, vol. 1, ed. John Collins (NY: The Continuum International Publishing, Inc., 2006), 3.

<sup>46</sup> Clifford, 7-12.

<sup>47</sup> See Schwartz, xlv and Campbell, *The Inner Reaches*, 28 for an elaborative discussion on myth's pseudo-accusations.

<sup>48</sup> H.G. Liddell et al., "*μῦθος*" in *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1151.

For Robert Alan Segal, mythology’s enigmatic nature necessitates a broad definition: “I propose defining myth as a story.”<sup>49</sup> More often than not, mythological stories address deities and heroes, each of which hold a prominent and extraordinary status.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, for the primitive audience, mythology held an explanatory purpose—it provided educational accounts on the cosmos, culture, health, etc.<sup>51</sup> In other words, mythological literature signifies a form of “primitive science.”<sup>52</sup>

A “divine charter,” according to Howard Schwartz, appropriately describes a mythological narrative on account of the religious value it holds.<sup>53</sup> Myths provide spiritual, authoritative, and cosmological messages to a wide array of religious systems, including the Abrahamic traditions.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, Schwartz augments that Judaic myths expound upon “a powerful impulse in Judaism to better understand the nature of God.”<sup>55</sup> Abrahamic myths emit sacredness and provide authoritative perspectives on God.<sup>56</sup>

Rudolf Bultmann also merits evaluation. In *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, he explores Christian mythology; however, his emphasis on a myth’s educational function holds pertinent value—a myth helps describe the mysteries of the universe.<sup>57</sup> Mythology

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<sup>49</sup> Robert Alan Segal, *Theorizing About Myth* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 2 and Segal, *Myth*, 4.

<sup>50</sup> Segal, *Myth*, 4-5.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>53</sup> Schwartz, xliv.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, xliv, lxvii.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, xlvi.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>57</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958), 19.

provided a pre-scientific contemplative lens, a “mythical world picture,” that favored cosmic explanations.<sup>58</sup> For instance, the biblical authors used Christ to convey mythological and eschatological messages.<sup>59</sup>

H.J. Rose’s insights also warrant attention when determining the nature and function of mythology:

A myth is the result of imaginative reflection, the precursor we may say of scientific curiosity and hypothesis, on striking natural phenomena and still more on the religious beliefs and practices of the people.<sup>60</sup>

Once again, an association between myth and pre-science is evident; however, Rose’s contribution of “imaginative reflection” provides additional insight into the purpose of mythology.<sup>61</sup> Imagination provided the primitive audience with an outlet to express and rationalize the conundrums of the universe.<sup>62</sup> Social norms and religious practices also originated from primitive imagination.<sup>63</sup>

A discussion on mythology cannot exclude Campbell’s revolutionary insights. According to Campbell, mythology holds a fourfold purpose: (1) to rationalize “existence;” (2) to rationalize the “cosmos;” (3) to rationalize cultural values; and (4) to rationalize the inner psyche.<sup>64</sup> Campbell overly stresses the fourth mythological purpose,

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<sup>58</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament & Mythology and Other Basic Writings* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984), 3.

<sup>59</sup> Bultmann, *Christ and Mythology*, 16.

<sup>60</sup> H.J. Rose, *Gods & Heroes: An Introduction to Greek Mythology* (NY: The World Publishing Company, 1958), 4.

<sup>61</sup> Rose, 4.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>64</sup> Campbell, *Pathway to Bliss*, 4-9.

which results in the following conclusion: mythology represents “imagery of a dream.”<sup>65</sup> Hence, throughout his works, he stresses a psychological and metaphorical interpretation of mythology.<sup>66</sup>

In *Thou Art That*, Campbell accuses Western religions of instigating violence and hyper-literalism due to their inability to follow this interpretive mandate.<sup>67</sup> For example, Campbell observes: “God is a metaphor, as he also is a metaphor for that which we all are.”<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, the mythologist diminishes the religious value of “[bringing] about a relationship between human beings and God.”<sup>69</sup> According to Campbell, a metaphorical divine-human relationship enhances intrinsic awareness, not religious or theological awareness.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, this relationship occasions personal satisfaction in life.<sup>71</sup>

Segal, however, acknowledges the religious appreciation for divine-human relationships and argues that mythologists should not lose sight of this religious tenet.<sup>72</sup> Divine-human relationships demand attention on account of their overall significance to

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<sup>65</sup> Campbell, *The Inner Reaches*, xlv.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiv.

<sup>67</sup> Joseph Campbell, *Thou Art That: Transforming Religious Metaphor* (CA: New World Library, 2001), 11-12.

<sup>68</sup> Campbell, *Thou Art That*, 19.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Campbell, *The Inner Reaches*, xx-xxi.

<sup>72</sup> Segal, *Theorizing*, 139.

religious audiences—both ancient and contemporary audiences.<sup>73</sup> Campbell overlooks the audience’s fundamental beliefs in favor of his intrinsic, humanistic values.<sup>74</sup>

### **Apocalyptic Literature**

The Greek term ἀποκάλυψις translates to “uncovering” or “revelation.”<sup>75</sup> Collins’ standardized definition of apocalyptic literature holds value:

“Apocalypse” is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.<sup>76</sup>

Furthermore, literary motifs reappear throughout apocalyptic literature, such as: (1) a divine revelation; (2) “an otherworldly mediator;” (3) a “human recipient;” (4) and “otherworldly content.”<sup>77</sup> Collins also believes that apocalyptic literature holds imaginative qualities.<sup>78</sup>

Greg Carey also stresses the imaginative qualities of apocalyptic literature.<sup>79</sup> As seen above, imaginative contemplation dominated the ancient audience’s worldview.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Segal, *Theorizing*, 139.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>75</sup> H.G. Liddell et al., “ἀποκάλυψις” in *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 201.

<sup>76</sup> Collins, “Morphology,” 9.

<sup>77</sup> These features were selected and revised from Joseph J. Collin’s “master paradigm,” which consists of over thirty apocalyptic features (See *Semeia* 14, pp. 5-8, 13).

<sup>78</sup> Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, n.p.

<sup>79</sup> Greg Carey, *Ultimate Things: An Introduction to Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic Literature* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005), 1.

<sup>80</sup> Carey, 2.

Additionally, Carey provides eleven common apocalyptic “*topoi*,” such as “alternative worlds.”<sup>81</sup> A characteristic of special interest for this study is “determinism”—throughout apocalyptic literature, God presides over creation and historical events.<sup>82</sup>

As the scholars above, Russell classifies apocalyptic literature as a “distinct literary corpus” on account of four common features: (1) an emphasis on “divine secrets;” (2) a narrative basis; (3) an imaginative worldview; and (4) a “pseudonymous”-authoritative nature.<sup>83</sup> He also emphasizes the *Sitz-im-Leben* of apocalyptic literature—the exilic and Hellenistic contexts.<sup>84</sup> Amid such circumstances, apocalyptic texts provide a hopeful reminder of God’s supremacy and God’s ability to mend the wrongs of creation.<sup>85</sup>

Rowland’s perspective, which resembles theocentrism, also necessitates consideration. Rowland does not limit apocalyptic literature to a discussion on the eschaton, as many scholars tend to do.<sup>86</sup> The main thrust of his perspective hinges upon the “knowledge of God and secrets of the world above.”<sup>87</sup> In addition, apocalyptic

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<sup>81</sup> Carey, 6.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8, and also Richard A. Taylor, *Interpreting Apocalyptic Literature: An Exegesis Handbook*, Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2016), 77.

<sup>83</sup> R.S. Russell, *Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*. The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1964), 106-127.

<sup>84</sup> Russell, *Apocalyptic*, 3.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>86</sup> Christopher Rowland, “The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature,” *Journal of the Study of Judaism* 10, no. 2 (1979): 138.

<sup>87</sup> Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 9-10, 20.

literature underscores revelation and a divine-human relationship.<sup>88</sup> Also, according to Rowland, God, and only God, can grant access to heavenly truths.<sup>89</sup>

J. Christiaan Beker also merits a brief note. In *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought*, Beker discusses Paul's apocalyptic-message—a message founded upon God.<sup>90</sup> Paul entreats the Christian community to have “hope” in God, Christ, and the coming kingdom.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, apocalyptic hope and reassurance underscore God and Christ's deliverance of eschatological “glory.”<sup>92</sup> Pauline apocalyptic content prioritizes God, as observed in Beker's assessment of 1 Corinthians 15: “Although Christocentrism seems a true description of Paul's thought, it leads to distortion if we ignore Paul's theocentric-apocalyptic posture.”<sup>93</sup> Thus, one observes a similar approach.

## **Conclusion**

Scholarship's views on mythological and apocalyptic literature assist in exposing the theocentric thought of Abrahamic otherworldly journeys. The literary genres provide information regarding intention, the use of motifs, and a text's underlying meaning. Otherworldly journeys hold mythic and apocalyptic qualities that demand consideration.

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<sup>88</sup> Christopher Rowland, “Part One: Things into which Angels Long to Look: Approaching Mysticism from the Perspective of the New Testament and the Jewish Apocalypses,” in *The Mystery of God: Early Jewish Mysticism and the New Testament*, ed. Christopher Rowland and Christopher R.A. Morray-Jones (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 17-19.

<sup>89</sup> Rowland, *Mystery of God*, 17-18.

<sup>90</sup> J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1980), 142.

<sup>91</sup> Beker, 147.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

The literary label “myth” refers to imaginative story-telling that holds explanatory qualities. Mythology describes the surrounding universe. In agreement with Bultmann, the ancient authors relied upon mythical explanations to rationalize the universe. A myth presents pedagogical insights on the cosmos, god(s), and humankind. Moreover, mythology directs the reader’s attention to earthly and heavenly realities. Therefore, an Abrahamic otherworldly story is a myth on account of the inevitable divine-human and earthly-cosmic encounters.

The literary label “apocalyptic” holds reoccurring motifs and elements. Imaginative communication also dominates this genre. Apocalyptic literature entertains cosmic realities and attempts to expose these realms to humankind. Furthermore, God serves as the heart of the apocalyptic literature in the Abrahamic traditions. Chapters 4 and 5 elaborate further on this conclusion.

An affinity certainly exists between myth and apocalyptic literature. These genres hold several features in common. For instance, both myth and apocalyptic possess imaginative qualities that dramatically shape a story. Of significance, however, are the pedagogical nuances of these genres. Both myth and apocalyptic literature provide educational materials about the cosmos. Hence, the cosmic pedagogical function of Abrahamic otherworldly journeys stems from these genres.

In agreement with Segal, Campbell’s humanistic interpretations belittle orthodoxy. Campbell devalues the original author’s message, a moral that was shaped and purposed by a worldview, faith, and/or theology. Regardless of whom an author pledged his/her loyalty to, whether that be heroes or gods, the moral it produced warrants

considerable attention. Campbell's assertions, therefore, preclude theocentrism and devalue the moral of the story.

## The Monomyth

### Definition of the Monomyth

Campbell's monomyth accurately captures the Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman otherworldly stories considered for this study.<sup>94</sup> The "one story"—the literal rendering of the term "monomyth"—receives the following description in the opening lines of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*:

...it will always be the one, shape-shifting yet marvelously constant story that we find, together with a challengingly persistent suggestion of more remaining to be experienced than will ever be known or told.<sup>95</sup>

Based on this perspective, "there are no new stories."<sup>96</sup> Campbell attributes reoccurring characteristics—plots, characters, journeys, motifs—to a universal mythological story.<sup>97</sup>

Robert J. Begiebing locates this pattern in *The Time Machine*, H.G. Wells' literary masterpiece which illustrates the hero's journey through time and space.<sup>98</sup> According to Jos A. Johnson Jr., the monomyth does not hold a solidified sequence of events; although

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<sup>94</sup> For a similar perspective, see: Bernard Schweizer, "About this Volume," in *Critical Insights: Hero's Quest*, ed. Robert Alan Segal and Bernard Schweizer (MA: Salem Press, 2013), ix.

<sup>95</sup> Clint Randles, "'The Hero's Journey': A Way of Viewing Music Teacher Socialization," *Journal of Music Teacher Education* 22, no. 1 (2012): 11 and Campbell, *The Hero*, 1.

<sup>96</sup> Will Craig, *Living the Hero's Journey: Exploring Your Role in the Action-Adventure of a Lifetime* (Boulder, CO: Live and Learn Publishing, 2017), 24-25. Vogler provides a similar perspective: "[Campbell] exposed for the first time the pattern that lies behind every story ever told" (Vogler, 4).

<sup>97</sup> Campbell, *The Hero*, 1.

<sup>98</sup> Robert J. Begiebing, "The Mythic Hero in H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*," *Essays in Literature* 11, no. 2 (1984): 202. For similar views, see: Jos A. Johnson, Jr., "The Journey of the Red Cross Knight and the Myth of the Hero," *The South Central Bulletin* 33, no. 4 (1973): 203-206; Yvette K. Khoury, "'To be or not to be' in 'the Belly of the Whale': A Reading of Joseph Campbell's 'Modern Hero' Hypothesis in Hamlet on Film," *Literature-Film Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (2006): 120-129.

some sequences are more common than others, the monomyth adjusts to the needs of the author.<sup>99</sup> As briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, the monomyth—or otherwise identified as the “the hero’s journey”—prioritizes the achievements and/or failures of the hero.<sup>100</sup> As such, Møllegaard and Belcher observe: “the hero is a subject position.”<sup>101</sup>

Due to the hero’s internal archetypal representation, Campbell points to the hero’s overall importance to a story.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, as seen above, he asserts that divine-human encounters offer personal insights.<sup>103</sup> Thus, Campbell’s humanistic sentiments preclude theocentrism. Although Campbell’s psychological expositions receive minimal attention on account of a narratological emphasis, it is essential to understand this bias and the hero-centered agenda it produced.

### **The Plot-Structure**

“Departure, initiation, and return” represent, respectively, the beginning, middle, and end of the monomyth.<sup>104</sup> In the first act, a “call to adventure” occurs—the hero witnesses the conclusion of normalcy with the arrival of a crisis that necessitates resolution.<sup>105</sup> Depicting a sense of normalcy represents a pivotal aspect of this scene, for

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<sup>99</sup> Johnson, Jr., 203.

<sup>100</sup> Campbell, *Pathway to Bliss*, 113.

<sup>101</sup> Møllegaard and Belcher, 421.

<sup>102</sup> Campbell, *Pathway to Bliss*, 113.

<sup>103</sup> Campbell, *Thou Art that*, 19. See the following for an example of Campbell’s assertions: “Who and what is in Heaven? God is in Heaven. Where is God? Within you” (Campbell, *Thou Art that*, 20).

<sup>104</sup> Møllegaard and Belcher, 422. As discussed in Chapter 1, the Zoroastrian ascension myth, the *Book of Arda Viraf*, does not receive attention in Chapter 3. However, this myth holds the monomythic pattern and advocates for herocentrism—the prophet receives more attention than the high-god. Hence this myth receives attention in this section in order to highlight the monomythic pattern.

<sup>105</sup> Campbell, *The Hero*, 42.

it conveys “a vivid contrast with the strange new world [the hero] is about to enter.”<sup>106</sup> One possibility presents itself in Chapters 1-2 of the *Book of Arda Viraf*, a Zoroastrian ascension myth in which a priestly order sends Arda Viraf to heaven on account of the ongoing religious conflict in ancient Iran. Arda Viraf ascends to heaven in order to acquire proof of heaven and reestablish Zoroastrianism’s religious supremacy (1-2).

Critical to this study is the “refusal of the call,” a possibility which implies a degree of choice.<sup>107</sup> In this case, “fear” or irresponsibility distort the hero’s initial judgment and result in the hero declining the bestowed challenge.<sup>108</sup> The *Book of Arda Viraf* does not capture this point; however, in Chapter 2, Arda Viraf’s sisters advice against his ascension in dread their vulnerability (2: 1-6). Thereafter, the hero receives support through the arrival of “supernatural aid.”<sup>109</sup> As seen with Virgil in the *Divine Comedy*, this character assists the hero throughout the journey.<sup>110</sup> In Arda Viraf’s ascent, the priests initially satisfy this role (2-3). In addition, the angel Adur serves as the Zoroastrian prophet’s heavenly guide (4:1-2). In the final stages of this act, the hero travels to a strange and foreign realm, often through a “threshold.”<sup>111</sup> The “Chinvat Bridge,” a bridge that leads to the afterlife, denotes this locale in Arda Viraf’s ascent (4:4). “The Belly of the Whale” follows—the mysterious and transformative regions that

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<sup>106</sup> Vogler, 10.

<sup>107</sup> Campbell, *The Hero*, 49.

<sup>108</sup> Vogler, 11.

<sup>109</sup> Campbell, *The Hero*, 57.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

the hero must explore.<sup>112</sup> For Arda Viraf, this describes his entry into eternal realms. Christopher Vogler adds that the first segment of a myth highlights the hero's choice, and the rest of the myth depicts the consequences of the decision—whether good or bad.<sup>113</sup>

In the second act, “the Trials and Victories of Initiation,” the hero encounters foreign figures and obstacles that he/she must overcome.<sup>114</sup> At this stage in the journey, the hero engages characters that either provide further assistance or derail his/her efforts, such as a “temptress,” “goddess,” and/or “the father.”<sup>115</sup> In *Pathway to Bliss*, Campbell notes that it is common practice for Abrahamic prophets and/or heroes to encounter God, who represents the latter figure.<sup>116</sup> Arda Viraf's myth captures the prophet's encounter with a beautiful celestial woman who symbolizes “good actions” (4:11). Arda Viraf also encounters Ohrmazd, the high-god of Zoroastrianism (11:2). “Apotheosis,” or a sense of inner “realization” and fulfillment, often follows; acquiring “the Ultimate boon,” the sought-after item, represents another possible outcome.<sup>117</sup> Arda Viraf attains the revelatory materials necessary to revive the Zoroastrian religion (101ff).

In the final stage of the myth, “the Return and Reintegration with Society,” the hero returns to normalcy.<sup>118</sup> According to Campbell, the return serves individual and/or

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<sup>112</sup> Campbell, *The Hero*, 76. Moreover, he states: “The temple interior, the belly of the whale, and the heavenly land beyond, above, and below the confines of the world, are one and the same” (Campbell, *The Hero*, 77).

