

Mirror of Heaven

- ¹ Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.
- ² And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.
- ³ And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned."
- ⁴ When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."
- ⁵ Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

Exodus 3:1-5

Most people, when they die, want to go to heaven. In popular culture, heaven is usually depicted as some ethereal place in the sky where cute little cherub-babies happily strum on little teeny harps as they lay cross-legged upon soft pillowy clouds. You enter through those pearly white gates which are somehow fastened down securely to those same ephemeral clouds. These gates are usually depicted as shut, guarded by two gray bearded men who point you in the direction of a sort of judge's bench, where an old white bearding man will preside over your eternal destiny. If the balance of your sins is good, then those gates will open and Saint Peter will whisk you off to the golden street whereupon you will walk into a fine shadowy white mist never to be seen outside of that place again.

Beloved, get that kind of an image out of your mind once-and-for-all. You are not to have your eschatology guided by political cartoons, Roman Catholic superstition, or Angel Soft toilet paper commercials, but by God's Word. Holy Scripture plainly teaches, **"He built his sanctuary like the high heavens, like the**

earth, which he has founded forever” (Ps 78:69). So if you want to understand heavenly things, look to the inspired earthly replicas and seek to understand them.

The previous verse teaches that God “chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion, which he loves” (68). In this verse, Mount Zion is being used figuratively (metonymy) for the people of Israel. So the idea of the two verses is that Judah and Zion are being built up as sanctuaries which emulate other sanctuaries that God has built.

When we think of Mt. Zion, we usually think of the Temple that was built on top of it. But, when Asaph wrote this Psalm, there was no Temple, as David had put him in charge of the duties of the *Tabernacle* (1 Chron 16:4-5). Thus, it is *the holy mountain itself* which is being compared to God’s people. And it is both which are interchangeable as God’s sanctuary. This becomes more remarkable when you think that God built a temple *on top of* Mt. Zion, or to put it another way, when he built one sanctuary on top of another, both of which are similar in many respects to the other. And it becomes more remarkable still when you think that in the NT, the building of cold stone makes way for a building of living stones.

Zion has been called a holy mountain before. In Psalm 2:6 the LORD says, “I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.” But God has also set *himself* upon that holy hill, as he says in Ps 68:16, “Why do you look with hatred, O many-peaked mountain (Bashan), at the mount that God desired for his abode, yes, *where the LORD will dwell forever.*” Joel predicts the future when he says, “So you shall know that I am the LORD you God, *who dwells in Zion, my holy mountain.* And Jerusalem shall be holy, and strangers shall never again pass through it” (Joel 3:17). And so the king of the mountain in Psalm 2 (will be) Messiah, as prefigured by David.

So, God dwells on Mt. Zion, his holy hill. Yet, of course, God also dwells *in heaven*. “The LORD will roar from on high, and from his *holy habitation* utter his voice” (Jer 25:30). “Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD, for he has roused himself from his *holy dwelling*” (Zech 2:13). . . “His *holy habitation in heaven*” (2 Chr 30:27).

And with these two ideas firmly in mind now, the LORD tells Isaiah, “Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool” (Isa 66:1). Thus, heaven and earth are the throne-room of God. Now, you are able to understand the first verse from this morning: He built his sanctuary like the high heavens, like the earth, which he has

founded forever. Basically, the idea is that God has created biblical sanctuaries to be mirrors of heaven, of which the created heavens and earth serve as the first, best, ultimate reflection because they were built by God himself. Philo tells us of the universal understanding of this with the Jews, “**The whole universe must be regarded as the highest and, in truth, the holy temple of God**” (*De spec. leg.* 1:66).

