

the Holy Place

Bud Morris

The first mention of the word, "Holy," in the Bible is where Moses stopped to watch the Burning Bush. God called to him saying:

Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. *Exodus 3:5*

Since there are no other Scriptural references to any sacred part of the Sinai desert, we assume that the area was hallowed for the occasion because God was there--in the midst of the burning bush.

God established a more tangible holy place for worshipping Him in the Tabernacle built by Moses. The outer section where most of the tabernacle service was accomplished was called the "Holy place." The part behind the veil where God met with His people from above the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant was called the "Holy of Holies." (*Hebrews 9:1-7.*) Divine protocol was mandated in the Holy Place; and the high priest could only enter the Holy of Holies--where God dwelt--once a year, and not without sacrificial blood.

The furnishings of the Tabernacle were transferred to a more permanent holy place at the dedication of Temple built by king Solomon. The Shekinah cloud that graced the Tabernacle in the wilderness visually confirmed God's acceptance of the Temple as the Holy Place. (*I Kings 8:5-11.*) Solomon's Temple was burned by Nebuchadnezzar, (*II Chronicles 36:17-19,*) in God's judgment on His disobedient people who had horribly defiled it. (*Ezekiel 9.*)

The site of the Temple continued to be revered by God's people. (*Daniel 9:17.*) The prayers of the faithful were answered, and God contrived for a new temple to be built on the old site in Ezra's times. Although about the same size, the second temple seems to have lacked the glory of the first one. (*Ezra 3:12, 13.*) Even though no miraculous signs confirmed Ezra's temple as the holy place, the Scriptures leave no doubt as to its authenticity.

A magnificent third temple was built on the same site by Herod to gain the favor of the Jews. It was built right over the second one, which was subsequently dismantled from underneath it. This third temple is the one referred to in the New Testament times of Christ. Jesus authenticated it by alluding to it as, "My house," (*Matthew 21:12,13.*) But He also prophesied that it would be utterly destroyed. (*Matthew 24:1,2.*) Herod's temple was totally demolished by the Romans in 70 A.D. because of Jewish rebellion.

The Jewish state of Judea itself was dissolved, and the surviving Jews more or less dispersed by the Roman emperor, Hadrian, in A.D. 135, because of persistent resistance to Roman authority. The area was renamed "Syria Palastina," derisively derived from Israel's ancient Philistine archenemies. Jerusalem was renamed "Aelia Captolina," and a temple to Jupiter was built on the ancient Temple site in this definitive humiliation of the rebellious Jews. Only a vestige of a Jewish mini-state survived, in Galilee; and much of that was destroyed by Roman "Christians" in the fourth century. (*David Dolan--Holy War for the Promised Land, page 55.*)

Palestine fell under Muslim control in 661 A.D. Claiming that Muhammad ascended for a visit to heaven from the ancient Temple site, they touted the domination of Islam over both Judaism and Christianity by building the Dome of the Rock shrine on the site in 691 A.D. The Jews were not powerful enough to contest this desecration of their Holy Place, and the Roman Catholic were unable to gain lasting control of the "Sacred" sites of the holy land despite many crusades. Palestine came under British rule during World War II in 1918, and the nation of Israel was reborn in 1948, but intense international pressure has prevented the Jews from reclaiming their ancient Temple site. The Dome of the Rock still stands under Muslim control on the ancient site of the Holy Place.

The Scriptures conclusively show that the Jewish Holy Place was only a figure of "A greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands" (*Hebrews 9:11.*) It represented a position in the very presence of God Himself--finally made accessible to man by the sacrificial death of Christ, as declared by the rent veil. Christians who are willing to live purified lives are urged to confidently enter this position by virtue of His blood. (*Hebrews 10:19-22.*) What a privilege for redeemed sinners to worship and serve in intimate communion with a holy God! May we value it and avail ourselves of it.

Under the Mosaic law, the Lord's people had to worship at **the place** where He directed:

The place in which the Lord your God shall choose for His name to dwell... *Deuteronomy 12:11*

But Christians are assured that the Lord will meet with them where ever they gather in His name:

Where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst. *Matthew 18:20*

The change from the covenant of **law** to the principle of **grace** ushered in by the crucifixion was difficult for even the believing Jews. They clung tenaciously to their tangible Holy Place, until the doors of the Temple were finally symbolically slammed in their faces. (*Acts 21:30.*)

The veneration of "Place" lingers on in the Christian tendency to hallow the buildings where they meet as the "House of God," even though the Scriptures teach that He dwells in the body of Christ:

For we are the temple of the living God.

1 Corinthians 6:15

But staking exclusive claims on the scriptural way of Christian gathering is simply a more subtle veneration of "Place." The notion that the Holy Spirit gathers a select fellowship of believers to a specific "Place" or position where the Lord is contradicts His precious promise to be **wherever** His people gather in His name. It amounts to erecting a sectarian shrine at the true position that properly belongs to all godly Christians. It essentially makes all other believers accountable to find the right group of Christians in order to worship aright, rather than simply acting on the Word of God to worship "In Spirit and truth." And the sectarian squabbles over the divine title to this illusory "Place" rival the historic struggles over the Temple site.

God grant us to gather simply in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ rather than to any theoretical place or position. May our sight be fixed on the holy Person rather than some venerated "Place!"