<sup>113</sup> Vogler, 13.

<sup>114</sup> Campbell, *The Hero*, 28-29, 81.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

<sup>116</sup> Campbell, *Pathway to Bliss*, 118.

<sup>117</sup> Campbell, *The Hero*, 127, 148.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

cultural ramifications—the hero’s acquired knowledge must further humanity.<sup>119</sup> The final act possesses a wide array of possibilities: the hero could require a “rescue from without” or be apprehensive about returning.<sup>120</sup> In Arda Viraf’s ascension myth, the former occurs—after the prophet’s revelatory experience, Ohrmazd sends him back to earth to report his findings (101:1-16). Regardless of the hero’s method of return, he/she becomes a “master of two worlds”—both the regular and the irregular, the external and the internal—and/or acquires the “freedom to live”—a newfound comprehension of self-awareness.<sup>121</sup>

### The Otherworldly Paradigm

The otherworldly paradigm represents a narratological framework that, at times, resembles the monomyth. It exposes how morals shape literary characteristics. The proposed framework depicts the sequence of events that commonly occur in Abrahamic otherworldly stories. These plot-points bring to light God’s role in the story. Heroes receive narratological attention; however, theocentrism shapes their function. The otherworldly paradigm demonstrates that, despite shared characteristics, multiple inspirational stories exist throughout the world.

Many of the monomythic qualities received an apocalyptic and otherworldly adaptation to highlight a specific moral. While Campbell’s monomyth captures a wide variety of myths, Abrahamic otherworldly journeys have theological nuances that his

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<sup>119</sup> Campbell, *The Hero*, 167.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 167-178.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 196, 209.

understanding of story does not consider. Otherworldly myths prove that all myths cannot be identical in meaning and purpose.

### **The Plot-Structure**

The opening scene illustrates “the calling.” Classifying the beginning in such a way underscores God, the enabler of a heavenly ascension. In agreement, Ioan Petru Culianu classifies similar myths as a “‘Call’-Apocalypse.”<sup>122</sup> Culianu considers the *Book Arda Viraf* a “‘Quest’-Apocalypse,” for the prophet’s ascension occurs due to an ancient ritual, not the Zoroastrian high-God.<sup>123</sup> Myths similar to the former classification emphasize nomination; myths similar to the latter classification emphasize “voluntary,” heroic heavenly journeys.<sup>124</sup>

At this stage in the journey, five possible plot-points surface throughout the considered texts. First, there is a depiction of an *earthly domain*. This point addresses apocalyptic literature’s dualistic concern.<sup>125</sup> Similarly, Robert W. Canoy states: “these texts acknowledge an interaction of two worlds—the heavenly and the earthly—the divine and the human.”<sup>126</sup> Through this comparison, the magnificence of heaven—the true home of the Divine—receives narratological attention.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Ioan Petru Culianu, *Psychanodia I: A Survey of the Evidence Concerning the Ascension of the Soul and Its Relevance* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1983), 6. All of the considered Abrahamic myths are classified as such (6-7). Similarly, Tabor stresses God’s necessary role in the hero’s ascension (Tabor, 87).

<sup>123</sup> Culianu, *Psychanodia*, 7.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>125</sup> Mitchel Reddish, *Apocalyptic Literature: A Reader* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 21.

<sup>126</sup> Robert W. Canoy, *Atonement in the Apocalypse: An Exposé of the Defeat of Evil* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2017), 3.

<sup>127</sup> Also see Tabor, 87, 98. The thematic emphasis of this plot-point compares nicely to the monomyth, which also portrays the tension between opposite realities (Vogler, 10-11).

The second sequence depicts the arrival of the *divine agent*. The divine agent—a force of nature or some variation of a cosmic figure—comes on God’s behalf. Carey identifies these characters as “heavenly intermediaries,” the figures that assist the heroes.<sup>128</sup> Metaphysical encounters often produce *emotional turmoil*, or cosmic shock that results in an existential crisis. Similarly, Klaus Kosh classifies this feature as “spiritual turmoils.”<sup>129</sup> In some cases, *acts of purifications* prepare the mortal for this heavenly invitation.<sup>130</sup> The final stage, *ascension* or *descension*, illustrates the hero’s transition from one realm to the next.<sup>131</sup>

The second act of an otherworldly journey, the “cosmic journey,” holds six possible plot-points that capture the hero’s heavenly journey. Trials are not necessarily the primary concern, as seen in traditional heroic literature; rather, the hero’s experiences serve divinely-focused “revelatory” purposes.<sup>132</sup> At this point, the hero learns more about God, heaven, and creation through *cosmic observations*, which can include: heavenly/infernal locale, methods of judgment, liturgical practices, the operations of the universe, and *interacting with cosmic beings*.<sup>133</sup> Thereafter, *meeting the High-God*

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<sup>128</sup> Carey, 7. Campbell’s “supernatural aid,” who holds a similar purpose, serves as the monomyth equivalent (Campbell, *The Hero*, 57).

<sup>129</sup> Klaus Kosh, *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic* (Great Britain: SCM Press, 1972), 25.

<sup>130</sup> Vuckovic, 17.

<sup>131</sup> Also see Tabor, 87. Campbell’s scene “the crossing the first threshold” provides a broader view of this plot-point (Campbell, *The Hero*, 64).

<sup>132</sup> Reddish, 20-21. Campbell’s equivalent, “the road of trials,” emphasized the hero’s ability to survive and triumphantly overcome in such unfamiliar territory and obstacles (Campbell, *The Hero*, 81).

<sup>133</sup> Carey, 7, 9 and Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 9-10. Also See Tabor, 87.

commences and serves as the pivotal moment of each myth.<sup>134</sup> In some occasions, the heroes undergo a *transformative act*, which extols the heroes and further prepares them to fulfill God's mission.<sup>135</sup> The *presentation of the moral* follows. In most cases, the heroes' revelatory insights address God through creational and/or eschatological measures.<sup>136</sup>

Act III of otherworldly journeys, the "Concluding Moral," continues the presented moral. Here, the divine-commandment comes to fruition. The third act inaugurates with a *new journey*, which captures a return to the earthly abode; however, the hero possesses a newfound purpose.<sup>137</sup> The manifestation of this purpose either entails a *message to creation* and/or *acts of admiration*.<sup>138</sup> Compared to Acts I and II, the final act often receives minimal detail. The focus is the fulfillment of God's commandments and the hero's obedience.

### Conclusion

As observed above, there are notable similarities between the monomyth and the otherworldly paradigm. Both frameworks utilize similar plot-points—such as a calling—and characters—such as heroes, mediators, and god(s). Indeed, an affinity exists between these frameworks. However, specific morals altered these literary devices. Losing sight of this fact in the pursuit of common characteristics devalues the overall art and power of story.

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<sup>134</sup> Also see Tabor, 87. Campbell's "atonement with the father" and Vogler's "the Ordeal" serve as the monomythic equivalents (Campbell, *The Hero*, 107-110; Vogler, 15-16).

<sup>135</sup> Also see Tabor, 87.

<sup>136</sup> Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 10. Campbell's "desired boon" serves as the monomythic equivalent (Campbell, *Pathway to Bliss*, 118). Also see Tabor, 87.

<sup>137</sup> Also see Tabor, 87.

<sup>138</sup> Also see Tabor, 87.

The revelatory materials expressed in these frameworks differ significantly. For example, the monomythic revelatory lessons serve internal and/or personal purposes. However, the otherworldly paradigm promotes theocentric revelations. Through a hero's revelation, a myth promotes herocentrism or theocentrism.

A hero's autonomy proves to be another notable difference. The monomyth captures the hero's ability to make decisions. For example, the monomythic scheme recognizes the possibility that a hero may reject the quest. Abrahamic otherworldly journeys prioritize God's supremacy and often provide minimal detail on the hero's autonomy—the hero's ability to reject God's call-to-heaven. The characters serve as vessels of God. Thus, the Abrahamic heroes possess limited heroic abilities, unlike the Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman heroes. The theological nuances shape the moral of the story.

### Chapter 3: Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman Otherworldly Journeys

#### Introduction

Herocentrism heightens the hero in the eyes of the reader, even in the presence of divinities. According to Segal, embarking on a journey represents the defining quality of a hero.<sup>139</sup> Heroism appears to be a dominant concern in ancient mythology, and Campbell's interpretation of the monomyth captures this interest.

The Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman otherworldly journeys detailed below align with herocentrism. Gilgamesh, Etana, Odysseus, and Aeneas receive primary narratological attention. These samples of heroic literature lack a substantial degree of religiosity, which enables a hero-based story.<sup>140</sup> The protagonist receives elucidation through morals, plot-points, supporting characters, and vivid imagery. These elements drive the story and amplify the hero, even in the presence of higher powers and cosmic realms. In the pages below, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the ascent of *Etana*, and the quests in the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* receive attention.<sup>141</sup> After these reviews, the accuracy of the monomyth will be demonstrated in the conclusion of this chapter.

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<sup>139</sup> Robert A. Segal, "On the Hero's Quest," in *Critical Insights: Hero's Quest*, ed. Robert Alan Segal and Bernard Schweizer (MA: Salem Press, 2013), 1.

<sup>140</sup> I.P. Culianu, *Out of this World: Otherworldly Journeys from Gilgamesh to Albert Einstein* (Boston: Shambhala, 1991), 52.

<sup>141</sup> All of the Greco-Roman literature referenced and/or quoted in this thesis came from the following sources: Homer. *The Iliad and the Odyssey*. Trans. By Samuel Butler. NY: Barnes & Noble, 2013 and Virgil. *The Aeneid*. Trans. By David West. London: Penguin Books, 2003.

## Mesopotamian Myths

### The Epic of Gilgamesh

The *Epic of Gilgamesh*, according to Campbell, is “the greatest tale of the elixir quest.”<sup>142</sup> Authored circa sixteenth century BC, this epic serves as one of the more primitive otherworldly journeys.<sup>143</sup> Gilgamesh was “a warrior lord of great stature” who “brought back a tale of times before the Flood” (Tablet I). According to this myth, “two-thirds of him was divine” (TB I). The *Epic of Gilgamesh* illustrates the hero’s search for eternal life in an attempt to remedy his fear of death.<sup>144</sup> As such, Alexander Heidel identifies this myth as “a meditation on death, in the form of a tragedy.”<sup>145</sup> Mesopotamian mythology encourages the “acceptance” of death, a lesson found in this text through Gilgamesh’s inability to acquire eternal life.<sup>146</sup> Additionally, this epic captures Gilgamesh’s salvific and ethical progression—the hero’s progression from unrighteousness to righteousness.<sup>147</sup> The personal basis of Gilgamesh’s quest provides a herocentric tone.

At the beginning of the myth, Gilgamesh participates in promiscuous behavior—he uses his power to abuse “the brides of young men” (TB I). Myths often portray

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<sup>142</sup> Campbell, *The Hero*, 158.

<sup>143</sup> Culianu, *Otherworldly Journeys*, 51.

<sup>144</sup> Van Nortwick, Thomas. *Somewhere I Have Never Travelled: The Hero’s Journey* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1996), 29. In regard to eternal life, Campbell asserts a psychological interpretation—he believes that it should be interpreted as a “present” phenomenon (Campbell, *The Hero*, 161).

<sup>145</sup> Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and the Old Testament Parallels: A Translation and Interpretation of the Gilgamesh Epic and Related Babylonian and Assyrian Documents* (CHI: The University of Chicago Press, 1949), 10.

<sup>146</sup> Segal, *Life After Death*, 83.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 84, 93.

superior mortals as aggressive and/or threatening, regardless of his/her inherent nature.<sup>148</sup> In response to Gilgamesh's actions, the gods create Enkidu in hopes of bringing an end to the hero's reign of terror.<sup>149</sup> In time, Enkidu becomes confident in his abilities and challenges Gilgamesh to a duel (TB I-II).

Gilgamesh prevails; yet, a deep friendship arose from this duel, which holds transitional significance in the story: the callous Gilgamesh develops a sense of compassion.<sup>150</sup> Gilgamesh and Enkidu engage in many adventures. For instance, *Gilgamesh VI* captures the heroic duo's battle against "the Bull of Heaven," a creature sent on behalf of the goddess Ishtar to punish Gilgamesh for rejecting her request for intimacy. Similar proposals surface in other Mesopotamian myths, in which the proposal averts the hero from the quest and results in his/her confinement to the underworld.<sup>151</sup> At this point in history, the underworld offered no blissful eternity; a hero only achieved a glorious afterlife through earthly remembrance and heroic achievements.<sup>152</sup> Hence, Gilgamesh avoids a distraction that would have derailed his search for eternal glory.<sup>153</sup>

The heroes defeat the bull, which prompts additional divine intervention—the gods agree to kill Enkidu as a result of the Bull's demise (TB VI). Upon Enkidu's death,

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<sup>148</sup> Van Nortwick, 12.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>150</sup> Jeremy M. Downes, "Romancing the Quest: Quest Narratives in Changing Context," in *Critical Insights: Hero's Quest*, ed. Robert Alan Segal and Bernard Schweizer (MA: Salem Press, 2013), 60.

<sup>151</sup> Segal, *Life After Death*, 85.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

Gilgamesh grieves “like a wailing woman” (TB VIII). Thereafter, Gilgamesh’s mourning transitions to fear:

Shall I die too? Am I not like Enkidu? Grief has entered my innermost being, I am afraid of Death, and so I roam the open country. I shall take the road and go quickly to see Ut-napishtim, son of Ubara-Tutu (TB IX).

Enkidu’s death reminds Gilgamesh of death’s inevitability and causes an internal crisis.<sup>154</sup> *Gilgamesh IX* features the hero praying to the god Sin, requesting for protection, and starting his journey.

In the first segment of Gilgamesh’s journey, he travels to Mount Mashu, a geographical landmark where the frightening “Scorpion-men” patrol the entrance to cosmic realms (TB IX). All of the supporting characters in this epic, including the guards, serve a twofold purpose: to “test [Gilgamesh’s] resolve and ultimately help him on his way.”<sup>155</sup> Gilgamesh requests to pass through the gates for the sake of acquiring eternal life (TB IX). The guards describe this mission as “impossible;” yet, they allow Gilgamesh to continue his search (TB IX). Thomas Van Nortwick contends that this scene captures the hero’s inability to submit to the inevitable—the reality of death.<sup>156</sup>

Thereafter, in *Gilgamesh IX*, Gilgamesh travels on a dark pathway until he enters a blissful and agriculturally appealing realm “in front of the sun,” which symbolizes the hero’s transition from his present state-of-being to his future state-of-being.<sup>157</sup> Some refer

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<sup>154</sup> Segal, *Life After Death*, 86.

<sup>155</sup> Van Nortwick, 28.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

to this place as “the garden of the gods,” the Mesopotamian equivalent to Paradise.<sup>158</sup>

*Gilgamesh X* captures Gilgamesh’s encounter with Siduri. Siduri informs the hero of the near-impossible oceanic journey ahead of him (TB X). However, Gilgamesh rejects Siduri’s advice and continues his journey, which provides yet another instance of Gilgamesh’s “denial” of the forthcoming truth.<sup>159</sup> Afterward, Gilgamesh travels to Ur-shanabi, the “boatman of Ut-napishtim,” to appeal for assistance in locating Ut-napishtim (TB X). At first sight of each other, Gilgamesh and Ur-shanabi engage in combat; after establishing peace, they travel over the “lethal waters” (TB X).

Ut-napishtim represents a non-traditional deity—J.F. Bierlein claims he “became a god by virtue of his goodness and obedience to the gods;” thus, Ut-napishtim received a divine transformation.<sup>160</sup> Also, the name Ut-napishtim alludes to the quest’s main purpose—the Akkadian word for “soul” (“Napishtu”), which denotes a life-force, is constructed into this character’s name.<sup>161</sup> After arriving at the deity’s place of residence, Gilgamesh demands for the secret to immortality, to which Ut-napishtim replies:

Why do you prolong grief, Gilgamesh? Since [the gods made you] from the flesh of gods and mankind, since [the gods] made you like your father and mother, [Death is inevitable] at some time, both for Gilgamesh and for a fool, but a throne is set down [for you] ... to a fool is given dregs instead of butter... (TB X).

As seen in the statement above, Ut-napishtim encourages him to be grateful for his placement in life and to accept the reality of death. Gilgamesh’s stubbornness continues; in response, Ut-napishtim informs Gilgamesh of the global deluge and his acquisition of

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<sup>158</sup> Rivkah Schärf Kluger, *The Archetypal Significance of Gilgamesh: A Modern Ancient Hero* (Switzerland: Daimon Verlag Am Klosterplatz, 1991), 171.

<sup>159</sup> Van Nortwick, 32.

<sup>160</sup> J.F. Bierlein, *Parallel Myths* (NY: Ballantine Books, 1994), 125.

<sup>161</sup> Kluger, 161.

eternal life (TB XI).<sup>162</sup> The divine pantheon inflicted a flood upon humanity; through “divine favor,” Ut-napishtim survived the flood and attained eternal life.<sup>163</sup> Thus, the deluge myth presumes that only the gods hold the rights to immortality.<sup>164</sup>

After this story, Ut-napishtim tests Gilgamesh by commanding him to “not sleep for six days and seven nights” (TB XI).<sup>165</sup> Gilgamesh inevitably fails this task; Ut-napishtim deems the hero unworthy of immortality.<sup>166</sup> However, Ut-napishtim directs Gilgamesh to another plant that holds the ability to extend life (TB XI).<sup>167</sup> Gilgamesh calls this “a plant to cure a crisis” (TB XI). Gilgamesh’s remarks prove to be fruitless enthusiasm—shortly after the hero obtains the plant, a serpent stole it from him (TB XI).

At the myth’s conclusion, Gilgamesh returns to his kingdom with newfound knowledge, which proves to be a more significant acquisition than eternal life.<sup>168</sup> Katherine C. King argues that the hero’s acquisition of knowledge and a moral compass represents the primary purpose of this journey.<sup>169</sup> Through these acts, he receives “salvation.”<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Van Nortwick, 32.

<sup>163</sup> Heidel, 12.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>165</sup> Katherine C. King, “Quests for Immortality and Identity: The Epic of Gilgamesh and the Odyssey,” in *Critical Insights: Hero’s Quest*, ed. Robert Alan Segal and Bernard Schweizer (MA: Salem Press, 2013), 101.