As a matter of fact, **most ancient cultures** remembered this truth which was surely passed on from Adam and Eve, but which has in our own day become almost totally forgotten. For example, the famous Babylonian creation myth—*Enuma Elish* (6.113)—says about the building of Marduk’s temple, “**He shall make on earth the counterpart of what he brought to pass in heaven.**” In Egypt, Pharaoh Ramses III wrote, “**I made for thee [my god] an august house in Nubia . . . the likeness of the heavens.**” This fits with some of the actual names given to very ancient ziggurats in Babylon; names like: **Temple of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth, Temple of the Stairway to Pure Heaven.**¹

And yet, we must always remember that no replicated sanctuary **contains God**. They do not capture him; they do not box him in. Solomon, who was commanded to build a large, permanent replica of the tabernacle said, “**Who is able to build him a house, since heaven, even the highest heaven, cannot contain him?**” (**2 Ch 2:6**). The pagans never understood this, and they used their temples to try and control the deity.

Sanctuary as a Mountain

One of the many interesting features of these temples, is how so many of them are **shaped like mountains**. The Tower of Babel, for example, was not shaped like the World Trade Center—tall and straight—or like some great round cylinder, but like a mountain. The ancient ziggurat, which the Tower almost surely was, had different levels, much like the Mexican pyramids where they rise at an angle and then go flat, rise and go flat, rise and go flat. Thus, they named some of their ziggurats: **Temple of the Exalted Mountain** or **Temple of the Mountain Breeze.**²

¹ Cited in John H. Walton, “The Mesopotamian Background of the Tower of Babel Account and Its Implications,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 5 (1995): p. 159.

² Ibid.

The idea was that as the structure narrowed towards the top, the different levels would become more sacred. It was the god (and in their case, the human king) that lived at the pinnacle. Even the **Greeks** seem to remember this to some degree in their depiction of Mt. **Olympus** as the home of the gods. But you see, these ancient peoples did not make this stuff up. Rather, **they stole the original designs by the One True God**, and **corrupted them** so as to fashion their temples in their own images. They enshrined themselves when they built their temples to their dumb and deaf gods.

Let me now get more specific about these designs by looking at what the Bible has to say about **mountain-sanctuaries**. **What is there about a mountain that God might choose to make it very specific natural reflection of his invisible habitation? First, it isn't any old mountain that is a sanctuary.** As much as I love the Rockies, Alps, or Himalaya, God did not choose any of them to be his home, despite the names given by the pagans who call Everest: “**Chomolungma**”—Mother Goddess of the Earth, or McKinley: “**Denali**”—The Great One. As we have already seen in **Ps 68:16**, **God mocks the great northern mountains of Israel, the highest and most rugged in all the land** (perhaps including the Hermon massif).³ Figuratively speaking, they think (like

³ **Psalm 68:15** is translated all over the map. The original Hebrew reads “har-’elohim har-Bashan har Gabnunnim har-Bashan.” This is in turn translated:

“A hill of God is the hill of Bashan, A hill of heights is the hill of Bashan” (YLT),

“The hill of God *is as* the hill of Bashan; an high hill *as* the hill of Bashan” (KJV),

“A mountain of God is the mountain of Bashan; A mountain of many peaks is the mountain of Bashan” (NAS, NKJV),

“A mountain of God is the mountain of Bashan; A high mountain is the mountain of Bashan” (ASV),

“O mighty mountain, mountain of Bashan; O many-peaked mountain, mountain of Bashan!” (RSV),

“O mountain of God, mountain of Bashan; O many-peaked mountain, mountain of Bashan” (ESV),

“The mountains of Bashan are majestic mountains; rugged are the mountains of Bashan” (NIV),

“The mountains of Bashan are majestic, with many peaks stretching high into the sky.” (NLT),

“The mountain of Bashan is a towering mountain; the mountain of Bashan is a mountain with many peaks” (NET),

“The mountain of God is a rich mountain; a swelling mountain, a rich mountain” (LXX),

“You mighty mountain, Mount Bashan! You rugged mountain, Mount Bashan!” (CJB).

