

**WHERE DO YOU FIND GOD?**

Mountains are quite a geological wonder in creation. Mountains are so majestic in their appearance, powerful in their presence, and awesome in their grandeur. The Psalmist made reference to the strength that mountains convey in his words, **“I lift up my eyes to the hills, from whence cometh my strength?”** For many, mountains are a source of strength and comfort. Having lived in the mountains for ten years, I can identify with that notion. America is blessed with some beautiful mountains, each with its unique beauty. Has anyone seen Stone Mountain, the Smokey Mountains, the Appalachians, the Adirondacks, the Big Horns, the Rocky Mountains, or the Sierra Nevada Mountains?

This year in our Lenten services we will take a tour of seven mountains in Israel. Each of these seven mountains has played a significant role in the outpouring of God’s grace. Each mountain has a special message for us.

Our first stop is at Mount Moriah. Mount Moriah is an elongated stretch of land running north-south and lying between Kidron Valley and "Hagai" Valley, between Mount Zion to the west and the Mount of Olives to the east. It is a limestone formation that stands 2,428 feet above sea level. It runs 1601 feet on the west, 1542 feet on the east, 1033 feet on the north, and 919 feet on the south. In total, the mountain covers an area of 35.5 acres. Mount Moriah is one of four mountains in the Judean Mountain Range on which the city of Jerusalem is built. These include Mt. Scopes, Mt of Olives, and Mt. Zion. Golgotha, or Mt. Calvary, was outside the walls of ancient Jerusalem.

The Talmud claimed that Adam, Cain, Abel, and Noah worshipped God on Mt. Moriah. The stone on Mt. Moriah on which the ark of the covenant stood was said by the Talmud to be the very stone Jacob slept on when he had his dream about the angels climbing up and down the ladder from heaven. The ancient Jews consider this spot to be the center of the universe. It was on Mt. Moriah that people met God.

It was on Mount Moriah that Abraham was to sacrifice his son Isaac. For three days Abraham travelled north from his home in Hebron until he arrived at Mount Moriah. With total obedience and total trust in the promises of God, the aging servant of Yahweh prepared to sacrifice his only son by Sarah. Then, just as Abraham was about to kill his son, God provided a

substitute, a ram. This foreshadowed what the promised seed of Abraham would do centuries later: be a substitute for all people, sacrificing Himself as **“the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world.”** It is from this act of God’s grace that spared Isaac that Mt. Mount Moriah derives its name: *“where the LORD provided.”* Here God’s grace gave back to Abraham his son Isaac. Here God’s grace provided new life for Isaac just as the Messiah, the seed of Abraham, would provide new life for all believers.

In 2 Chronicles 3:1 we read that Solomon built **“the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mt. Moriah.”** The temple, the place that represented the dwelling of God, the spot where people met God, was built on Mt. Moriah. True to its name, on this mountain God provided for Israel what they needed most: the certainty of God’s love, forgiveness, and grace. Here in the temple, here on Mt. Moriah, the people came to hear the Word of the LORD. Here God provided them with the assurance of His forgiveness; here God provided those struggling with suffer, pain, and loss His comfort and love.

Why do you come to this House of the God? Is it not so God can provide you with the assurance of His love? Is it not so God can provide you with the certainty that your sins are forgiven, washed away by the sacrificial blood of His Son Jesus. Is it not so God can provide you with strength to live your faith daily, power to resist the temptations of the devil, and the knowledge of the ways of God so you might walk with God throughout your life? Do we not come to be reassured that God loves us, that we important to God and that God will care for us, protect us, and be with us?

The temple on Mt. Moriah symbolized the presence of God. As long as the temple stood, the people believed that God was with them. Where did you go to find God? To the ancient Jews one went to the temple, to Mt. Moriah.

Where do we find God? In John’s Gospel Jesus said something very interesting, most significant, something that is most worthy of our attention. Our LORD said, **“I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”** Sounds like the description of Jacob’s ladder. That’s exactly what Jesus is saying: the ladder from heaven will rest on me in the future and not in building on a mountain. Remember, the ancients believed that the ark of the covenant, the exact dwelling of God, stood on the very stone that Jacob slept on when he had his dream about the angels climb the ladder. That stone was seen as the contact point where man came to meet God.

But Jesus replaced the temple. No longer do we meet God at the stone in the temple on Mt. Moriah. No! The new contact point is Jesus. Where do we find God when we desperately seek God's forgiveness for our sins, assurance of His love, or comfort in times of pain and loss? In Jesus! In His grace, His underserved love for mankind, God made it so easy for people to meet Him. It is through Jesus, the Word made flesh, that we find God. We find God in His written Word, in the proclaimed Word, in the living Word. When two or three gather around the Word, Jesus is present. When we gather around the Word and water in Baptism or the Word and the bread and wine in Communion, Jesus is present.

Jesus is present because God wants us to know that through Jesus our sins are washed away. God wants us to be assured that we are loved and of value to Him. God wants us to know that He is always present to care for and provide for us. God wants us to know and believe that He is a gracious God.

Mt. Moriah is a mountain overflowing with God's grace. On this Mountain God's prophets and priests had foretold how the Messiah would suffer for our punishment, take our place in suffering the penalty of hell, and be a guilt offering for all our sins so we could be forgiven, be empowered to live a new life, and be assured of an everlasting life. God has provided for us on Mt. Moriah. Mt. Moriah is a mountain of grace for us! Amen!