<sup>166</sup> King, 101.

<sup>167</sup> Heidel, 141.

<sup>168</sup> Downes, 61.

<sup>169</sup> King, 99.

<sup>170</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, “Wisdom’s Place,” in *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys*, ed. John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane (Albany, NY: University of New York Press, 1995), 12.

## Etana

Tabor describes *Etana* as “an invasion of heaven”—this text exhibits the improbability of a mortal man gaining access to the heavenly abode.<sup>171</sup> Despite such impossible odds, Etana ascends to heaven in hopes of establishing his bloodline—an ancient comprehension of eternal life.<sup>172</sup> At the beginning of this myth, the gods grant Etana power over the kingdom of Kish (TB I). *Etana* II describes the companionship of a serpent and an eagle. Each creature “[swore] an oath [on the net of Shamash],” a deity who would inflict a punishment upon the party that breaks the pledge (TB II). The duo state:

Whoever oversteps the limit set by Shamash, Shamash shall deliver into the hands of the Smiter of harm. Whoever oversteps the limit set by Shamash, May the mountain keep its pass far away from him, May the prowling weapon make straight for him, May the snares (on which) the oath to Shamash (is sworn) the oath on [the net of Shamash] (TB II).

After taking the oath, the serpent and the eagle possess superior hunting abilities—the former rules the ground; the latter rules the sky (TB II).

However, “the eagle plotted evil in its heart...and made up its mind to eat its friend’s young ones” (TB II). The eagle’s children advise against this act; however, the eagle disregards their insight and devours the serpent’s young (TB II). The serpent calls out to Shamash and demands retribution (TB II). Shamash responds accordingly:

Go along the path, cross the mountain where a wild bull... has been bound for you. Open up the innards, slit open its stomach, make a place to sit inside its stomach. All kinds of birds will come down from the sky and eat the flesh. The eagle too [will come down] with them.... When it enters the innards, you must seize it by the wing, cut its wings, feather and pinion, pluck it and throw it into a bottomless pit, let it die there... (TB II).

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<sup>171</sup> Tabor, 69.

<sup>172</sup> Segal, *Life After Death*, 76.

Thereafter, the serpent traps the eagle and throws him to the bottom of a pit (TB II). The eagle cries out to Shamash, and the deity informs the eagle of Etana (TB II). Shamash guarantees Etana's assistance; however, in return, the eagle must assist the hero throughout his quest (TB II).

The distraught Etana cries out to Shamash in the hope of acquiring a son (TB II).

In response to the hero's plea, the god charges Etana to

Go along the road, cross the mountain, find a pit and look carefully at what is inside it. An eagle is abandoned down there. It will show you the plant of birth (TB II).

Etana accepts this calling and searches for the eagle (TB II). Etana locates the pit and allies with the eagle—the eagle promises to assist Etana in acquiring “the plant of birth” if he rescues him from the pit (TB III). This token echoes the desired plant in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. After this occurs, the eagle helps Etana locate the necessary elixir (TB III).

*Etana* III illustrates a futile earthbound quest, which results in an ascension to visit the goddess Ishtar in heaven. During Etana and the eagle's flight to heaven, an overwhelming fear of heaven's height startles Etana and prompts their return to earth (TB III). Etana's fear of heaven underlines humanity's earthbound placement.<sup>173</sup> After returning to earth, Etana receives many dreams and visions from the divine pantheon, some of which depict “the city of Kish sobbing” due to the lack of an heir (TB III). These visions highlight Etana's shame and ineptitude. Another vision depicts Etana before “the entrance of the gate of Anu, Ellil, and Ea” in heaven (TB III). The visions inspire Etana to reattempt his heavenly journey (TB III).

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<sup>173</sup> Tabor, 70.

Etana and the eagle successfully ascend to heaven and pass through the heavenly gates (TB III). Tradition serves as the only means of uncovering this story's conclusion due to the myth's incompleteness, which holds that Etana and the eagle's mission was successful, for Etana produces an heir.<sup>174</sup>

## Greco-Roman Myths

### The Odyssey

Homer, in the *Odyssey*, illustrates the homeward bound journey of Odysseus.<sup>175</sup> Bierlein classifies the *Odyssey* as a “love myth” on account of Odysseus' desire to reunite with his wife, family, and country.<sup>176</sup> The myth's human-antagonists, “the suitors,” gained control of Odysseus' “*oikonomia*” while the hero was fighting in the Trojan War; thus, this quest serves personal and restorative purposes.<sup>177</sup>

Book I of the *Odyssey* describes a scene that occurs several years following the Trojan War—a war fought between the Greeks and the Trojans over Helen. At this point, Odysseus is a captive of Calypso (Book I). Human actions constitute a dominant theme in the *Odyssey*, a message that Zeus articulates at the beginning of the myth.<sup>178</sup> Observe the words of Zeus:

See now, how men lay blame upon us gods for what is after all nothing but their own folly. Look at Aegisthus; he must needs make love to Agamemnon's wife unrighteously and then kill Agamemnon, though he knew it would be the death of him; for I sent Hermes to warn him not to do either of these things, inasmuch as

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<sup>174</sup> Segal, *Life After Death*, 76-77.

<sup>175</sup> Louis Markos, *From Achilles to Christ: Why Christians Should Read the Pagan Classics* (Downers Grove, ILL: IVP Academics, 2007), 79.

<sup>176</sup> J.F. Bierlein, *Living Myth: How Myth Gives Meaning to Human Experience* (NY: The Ballantine Publishing Company, 1999), 53 and Markos, 79.

<sup>177</sup> Markos, 80.

<sup>178</sup> Erwin F. Cook, *The 'Odyssey' in Athens: Myths of Cultural Origins* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 10.

Orestes would be sure to take his revenge when he grew up and wanted to return home. Hermes told him this in all good will but he would not listen, and now he has paid for everything in full (Book I).

In other words, the gods do not coerce humankind; a person's conduct either hinders or enables success.<sup>179</sup>

It holds true that the gods control certain moments of human life, such as the inevitability of death; yet, the gods are also quite limited in human affairs.<sup>180</sup> According to Greco-Roman thought, divine intervention does not guarantee a result—the gods have no control over destiny.<sup>181</sup> Choice plays a significant role in the hero's quest—Odysseus' survival depends on orthopraxy.<sup>182</sup> As G.M.A. Grube says,

The gods may wound a hero, they may kill him, they can even break his spirit. When you die is a matter of fate and the gods; how you die, and what kind of a man you are while you live, is your own responsibility.<sup>183</sup>

Zeus' above proclamation occurs on Mount Olympus, where Athene, the daughter of Zeus, demands that the gods release Odysseus and assist his homeward bound journey (Book I). Zeus grants this request, but reminds Athene "that Poseidon is still furious with Odysseus for having blinded an eye of Polyphemus, king of the Cyclopes" (Book I). Erwin F. Cook notes that this myth presents a wide array of extremes—for instance, those

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<sup>179</sup> Cook, 10, 27.

<sup>180</sup> G.M.A. Grube, "The Gods of Homer," *Phoenix* 5, ¾ (1951): 71-72.

<sup>181</sup> Lisa Raphals, "Fate, Fortune, Chance, and Luck in Chinese and Greek: A Comparative Semantic History," *Philosophy East and West* 53, no. 4 (October 2003), 556.

<sup>182</sup> Kullmann Wolfgang, "God and Men in the Iliad and Odyssey," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 89 (1985): 6-7.

<sup>183</sup> Grube, 71-72.

for Odysseus and those against Odysseus—between which Odysseus must operate accordingly.<sup>184</sup> Hence, the *Odyssey*'s structure highlights the actions of the hero.<sup>185</sup>

Odysseus' journey inaugurates when Hermes, the messenger of the gods, informs Calypso of the gods' decision and the hero's destiny: "return to his house and country and see his friends again" (Book V).<sup>186</sup> Before releasing Odysseus, Calypso attempts to "trap" the hero by offering him eternal life—a chance to escape a meaningless existence in Hades and live with her in a state of eternal bliss.<sup>187</sup> Odysseus transcends this lure and starts his journey.<sup>188</sup> As such, Odysseus' refusal of eternal luxury further demonstrates his heroic orthopraxy.<sup>189</sup> In accordance with Zeus' commandments, Odysseus receives the necessary materials to start his quest homeward (Book V).

On this voyage, the hero encounters a variety of trials, including the vices of Poseidon, the god of the sea, who shipwrecks Odysseus and propels him to the Phaeacians' kingdom (Book V). At this kingdom, Nausicaa and Athene advice Odysseus to search for the king's palace (Books VI-VII). Once Odysseus encounters the king, the hero backtracks and describes tales of the past (Book VIII). "*In medias res*" represents

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<sup>184</sup> Cook, 20- 21.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>186</sup> Books II-IV illustrate the adventures of Telemachus, and Odysseus' quest to Ithaca is hardly discussed. Since the voyage of Odysseus is the primary concern of this thesis, these chapters will not receive an analysis.

<sup>187</sup> Segal, *Life After Death*, 212.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 213-214.

the dominant literary structure of the *Odyssey*, meaning the hero's journey starts in the middle and backtracks to deliver the beginning of the myth.<sup>190</sup>

The *Odyssey* IX describes the conclusion of the Trojan War. On his way home, Odysseus encountered a variety of trials, including “cyclones” and a Cyclops (Book IX). Misfortunes led the hero and his crew to the island of Aeolian, where the hero and his surviving crewmembers encountered Circe (Book X). The goddess Circe instructed the hero to “go to the house of Hades and of dread Persephone to consult the ghost of the blind Theban prophet Teiresias” (Book X). Circe provided the hero with sacrificial instructions on how to engage the shades of the underworld in a proper manner (Book X). This ritual, commonly known as “nekyia,” presents a unique form of living-deceased interplay—through sacrificial means, Odysseus attracted the shades from the underworld and discoursed with them without requiring a descension.<sup>191</sup> After this, the goddess directed them to the entrance of Hades (Book X).

The *Odyssey* XI captures the hero's tenure at the “House of Hades.” As instructed by Circe, Odysseus “made a drink offering to all the dead, first of honey and of milk, then with wine, and thirdly with water, and...sprinkled white barley meal over the whole” (Book XI). Then, to entice the shades of the underworld, the hero “cut the throats of the two sheep and let the blood run into the trench” (Book XI). After the completion of this rite, shades arose from the underworld en route to the blood, including his mother and a deceased member of his crew (Book XI). The prophet Teiresias came to the source of

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<sup>190</sup> Markos, 212.

<sup>191</sup> Culianu, *Otherworldly Journeys*, 119.

blood, who “had [to] drink the blood” to receive enough enlightenment to answer his questions (Book XI).

The concept of revelation, in this case, serves a herocentric purpose. After receiving nourishment and rejuvenation, the postmortem prophet declared that the hero would return home safely; however, the prophet warned the hero of the future temptations that he must rebuke (Book XI). According to the prophet, “destruction” awaits those of poor moral fiber, which reinforces the importance of proper heroic conduct (Book XI).<sup>192</sup> Odysseus utilized the remaining blood to interact with various shades, including his mother, who informed him of his wife’s “great distress” (Book XI). The shades would often inform Odysseus of the horrific ways they died, which reaffirm this myth’s underlying emphasis on the importance of proper orthopraxy.<sup>193</sup>

After this segment of the adventure, Odysseus and his crew continued their oceanic voyage and encountered more trials. A trial of significance was the crew’s settlement on “the noble island of the sun-god” (Book XII). Here, the prophet’s warning came to fruition—against Odysseus’ wishes, his crew feasted on cattle that belonged to a god, which continues the theme of proper action.<sup>194</sup> Human actions create consequences—Zeus unleashed vengeance upon the crew, and Odysseus was the only survivor.<sup>195</sup> The sea dragged him to Calypso, which provides the origin of how the hero met the goddess (Book XII).

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<sup>192</sup> Cook, 23.

<sup>193</sup> Wolfgang, 6.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

In the *Odyssey* XIII, Odysseus concludes his rendition of the past and depicts the hero's triumphant arrival at Ithaca, "his own soil." Upon arrival, Athene instructs him to prepare for the remaining troubles. Book XVI captures the heartfelt reunion of Odysseus and his son, Telemachus, and their conspiracy against "the suitors" (Book XVI). In *Odyssey* XXII, Odysseus, alongside his son, slaughter the villains and recapture Ithaca.

### **The Aeneid**

The *Aeneid* provided ancient Rome with "an eschatological view of history."<sup>196</sup> To exemplify this point, Aeneid's call-scene occurs circa the Trojan War, which demonstrates history's linear progression toward the future establishment of Rome—where hope lies.<sup>197</sup> Moreover, Rome's origin represents the central concern of this myth.<sup>198</sup> Through the *Aeneid*, ancient Rome received divine and heroic ancestries that served a twofold purpose: (1) it empowered the Roman bloodline; and (2) it granted the Roman rulers a superior status.<sup>199</sup> Aeneas, the hero and founder of Rome, symbolizes the "Roman virtue of duty."<sup>200</sup> On several occasions, Aeneas rebukes his egotistical desires for the greater good—for the future Roman Empire.<sup>201</sup>

In the *Aeneid* I, the myth inaugurates with a discussion on Aeneas' destiny: "beginning the Latin race, the Alban fathers and the high walls of Rome" (Book I, 6-8). George E. Duckworth acknowledges this underlying moral, adding that harm befell

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<sup>196</sup> Markos, 201.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 207, 211.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>199</sup> Bierlein, *Living Myths*, 201.

<sup>200</sup> Markos, 217.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 224.

characters who did not align with their destiny.<sup>202</sup> Throughout this quest, Aeneas contends with gods and other cosmic forces—some of which offer guidance, while others hinder his mission.<sup>203</sup> *Aeneid* I introduces the divine-antagonist, Juno, who attempts to prevent the hero from fulfilling his destiny. Juno favors Carthage over any other nation and fears that Aeneas' bloodline will conquer this empire (I, 15-25). Jupiter bestows upon Aeneas his divine providence; Juno still pursues Aeneas and his crew (I, 42-44; 258-267).

The goddess Venus, the mother of Aeneas, protects her son throughout this quest. One night, Venus instructs Aeneas to visit Dido, the queen of Carthage, and request for assistance (I, 390-394). Aeneas obeys the goddesses' instruction; upon arrival, Dido requests for stories of the Trojan War (I, 750-II, 14). The *Aeneid*'s literary structure centers around a retelling of events—the myth begins in the middle of the hero's journey.<sup>204</sup>

Aeneas' flashback commences after the Trojan War, in which the Greeks prevailed over the Trojans due to superior militarism and the construction of the Trojan Horse (Book II, 17-18). The Greeks left Troy "in utter confusion and despair" (II, 299). At the point of despair, Hector, a deceased Trojan warrior, charged Aeneas to escape this fallen city and "look for a great city" (II, 295). Aeneas, however, desired death-by-combat and ignored the shade's commandment; this highlights the hero's initial struggle

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<sup>202</sup> George E. Duckworth, "Fate and Free Will in Vergil's *Aeneid*," *The Classical Journal* 51, no. 8 (1956): 357.

<sup>203</sup> Eric Sandberg, "Vergil's *The Aeneid* and the Ambivalence of Aeneas's Heroic Quest," in *Critical Insights: Hero's Quest*, ed. Robert Alan Segal and Bernard Schweizer (MA: Salem Press, 2013), 129.

<sup>204</sup> Markos, 212.

to align with his destiny.<sup>205</sup> Death on the battlefield was considered an honorable act, and this outcome seemed more appealing to Aeneas than his allotted destiny.<sup>206</sup> Hence, the *Aeneid* highlights the hero's coming-to-terms with destiny.<sup>207</sup> Self-autonomy, Duckworth adds, drives the story as both "divine intervention and psychological motivation combine to achieve the desired results."<sup>208</sup>

Distressed at the sight of Trojan defeat, Aeneas decided to kill Helen, the primary cause of the war (II, 568-570). Before the completion of this act, Venus charged Aeneas, similarly to Hector, to save his father and escape Troy (II, 618-24). During this escape, Aeneas lost his wife, Creusa, who reappeared to him in a shade-esque form and stated:

Before you lies a long exile and a vast expanse of sea to plough before you come to the land of Hesperia where the Lydian river Thybris flows with smooth advance through a rich land of brave warriors. Their prosperity is waiting for you, and a kingdom and a royal bride (II, 780-758).

Thus, Aeneas sets sail and begins the journey of fulfilling his destiny.

Aeneas and his crew traveled across the seas, during which trials arose. On the island of Delos, for example, Apollo instructed Aeneas to venture toward "the land which first bore you from your parents' stock," which Anchises wrongly interpreted as Crete (III, 95-96). After setting sail toward Crete, some deities redirected Aeneas toward Italy (III, 162-172). Aeneas also experienced the death of his father, who, according to the hero, "had been my support in every difficulty and disaster" (III, 710-713).

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<sup>205</sup> Duckworth, 357.

<sup>206</sup> Sandberg, 118.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>208</sup> Duckworth, 359.

Aeneas concludes his flashback in the *Aeneid* IV, in which Dido falls in love with the hero. Aeneas indulges at this moment which, once again, distracts the hero from his allotted destiny.<sup>209</sup> Juno encourages this attraction, hoping this newfound relationship would “divert the empire of Italy to the shores of Libya” (IV, 7-8). This love continues until Mercury redirects Aeneas to his initial calling; thus, the hero continues to crave a lifestyle outside the realm of his allotted destiny.<sup>210</sup>

In the *Aeneid* V, Aeneas settles in Eryx where the protagonist hosts a wide array of games in memory of his father. During the games, Juno guides the Trojan women “to madness” and convinces them to destroy the Trojan naval fleet (Book V, 660). At the sight of such destruction, Aeneas questions his purpose (V, 701-702). However, amid such turmoil, Aeneas receives support from many companions, including Nautes and the shade of his deceased father, Anchises, who says:

...choose warriors from your people, the bravest hearts among them, to take to Italy. There in Latium is a wild and hardy people whom you have to overcome in war. But first you must come to the home of Dis in the underworld and go through the depths of hell to seek a meeting with me. A chaste Sibyl will lead you to his place...then you will learn about all the descendants who will come after you and the city walls you are to be given (V, 728-738).