Then there are the Jewish Targums which really “go to town” in interpreting this verse: Mount *Moriab*, the place where the patriarchs worshipped in the presence of the LORD, was chosen for the building of the sanctuary; and Mount *Sinai* for the giving of *Torah*; Mount *Mathnan*, *Mount Tabor*, and *Carmel* were disqualified, and a hump was made for them like Mount *Mathnan*. ANOTHER TARGUM: Mount *Moriab* was chosen first for the worship of the patriarchs in the presence of the LORD, and was chosen second for the building there of the sanctuary; and Mount *Sinai* was pulled up from there and chosen third for the *Torah*; Mount *Buthnin* was removed and set far away; Mount *Tabor* a miracle was performed there for *Barak* and *Deborah*; Mount *Carmel* miracles were performed there for *Elijah* the prophet. And they were racing, one against the other, and arguing one with the other. One said, “On me the presence shall abide,” and the other would say, “On me the presence will abide.” And the Lord of the World, who sharpens the

good pagans) that he should have chosen them to be his dwelling place because they are so great. Instead, he chooses this barely noticeable bump in Jerusalem, not high, not rugged; really, you can't even call it a mountain in comparison to the great mountains of the world.

Second, there is more than one mountain in Scripture that is called God's holy mountain. Peter recalls going to the top of a mountain with Jesus at the Transfiguration saying, "We were with him on the holy mountain" (2 Pet 1:18). The first such mountain might surprise you. It is "Mt. Eden." You say, "I thought Eden was a Garden?" It is, of course. But Eden was itself built upon a mountain, as the word itself indicates. Eden means "steppe." Ezekiel is very clear speaking of Lucifer. Let me give you the whole pericope:

You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle; and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created they were prepared. ¹⁴ You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. ¹⁵ You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you. ¹⁶ In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire.

(Ezek 28:13-16)

Edenic Features

proud and rebellious with the hump, struck them down and they were disqualified. A hump was made for them like Mount Buthnin. (The Jewish Encyclopedia online says the following regarding the insertion of Sinai into this verse: The Rabbis consider "Sinai" and "Horeb" to be two names of the same mountain, which had besides three other names: (1) "Har ha-Elohim" (= "the mountain of God"), the Israelites having received there the knowledge of the divinity of God; (2) "Har Bashan," the latter word being interpreted as though it were "beshen" (= "with the teeth"), that is to say, mankind through the virtue of this mountain obtains its sustenance; and (3) "Har Gabnunim" (= "a mountain pure as cheese"). The names "Horeb" and "Sinai" are interpreted to mean, respectively, "the mountain of the sword," because through this mountain the Sanhedrin acquired the right to sentence a man to capital punishment, and "hostility," inasmuch as the mountain was hostile to the heathen (Ex. R. ii. 6). Shab. 89a, b gives the following four additional names of Sinai: "in," "adesh," "edomot," and "Paran," but declares that its original name was "Horeb" (comp. Midr. Abkir, quoted in Yal., Ex. 169); according to Pir e R. El. xli., it acquired the name "Sinai" only after God had appeared to Moses in the bush").

Mentioning some of the features of this place will be helpful as we are about to come to our text today. You will remember that outside the Garden there was a [river](#) that flowed near the land of Havilah where the riches that Ezekiel speaks of were located. There was an [eastern gate](#) that shut the way to the Garden. It was guarded by mighty angels with [flaming](#) swords. What you may not know is that Cain and Abel appear to be [sacrificing](#) at the “door” of Eden, though I do not have time to tell you about that this morning.

The Garden itself contained a [tree](#) of life for [food](#). And it seems to have been in this place that God made the [animal sacrifice](#) its life so that he might give skins of covering to Adam and Eve. Then there is Eden proper, which seems to be a separate inner place wherein was located the [Law](#): The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It was in Eden that God’s special presence seemed to go with Adam before the fall. That gives you [three distinct spaces](#): Eden, the Garden, and outside the Garden.

None of the geographical features of the Garden of Eden are accidental. Indeed, scholars are increasingly recognizing what the ancient Jews and Christians knew millennia ago: This place was a sanctuary-temple built by God himself. No one should have forgotten this, since Ezekiel tells us in that same passage in [vs. 18](#), “[By the multitude of your iniquities, in the unrighteousness of your trade you profaned your sanctuaries.](#)” This is why the Jews called Eden, “[The Holy of Holies](#)” ([Jub 8:19](#); cf. [4Q418 Frag. 81](#)).

