

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



October 20, 2013

God Among His People

Unlike most religions, Christianity (at least the original version) recognizes no holy places. God's presence among His people is determined by the heart, not geography.

“You shall seek the place where the Lord your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go” (Deut. 12:5).

“Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20).

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These two verses provide a sharp contrast between two distinctly different ways of seeking God—and two conceptions of who God's people are.

In the Old Testament, “God's people” were a physical nation whose identity involved, among other things, a physical place of worship. That place was wherever God's holy ark was located, first at the tabernacle in Shiloh, then later at the temple in Jerusalem. It was to this holy place that God's people had to come to offer their sacrifices and to participate in the annual feasts (Deut. 12:5-11). Those who tried to substitute other places of worship were condemned as heretics (e.g., Jeroboam, 1 Kgs. 12:25-33). In those days, geography played a key role in seeking God's presence.

But throughout Israel's history, this mental linkage of God with a physical location got them into trouble. In times of dire political danger, for example, the Jews would often flee to Jerusalem to escape the threat of enemies, reasoning that God would never allow His holy city to fall into unclean hands. Millions of Jews died thinking like that.

When Jesus came He turned this carnal concept of divine presence upside down. God's presence, He argued, is not determined by *where* God's people meet, but by *who* they meet with, and *why* they are meeting. Whenever two or three saints come together to honor Him, *wherever that might be*, God is there with them. The physical location is irrelevant. He told the Samaritan woman at the well of a coming time when people would worship God “neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem,” but rather “in spirit and truth” (Jn. 4:21, 24). God's presence, in other words, would be determined not by geography, but by the hearts of the worshippers.

Jesus' words were fulfilled in the story of emerging Christianity. Although

the church began in Jerusalem, it quickly spread to cities and towns all over the Roman Empire, resulting in little groups of disciples meeting regularly in their own localities. These early Christians were under no obligation to travel periodically to Jerusalem or any other holy site. God was now among His people wherever they dwelt—because of *who* they were, not *where* they were. As Paul told the Athenians, God is “not far from each one of us” (Ac. 17:27).

Paul told the Corinthians that “you are the temple of God and . . . the Spirit of God dwells in you” (1 Cor. 3:16). The pronoun “you” here is plural, meaning, *the people* are God's temple. He dwells *among* His people by dwelling *in* them. The physical location doesn't matter.

We can never get any closer to God in Jerusalem or Rome or Mecca than we can in our own living room. Wherever there are individuals who love God and are striving to obey Him, God is there among them. This personal, non-centralized nature of Christianity gives it a resilient strength that all the powers of Satan cannot destroy.

— David King