Aeneas rejects the advice of the former, which further alludes to the hero’s current state-of-mind and his disdain towards his destiny, but accepts the recommendation from his father’s shade.<sup>211</sup>

Aeneas travels to Cumae, the home of the Sibyl, the guide instructs the hero to locate the “golden bough,” the item needed to enter the blissful realms of the underworld

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<sup>209</sup> Duckworth., 358.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 358.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

(Book VI, 37). After acquiring the necessary elixir, the Sibyl and Aeneas enter the underworld (VI, 193). Louis Markos poses that Aeneas' descent readies the hero to fulfill his destiny as the founder of Rome.<sup>212</sup> Here, the hero observes monsters and the prominent entities of the underworld, such as Charon and Cerberus (VI, 273). He also witnesses infernal landmarks, such as the river "Acheron," on which the ferry transports shades to their eternal destination (VI, 297). He also encounters Dido, who committed suicide after Aeneas abandoned her, and other soldiers who lost their lives fighting in the Trojan war (V, 450ff.). Aeneas encounters Dido outside of the blissful realm of the underworld, the realm reserved for people that upheld "stern Roman duty" in life.<sup>213</sup> Acting accordingly promises eternal bliss, and Dido's lavish and pleasurable lifestyle prompted eternal suffering.<sup>214</sup>

Afterward, the Sibyl and the hero see a twofold path, one of which goes to Tartarus, a variant of hell, which contains various forms of punishment (VI, 581-582). After observing the horrors of Tartarus, Aeneas sees the path to Elysium, a variant of Paradise, and places the bough before the gates of Elysium (VI, 639).

After entering Elysium, Aeneas encounters his father and receives additional information regarding his future bloodline—he witnesses many of his heirs, such as Silvius and Romulus (VI, 760-820). In the *Aeneid*, Aeneas' alignment with destiny promises earthly and eternal bliss.<sup>215</sup> As Segal states: "in this Roman view of heaven, the heroes of the Roman state postpone present rewards to become inhabitants of the

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<sup>212</sup> Markos, 237.

<sup>213</sup> Segal, *Life After Death*, 243.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

Elysium fields.”<sup>216</sup> After this revelation, Aeneas embarks on the final portion of his journey—to the kingdom of Latium to engage in a final battle (V, 900).

Upon arrival, the Trojans battle the current inhabitants of their future home with mythical weaponry and armor provided by Venus (VIII, 626-627). The Trojans hold a slight advantage at the beginning of the battle. However, due to the catastrophe of this war and the continual conflict within the divine pantheon, especially between Juno and Venus, Jupiter lifts his divine providence:

...this day let each man face his own fortune and set his course by his own hopes. Trojan and Rutulian I shall treat alike. Whether this camp is blockaded by the destiny of Italy or because of the folly and wickedness of the Truants and false prophecies they the labour and the fortune of it—I do not exempt the Rutulians. Jupiter is the same king to all men. *The Fates will find their way* (X, 108-115; emphasis added).

Duckworth’s commentary proves to be useful in understanding Jupiter’s statements:

In the words of Jupiter, the supreme authority, we have Vergil’s definite statement that mortals can and must work out their own salvation in a world governed by Destiny. Human beings are free agents; they may make their own decisions and if the decisions are wrong, they must suffer the consequences.<sup>217</sup>

Jupiter describes the “inevitable march of events,” the ultimate power of the universe.<sup>218</sup>

Hence, the future of the Roman Empire now rests in the hands of Aeneas and his once divinely protected quest becomes a matter of human affairs.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Segal, *Life After Death*, 243.

<sup>217</sup> Duckworth, 361.

<sup>218</sup> K. McLeish, “Fates,” *Bloomsbury Dictionary of Myth* (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 1996), n.p. and C.H. Wilson, “Jupiter and the Fate in the Aeneid,” *The Classical Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (1979): 364.

<sup>219</sup> Duckworth, 361.

In Books XI-XII, Aeneas rises to the challenge and establishes the future Roman lineage through the Trojan's victory. The myth concludes with Aeneas' victory over the mighty Turnus, inaugurating the bloodline that creates the Roman Empire (XII).

### Conclusion

In the reviews above, one might have noticed a variety of notable monomythic qualities and the heroes' overall importance to their respective myth. Although the intentions differ, the heroes represent the primary focus of these myths, even in the midst of gods and higher powers. Gilgamesh's quest starts on account of his fear; Etana and Aeneas' quests focus on the establishment of heirs and bloodlines; Odysseus' quest captures a homeward bound journey. Although gods and higher powers have leading roles, the heroes' quests remain herocentric. In the world of the story, the hero receives primary attention.

Campbell's opening plot-point, "the call to adventure,"<sup>220</sup> inaugurates each of the myths provided above. Gilgamesh's call occurs at the sight of his deceased friend, which prompts him to consider the realities of death and inevitably results in his search for immortality. Etana receives a call from Shamash to find the wounded eagle, who could assist the hero in acquiring the necessary elixir. Odysseus and Aeneas receive calls from deities and/or shades, characters that direct the heroes to distant lands: the former to Ithaca, the latter to future Italy.<sup>221</sup> In these cases, the call-scenes reflect herocentrism. These scenes offer in-depth reviews of the heroes, not the divine figures in the backdrop. The call-scenes set the tone for the remainder of each myth.

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<sup>220</sup> Campbell, *The Hero*, 28-29.

<sup>221</sup> Vogler, 56.

Of the considered texts, “the refusal of the call”<sup>222</sup> only arises in the *Aeneid*, which captures the hero’s struggle between duty and proper choice. “Supernatural [aids]”<sup>223</sup> also present themselves in the forms of deities, shades, and inspiring people. These characters provide the heroes with advice and/or tokens. Etana’s eagle fulfills this role. As seen in the *Aeneid*, Aeneas consistently receives encouragement to continue the adventure. However, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* presents a slight reversal of this point. Throughout his quest, Gilgamesh declines the advice of characters who discourage the quest. Each myth contains a depiction of the hero “crossing the first threshold,” as observed with Gilgamesh traveling on a dark pathway, Etana’s premier ascension, and the Greco-Roman myths’ usage of oceanic voyages.<sup>224</sup> Thereafter, the considered heroes enter “the Belly of the Whale”<sup>225</sup>—Paradise, Heaven, the Underworld, and/or another strange territory.

Overcoming obstacles represent a fundamental concern of these myths. Gilgamesh battles celestial entities and undergoes tests to acquire immortality. Etana overcomes his fear of heaven. Odysseus and Aeneas prevail amid gods and armies, all of whom desire different outcomes.

Gilgamesh, Odysseus, and Aeneas overcome a wide array of distractions from female characters—variants of the “temptress.”<sup>226</sup> Etana’s interaction with Ishtar in

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<sup>222</sup> Campbell, *The Hero*, 28-29.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29 and Campbell, *Pathway to Bliss*, 119.

<sup>225</sup> Campbell, *The Hero*, 76.

<sup>226</sup> Segal, *Myth*, 107.

heaven constitutes “the meeting with the goddess.”<sup>227</sup> Furthermore, the “atonement with the father” surfaces in many of the considered myths.<sup>228</sup> Such moments include (but not limited to): Gilgamesh’s encounter with Ut-napishtim; Odysseus and Aeneas’ encounter occurs in the underworld, in which both characters receive a personally based revelation from a shade of great importance. The moment of truth, “the ultimate boon,” occurs in *Etana* and the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, in which the heroes receive the necessary token that either revives life or supplies an heir.<sup>229</sup> However, the theft of Gilgamesh’s item bound him to mortality. Aeneas’ reception of the golden bough also classifies as this act. “Apotheosis” occurs in the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*, in which the heroes receive their sought-after revelatory words.<sup>230</sup> As seen, the heroes fulfill quests that relate to themselves as individuals. While divinities and cultural implications surface throughout these myths, very personal elements also arise.

To conclude their journeys, the heroes cross another “threshold”—Gilgamesh returns home; Odysseus and Aeneas endure oceanic voyages en route to their destinations.<sup>231</sup> All of the Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman heroes benefit the masses after their journey—for example, Gilgamesh, although unsuccessful at attaining immortality, advances his kingdom with his reception of newfound knowledge.<sup>232</sup> *Etana*

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<sup>227</sup> Campbell, *The Hero*, 28-29.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29, 158.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>231</sup> Campbell, *The Hero*, 28-29 and Campbell, *Pathway to Bliss*, 119.

<sup>232</sup> King, 102.

and Aeneas also establish heirs and bloodlines. Each hero becomes a “master of the two worlds.”<sup>233</sup>

Campbell’s proposed monomyth captures the ancient audience’s concern for the hero. All of the plot-points revolve around the hero and demonstrate a high-degree of herocentrism. The heroes’ free will and the personal basis of these quests are two particular characteristics that exemplify herocentrism. Although Abrahamic otherworldly journeys share similarities to the monomyth, the underlying theocentric moral alters the presentation of the story.

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<sup>233</sup> Campbell, *The Hero*, 28-29.

## Chapter 4: Judeo-Christian Otherworldly Journeys

### Introduction

The monomyth proves to be a useful lens for addressing herocentric literature. Chapter 3 demonstrates that Gilgamesh, Etana, Odysseus, and Aeneas drive their assigned myths. However, Campbell's monomyth overlooks the theology in the backdrop of Abrahamic otherworldly journeys. The proposed storyline accurately signifies the progression and meaning of the considered Abrahamic stories, despite the presence of multiple monomythic qualities. Otherworldly stories in the Abrahamic traditions hold a theocentric pedagogical function. Enoch, Abraham, Ezra, Sedrach, and Baruch are exemplary religious characters; yet, they receive a secondary narratological focus.

The chapter at hand examines Judeo-Christian otherworldly journeys. The first section analyzes six otherworldly journeys from Judaism and Christianity, three from each religion.<sup>234</sup> The conclusion demonstrates the accuracy of the otherworldly paradigm. Chapter 4 highlights how theocentricism saturates the plot-points of each myth.

### Judaic Myths

#### 1 Enoch

Theodicy proves to be the dominant theme of the *Book of the Watchers* (circa second century BC), Chapters 1-36 of *1 Enoch* (1 En).<sup>235</sup> The *Book of the Watchers* reflects a Judaic, pre-Maccabean Revolt worldview—a worldview impacted by the

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<sup>234</sup> All of the Pseudepigraphal references and/or quotations in this thesis came from the following sources: Charlesworth, James H., Ed. *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*. The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, vol. 1. Ed. James H Charlesworth. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2016.

<sup>235</sup> Lelia Leah Bronner, *Journey to Heaven: Exploring Jewish Views of the After Life* (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2001), 50 and Taylor, 50.

spread of Hellenism.<sup>236</sup> This myth describes Hellenistic persecution with mythical imagery—*I En* attributes the crimes of the world (Hellenism) to improper angelic conduct.<sup>237</sup>

In *I En* 1-5, the myth commences with a segment pertaining to Enoch’s revelation and the obedience of creation. Collins agrees, adding that *I En* underscores the characteristics of the righteous—those obedient to YHWH—and the unrighteous—those disobedient to YHWH.<sup>238</sup> At first, the author describes creation as the prototypical example of obedience, as observed below:

Examine all the activit(ies which take place) in the sky and how they do not alter their ways, (and examine) the luminaries of heaven, how each one of them rises and sets; each one is systematic according to its respective season....And look at the earth and turn in your mind concerning the action which is taking place in her from the beginning to the end: how all the work of God as being manifested does not change (2:1-3).<sup>239</sup>

Creation’s obedience contrasts unrighteousness, and Enoch foreshadows the judgment awaiting those whom do not uphold YHWH’s commandments.<sup>240</sup> The inaugural segment of *I En* concludes with a promotion of God’s supremacy, stating: “everything functions in the way in which God has ordered it” (5:3). Such imagery magnifies YHWH. The opening segment promptly stresses theocentrism and sets the stage for the remainder of this myth.

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<sup>236</sup> E. Isaac, “1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch: A New Translation and Introduction,” in *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, vol. 1, ed. James H Charlesworth (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2016), 7.

<sup>237</sup> Bronner, 50.

<sup>238</sup> Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, n.p.

<sup>239</sup> Bronner, 50 and Collins, *Apocalyptic Literature*, n.p.

<sup>240</sup> Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, n.p.

The central crisis of the story commences in *1 En* 6, in which angels prey upon the “handsome and beautiful daughters” (6:2). Immortal angels desire the intimacy of mortal human beings, which breaks YHWH’s established order of creation.<sup>241</sup> In order to satisfy this desire, a legion of angels abandon heaven and seize earthly women for intimate companionship (6:6). In addition to this crime, Azaz’el provides humanity with newfound knowledge:

And Azaz’el taught the people (the art of) making swords and knives, and shields, and breastplates; and he showed their chosen one’s bracelets, decorations, (shadowing of the eye) with antimony, ornamentation, the beautifying of the eyelids, all kinds of precious stones, and all coloring tinctures and alchemy (8:1-2).

As a result of the Watchers’ rebellion and Azaz’el’s guidance, sin enters the world.<sup>242</sup> *1 En*’s interpretation of sin’s origin contradicts the interpretation found in the *Book of Genesis*, which credits its origin to humanity.<sup>243</sup> The *Book of the Watchers* serves as a platform on which Judaism credits the Hellenistic persecution to corrupt, cosmic entities, for such horror surpasses human capabilities.<sup>244</sup>

Thereafter, the archangels of heaven prepare a decree that emphasizes YHWH’s lordship.<sup>245</sup> “Divine intervention,” as George W.E. Nickelsburg claims, is the focus of the angelic decree and serves as the remedy for earth’s current condition.<sup>246</sup> In anger,

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<sup>241</sup> George W.E. Nickelsburg, “Apocalyptic and Myth in 1 Enoch 6-11,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93, no. 6 (1977): 387.

<sup>242</sup> Collins, *Apocalyptic Literature*, n.p

<sup>243</sup> Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *The Myth of Rebellious Angels: Studies in Second Temple Judaism and New Testament Texts* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 15.

<sup>244</sup> Collins, *Apocalyptic Literature*, n.p.

<sup>245</sup> Nickelsburg, 387.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 387, 389.

YHWH declares a global flood, stating: “the Deluge is about to come upon all the earth; and all that is in it will be destroyed” (10:2-3). YHWH’s rule—a dominant Enochian theme—surpasses the Watchers’ power and concludes their reign on earth.<sup>247</sup>

Thus far, Enoch’s role is limited. Enoch plays no role in resolving the myth’s crisis; Enoch plays no role in resolving the angelic rebellion. YHWH resolves this crisis, and the Enochian hero affirms this notion. Heroism, therefore, does not mend this crisis. Theocentrism surfaces before Enoch’s ascension to heaven.

*I En* 12 inaugurates the ascension of Enoch. Righteous angels charge Enoch to inform the Watchers of their impending judgment, a decree which Enoch obeys (12: 4-6). He states:

There will be peace unto you; a grave judgment has come upon you. They will put you in bond, and you will not have (an opportunity for) rest and supplication, because you have taught injustice and because you have shown to people deeds of shame, injustice, and sin (13:1-3).

Enoch’s decree traumatizes the Watchers, who request the hero “to write for them a memorial prayer in order that there may be for them a prayer of forgiveness” (13:4-5). Enoch, in other words, serves as an intermediate-spokesman on behalf of the Watchers before YHWH.<sup>248</sup>

Afterward, Enoch receives a vision that consists of natural phenomena—such as “wind,” “fogs,” and “stars”—transporting him to heaven (14:5-6). Abrahamic otherworldly journeys typically employ an angelic figure to transport the hero; however,

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<sup>247</sup> Stefan Beyerle, “The ‘God of Heaven’ In Persian and Hellenistic Times,” in *Other Worlds and Their Relation to this World: Early Jewish and Ancient Christian Traditions*, ed. Tobias Nicklas (Boston, MA: Brill, 2010). 36.

<sup>248</sup> John J. Collins, “A Throne in the Heavens: Apotheosis in pre-Christina Judaism,” in *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys*, ed. John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane (Albany, NY: University of New York Press, 1995), 48.

in an attempt to heighten Enoch, *1 En* utilizes natural phenomena as opposed to superior entities.<sup>249</sup> Yet, YHWH-esque imagery also surfaces in this scene. These natural phenomena represent a theophany—a physical representation of the Divine. Exodus 13:21 uses similar imagery: YHWH guides the Israelites in the form of “a pillar of cloud by day” and “a pillar of fire by night.” Regarding a biblical ascension story, *2 Kings 2* presents similar theophanic imagery, in which the prophet Elijah ascends to heaven “in a whirlwind” (2:1, 11).<sup>250</sup> In this sense, YHWH guides Enoch to heaven.

Heaven consists of “great house[s]” (14:10). Due to this structural layout, Himmelfarb and Collins insist that heaven is a “temple.”<sup>251</sup> Such a worldview transitions the reverence away from the temple in Jerusalem towards heaven because of improper priestly orthopraxy.<sup>252</sup>

At this point, Enoch encounters YHWH for the first time. YHWH dwells in a place where “none of the angels [are] able to come in and see” (14:21-22). YHWH sits upon an overpoweringly bright throne, which consists of angelic praise (14:22). Enoch collapses at the sight of YHWH’s glorious, yet terrifying temple; however, YHWH comforts the hero in his time of need.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Paula Gooder, *Only the Third Heaven?: 2 Corinthians 12.1-10 and Heavenly Ascent*. Library of New Testament Studies (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 46.

<sup>250</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*. Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2000), 294.

<sup>251</sup> Himmelfarb, 13 and Collins, *Apocalyptic Literature*, n.p

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-40.

According to Gooder, “placing righteous humanity in the rank far above fallen angels” serves as the primary thrust of this scene.<sup>254</sup> While this opinion holds a degree of merit, one should not lose sight of YHWH’s role in the segment. YHWH says:

Indeed you, formerly you were spiritual, (having) eternal life, and immortal in all the generations of the world. That is why (formerly) I did not make wives for you, for the dwelling of the spiritual beings of heaven is heaven...The dwelling of the spiritual beings of heaven is heaven; but the dwelling of the spirits of the earth, which are born upon the earth, is in the earth (15:6-7, 10-11).