Ark, Tabernacle, Temple

When you compare the Garden of Eden with the three buildings that become temples in the Scripture, you begin to notice certain patterns. Noah’s Ark, the Tabernacle, and Solomon’s Temple were each [designed by God](#). (All three, by the way, eventually *come to rest on a sacred mountain*). All three, like Eden, contain [three spaces](#). In the case of the Ark, it had three levels. The other two had imagery (deep blues, angels etc.) that forced you to think “[upwards](#)” to heaven, as a mountain or the Ark would do. [All are rectangular](#). All have doors, with the buildings entered in on the [east](#) side. In the Tabernacle and Temple you have an [altar](#) and a [water-stand](#) outside the holy place. Inside the holy place you have a [fiery lampstand](#) that resembles a [tree](#) and a [table](#) where the food was placed. Inside the Most Holy Place you have the Ark of the Covenant which contained the [Law](#) of God forbidding Israel from breaking God’s commands. It is also in this Most Holy Place that the

Shekinah Glory cloud of God descended in a very special presence. It is the this feature that the single most important in making a sanctuary holy: **The presence of God** in the inner sanctum.

Why are there so many similarities: altars, water, trees, fire, food, and laws all in the same places in three very similar layers? As we will see later in Exodus, it is because God was patterning these temples after his heavenly abode. Now, when you begin to look at these things, it becomes clear immediately that what we have here is nothing like that description of heaven that I painted at the beginning of this sermon. Instead, we have symbols, geography, architecture, gemstones, colors, fabrics, and images that begin to **teach us what God is like, and they teach us what it means to dwell with him and why it is that he alone is to be worshipped.**

Listen to how other Scriptures put this. **“The heavens declare the glory of God... Day to day they pour out speech, night to night reveals knowledge” (Ps 19:1-2).** **“The heavens proclaim his righteousness” (Ps 97:6).** **“Your righteousness is like the mountains, your judgments are like the great deep” (Ps 36:6).** **“The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice” (Deut 32:4).** At their core, sanctuaries reveal God’s glory, his omnipotence, his righteousness, his justice, his goodness, and his judgments. For these reasons alone, he is to be worshiped.

Sinai

With this in mind, let us embark on a trail to the foot of Mt. Sinai to discover what glories await us on that mountain. Before we get into anything like covenant discussions, the meaning of God’s name, the angel of the Lord, Moses’ response or anything else, the stage must first be set. And like any good play or movie, the stage before you is rich with color, detail, and meaning. If you can see the setting, then the drama that will unfold on its slopes will have more significance that you have ever imagined. It says,

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. ³ And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." ⁴ When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵ Then he

said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

(Exodus 3:1-5)

Have you ever wondered why a mountain in the wilderness would become for the main setting of the Exodus drama? Have you ever wondered about the significance of a burning bush that is not consumed (Moses sure did)? Have you ever wondered what made this place “holy ground?” Let us begin to search out the answers.

First, we want to think about the location. Moses has been in *Midian* for nearly 40 years (Ex 2:15), tending sheep for his father-in-law. And it says (in the ESV, NAS, RSV) that Moses led the flock to “the west side of the wilderness” and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. We have three things to look at in this verse. 1) The meaning of the “west side of the wilderness.” 2) The meaning of Horeb. 3) The “mountain of God.”

Let me deal with the second question: The meaning of Horeb. First, you should know that Horeb is the “other name” given to Mt. Sinai in the Bible. Look at vs. 12 where it says, “When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.” And where did they go? To Mt. Sinai (Ex 19:2, 11). Horeb is the first reference of either name in the Bible. Why did Moses choose to refer to it as Horeb? Perhaps it is because the word means “parched,” “dry,” or “desolate.” That tells you about the geography of the place where Israel would camp while Moses went up the mountain. This is not a rain-making mountain. This is not Eden! It has enough vegetation to keep sheep alive, but not much else.

