

## Religious Beliefs

*You are in the tomb of a royal scribe. You are looking at an illustration that shows the Judgment Hall of Osiris, a mythical location that ancient Egyptians believed to be the first place people went after they died.*

Ancient Egyptians believed in and worshipped many Gods. They believed that their Gods had created and ruled the world. While each God served a particular need or purpose, some were more important than others. One such God was Osiris, God of the underworld, the home of the dead. Osiris, assisted by other Gods and many judges, sat in a hall and passed judgment on the souls of deceased people. The dead person's heart was weighed against an ostrich feather. If the feather and heart balanced, the deceased gained everlasting life. If they did not balance, the heart was fed to the "Swallower," a monster who had the head of a crocodile and the body of a lion and a hippo.

Some Egyptian Gods had the body of a human and the head of an animal. Anubis was one such God. He had the body of a human and the head of a jackal. Anubis was God of the *necropolis*, the place where Egyptians believed the bodies of the dead were prepared for the afterlife. Thoth, the God of writing and knowledge, had the head of an ibis (type of a bird), and Horus, the sky God, had the head of a falcon.

Egyptians believed that temples were the earthly homes of the Gods and Goddesses. Except for a few select occasions, only priests and priestesses could enter temples. Most temples resembled palaces, because a holy statue of a God lived or "visited" there. When the statues were inside a temple, high priests and priestesses carried out certain rituals to honor them. During important festivals, a statue of a God was carried in a ceremony through the courtyard to the most sacred part of the temple. Only on these special festival days were ordinary Egyptians allowed to enter the outer courtyards of a temple to view the ceremonies. However, smaller structures built outside the main temple were dedicated to the prayers of the common people.

Commoners also paid homage to Gods and Goddesses in their homes. Most people had a small area in their homes where they could make offerings to local Gods, whom they asked to protect them. People honored Gods for such things as being able to have a child, as well as to keep away bad spirits and the spirits of the dead.

**Discussion Questions:** Who were some of the most important ancient Egyptian Gods? What did they do? How did people worship them?