In *1 En* 16, YHWH seals the fate of the rebellious angels. Although Enoch’s placement does deserve consideration, the power of YHWH dominates this scene as YHWH seals the Watchers’ fate. Alan F. Segal supports this conclusion, and also enhances this point through the following observation: Enoch fails in his intermediary mission.<sup>255</sup> Enoch is not able to secure YHWH’s forgiveness, and as a result, the Watchers receive damnation; thus, Enoch’s heroism appears to be limited.<sup>256</sup> Despite Enoch’s failure, YHWH blesses and transforms the hero on account of his righteousness.<sup>257</sup>

Chapters 17-36 transition from this storyline and illustrate Enoch’s journey through the cosmos. The archangel Uriel guides Enoch and relays cosmic secrets that underscore YHWH’s superior placement in creation. At this point in the myth, Enoch serves as an observer of YHWH’s creation. Therefore, Enoch’s heroism is of little concern.

In *1 En* 17, Uriel guides Enoch to a mountain that connects heaven to earth. Verse 2 states: “they took me into a place of whirlwind in the mountain,” which, again, presents

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<sup>254</sup> Gooder, 45.

<sup>255</sup> Segal, *Life After Death*, 274.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*

theophanic imagery. In 18:2, the hero sees the earth and the forces of wind that serve as “the very pillars of heaven” and set the cosmos in movement (18:4).

Uriel, in *1 En* 20, provides the hero a lesson in angelology followed by a discussion on the stars’ eternal punishment by Uriel and Ura’el in Chapter 21. The angel Rufael provides Enoch with information regarding the impending eschaton, which prompts Enoch to praise YHWH on account of the Divine’s “righteousness” (22:14).

*1 En* 22 discusses Sheol. Simcha Paull Raphael observes that *1 En* provides a primitive attempt at developing the afterlife into a realm centered on orthopraxy.<sup>258</sup> *1 En* promises righteous religious adherents a deserving afterlife (and vice-versa).<sup>259</sup>

Chapters 24-25 illustrate Enoch’s observation of a commonly discussed element of creation. Enoch travels to a mountainous region that contains a pleasant tree that catches the hero’s eye (24:2). Enoch learns that the earthly “throne of God” dwells in this place (25:3). This is the infamous tree mentioned in the *Book of Genesis*. Michael states:

And as for this fragrant tree, not a single human being has the authority to touch it until the great judgment, when he shall take vengeance on all and conclude (everything) forever. And the elect will be presented with its fruit for life. He will plant it in the direction of the northeast, upon the holy place—in the direction of the house of the Lord, the Eternal King. (25:4-5).

Michael’s statements counter the biblical portrayal of this tree. Of particular importance, however, is Enoch’s admiration. These observations inspire liturgy on account of YHWH’s majesty and grace (25:7). Enoch’s cosmic tour concludes in Chapters 26-36 with his observance of Jerusalem and the ends of the earth, in which YHWH’s creation receives primary attention.

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<sup>258</sup> Simcha Paull Raphael, *Jewish Views of the Afterlife* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 86.

<sup>259</sup> Raphael., 87.

## 2 Enoch

*2 Enoch* (2 En), authored circa first-second century AD, demands universal conformity to the God-and-righteous-centered mandates revealed at the myth's conclusion.<sup>260</sup> *2 En* holds an eschatological concern—earthly conduct determines one's eternal placement.<sup>261</sup> Heaven's structure drives this point, for Enoch observes “paradise and hell” which mirrors “reward and punishment.”<sup>262</sup> A pre-Jewish-Roman War context likely serves as the historical context; hence, *2 En* provides eschatological hope for those who abide by YHWH's commandments.<sup>263</sup>

The myth claims “the LORD took [him] away” (1:1). The acts of Enoch are not the cause of his ascension. Verses 1-4 contrast Enoch and YHWH. Verse 1 describes the former as “a wise man,” which alludes to this character's respect amongst the ancient audience. However, the latter receives higher praise. Verse 4 refers to YHWH as “the most wise and great.” The author utilizes contrasting statements to describe the reverence of both characters; yet, the myth grants higher favor to YHWH and establishes theocentrism early in the myth.

While at his home in a state of slumber, Enoch receives a call-to-ascension from two unnamed angels who resemble “the shining sun” (1:5). The angels inform Enoch that “the eternal LORD has sent us to you,” highlighting the divine influence in Enoch's ascension (1:8).

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<sup>260</sup> Larry R. Helyer, *Exploring Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period: A Guide for New Testament Students* (Downers, Grove, ILL: IVP Academic, 2002), 382.

<sup>261</sup> Helyer, 381-382.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 382.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*

Enoch and the angels ascend to the first level of heaven, a realm which consists of “the rulers of the stellar orders” (4:1). Enoch has a cosmic outlook of creation, gaining awareness of and appreciation for the cosmic operations of the universe.<sup>264</sup> In this level of heaven lies various angels who set the cosmos in motion and “govern” the fundamental components of creation (4:1). James Buchanan Wallace acknowledges this angelic presence, adding that the angels symbolize “priestly functions.”<sup>265</sup> Thus, Enoch learns how the angels (the symbolic priests) operate and maintain heaven (the symbolic holy temple).<sup>266</sup>

After observing the cosmic operations of the first heaven, the hero ascends to the second heaven, which holds a gloomier purpose. The second heaven holds “the condemned angels” (7:2). The fallen angels recognize Enoch’s piety and request for prayer regarding their current salvific state; Enoch downplays his piety in part due to his mortality (7:5). The hero, therefore, recognizes his inferiority amid immortal entities.

Chapters 8-10 describe Enoch and the angels’ tenure in the third level of heaven, which contains “Paradise” and a cohort of liturgical angels (8:1-3). Himmelfarb stresses the importance of angelic worship, claiming it further supports “the idea of heaven as temple.”<sup>267</sup> In addition, both earth and heaven represent liturgical realities.<sup>268</sup> According to the angelic guides, only adherents of YHWH are welcome in this realm:

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<sup>264</sup> James Buchanan Wallace, *Snatched into Paradise (2 Cor. 12:10): Paul’s Heavenly Journey in the Context of Early Christian Experience* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001), 121.

<sup>265</sup> Wallace, 120.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>267</sup> Himmelfarb, 38-39.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-39.

...suffer every kind of tribulation in this life and who afflict their souls, and who avert their eyes from injustice, and who carry out righteous judgment, to give bread to the hungry, and to cover the naked with clothing, and to lift up the fallen, and to help the injured, who walk before the face of the LORD, and who worship him only (9:1).

The other side of the third heaven contains Gehenna, a realm with no such pleasantries.<sup>269</sup> Instead of angelic praise, this realm contains angels who punish the unrighteous:

...for those who practice godless uncleanness on the earth, who perform witchcraft... who boast about their deeds. They steal souls secretly; who untie the yoke that has been secured; who enrich themselves by fraud from the possessions of others, and bring about the death of the hungry by starvation; not being able to provide sustenance; and not being able to supply clothing, take away the last garment of the naked; who do not acknowledge their Creator, but bow down to vain gods, constructing images, and bowing down to something made by hand (10: 4-6).

Larry R. Helyer asserts that *2 En*'s dualistic portrayal of heaven exemplifies ethical deeds and the eternal consequences of one's actions.<sup>270</sup>

After this, Enoch and his angelic guides observe the operations of the various cosmic entities on the fourth realm. Here, "the movements...of the sun and the moon," and the angels who operate such entities and worship the Divine receive attention (11:1-2). In *2 En* 18, the cosmic tour leads Enoch and the angels to the fifth heaven. The fifth heaven holds the Watchers, the antagonists of *1 En*. Here, Enoch finds an absence of liturgy and charges these fallen angels to "perform liturgy before the face of the LORD" (18:8). Himmelfarb supports this viewpoint, claiming "the heavens should be the scene of praise."<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Raphael, 95-96.

<sup>270</sup> Helyer, 382.

<sup>271</sup> Himmelfarb, 39.

*2 En* 19 depicts Enoch's time on the sixth level of heaven, which contains an angelic focus. Here resides a cohort of angels who contemplate the cosmic realities, praise YHWH, and "make celestial life peaceful" (19:3). Other angels on this realm possess responsibilities over the operations of the seasons.

Chapters 20-33 depict the seventh heaven and the power of this heaven. For example, Enoch witnesses "the heavenly armies, according to rank, advancing and doing obeisance to the LORD" (20:3). Such images frighten the hero, who receives comfort when the angels "[showed him] from a distance the LORD, sitting on his throne" (20:2-3). Enoch's comfort comes from YHWH, not from internal satisfaction or his heroic abilities.

There comes a point in this realm when the angelic guides abandon Enoch. *2 En* 21:2 states: "they placed me at the edge of heaven, alone. And I became terrified." Unlike the heroes discussed in Chapter 3, Enoch lacks the heroism necessary to survive without assistance. Enoch's fear results in the appearance of Gabriel, an archangel, who supports the hero for the remainder of the quest. Verse 3 credits YHWH for Gabriel's arrival. For the second time in this myth, YHWH sends angelic assistance. This reinforces Enoch's reliance on YHWH.

*2 En* 22 captures Enoch's premier gaze at YHWH. Enoch uses strange and paradoxical descriptors throughout his attempt at relaying and rationalizing YHWH's true nature.<sup>272</sup> Enoch's descriptors fail to capture YHWH on account of the Deity's holiness.<sup>273</sup> For example, in vv. 1-2, Enoch describes YHWH's face as "strong and very

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<sup>272</sup> Wallace, 123.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

glorious” and “strong and very terrible.” In. v. 4, Enoch prostrates before YHWH, and the archangel Michael assists the hero at YHWH’s command.

Himmelfarb uncovers a unique trait in *2 En* of particular interest to this study— she notes that Enoch collapses twice in this myth: once at the angels’ abandonment and once at the sight of YHWH.<sup>274</sup> However, in the *Book of the Watchers*, as stated above, Enoch only kneels at the overwhelming sight of the heavenly temple.<sup>275</sup> *2 En*’s additional act of kneeling points to Enoch’s reverence for YHWH.<sup>276</sup>

At this point, Enoch receives comfort from YHWH: “Be brave, Enoch! Don’t be frightened! Stand up, and stand in front of my face forever” (v. 5-6). At YHWH’s request, “clothes of glory” replace Enoch’s “earthly clothing,” which transforms the hero into an angelic entity (vv. 9-10). A mortal being cannot operate in YHWH’s presence without possessing a cosmic essence.<sup>277</sup>

YHWH commands the archangel Vereveil to inform Enoch of cosmic secrets for “30 days and 30 nights,” during which the hero is responsible for recording these secrets in sacred books (23:3,6). Enoch’s scripts will provide the post-deluge world with wisdom and the ability to achieve righteousness.<sup>278</sup> Regarding the scripts’ content, Grant Macaskill states: “the clear emphasis is on the unique status of the Lord as creator.”<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Himmelfarb, 39-40.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-40.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>277</sup> Wallace, 124 and Helyer, 382.

<sup>278</sup> Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, n.p.

<sup>279</sup> Grant Macaskill, *Revealed Wisdom and Inaugurated Eschatology in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism (Leiden: Brill NV, 2007), 210.

Chapters 24-32 describe cosmic information “not even [disclosed to the] angels” (25:2). Such revelations highlight the relationship between the Enoch and YHWH. In 2 *En* 33, YHWH charges Enoch to descend to earth and relay this newfound information to humanity. YHWH grants Enoch time on earth to relay this message, after which the hero will return to the heavenly abode (36:1). Enoch’s lack of choice deserves further consideration. While Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman heroes hold a degree of autonomy throughout their journeys, YHWH seals the fate of Enoch and uses the patriarch to fulfill the Deity’s plan. Thus, Enoch’s character holds a vertical, God-centered purpose.

### **The Apocalypse of Abraham**

The *Apocalypse of Abraham* (*ApAb*) instructs on liturgy and idolatrous acts, as well as the consequences of these acts.<sup>280</sup> As a post-Jewish-Roman War document (circa first-second century AD), *ApAb* uses Judaism’s habitual display of idolatry to rationalize the siege of the temple.<sup>281</sup> *ApAb* teaches that idolatry insults YHWH on a personal level, and warrants a harsh response—judgment.<sup>282</sup> Idolatry is first addressed in Chapters 1-8, which focus on Terah, the father of Abraham, and his idolatrous deeds.<sup>283</sup> Noticeable theocentric morals surface throughout *ApAb* 1-8. For instance, Abraham’s anti-idolatrous convictions underline “the true God” (7:11).

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<sup>280</sup> Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, n.p. and Himmelfarb, 61.

<sup>281</sup> R. Rubinkiewicz, “Apocalypse of Abraham: A New Translation and Introduction,” in *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, vol. 1, ed. James H Charlesworth (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2016), 685.

<sup>282</sup> Rubinkiewicz, 685.

<sup>283</sup> Wallace, 127.

Abraham's otherworldly journey commences in *ApAb* 9:1 with a familiar call from YHWH. YHWH directs Abraham to "God's mountain, glorious Horeb," where the hero receives instruction on proper sacrificial offerings (12:3). YHWH charges Abraham to complete sacrificial rites; however, YHWH's voice frightens the patriarch and occasions his death: "...and my soul fled from me" (10:2). Abraham's death prompts YHWH to send the angel Iael to revive the hero (10:3-4).

The angel Iael demands further attention. Andrei Orlov calls attention to Iael's depiction as a "griffin," arguing that the angel's appearance represents the myth's desire to produce "anti-anthropomorphic" imagery.<sup>284</sup> Such imagery uses non-idolatrous means to describe YHWH and Iael.<sup>285</sup> In addition, in order to symbolize the "glory of God," *ApAb* uses divine-esque imagery to describe Iael.<sup>286</sup>

The angel's name, Iael, also warrants consideration. "Yahael" represents another common spelling for Iael, and according to Wallace, "the first three letters appear to be a variation of the Tetragrammaton."<sup>287</sup> God's holiest name, יהוה (YHWH), shares an affinity to the angel's name, as observed with YHWH's statement in 10:3: "Go, Iael, of the same name, through the mediation of my ineffable name..."<sup>288</sup> On this matter, Collins

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<sup>284</sup> Andrei A. Orlov, "The Pteromorphic Angelology of the Apocalypse of Abraham," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 10, no. 71 (2009): 841.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, 831-832, 841.

<sup>286</sup> Himmelfarb, 61 and Orlov, 831.

<sup>287</sup> Wallace, 128 and Orlov, 831.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

states: “the name is evidently a substitute for Yahweh, or Yahweh el.”<sup>289</sup> Thus, the angel Iael direct one’s attention to the underlying theocentric moral.

After Abraham’s resurrection, Iael assists the patriarch in fulfilling this divinely mandated sacrifice, the first of many liturgical proceedings to occur throughout this myth.<sup>290</sup> The sacrifice holds a preparatory purpose, meaning the patriarch’s ascension depends on the completion of this sacrificial act.<sup>291</sup> Prior to the completion of the sacrifice, the fallen angel Azazel appears and attempts to sway the patriarch from his divine mandate:

What are you doing, Abraham, on the holy heights, where no one eats or drinks, nor is there upon them food for men. But these all will be consumed by fire and they will burn you up. Leave the man who is with you and flee! For if you ascend to the height, they will destroy you (13:2-5).

However, in *ApAb* 13-14, Iael diverts Abraham’s attention towards YHWH. After the completion of this sacrifice, Abraham and Iael ascend to heaven on the backs of a “pigeon” and a “turtledove,” two of the animals Abraham sacrificed to YHWH (15:2-3). Abraham’s ascent resembles the heavenly ascent of Etana, who, as stated above, travels to heaven on the back of an eagle.

Abraham’s heavenly journey results in an immense amount of anxiety; in response, Iael instructs Abraham to worship YHWH, which Himmelfarb describes as a “remedy for fear.”<sup>292</sup> At the apex of heaven, Iael teaches Abraham a hymn that

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<sup>289</sup> Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, n.p.

<sup>290</sup> Himmelfarb, 61-62.

<sup>291</sup> Uzdevinys, 71.

<sup>292</sup> Himmelfarb, 63.

highlights YHWH's power and creative abilities.<sup>293</sup> Some of YHWH's titles include: "Eternal One, Mighty One, Holy El, God autocrat self-originate..." (vv. 8-9).

Therapeutic worship cures Abraham and instills in him a sense of bravery that remains for the duration of the myth.<sup>294</sup>

In *ApAb* 20, YHWH greets Abraham. Chapter 20 depicts the formation of a covenant between the Divine and the patriarch. In vv. 2-6, YHWH states:

Look from on high at the stars which are beneath you and count them for me and tell me their number...as the number of the stars and their power so shall I place for your seed the nations and men...

YHWH provides Abraham a heavenly view of YHWH's creation—the patriarch observes humankind, agriculture, the infernal realms, and "the garden of Eden and its fruits" (21:6). This viewpoint highlights YHWH's superior creative abilities.<sup>295</sup> YHWH proceeds to describe the Divine's creative process and power, stating: "I gave them a command by my word and they came into existence" (22:2). Abraham also observes the righteous, the people of YHWH, and the unrighteous, "the people with Azazel" (22:5).

In *ApAb* 23-28, YHWH grants Abraham a heavenly view of history that stresses the consequences of free will.<sup>296</sup> Each segment of history represents a different sin, with "idolatry" representing the most significant sin.<sup>297</sup> At this point in the myth, the patriarch

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<sup>293</sup> Wallace, 128.

<sup>294</sup> Himmelfarb, 64.

<sup>295</sup> Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, n.p.

<sup>296</sup> Himmelfarb, 66.

<sup>297</sup> Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, n.p.

challenges YHWH's rationale for judging humanity; YHWH justifies judgment with a reminder of humanity's free will and its cost—judgment.<sup>298</sup>

Abraham witnesses the origination of sin in the garden of Eden, the evil that transpired between Cain and Abel, and various acts of “fornication” (24:6). The myth credits Azazel with the corruption of Adam and Eve, claiming: “he was holding the grapes of the tree and feeding them to the two I saw entwined with each other” (23:8-9). *ApAb* 25 illustrates the infamous temple in Jerusalem. The patriarch witnesses the Babylonian invasion and the temple's destruction (27:5-6). Jerusalem's idolatrous acts prompt YHWH to use violent measures.<sup>299</sup> YHWH, through the Babylonian army, sacks the temple due to the idolatrous and improper actions of the priestly institution.<sup>300</sup> As Himmelfarb observes, this displays YHWH's autonomy—YHWH's ability to evaluate sin and judge accordingly.<sup>301</sup>

A discussion of the eschaton follows, during which YHWH will send natural phenomena to destroy creation and inaugurate “the age of justice” (29:19). *ApAb* 32 concludes the myth with Abraham abruptly appearing on earth, where the patriarch reminds creation of YHWH's supremacy and divine justice.