The first question—the meaning of “west side of the wilderness”—is the tricky part. You probably know that no one is 100% sure where Mt. Sinai actually is. There are upwards of twenty different guesses for its actual location.⁴ Most contemporary Bible maps locate it in the Sinai Peninsula between the two forks of the Red Sea (the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba). Yet, there is very little historical reason to do this, other than the tradition that seemed to spring up overnight during the rise of monasticism in the 3rd century AD. Helena, the mother of Constantine, had been commissioned by her son after his

⁴ See Charles A. Whittaker’s Dr. Dissertation, “The Biblical Significance of Jabal al Lawz,” p. 7. Available online.

conversion to find the real location of Mt. Sinai. Legend has it that she saw *Jabel Musa* in a dream and this became her divine sanction! By the 4th century, pilgrimages to *Jabel Musa* were commonplace. Such is the strange and sad way that Christianity has often gone about proving the validity of its relics.

From what archeology and ancient historians seem to indicate, Midian was the land that occupied the area on the east side of the Gulf of Aqaba.⁵ If Mt. Sinai is in the traditional location, then Moses would most likely have been feeding Jethro's flock some 120 miles from home through vast desert terrain and around most of the fork of Aqaba.⁶ There has never been any archeological evidence that a host of Israelites ever went near the traditional location. Furthermore, there is only one place where 2,000,000 Jews could have camped near it, and according to one source I read, it would provide a grand total of 1 Sq. Ft. per person. But if Sinai isn't in the traditional location, we need to remember that mountains don't just stand up and walk away. It has to be somewhere.

In recent years, attempts to locate Sinai in [Saudi Arabia](#) have gained a lot of attention. This fits better with where Paul and Philo say Sinai was located. There is one mountain in particular—*Jabal al Lawz*—that would have been only a 15-20 miles away, still a long distance to take a heard of sheep, but not so long as to make the journey absurd.

The troublesome phrase “[west side of the wilderness](#),” assumes that Sinai is in the Sinai Peninsula. But it literally reads, “behind” or “after” the wilderness. Thus, several translations opt for this less dogmatic translation, one that doesn't specify any particular direction.⁷ Given this reading, such a site would fit the description of a mountain that is beyond the wilderness or on the far side of a mountain range. If you want to read more about this from a scholarly point of view, I suggest [Charles Whittaker's](#) Dissertation, “The Biblical Significance of Jabal al Lawz” as a good place to start. It is available online.

⁵ Some locate Midian on both sides.

⁶ <http://www.geocities.com/athens/parthenon/3021/redsea5.html>. The source may not be the best, but it seems a reasonable estimate.

⁷ “Behind the wilderness” (YLT); “nigh to the wilderness” (LXX), “backside of the desert” (KJV, ASV, GENEVA), “beyond the wilderness” (NRS), “far side of the wilderness/desert” (NET, NIV). These follow in line with the advice of *A Handbook on Exodus* which suggests that a more neutral translation is preferable.

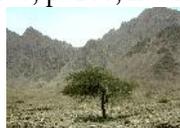
The reason I take this far too short of time to tell you about this, is a very practical and important one. It is because I think **the Bible deserves the best archeological and historical work that we can give it.** We do not follow the fables of Mormonism. Mt. Sinai has to be somewhere, since it hasn't been destroyed by a flood. And when the first grounding of a source is a dream by the mother of an Emperor, I think we have good reason to begin searching anew. I may just be that the real Mt. Sinai has finally shown up, and I think that is an exciting thing to think about.

But it is **the third point** that is really what I want to focus on now. Horeb is called "**the mountain of God.**" In Scripture, this phrase occurs only seven times. Five refer to Sinai/Horeb and two refer to Eden.⁸ What is it about this mountain that gives it such a supremely important status in the Bible? I think most of it has to do with the things that are located on and which occur on this amazing place.

