

Swept off your Feet

Beyond Worship-as-Usual

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CHAPTER 38

Where Worshipers Gather

God's presence determines when and where worshipers convey reverence. Jesus reinforced this priority by revealing the stunning truth about Himself and the astonishing truth about our Heavenly Father. When worshipers realize the truth about God's attributes, activities, and promises, they spontaneously and deliberately worship Him.

At Jacob's Well in Samaria, an inquisitive woman realized that Jesus possessed acute prophetic insight. Despite personal grief and emotional pain, the first question off her lips dealt with locations for worship, which rival religious leaders stipulated geographically and validated exclusively. She said:

"I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."
(John 4:19-20 NIV)

In response to this probe for clarity, Jesus announced a liberating future. He modified her options with hope—without making location irrelevant. Jesus said:

"Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem."
(John 4:21 NIV)

Jesus did not endorse Mount Gerizim as the official site for worshipers in Samaria. One of the highest peaks in Israel, Gerizim sits 48 km (30 mi) north of Jerusalem on the south of Shechem (Nablus in the West Bank).¹ While Nehemiah rebuilt the walls around Jerusalem in 445 BCE, Sa-



Mount Gerizim, 2018

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Gerizim (accessed 8-7-07)

maritan priests established their temple on Mount Gerizim (blessed mountain) across from Mount Ebal (cursed mountain).

Likewise, Jesus did not endorse Mount Moriah as the exclusive site for worshipers in Jerusalem. King Solomon established a spectacular temple on Moriah 966 years before Christ. After its destruction by the Babylonian Empire, it was rebuilt by Ezra in 515 BCE, and then expanded by King Herold and significantly upgraded in 20 BCE—just in time for Jesus.



Model of Mount Moriah's 1st Century Late Second Temple
Israel Museum, Jerusalem 2014

Jesus' take away message in this conversation was not the validation of a universal site for worshipers (cult centralization). A new covenant was about to liberate worshipers from strict Levitical oversight and precise religious protocols. Worship in spirit and truth would soon replace saying and doing religion based on Torah commandments and rabbinical directives. Unlike Old Covenant decrees, which mandate cult centralization,² the New Covenant does not emphasize an exclusive place for an exclusive priesthood to perform exclusive rituals. It no longer confines worshipers to a chosen city, a sacred mountain, or a holy temple. God personally facilitates each person responding with reverence to His presence. He accommodates everyone, everywhere with an open access invitation. Complete in Christ, redeemed believers now serve as the temple of the Holy Spirit. They function as royal priests, worshiping our Heavenly Father both independently and in community.

Animal sacrifices, burnt offerings, and temple rituals have served their redemptive purpose. The need for sanctified priests to offer consecrated sacrifices on a specified altar no longer exists. Jesus fulfilled the substitutionary purpose of these symbolic types and shadows. Burnt offerings are an unnecessary formality

² Deuteronomy 12:5-7

because the blood of Christ atones for our sins completely and permanently. Jesus the Lamb of God offered Himself once for all to consummate an eternal covenant with superior promises.³ Jesus deserves our worship with radical reverence.

Since One greater than Israel's temple has arrived (Jesus the Messiah). Jerusalem no longer holds preeminence for religious service and its associated worship. No matter where worshipers gather, Jesus promises to be present; He affectionately dwells within redeemed men, women, and children.

Worshipers Occupy the Ground where they Bow

Throughout biblical history, our Heavenly Father established special occasions to accommodate special assemblies in special places. Informed worshipers recognize God's timing and purpose as it relates to their spiritual well-being and their influence when they assemble for designated events.

Sensible military leaders deliberately gravitate toward strategic locations. They assemble troops and deploy weapons where they might gain tactical benefits, either to attack or to defend. Before each battle, warriors maneuver with calculated foresight because geography dictates advantage. The significance of a location influences the outcome of the war due to its resource supply, population base, and seat of government.

When worshipers gather, they too consider the advantage and significance of their location. Usually, they assemble in homes, chapels, cathedrals, sanctuaries, tents, parks, stadiums, arenas, or conventions centers. These venues accommodate their need for shelter, utilities, security, transportation, and toilets. While the primary aim of worship centers on venerating God, worshipers do more than bow to convey reverence. They also cooperate with the Holy Spirit to embrace biblical truth, confess sins, make intercession, assert declarations, present petitions, offer thanks, and articulate praise with or without music, song, or dance. Because location affects impact and reflects significance, informed worshipers consider the historic, prophetic, and geopolitical implications of their spiritual activity.

Public Praise and Worship Exposed

When demonic powers and principalities demand idol worship, what response will true worshipers offer their Heavenly Father?⁴ Will they praise Jesus openly or resort to isolation in clandestine chapels? Will they worship Him publicly or bow

³ Hebrews 7:22 and Hebrews 8:6

⁴ Revelation 13:12,15

privately? Will they prostrate themselves beyond their discreet wall of protection or conceal their reverence with covert caution? During times of unprecedented chaos, persecution, and warfare, all worshipers will respond one way or another. Some will worship openly while others respond with reserve. Will true worshipers adopt stealth and solitude or burst into the open with the stellar enthusiasm of the heavenly hosts? As victorious overcomers, will they offer glorious praise, declaring a valiant testimony without loving their own life even unto death?⁵

What will distinguish true worshipers from those who worship idols, the Beast, the Dragon, or Satan? How will they stand out from petrified parrots and bedeviled pawns cowering from satanic moratoriums? Will they act with intrepid courage or become discreet, tentative, paralytic, or inconspicuous? As restrictions intensify, will worshipers rally in unified veneration or submit to demonic intimidation?

What constitutes an appropriate response when Satan's mendacity triggers multitudes to display public obeisance to impostors posing as deities? Where will worshipers gather when panic and terror coerce nations to compromise their convictions? Where, when, and how will true worshipers worship their Heavenly Father in Spirit and Truth?

In the end, worshipers and warriors will gravitate toward strategic locations. Where will they gather to meet their Father's gaze? When will they generate the response He deserves? Who will dominate cities, streets, and battlefields in the future? Who, when, and where?

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⁵ Revelation 12:11