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<sup>298</sup> Himmelfarb, 66.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>300</sup> Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, n.p.

<sup>301</sup> Himmelfarb, 66.

**The Greek Apocalypse of Ezra**

According to Richard Bauckham, the *Greek Apocalypse of Ezra* (GkApEzra), along with other similar apocalyptic texts, “[implores] God’s mercy for the damned.”<sup>302</sup> The *GkApEzra* and *Apocalypse of Sedrach* depict Ezra and Sedrach’s reproach of YHWH’s use of judgment.<sup>303</sup> As such, theodicy represents the main concern of the present myth—YHWH demands justice, a belief Ezra repeatedly counters.<sup>304</sup>

*GkApEzra* 1 depicts a homebound hero. Ezra’s opening prayer to YHWH holds a God-centered message: “Lord, grant (me) glory so that I may see your mysteries” (1:3). From Ezra’s short prayer, three elements of importance necessitate consideration: (1) Ezra acknowledges that only YHWH grants heavenly secrets; (2) Ezra acknowledges that cosmic secrets belong to YHWH; and (3) Ezra lacks the strength to embark on such a revelatory journey. Ezra seeks revelation concerning divine justice, stating: “I wish to plead with God concerning the Christian people. It were better that man were not born than he enter the world” (1:6). Similar statements arise throughout theodicy-based apocalyptic literature, for it underlines the hero’s disdain toward YHWH’s treatment of the unrighteous.<sup>305</sup> Often, YHWH’s reply hinges upon humanity’s “free-will.”<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead: Studies in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Leiden: Brill NV, 1998), 136-137.

<sup>303</sup> Bauckham, 137.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 134 and M.E. Stone, “Greek Apocalypse of Ezra: A New Translation and Introduction,” in *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments, The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, ed. James H Charlesworth (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2016), 564.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 140.

In response, the archangel Michael appears to Ezra and instructs him to engage in a series of fasts (1:3-4). After the completion of these tasks, YHWH grants Ezra's wish and shows him cosmic secrets and realities. In *GkApEzra* 1:7, Ezra finds himself on the first level of heaven, in which YHWH and Ezra engage in a divine-human discourse. Here, Ezra observes "the judgments" (1:8) and the souls of the unrighteous, which prompts him to challenge the ways of YHWH:

Lord, why do you show favor to the righteous? For as a hired man completes his time of service and goes away, and again a slave serves his masters in order to receive his wage thus the righteous man receives his reward in the heavens. But, have mercy upon the sinners for we know that you are merciful (1:13-17).

Ezra deems YHWH's logic insignificant. According to Ezra, the righteous only follow YHWH's mandates for the sake of heavenly compensation (1:14). Bauckham correctly notes that Ezra's argument attempts to "appeal to God's [merciful] nature."<sup>307</sup> YHWH, however, informs Ezra in vv. 17-18: "I have no way to be merciful to them." YHWH's role as judge limits YHWH's actions.<sup>308</sup>

The discussion in *GkApEzra* 2 captures Ezra's debate with YHWH over sin. Ezra challenges YHWH's treatment of Adam, the primordial man (2:1). Ezra blames YHWH for the events that transpired in the *Book of Genesis*: "If you had not given him Eve, the serpent would never have deceived her. If you save whom wish you will also destroy whom you wish" (2:16-17). Hence, Ezra faults YHWH for original sin. Throughout this discourse, YHWH relies upon YHWH's power to justify the operations of the universe and the placement of the righteous/unrighteous. Ezra pleads for mercy, which the Deity responds as follows: "How can I have mercy upon them? They gave me vinegar and gall

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<sup>307</sup> Bauckham, 140.

<sup>308</sup> Stone, 564.

to drink...” (2:24-25). Here, through an allusion to the New Testament, one notices a trinitarian portrayal of YHWH—God the Son, Christ, received persecution on earth, which demands judgment.<sup>309</sup>

Several times throughout this myth, YHWH belittles Ezra through a reminder of the hero’s humanity. Observe 2:2:20-23:

And the prophet said, “I will never cease to argue the case with you until I see the day of consummation.” (And God said,) “Count the stars and the sand of the sea and if you will be able to count this, you will also be able to argue the case with me.”

A similar verse surfaces in *GkApEzra* 4:1, where YHWH challenges Ezra to “count the flowers of the earth.” Although YHWH entertains Ezra’s diatribe, YHWH holds the upper hand because of YHWH’s omnipotence and omniscience.

In *GkApEzra* 4, YHWH sends Ezra to Tartarus where he observes the depravity of humankind. Ezra, along with a legion of angels, descend to Tartarus where he witnesses king Herod, the Antichrist, and unrighteous souls. Then, an emotionally distraught Ezra ascends back to the heavenly abode via a “cloud” (5:7). Echoing *I En*, a theophanic object transports the hero to heaven.

Ezra, once again, challenges YHWH by questioning the Divine’s rationale behind the creation of humanity, to which the Deity replies: “I prepared everything because of man and man does not keep my commandments” (5:18-19). YHWH holds loving and provisional abilities; yet, YHWH also necessitates justice.<sup>310</sup> YHWH transports Ezra to the realm of heaven designated for the righteous and the holding place of the “the tree of life” (5:20).

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<sup>309</sup> Stone, 564.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, 564.

The next sequence of events proves to be quite bizarre. In *GkApEzra* 6-7, Ezra converses with YHWH concerning the protagonist's soul. In 6:3, a cosmic entity presents itself to Ezra and demands the hero to hand over his soul. Ezra refuses to honor this request until YHWH agrees to his terms: Ezra promises to give YHWH his soul, and in return, YHWH will record Ezra's story, a "blessing from heaven," and deliver it to earth so that humanity may achieve righteousness (7:10). YHWH consents; at the end of the myth, Ezra "gave over his precious soul" (7:14).

### **The Apocalypse of Sedrach**

Echoing the *GkApEzra*, the *Apocalypse of Sedrach* (*ApSedr*) addresses theodicy through a divine-human discourse that takes the form of a debate.<sup>311</sup> However, *ApSedr* presents a unique twist to theodicy-based literature—the myth underlies "the love of God."<sup>312</sup> The present myth possesses various eye-catching qualities that stand out from the rest of the considered myths. For example, the myth commences with Sedrach reciting a love-based sermon that dominates the entirety of Chapter 1.<sup>313</sup> Observe a sample of the sermon below:

And if one brings gifts to God, or offers the first fruits of all his goods, or builds churches or does anything else without love, it shall be counted by God as nothing, for (these things) are not acceptable... 'the sacrifice of the impious is an abomination to the LORD.' Do not be advised to do anything without love. If you say, 'I hate my brother but I love Christ,' you are a liar... (1:7-9).

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<sup>311</sup> Bauckham, 134.

<sup>312</sup> S. Agourides, "Apocalypse of Sedrach: A New Translation and Introduction," in *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, vol. 1, ed. James H Charlesworth (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2016), 607.

<sup>313</sup> Wallace, 132.

*ApSedr* 1 claims that love—or more specifically, “divine love” (1:17, 21)—represents the driving force of the characters in the Old and New Testament, such as Moses and Jesus.

Thus, a concern for love drives Sedrach’s apocalypse.<sup>314</sup>

*ApSedr* 2 depicts Sedrach’s call-to-heaven. Of particular importance is 2:4, which states: “I want to speak to God face to face, but I am not able to, Lord, to ascend into the heavens.” Human ineptitude continues to be a dominant otherworldly theme—Sedrach’s humanity hinders his ability to ascend.<sup>315</sup> In *ApSedr*, Sedrach’s ascension occurs on account of divine and angelic intervention.<sup>316</sup> Furthermore, *ApSedr* provides no discussion on heaven’s layout, which draws further emphasis to the paramount conversation between YHWH and Sedrach.<sup>317</sup> *ApSedr* 2:5 illustrates the extent of the hero’s voyage:

But the angel, having stretched out his wings, took him and went up into the heavens, and took him up as far as the third heaven, and *the flame of the divinity* stood there (emphasis added).

The italicized phrase in verse above requires further consideration. According to Wallace, it highlights “the presence of God,” not YHWH’s corporeal presence.<sup>318</sup> The lack of descriptors stress YHWH’s conversational capacity and the paramount divine-human discourse.<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> Agourides, 607.

<sup>315</sup> Wallace, 133.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*

YHWH and Sedrach disagree on humanity's judgment.<sup>320</sup> Initially, Sedrach challenges YHWH's rationale for creating the universe and accuses YHWH of possessing destructive, judgmental tendencies (3:7-8) YHWH's superior power serves as the logical basis of YHWH's rebuttal: "Man is my work and the creatures of my hands, and I discipline him as I find it right" (3:8).

In *ApSedr* 4, YHWH and Sedrach discuss humankind's inability to remain pure and sinless. The opposing parties use the events of *Gen.* 2-3, the fall of Adam and Eve, as the logical basis for their arguments. YHWH focuses on the disobedience of Adam and Eve. Despite the reception of a bountiful creation, the primordial duo "disobeyed [YHWH's] commandment and having been deceived by the devil he ate from the tree" (4:5). As S. Agourides notes: "free will...is granted to man as a result of God's unbounded love."<sup>321</sup> Yet, at times, this freedom provokes YHWH's judgment.<sup>322</sup> Sedrach's rebuttal occurs in *ApSedr* 5, which focuses on YHWH's injustice. Sedrach blames YHWH for Satan's actions in the garden, stating:

It was by your will that Adam was deceived, my Master. You commanded your angels to worship Adam, but he who was first among the angels disobeyed your order and did not worship him; and so you banished him, because he transgressed your commandments and did not come forth (to worship) the creation of your hands If you loved man, why did you not kill the devil, the artificer of all iniquity? (5:1-5).

As seen above, Sedrach considers Satan a fallen angel who was cast from heaven before Adam and Eve's encounter in the garden. For Sedrach, the problem began in heaven before the events in the Garden of Eden. In other words, sin occurred in heaven before it

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<sup>320</sup> Wallace, 133.

<sup>321</sup> Agourides, 607.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 607.

occurred on earth. Thus, Sedrach blames YHWH and, once again, mentions human inadequacy, arguing it is impossible for a mortal to “fight against an invisible spirit” (5:5).

In 6:1-2, YHWH counters Sedrach’s claim of human inability, claiming: “that everything which I commanded man to do was within his reach.” Here again, YHWH reminds Ezra of humankind’s autonomy.<sup>323</sup> YHWH also reminds Sedrach of humankind’s “inheritance” and their inability to love YHWH despite such generosity (6:4). *ApSedr* describes YHWH as an angry, disappointed God who demands justice.<sup>324</sup> Humankind takes advantage of YHWH’s grace; YHWH cannot overlook such egregious acts.<sup>325</sup>

In *ApSedr* 7-8, Sedrach requests YHWH to prevent humanity from experiencing punishment. YHWH, however, responds in 8:6-7 with a series of unanswerable questions, such as: “how many people have been born, and how many people have died....” Such a response heightens YHWH’s wisdom.

Christ enters the myth in *ApSedr* 9. In vv. 1-2, YHWH mandates Christ to “take the soul of my beloved Sedrach, and put it in Paradise.” Sedrach refuses this mandate and demands to acquire information regarding “repentance” (12:5). YHWH states:

If [man] returns after living one hundred or eighty years and repents for three years and bears the fruit of righteousness and death should reach him, then I shall not remember all his sins (12:6).

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<sup>323</sup> Bauckham, 140.

<sup>324</sup> Agourides, 607.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, 607.

Such a response does not satisfy the hero's concerns—for Sedrach, YHWH hinders humanity from “[fulfilling] his repentance” (13:3). In *ApSedr* 13-16, Sedrach inquires about lowering the required years of repentance to provide humanity with a better chance of achieving forgiveness and salvation.

*ApSedr* also considers the proper methodology of repentance. In 14:2-3, Sedrach asks, “Lord, teach us in what way and through what repentance man may be saved, or by what labor,” to which YHWH provides a striking response. YHWH claims that people throughout the world perform similar rites and practices; yet, they do not love YHWH (14:3ff.). It takes more to receive forgiveness than mere tradition—repentance and submission to YHWH are fundamental requirements.

YHWH and Sedrach settle on “even less than forty days, as far as twenty” days of repentance to receive forgiveness and salvation (16:3). Bauckham describes this conclusion as a “concession from God,” highlighting YHWH's merciful and relational capacity.<sup>326</sup> The myth of Sedrach concludes with his death and placement in Paradise. The final verses liturgically underscore YHWH's superiority, stating: “To him be glory and power forever and ever, amen” (16:6-7).

### **The Greek Apocalypse of Baruch**

Unlike the other Christian otherworldly journeys, the *Greek Apocalypse of Baruch* (3Bar) depicts an exilic context. The Babylonian exile drastically shaped the Judeo-Christian tradition, as well as this tradition's sacred literature. Such an impact presents itself throughout the biblical text (cf. *2 Kings* 24). This catastrophic event seeped

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<sup>326</sup> Bauckham, 141 and Agourides, 607.

into the present myth. Baruch, the myth's hero, credits YHWH with this exilic event in *3Bar* 1:1: "King Nebuchadnezzar was permitted by God to plunder his city."

YHWH, who could hear the hero's cry of distress, sent the angel Phamael to inform Baruch of YHWH's desire for him to observe "the mysteries of God" (1:8). Wallace considers this the main thrust of the myth, adding that the hero acquires newfound knowledge of various historical events.<sup>327</sup>

*3Bar* 2 inaugurates the heavenly ascension. The first realm of heaven possesses a prolific gate that the duo must pass through (2:1-2). It is worth noting that of the considered Judeo-Christian myths, only *3Bar* discusses the heavenly gates and the distances of each gate. As observed in *3Bar* 2:2: "and we entered [the gate] as on wings about the distance of 30 days journey." Later in v. 5, the Phamael elaborates further on this distance, claiming the gate "is as great as the distance from earth to heaven." Each level of heaven contains a similar gate, and (as seen below) the distance will exponentially lengthen. The gate-imagery serves theocentric purposes later on in the myth.

On the first level of heaven, Baruch witnesses a group of individuals who were involved in the construction of the Tower of Babel—an attempt to reach YHWH and the heavenly realms (2:7). The *Book of Genesis* discusses this event in depth. *3Bar* claims that these men committed a "war against God" (2:7). Similar to the *Book of Revelation*, the Babylonians, the proposed antagonists of the Genesis tale, symbolically represent the Romans, the true antagonists of the original audience.<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> Wallace, 127.

<sup>328</sup> Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, n.p.

Phamael and Baruch advance to the second level of heaven, where they encounter another gate that required “60 days” of travel (3:1). On this realm, the hero witnesses more deceased souls who participated in the construction of the Tower of Babel (3:5). In *3Bar* 3:6-8, the angel informs Baruch that these postmortem souls were the leaders and architects of the tower. Of significance is the reason these people failed: “God did not permit them...” (3:8). YHWH, and YHWH only, permits a human to enter heaven; a mortal being cannot ascend to heaven without divine assistance.

After this observation, they travel to the third level of heaven where a heavenly gate with the distance of “185 days” resides (4:2). In *3Bar* 4:5, Baruch observes Hades, as well as a dragon who “eats the bodies of those who pass through their lives badly.” The description of Hades differs greatly in this myth. According to *3Bar* 5, this inferno realm is a serpent’s “belly” (5:2).

*3Bar* 10 describes their voyage to the fourth level of heaven where Baruch observes “a lake of water”—which fuels the earth’s rain clouds—and “the place where the souls of the righteous come when they assemble” (10:2, 5). Liturgical language describes the deceased religious adherents. Phamael describes this group as a “choir” (10:5). Liturgy presents itself again as the hero observes various “birds” that dwell in this abode, who “continuously praise the LORD” (10:7).

The fifth level of heaven becomes the topic of discussion in *3Bar* 11. Of significance is the heavenly gate. *3Bar* 11:2 claims: “the gate was closed.” Baruch’s limited access to heaven highlights his limited heroic abilities and the superiority of YHWH.<sup>329</sup> The archangel Michael enters the myth in Chapter 11, who “[descends] to

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<sup>329</sup> Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, n.p.

receive the prayers of men” in order to bring YHWH the “virtues of the righteous” (11:4, 9). The gates open only for Michael; the gates close after the archangel ascends back to YHWH (*3Bar* 14). In *3Bar* 15, Michael distributes blessings to the other angels and commands these angels to redistribute “to our friends, and those who have laboriously done good works” (15:2). The sacrificial and offertory overtones in this level of heaven further demonstrate Himmelfarb’s heavenly temple hypothesis.<sup>330</sup>

One might notice that a divine-human encounter never occurred, at least in the traditional sense.<sup>331</sup> Knowing this, one might find it difficult to assert a theocentric moral to the myth. Collins correctly notes that “the mysteries of God are the five heavens through which Baruch is then guided.”<sup>332</sup> Dean-Otting stresses the story’s emphasis on “the glory of God.”<sup>333</sup> *3Bar* 17 briefly illustrates Baruch’s descent to earth, where he worships YHWH. The final verse of *3Bar* charges the readers to “glorify God,” ending this myth on a liturgical note (17:4).

### Conclusion

The six otherworldly journeys presented above adhere to a common plot-structure—the otherworldly paradigm. The heroes hold a secondary emphasis, which contrasts Campbell’s narratological emphasis. This section demonstrates how the above reviews adhere to this storyline.

Act I, the *Calling*, inaugurates the story with a reminder that YHWH calls the heroes to action. The hero starts in an *earthly domain*, a mortal realm that contrasts the

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<sup>330</sup> Himmelfarb, 33.

<sup>331</sup> Wallace, 126.

<sup>332</sup> Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, n.p.