In our text, we get the first glimpses of this. The first thing is that it says, "**And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed**" (vs. 2). The second thing is that it says, "**The place on which you are standing is holy ground**" (vs. 5).

Why a bush? Why a bush filled with fire? And why is the fire not consuming the bush? It all has to do with the meaning of the symbols in the Sanctuary. First, you now need to recall how in Eden and the Tabernacle there are sacred **trees** in the holy place. This tree is in the same third of Sinai as the trees in other sanctuaries are: holy ground. In Eden, the way to the tree is continually **blocked** by flame. In the Tabernacle, the tree is continually **lit** by flame. The word "*seneh*" is translated "bush." Its exact botanical designation is not known.⁹ What is important is to think about its relation to the trees of the other sanctuaries.

⁸ See Greg Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, p. 100, n. 38.



⁹ The TWOT Lexicon suggests the Shittim Tree:  or the Acacia nilotica:  or the A.

Seyal:



This is all very interesting, but it gets even more so when we start to think about what this might symbolize. Throughout Scripture, fire symbolizes the holiness of God: “Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:29), “a jealous God” (Deut 4:24). He goes before his people like a pillar of fire, but consumes his enemies (Deut 9:3). “The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling has seized the godless: ‘Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?’” (Isa 33:14). When Nadab and Abihu went into the holy place with strange fire, with righteous fire from the LORD they were consumed.

Yet, the righteous are not consumed by the fire. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego walked happily in the midst of the flame along with another like the son of God (Dan 3:25). It was because God’s presence was with them. Like it says in Revelation, “The words of him who hold the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands” (2:1), which earlier symbolize the church (1:20). So then the flaming tree that is not consumed symbolizes, as the NT informs us, the presence of God in the midst of his people: a holy refining fire. “He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD” (Mal 3:3). He does not block our way into his presence with fire, he lights our way! “The word is a lamp.”

Perhaps you will remember when Israel camps in front of Sinai in Exodus 19. Clouds, darkness, and fire consumed the top of the mountain. The top of the Sinai was the place that only Moses was allowed to tread upon and Ezekiel 43:12 tells you why, “This is the law of the temple: the whole territory on the top of the mountain and all around shall be most holy.”

Most holy is a phrase saved for the Tabernacle and Temple! Only the High Priest was allowed to enter here. But other priests were allowed into the holy place, the place of the lampstand in the shape of a tree and the food-table. As we see later in Exodus, 70 elders are allowed to go up to mid-mountain, where they, like Moses here, see God. Interestingly, they eat with him like Adam in the Garden of Eden. If the right food is eaten, it becomes a veritable feast of life.

But the people were not allowed even to touch the mountain, or they would die. They had to put stone markers all around the base of the mountain at God’s

command. This was the common ground. While alone at the bottom, the natives became restless and built an altar. They also grew impatient and wanted water, so Moses hit the rock and out flowed a river.

When these images and others are put in the proper perspective, we begin to understand what is going on here with Moses. Moses has entered God's sanctuary. Sinai has all of the same features in exactly the right places as the other sanctuaries. He stands in the holy place with the burning lampstand. Soon he will enter the Most Holy Place to receive the law of God, the parallel place where the tablets were stored and where the first command to Adam was given.

A mountain doesn't seem capable in some ways of exhibiting the same qualities as a temple. Yes, it rises upward and this teaches us about heaven. But other things seem strange about its features. But that's is when you look at it from our perspective. But a funny thing happens when you take God's "bird's eye" perspective of the mountain's three-tiered holy gradations. From up above, the top of the mountain looks like the middle of the sanctuary. The mid-mountain looks like the holy place, and the base of the mountain looks like the courtyard! Suddenly, the holy mountain and the sanctuary are identical to one another.

Application:

All of this must lead to some kind of application, of course. And what an application it can be, if you will take the time to consider it. In the OT, [Mt. Sinai gives way to Mt. Zion](#)¹⁰, which you have already seen today. But in the NT, [Mt. Zion gives way to another mountain](#): Mt. Zion in Jerusalem gives way to Mt. Zion of heaven. Amazingly, this is foreshadowed in Jesus' sermon on the Mt. of Olives. And David foreshadowed this when he rode into Jerusalem from the Mt. of Olives on a Donkey in [2 Samuel 15-16](#)!

Today is the day that [Jesus entered into Jerusalem](#), wherein he [rode up to Mt. Zion](#), and I thought this might make an interesting transition to the point I wanted to make anyway. Jesus rides up to the temple wherein he [cleanses it like the good High Priest](#) should have been doing, and then makes this remarkable prophecy that he will very soon destroy the temple and raise it up in three days.

¹⁰ This is the meaning of [Psalm 68:17](#), "Sinai is now in the Sanctuary." All that Sinai was, is now transferred to Zion.

Everyone thinks that Jesus is talking about the Herod's Temple. But in reality, he is talking about **his own body**. In effect, he is saying that he is the true temple come down from heaven. He is what the OT sanctuary anticipated. He is the **living water**. He is the **bread of showcase**. He is the **fire walking among the lampstands**. He is **the sacrifice**. His body is **the altar**. He is what makes heaven what it is, he and the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Thus, what we are looking at even in Mt. Sinai is a picture of our God and of our Lord Jesus. As the angel spoke to Moses, so Christ now speaks to us. When we come to him, we have approached holy ground. We have approached **a permanent mountain** that will *never* be removed or shaken, though all others should topple into the sea.

But it gets even more profound. In his sermon on the Mt. of Olives, Jesus makes way for a new mountain. No longer will Zion hold the special presence of God. He had already in some sense left it in Ezekiel's day, when the glory-cloud left. And very soon he will destroy the temple that sits upon it (**Mt. 24:2ff**). But God does not leave his people without a temple as Jews think still.

In forty days, Pentecost would take place. And the Holy Spirit would descend in the power of flame to fill up, for the first time, all of God's people, even as his fiery presence filled up the bush and the top of the mountain and the Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle. And so the NT calls the church and the believer, the **temple-mountain of God**, taking its cue from **Ps 78:68** which I referenced at the beginning today, where Judah is called Mt. Zion. To put this into mountain language: **"You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Heb 12:22-24)."**

The end time temple sees the Lamb sitting on the throne in the middle of heavenly Jerusalem, which is a bride prepared for her husband. He is in her midst as she extends the glories of God throughout the whole earth and universe. That is **Revelation 21-22's** version. Listen to this section from **chapter 14**: **"Behold, on**

Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder [think Sinai]. The voice I heard was like the sound of the harpists playing on their harps, and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders" (vs. 1-3).

What were they singing? Only the 144,000 who have been redeemed from the earth could sing it. But I like to think it was something like this, "Hosanna, to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Mat 21:9). If you are his people, then you have sung the song, because you are the 144,000 along with all of God's elect past, present, and future who likewise sing unto the Lamb. And now you are able to enter into the very purpose for existence, to worship One and only living and true God.

Therefore, worship God today, for the glory of his habitation, for the glory of his righteousness and justice and holiness and mercy and grace. He has invited you into the holy place to be his new covenant priests to do the service of cleansing and working the sanctuary. And what a grave and glorious blessing that is. The Psalmist said it well. "The chariots of God are twice ten thousand, thousands upon thousands; the Lord is among them, in Sinai, in the sanctuary (NAS). You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men. Your procession is seen, O God, the procession of my God, my King, into the sanctuary—the singers in front, the musicians last, between them virgins playing tambourines: "Bless God in the great congregation, the LORD, O you who are of Israel's fountain!" (Ps 68:24-26).

Isaiah foresaw it this way, "It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.' For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Isa 2:2-5).

What do you do on the mountain? As the mountain of God's people? As those who are the temple, built upon the strong, tall Rock? You remember where you stand, "On Holy Ground." You have come to the sanctuary where God's people are gathered to receive good gifts from a good God's table. Therefore, "Exalt the LORD out God, and worship at his holy mountain; for the LORD out God is holy!" (Ps 99:9).