<sup>333</sup> Dean-Otting, 4-5.

adventures to come. Examples include *2 En*, in which the hero is housebound; in *3Bar*, the hero gazes upon the destruction of the temple. The hero, all of a sudden, receives a call from *the divine agent*, a force sent on behalf of YHWH. In *1 En* 12, the rebellious Watchers charge Enoch to ascend to heaven to serve as an intermediary; theophanies later appear to guide the hero to heaven. In other otherworldly journeys, such as *2 En* and *ApAb*, an angel appears to inform the hero of the heavenly task. This cosmic presence often results in *emotional turmoil*, which demonstrates the humanity of the hero and his/her ineptitude compared to divine/cosmic entities. The greatest example of this occurs in *ApAb* 10:2, in which the voice of YHWH killed the prophet. *Acts of purification* are not as common in Judeo-Christian otherworldly journeys; however, such acts do occur—Abraham performs sacrificial rites; Ezra participates in a series of fasts. The divine agent assists the hero in regaining his/her strength and embarks on a cosmic journey—*ascension/descension*.

The hero's call-to-heaven serves as a pivotal scene in the myth, for this scene helps determine whether the myth presents theocentrism or herocentrism. In the former, the hero receives a call from the divine, or a figure representing the divine. The call-scene often relates to YHWH in some manner. However, in the latter, the hero receives a call from any number of sources—some divine, some mortal—and the call often relates to the hero on a personal basis. In other words, the calling sets the tone for the myth.

Another point of emphasis for this study is the hero's lack of choice. In some manner, YHWH requires the hero to endure a journey. As for Ezra and Sedrach, the heroes demonstrate a degree of choice through their request to enter heaven. In a theodicy-related myth, humanity's autonomy represents a prominent concern. This motif

shaped the entirety of the story, including the hero's ascension to heaven. However, Enoch, Abraham, and Baruch's call-scenes depend on God's plan. Minimal discussion on the heroes' autonomy enables a more elaborative discussion on God's power. The Abrahamic heroes hold a vertical function; God's choices overshadow the heroes' choices.

The *Cosmic Journey*, Act II, underscores the mortal's presence in divine territory. The hero and the divine agent make note of *cosmic observations*, as well as their interactions with *cosmic beings*. In *2 En*, for example, the hero and his angelic companions travel through the seven heavens and learn of the operations of the cosmos. In *3Bar*, the hero observes creation and history from a heavenly perspective. These sights and encounters often result in additional *emotional turmoil*, which highlights the hero's inability to adapt to heaven. Enoch experiences such turmoil in both *1-2 En*. Most of these myths include a *meeting with the high-God*, which can result in a *transformative act* and/or the *presentation of a moral*. Enoch, in *2 En*, transforms into a celestial entity and receives a creation-based message. Of the considered myths, the only myth that does not provide a divine-human encounter is *3Bar*, but, as discussed above, the meeting with YHWH transpired in an unconventional sense—by observing the heavenly abode.

The hero's inability to adapt, comprehend, or properly navigate heaven frequently occurs in this act. The encounter with YHWH heightens this motif. Thus, this scene demonstrates the superiority of God and the inferiority of humankind.

The *Concluding Moral*, the final act, emphasizes the hero's venture back to earth. The message revealed in Act II is often actualized at this point in the myth. After YHWH gifts the hero with newfound knowledge or a message to humanity, he/she embarks on a

*new journey*. For Enoch, in *2 En*, such a journey means a return to earth with a divinely-based message (*message to creation*). A similar instance occurs in *ApAb*. In *3 Bar*, Baruch returns to earth and worships YHWH (*acts of admiration*). However, Ezra and Sedrach bargain away their souls to ensure that earth receives a salvific and/or redemptive message (*message to creation*). Thus, this *new journey* featured the heroes' trip to their eternal resting place.

## Chapter 5: Islamic Otherworldly Journeys

### Introduction

As observed in Chapter 4, the otherworldly paradigm more appropriately represents the message of the Judeo-Christian metaphysical journeys. The Abrahamic prophets and patriarchs hold the heroic roles; yet, the underlying moral concerns YHWH. YHWH's presence overshadows the presence of Enoch, Abraham, Ezra, Sedrach, and Baruch. Thus, Abrahamic otherworldly journeys focus on God.

A similar moral surfaces in Islam. However, Islamic otherworldly journeys extol Muhammad's heroism, more so than the Judeo-Christian otherworldly journeys. As commonly prescribed, the *Mi'raj* holds individual and sociological purposes:

the story of the Prophet's ascent to heaven ingeniously paints a compelling picture of a Prophet preordained to lead the Muslim community to greatness, both in this world and in the world beyond.<sup>334</sup>

In agreement with this conclusion, Margaret A. Leeming refers to Muhammad's heavenly ascent as "a foundational myth of Islam."<sup>335</sup>

The Qur'an also highly regards Muhammad, in which both Allah and Muhammad hold a heroic status.<sup>336</sup> Lawson identifies Campbell's monomythic scheme in the Qur'an's telling of Muhammad's heroic and prophetic journey.<sup>337</sup> Additionally, the Qur'an portrays Allah as Islam's "wali," an Arabic term closely related to the term "hero," and Muhammad as a "walaya," a related term that underscores the prophet's

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<sup>334</sup> Vuckovic, 1.

<sup>335</sup> Margaret A. Leeming, "Remarks on Myth, Interpretation, and Violence," *Journal of Religion and Health* 41, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 35

<sup>336</sup> Lawson, 25.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, 14-22.

“relationship to God.”<sup>338</sup> Islam recognizes the exemplary status of all the prophets; however, all of their messages hold a vertical concern—an Allah-centered concern.<sup>339</sup>

Similarly, in the *Mi'raj*, Muhammad's heroic and prophetic status is a secondary concern. The *Mi'raj* presents an Allah-centered pedagogy. Through a variety of measures, theocentrism remains the primary moral of Islamic otherworldly stories.<sup>340</sup>

Chapter 5 has a similar purpose to Chapter 4—to uncover the theocentrism of Abrahamic otherworldly journeys. The conclusion further demonstrates how the otherworldly paradigm more accurately captures these myths than Campbell's monomyth.

## Islamic Myths

### **Bukhari Hadith**

The *Bukhari Hadith*, authored circa ninth century AD, presents multiple renditions of the *Mi'raj*.<sup>341</sup> A “Hadith” serves as a formative piece of Islamic literature that provides commentary on Qur'anic verses and the deeds of Muhammad.<sup>342</sup> The rendition found in Volume 5, Book 58, Number 227 (5:58:227) receives consideration on account of its detail; other renditions receive attention for descriptive and educational purposes.

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<sup>338</sup> Lawson, 25.

<sup>339</sup> Cyril Glasse, “Muhammad,” in *The New Encyclopedia of Islam* (MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2013), 379 and Fazlur Rahman, *The Major Themes of the Qur'an* (CHI: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 83.

<sup>340</sup> All of the non-canonical Islamic sources referenced and/or quoted in this thesis came from the following sources: (1) Bukhari, Sahih. *The Hadith: Sahih Al-Bukhari*. Global Grey, 2017; (2) Guillaume, A, Trans. *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*. NY: Oxford University Press, 1955; and (3) Colby, Frederick Stephen. *Narrating Muhammad's Night Journey: Tracing the Development of the Ibn 'Abbās Ascension Discourse*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2008.

<sup>341</sup> Vuckovic, 5.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 5.

The opening scene of 5:58:227 places Muhammad at the Ka'bah, a sacred Islamic landmark located in Jerusalem.<sup>343</sup> Muhammad's placement at the Ka'bah forms an affinity to Jesus, who also ascends from Jerusalem in the *Book of Acts*.<sup>344</sup> Other versions, such as 4:54:429, place Muhammad "at the house in a state midway between sleep and wakefulness."

Here, Jibrīl (Gabriel), the archangel, and Buraq, a cosmic mule, greet Muhammad and make a vertical incision on the prophet's body to remove his heart (5:58:227). Afterward, Jibrīl places Muhammad's heart on "a gold tray of Belief" for cleansing and restorative purposes (5:58:227). Jibrīl uses water from the Zam-Zam well to cleanse Muhammad, water that Islamic mythology also credits with saving Hagar and Ishmael while in exile.<sup>345</sup> Vuckovic identifies this scene as a "purification narrative."<sup>346</sup> Through this practice, Muhammad receives two qualities necessary for ascension: "faith (*iman*) and wisdom (*hikmah*)."<sup>347</sup> Allah ensures Muhammad's survival through this preliminary measure, which underscores a high-degree of divine-favor.<sup>348</sup> On the back of Buraq, the prophet and Jibrīl ascend to the heavens (5:58:227).

On the first level of heaven, Muhammad, Jibrīl, and Buraq encounter a heavenly gate where a guard asks Jibrīl: "Has Muhammad been called?" (5:58:227). The guard

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<sup>343</sup> Uzdavinys, 30.

<sup>344</sup> David Leeming, "Ascension," in *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 1937), 32.

<sup>345</sup> Vuckovic, 47.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>347</sup> Uzdavinys, 31.

<sup>348</sup> Vuckovic, 22-23.

attempts to discover if Muhammad has permission to enter heaven. Jibrīl confirms Muhammad's divine approval and the guard grants him access to the first level of heaven (5:58:227).

On this heavenly level, they encounter Adam, whom Jibrīl calls "father" (5:58:227). Adam's status as the primordial man and prophet results in his placement on the first realm of heaven.<sup>349</sup> This scene represents the first of many "education narratives," or scenes in which Jibrīl instructs Muhammad on the universe and proper prophetic conduct.<sup>350</sup> Furthermore, Muhammad's engagement with Adam represents the first of many prophetic encounters, a symbolic device that depicts Muhammad's ascension over postmortem prophets of old.<sup>351</sup> Muhammad's ascension over the previous Islamic prophets demonstrates his prophetic superiority and propels the identity of the Islamic community.<sup>352</sup>

This particular interpretation of the myth highlights Adam's role as the primordial man and prophet; however, other myths grant Adam a different role. In 1:8:345, Adam holds the role of a judge. The first man decides the fate of "the people of Paradise" and "the people of Hell" (1:8:345). In this rendition of the myth, Muhammad observes Adam's judge-esque role and becomes emotionally distraught at the sight of such images (1:8:345).

Returning to 5:58:227, Muhammad and the heavenly duo ascend to the second level of heaven, where another celestial guardian greets the prophet. In a similar manner

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<sup>349</sup> Vuckovic, 51.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 32, 35.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid.

as the first heaven, the guard questions Jibrīl: “Has Muhammad been called?” (5:58:227). Again, Muhammad receives access to the second heaven because of his divine blessing (5:58:227). On this level, Muhammad encounters Jesus and John—prominent figures of the Christian tradition (5:58:227). Jesus and John symbolize Christianity, and this scene captures Muhammad’s (who symbolizes Islam) ascension above the Christian religion.<sup>353</sup>

Repetitive structural and thematic devices occur in the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth levels of heaven. Each realm presents the following cycle: (1) a heavenly guard asks Jibrīl: “Has he been called?” and the Jibrīl reaffirms Muhammad’s divine calling; (2) Muhammad meets a deceased prophet; and (3) the prophets confirm Muhammad’s superior prophetic status (5:58:227). “A cosmological hierarchy” demonstrates Muhammad’s ascension over, respectively: Joseph, Enoch, Aaron, Moses, and Abraham (5:58:227).<sup>354</sup> Each character holds a purpose—examples include Joseph and Aaron, both of which represent well-respected religious characters.<sup>355</sup> Enoch’s heavenly placement calls attention to the patriarch’s previous ascension narratives, as seen throughout Enochian literature, and “reinforces [Muhammad’s] status as a prophet who ascends.”<sup>356</sup>

Muhammad’s discourse with Moses on the sixth heaven warrants special consideration. Moses’ scene describes the patriarch as an emotionally distraught individual: “I weep because after me there has been sent...a young man whose followers will enter Paradise in greater numbers than my followers” (5:58:227). To state

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<sup>353</sup> Vuckovic, 56.

<sup>354</sup> Nerina Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire: Heaven and Hell in Islamic Culture* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2009), 34-35.

<sup>355</sup> Vuckovic, 54.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

differently, Muhammad's followers—the Islamic religion—will surpass the followers of Moses—the Judaic religion.<sup>357</sup>

On the seventh level of heaven, Muhammad encounters Abraham. Islamic lore places Abraham on the seventh realm due to his close rapport with Allah.<sup>358</sup> Jibrīl also instructs Muhammad of the secrets of heaven.<sup>359</sup> For example, Muhammad witnesses “the Sacred House,” in which the hero undergoes a task through the presentation of three beverages: wine, honey, and milk (5:58:227). Muhammad selects the latter option, which, according to Jibrīl, represents “the Islamic religion” (5:58:227). The “confirmation ritual” found in this scene declares the prophet's superior placement on earth and in heaven.<sup>360</sup>

Vuckovic stresses “Muhammad's choice,” claiming it has personal and sociological ramifications—Muhammad's prophetic status and the future of the Islamic community rest on his decision.<sup>361</sup> Although this myth grants Muhammad a degree of choice, it would be improper to attribute this act solely to Muhammad's heroism. One must remember that before this act on the seventh heaven, Muhammad underwent a cleansing on earth. Allah's influence on earth impacted Muhammad's decision in heaven. Attributing this act to Muhammad's heroism devalues the significance of this act. Therefore, a proper reading of the *Mi'raj* attributes this scene to both human choice and divine influence.

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<sup>357</sup> Vuckovic, 56.

<sup>358</sup> Rustomji, 35.

<sup>359</sup> Vuckovic, 34.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-27.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

Thereafter, the text states: “the prayers were enjoined to me” (5:58:227). This phrase refers to the daily prayers all followers of Allah must perform—the “salat.”<sup>362</sup> At this point, the salat requires “fifty prayers a day,” which Moses objects to on account of human inefficacy:

Moses said, “Your followers cannot bear fifty prayed a day, and by Allah, I have tested people before you, and I have tried my level best with Bani Israel (in vain). Go back to your Lord and ask for reduction to lessen your follower’s burden” (5:58:227).

Moses reveals the true origin of the salat—Allah. Thereafter, Allah and the prophet engage in divine-human dialogue, a similar trait found in many Judeo-Christian otherworldly journeys. According to 5:58:227: “[Allah] reduced ten more prayers.” However, Moses demands Muhammad to inquire about additional reductions (5:58:227). This cycle continues until Muhammad “was ordered to observe five prayers a day” (5:58:227).

Similar instances of divine-human dialogue occur throughout the Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions. In the *ApSedr*, as observed above, YHWH reduces the years of repentance upon Sedrach’s request. The *Book of Genesis* presents another instance of divine-human dialogue. In *Gen.* 18: 22-32, YHWH and Abraham discuss the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. YHWH, at first, promises Abraham that “if I find at Sodom *fifty righteous* in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake” (18:26; emphasis added). By v. 33, YHWH says: “*for the sake of ten* I will not destroy it” (emphasis added). The *Mi’raj*, then, refashions a common debate to underscore Allah’s generosity.

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<sup>362</sup> Stephen Colby Fredrick, *Narrating Muhammad’s Night Journey: Tracing the Development of the Ibn ‘Abbās Ascension Discourse* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), 2.

Moses, again, encourages Muhammad to seek a reduction; however, Muhammad refuses in fear of “[requesting] so much from my Lord” (5:58:227). The final line of the myth underscores Allah, who states: “I have passed My Order and have lessened the burden of My followers” (5:58:227). Thus, the *Mi’raj* emphasizes Allah’s grace.

### **The Life of Muhammad**

In the *Life of Muhammad*, Ibn Ishaq provides a biographical account of Muhammad that solidifies Islamic orthodoxy and Muhammad’s prophetic acts.<sup>363</sup> While in the presence of other monotheistic religions, this account, which was written post-Muhammad’s death (eighth-ninth century AD), provided the early Islamic communities religious security and orthodoxy.<sup>364</sup> As such, the *Life of Muhammad* secured Muhammad’s prophetic legacy and Islam’s supremacy for the Islamic audience.<sup>365</sup>

Before any elaboration occurs, the *Life of Muhammad* commences with a theocentric statement:

It was certainly an act of God by which He took him by night in what way He pleased to show him signs which He willed him to see so that he witnessed His mighty sovereignty and power by which He does what He wills to do (Part II, 263).

The author leaves no room to interpret Muhammad’s ascension as an example of prophetic heroism. Allah receives credit and praise for the exemplar’s ascension. Thus, this theocentric statement sets the stage for the remainder of this mythological quest.

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<sup>363</sup> Somaya Abdullah, “The Prophet as a Hero—Myth or Reality?: A Comparative Survey of Ibn Ishaq’s Biography of the Prophet (Sirach) and the Myth of the Hero,” *Journal for Islamic Studies* 23 (2003): 39. In addition, Somaya Abdullah concluded that Muhammad’s journey in “the life of the Prophet essentially does not conform to this [monomythic] pattern” (56). For further information regarding this study, see: Abdullah, 56.

<sup>364</sup> Abdullah, 39.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

The *Life of Muhammad* commences with a story called the “*isra*,” otherwise identified as the “Night Journey,” which allegedly occurred in 621 AD.<sup>366</sup> Jibrīl and Buraq transport Muhammad from Mecca to Jerusalem, where the prophet encounters Abraham, Moses, and Jesus (II, 264). Muhammad arrives at the resting place of the former temple, a locale of sacred value in the Abrahamic tradition.<sup>367</sup> Muhammad’s journey to this site, which contemporary Jerusalem identifies as “the Dome of the Rock,” depicts Islam as the superior and final monotheistic religion.<sup>368</sup>

Muhammad and his prophetic companions participate in prayer; some traditions refer to the hero as an “imam” (II, 264). Here, Muhammad undergoes a familiar task: some traditions say that the prophet chose between “wine” and “milk,” while others interject “water” into the selection of beverages (II, 236-264). In both cases, the prophet selects the “milk” (II, 236-264). This trial’s placement at the beginning of the myth, to a degree, changes its meaning—this scene now represents an “initiation ritual.”<sup>369</sup> Whereas some myths conclude with this task to stress the prophet’s confirmation, the *Life of Muhammad* places this story at the beginning for preparatory purposes.<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> Peter Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy in Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā): With a Translation of the Book of the Prophet Muhammad’s Ascent to Heaven* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 109 and Donald L. Berry, *The Pictures of Islam: A Student’s Guide to Islam* (Mason, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007), 25.

<sup>367</sup> Berry, 25.

<sup>368</sup> Segal, *Life After Death*, 654.

<sup>369</sup> Vuckovic, 25-26.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-26.

Muhammad's decision signifies herocentric and theocentric values. Limiting the task to the former value diminishes Allah's role in the myth. Prior to Muhammad's decision, the hero received some divine assistance:

I heard a voice saying when these were offered to me: If he takes the water he will be drowned and his people also; if he takes the wine he will go astray and his people also; and if he takes the milk he will be rightly guided and his people also (II, 261-261).

This mysterious voice, presumably Allah, guides Muhammad to the appropriate decision.

Once again, the *Mi'raj* presents a juncture between human choice and divine influence.

Both Allah and Muhammad warrant credit for the completion of this task.

Muhammad's ascension commences from Jerusalem (II, 268). As opposed to receiving guidance from Jibrīl and Buraq, Muhammad climbs to heaven on a ladder (II, 268). Such imagery represents the rationale for entitling Muhammad's ascent as the "*Mi'raj*"—the Arabic term for "ladder."<sup>371</sup> After Muhammad enters heaven, the angel Ismā'īl greets him at "the Gate of the Watchers," the angel's guard post (II, 268). Both the angel and the gate, according to Vuckovic, connect Muhammad to a specific history—the Judeo-Christian history.<sup>372</sup> Ismā'īl permits Muhammad passage on account of his prophetic status (II, 268). Another tradition holds that Muhammad encounters Mālik, who presides over the inferno region and allows the prophet to gaze into hell (II, 268). Another tradition claims that Muhammad encounters Adam, the first man, who judges postmortem souls and determines their eternal placement: "the spirit of a believer excited his pleasure, and the spirits of an infidel excited his disgust..." (II, 269).

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<sup>371</sup> Vuckovic, 2.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid., 46.

Thereafter, the hero ascends through the second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh layers of heaven and encounters several prominent prophets of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition (II, 270). Muhammad meets, respectively: Jesus and John, Joseph, Enoch, Aaron, Moses, and Abraham (II, 270). This tradition echoes the common tradition of Muhammad meeting previous prophets during his ascension.

The divine throne-room scene on the seventh heaven depicts a similar message: the hero's reception of the required prayers (II, 271). Again, Allah reduces the number of prayers from fifty-to-five prayers; Moses also encourages Muhammad to seek additional reductions (II, 271). Muhammad, once again, stops seeking reduction after Allah reduces the requirement to five prayers (II, 271).

#### **Ibn 'Abbas Ascension Narrative**

Compared to the Islamic myths presented above, Ibn 'Abbas' version presents a vastly different telling of the *Mi'raj*. The introductory sequence presents a simple call-scene: “[The Messenger of God said:] *When I was caused to journey by night to the [first] heaven, in it I saw the wonders of God's servants and creation*” (p. 175; emphasis added). Allah enables Muhammad's ascension. Despite the minimal detail of this verse, later contextual evidence supports this theocentric proposition. For instance, the end of the myth credits Allah with Muhammad's ascension (cf. 193). Jibril's presence in heaven also provides some additional context behind the prophet's ascension (cf. 176).

In the first heaven, Muhammad witnesses “the Rooster Angel,” a celestial creature who orchestrates the earthly roosters to worship Allah through the following prayer: “Glorified be God, the Great and Exalted! There is no god but he, the Alive and Manifest” (p. 176). Thus, Islam's monotheistic emphasis dominates this daily prayer.

Muhammad also observes “the Half-Fire-Half-Snow Angel” and “the Angel of Death” (p. 176). Jibrīl introduces Muhammad to the former angel as “the Prophet of mercy whom God sent to the Arabs” (p. 176). Afterward, Muhammad greets “the Guardian of Hellfire,” a grotesque angel who guards the inferno region until the eschaton (p. 177). Muhammad experiences emotional distress at the sight of hell; in response to such fear, the prophet commands Jibrīl to close the gates of hell (p. 177). Muhammad’s charge to Jibrīl demonstrates his power over Allah’s creation, both earthly and heavenly, and further exemplifies his prophetic superiority.<sup>373</sup>

The divine-human relationship of this next section demands attention. According to the myth, the hero witnesses a “number of [angels] of which only God, the One, the King, the Conqueror, knows” (p. 177). Hence, similarly to the Judeo-Christian heroes, Muhammad receives knowledge that transforms him and also binds him to Allah in a relational sense.<sup>374</sup> Through such transformation, Muhammad is able to lead the Islamic community.<sup>375</sup> Furthermore, Uzdavinys argues the communion between Allah and Muhammad resembles a “friendship,” an inspirational relationship for the Islamic community to admire.<sup>376</sup>

Ibn ‘Abbas’ myth does not provide a detailed analysis of the second, third, fourth, or fifth level of the heavens; however, the myth credits the journey to “God’s power” (p. 178). On the sixth level of heaven, Muhammad sees additional liturgical angelic figures; on the seventh level of heaven, Muhammad observes a large number of celestial beings

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<sup>373</sup> Vuckovic, 18.

<sup>374</sup> Uzdavinys, 56-57.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid.

(p. 178). However, Allah forbids the hero from revealing some of his observations to creation (pp. 178-179).

Thereafter, they ascend to “the High Realm,” a realm where Muhammad identifies and describes ten astronomical observations (pp. 179-185). Examples of these landmarks include a “mountain of ice” and three oceanic locations (pp. 179-185). Muhammad prefaces each elaboration with the following phrase: “with God’s permission...” (pp. 179-185). Moreover, Muhammad receives the ability to ascend from Allah. This theocentric tone continues as Muhammad ascends to Allah’s throne (p. 185).

Allah’s majestic throne blinds the prophet, whose vision does not return until “God returned [his] vision” (p. 185). Thus, Muhammad relies on Allah to overcome this ailment. Additionally, Allah’s restorative abilities further demonstrate the Deity’s close communion with Muhammad.<sup>377</sup> Muhammad describes Allah as having a frigid touch (p. 186). The divine-human physical contact concerned the ancient Islamic community due to the human-esque portrait it lent Allah; yet, the symbolism of this act warrants attention—it speaks of Allah’s relational and communal touch.<sup>378</sup>

Afterward, Allah compares Muhammad to the prophets of old, including Abraham, Moses, and Enoch, which underscores the hero’s unique status.<sup>379</sup> For example, Allah states: “I nourished your community...such that I did not offer to a community before yours” (p. 187). Uzdavinys argues this scene provides another glimpse

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<sup>377</sup> Uzdavinys, 57.

<sup>378</sup> Colby, 4.

<sup>379</sup> Uzdavinys, 57.

at this admirable divine-human relationship.<sup>380</sup> Furthermore, Muhammad's reception of forbidden heavenly knowledge stresses the uniqueness of this relationship.<sup>381</sup>

Finally, Muhammad travels to Paradise, where he witnesses a variety of blissful landmarks such as "the Lote Tree of Boundary" (p. 188-190). As Muhammad descends from Paradise, he encounters a wide array of postmortem prophets, including Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Enoch (p. 193). Instead of interacting with these prophets during his ascension to heaven, Muhammad engages these prophets during his return to earth. Muhammad's arrival at each realm of heaven results in prophetic liturgy (p. 193).

The conclusion of the narrative ends on a liturgical note: "Praise be to God for that [journey]! It was all in a single night, with God's permission and power" (p. 193). Allah, once again, receives the credit for Muhammad's heavenly journey. The conclusion does elevate Muhammad through the following statement: "the master of the children of Adam, without boasting, in this world and the afterworld" (p. 193). However, in this myth, the hero's strength does not originate from within—Allah provides Muhammad with the necessary heroism.

### Conclusion

Islamic otherworldly journeys underscore a familiar theocentric moral. One might notice the wide array of commonalities among the Judeo-Christian and Islamic stories. Theocentrism constitutes the most prolific similarity. Theocentrism distinguishes the Abrahamic stories from the Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman stories described in

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<sup>380</sup> Uzdavinys, 57.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., 57.

Chapter 3. Furthermore, the otherworldly paradigm, as observed below, further exemplifies this moral.

As for Act I, the *calling*, Muhammad receives a heavenly invitation from Jibrīl and Buraq, as observed in the *Bukhari Hadith*. The heavenly ladder represents another possible avenue for Muhammad's ascension, as observed in the *Life of Muhammad*. Similar to the Judeo-Christian myths, the Islamic myths credit Allah with Muhammad's ascension. In addition, Muhammad's choice is of little concern.

One notable difference of the *Mi'raj* is the prophet's lack of *emotional turmoil*, a common plot-point in Judeo-Christian journeys. The prophet remains calm and fearless throughout the call-scenes, a quality not found in the *2 En* or *ApAb*. Instead, an *act of purification* replaces this plot-point, which heightens the prophet's role in the myth. Both the *Bukhari Hadith* and the *Life of Muhammad* place tasks before the prophet's ascension to heaven: the former presents a medical procedure; the latter examines Muhammad's decision-making. Both acts serve a theocentric purpose. These trials extol Muhammad; yet, Allah's provision enabled the prophet's survival and success.

Act II, the *cosmic journey*, captures the prophet's ascension through the heavens. At this point, Muhammad makes *cosmic observations* of heavenly landmarks and eternal realms; he also engages *cosmic beings*, including heavenly guards and postmortem prophets of Allah. Many of these instances reinforce Muhammad's prophetic authority. Muhammad also continues to extol Allah throughout the journey. One instance of *emotional turmoil* surfaces in *Ibn 'Abbas Ascension Narrative*, in which Muhammad witnesses the terrors of hell. However, the prophet exercises his authority and demands the angel to seal the gates of hell.

In all of the considered Islamic myths, a pivotal divine-human encounter occurs. Allah demonstrates genericity through the reduction of daily prayers. Allah's relational capacity is also evident through the Deity's interactions with Muhammad. Furthermore, Muhammad's *transformative act* is not angelic, as observed in *2 En*. Instead, the prophet receives special knowledge and becomes the leader of the Islamic community. In addition, Muhammad receives the salat, and Allah charges the prophet to deliver this dutiful message to the Islamic community.

In Act III, the *concluding moral*, Muhammad returns to earth with newfound knowledge on the salat and cosmic realities. Muhammad embarks on *a new journey*—the prophet guides the Islamic community and assists in maintaining Allah's order. The salat serves as the *message to creation*.

Traditional heroic language, at times, saturates Muhammad's character. An example includes the prophet's engagement in trials that have implications for the entire Islamic community. Although Muhammad accomplishes these obstacles, Allah provides assistance that inevitably results in the correct decision. Muhammad also takes charge when amid hell's terror. *Ibn 'Abbas Ascension Narrative* also refers to Muhammad as "the master of the children of Adam, without boasting, in this world and the afterworld," which echoes Campbell's "the master of two worlds" (p. 193).<sup>382</sup> Thus, Muhammad receives a higher heroic status than the Judeo-Christian heroes considered for this study, which speaks to the Islamic community's reverence for the prophet.

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<sup>382</sup> Campbell, *The Hero*, 28-29.

## Chapter 6: The God of Abraham

### Theocentrism and Abrahamic Otherworldly Journeys

Stories provide the reader with more than one possible meaning. Heroes, gods, and schema serve as literary devices that help promote specific messages. Characters and frameworks receive their purpose from underlying morals. As seen in the chapters above, otherworldly journeys vary from religion-to-religion. Abrahamic otherworldly journeys promote theocentrism, the belief that attributes the mysteries and wonders of the cosmos to God. In these instances, the heroes serve a theocentric purpose. Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman otherworldly journeys align with Campbell's monomyth due to a shared herocentric concern. Favoring the hero over God contrasts the basic premise of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic otherworldly stories—many in these traditions would consider this an idolatrous act.

Campbell's interpretation of the monomyth and the proposed otherworldly paradigm hold similar characteristics, such as the use of heroes, gods, and common plot-points. Nevertheless, the emphases of these frameworks remain strikingly different. Otherworldly stories attest that a single story does not exist; the diversity of morals in otherworldly stories support this conclusion.

When compared to other heroes, the Abrahamic heroes hold limited heroism. Examples include the ascensions of Enoch and Muhammad, both of which were powered by God. Abrahamic heroism does not enable ascension, as it does with Etana. However, Muhammad's character holds a higher herocentric representation than Enoch, Abraham, Ezra, Sedrach, and Baruch. The *Mi'raj* depicts Muhammad's prophetic supremacy through the implementation of trials and prophetic greetings; yet, Muhammad's heroism depends on Allah. Allah secures the prophet's righteousness amid trials and decisions.

## The Characteristics of God

Abrahamic otherworldly journeys provide theocentric pedagogical insights. Through these insights, religious followers receive some additional perspectives to consider when studying God. Abrahamic otherworldly journeys use the following images to describe God: God as relational, God as creator, God as judge, and God as fate.

### **God as Relational**

Abrahamic otherworldly myths depict a relational God. For many religious adherents, God represents an unrelatable entity. Furthermore, religious institutions often instruct believers to follow God blindly. Disagreements commonly arise in relationships; yet, a divine-human relationship often serves as an exception to this rule—a disagreement with God often receives the label of taboo or heresy.

In the Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions, God's relationship allows for genuine discourse. Examples of this perspective arise in the Apocalypses of Ezra, Sedrach, and Baruch, as well as the *Mi'raj*. In these stories, divine-human debates transpire until the opposing parties reach an agreed upon conclusion. This image underscores God's love and relational capacity. God transcends humankind; yet, God entertains the thoughts of creation and strives for harmony. Abrahamic otherworldly journeys portray God and creation as a team—as members of a proper relationship. This divine-human portrayal challenges the misconception that a human being has no right to question God. The Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions worship a God who can handle criticism and heated discourse. God actively works to mend the hero's complaints. Furthermore, Bauckham offers a similar conclusion: "It is not a sentiment they considered disallowed by dogma,

but one voiced by the greatest saints in direct dialogues with God, in which God at any rate listens.”<sup>383</sup>

### **God as Creator**

The Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions endorse God’s creative power. Many otherworldly journeys thoroughly discuss creation, both on an earthly and heavenly level. In these journeys, the heroes observe God’s creation and acquire secrets regarding God’s creative abilities. At times, an otherworldly text’s dedication to creation distracts the reader from recognizing the underlying moral of the story. Nevertheless, creation holds a vertical emphasis. These stories credit YHWH and Allah with creative majesty, which reinforces the theocentric moral. Similar to the hero, creation serves as a literary feature that honors God.

### **God as Judge**

The Judeo-Christian-Islamic otherworldly journeys describe God’s paradoxical nature. Simple classifications cannot define YHWH and Allah. The God of Abraham holds relational and loving qualities; yet, God also operates in terms of justice. On multiple occasions, God judges those whom oppose the divinely stated order of the universe.

In several myths, the heroes witness the eternal holding place of postmortem souls. For example, the heroes often view Paradise, a realm full of pleasantries beyond human comprehension. Paradise serves as the holding place for the righteous. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the terrors of Hell receive attention. Hell serves as the holding place for the unrighteous. These journeys also locate the inferno realms.

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<sup>383</sup> Bauckham, 137-138.

Contemporary religious followers often describe Hell as a realm located under the earth and outside of God's immediate presence, as commonly found in Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman literature. However, many of these myths offer a different perspective. In many cases, Hell, or a Hell-esque realm, resides in heaven. Heaven is an all-encompassing reality that holds both Paradise and Hell. Therefore, God's presence ranges universally—even in Hell. The inferno realms often reside in God's midst, which alludes to the Deity's emphasis on judgment.

### **God as Fate**

The God of the Abrahamic traditions holds superiority over the universe. Despite God's relational concerns, God reserves the right to disregard the interests of humanity. On several occasions, God seals the fate of a wide array of entities. In the *Book of the Watchers*, YHWH condemns the rebellious angels. YHWH sentences the Watchers to eternal punishment, despite Enoch and the angels' plea for mercy. Additional examples surface in the Apocalypses of Ezra and Sedrach. YHWH judges the unrighteous and guarantees the eschaton, despite Ezra and Sedrach's plea for mercy.

Furthermore, these myths address the heroes' lack of autonomy. In other words, God seals the fate of the hero. Devaluing the hero's free will does not speak generally about humankind's free will. As seen in the Apocalypses of Abraham and Sedrach, YHWH acknowledges humankind's autonomy. Instead, Abrahamic otherworldly journeys prioritize God's power and supremacy. By limiting a hero's power, the story heightens God's power. Thus, a hero's limited autonomy reflects theocentrism. These stories do not discount humanity's free will; instead, these stories focus on the power of God.

The decision to describe God as “fate,” as opposed to “all-powerful,” represents the desire to compare Zeus and Jupiter to the God of Abraham. As seen in Chapter 3, in Greco-Roman otherworldly journeys, gods and heroes must align with fate. For example, Aeneas and the Roman pantheon struggle to align with this higher power. In the Abrahamic traditions, God holds the ability to adjust or stay true to a decision. God seals eternal fates and alters divinely stated mandates. If God deems it appropriate, God possesses the power to alter historical circumstances. God is the ultimate power in the universe. Moreover, if God considers it necessary, God enables ascension. In the Abrahamic traditions, the power to ascend does not come from within the hero. Ascension is a God-ordained mission.

#### Concluding Remarks

The present literary analysis uncovers the morals of otherworldly journeys from the Mesopotamian, Greco-Roman, and Abrahamic traditions. Otherworldly journeys, despite the similarities, reject the boundaries of a single moral. The theocentric pedagogical lessons of Judeo-Christian-Islamic otherworldly journeys challenge humanistic frameworks. Moreover, Joseph Campbell’s monomyth detects a herocentric concern, as observed in Chapter 3. On account of this herocentric concern, Campbell’s monomyth does not account for the theocentric agenda of the Abrahamic otherworldly journeys, as observed in Chapters 4 and 5. The otherworldly paradigm accurately fits the content and lessons of the Abrahamic myths. Other morals exist that do not receive extensive consideration in this project. For example, as observed above, Lawson poses

the possibility of an “ethnocentric” moral.<sup>384</sup> Further research should be conducted on the existence of these morals.

The God of Abraham receives unique and authoritative descriptions in otherworldly myths. Throughout these tales, readers can comprehend God on a new level. The contemporary readers experience the heavenly journey and witness the Abrahamic God from a heavenly perspective.

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<sup>384</sup> Lawson, xv.

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