

II. Christianity

For Christianity, worship of holy places can be traced back to antiquity for the territory of the “Holy Land” as well as for other locations throughout the Mediterranean area. The following article is concerned almost exclusively with biblical sites. These sites were considered holy because they evinced the presence of God in the mundane world. Indeed, God’s presence was consistently experienced in these places, so that special ritual practices were frequently performed there – especially since the 4th century BCE – and they were equipped to carry out the rituals (cf., among others, Egeria, *Itinerarium* 3.6; 4.5; 5.11; 12.3). The following outline deals with the Christian reception of biblical sites, particularly in the first six centuries CE. It is this precise time frame that decisively shapes the mental cartography of the Holy Land.

1. Holy Places in the Bible. While biblical literature mentions various holy places, worship conducted at these sites is often criticized. A centralization of the cult is observed in the HB/OT that considers Jerusalem the sole cultic center of Judah (cf. 2 Kgs 22–23). The pilgrimage on the occasion of at least three major harvest festivals was closely connected with this centralization (Passover, Feast of Weeks, Feast of Booths). The Jesus movement drew on this practice of pilgrimage to Jerusalem as the holy place. Indeed, Jewish Christians considered the temple in Jerusalem a holy place until its destruction in the year 70 CE. Jesus visited the temple during some pilgrimage festivals (cf., e.g., John 2:13) and referred to the temple as the house of his heavenly Father (Luke 2:49). In NT literature, however, the concentration on such sites is also criticized explicitly. The Gospel of John, e.g., mentions that God shall be worshipped only in spirit and in truth (John 4:23). Accordingly, God’s presence would neither be bound to the temple in Jerusalem nor to the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim (cf. John 4:21; also 1 Pet 2:5). Such passages – which still in the 4th century CE characterized the critique of pilgrimage (cf., e.g., Gregory of Nazianzus) – must have been composed after the destruction of the Second Temple.

2. Holy Places in Early Christianity. Alongside the veneration of the temple in Jerusalem, early Christianity rapidly developed awareness for the special significance of places related to the Jesus tradition. This trend might, among other things, have to do with the desire to behold the very ground on which God had set foot (cf. Eusebius, *Dem.* 6.18.23, in this case concerning the Mount of Olives; cf. esp. with regard to his much more elaborate incarnation theology, Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.* 4.10). Already in early Christianity several such sites were transformed into places of worship – e.g., archaeologically verifiable today is the house of St. Peter in Capernaum, in which traces of veneration can be dated back to the 3rd century CE.

Only in the 4th century CE, however, were biblical sites transformed into actual pilgrimage sites. The development virtually commences with Constantine’s accession to power and becomes especially apparent after his mother, Helena, travelled through Palestine in the year 326 CE. With regard to holy places, caves played a very special role (Mount of Olives, Grotto of the Nativity, Sepulcher of Christ). Four churches of great significance were built in Palestine: the Church of the Holy Sepulcher or Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem, the Church on the Mount of Olives (Eleona), the Church of the Resurrection in Bethlehem, and a basilica at Mamre (in memory of Gen 18:1–14). In addition, holy sites replaced or superseded pagan cultic sites. They were supported especially by local monks and bishops. In this regard, Cyril of Jerusalem and his catecheses, composed around 348 CE, played a pivotal role. Most of the time, bishops were not only concerned with the cult, but also with the preservation of the holy sites – among other things by supporting monastic communities. Cyril attempted to confirm the truth of passages from Scripture with reference to biblical sites and was likely the first to generate awareness of the relic of the cross. The number of holy places increased rapidly, especially during the reign of Justinian. Places, whose worship was biblically corroborated, were, however, not restricted to the Holy Land. Rather, they could also be found elsewhere, e.g., at sites of martyrdom (e.g., the tombs of the apostles in Rome, second half of the 3rd cent. CE, which are attested primarily through graffiti in San Sebastiano; in the 6th century the Basilica of St. John in Ephesus was rebuilt and expanded in memory of Jesus’ favorite disciple). In the Holy Land, the following sites, among others, evolved into main sites: The site of the annunciation of Jesus’ birth in Nazareth, the site of his baptism in the River Jordan, the site of the multiplication of loaves and fishes at Lake Tiberias, Jacob’s Well, the chamber of the Last Supper, the Garden of Gethsemane, and, finally, Emmaus.

3. Early Pilgrims at Holy Sites. From the 4th century CE onwards, documentation of holy or biblical

sites began to increase. A first overview pursuing exegetical, but likely also apologetical aims, is provided by the *Onomasticon* of Eusebius of Caesarea, which was composed around 300 CE. In this work, Eusebius mentions approximately 1,000 biblical locations, which, at least in part, have to be considered holy places.

Visitors gathered round the biblical places already in the 2nd and 3rd century CE (cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 1.11.2, Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.26–27). Some of them even stayed, such as the later bishop of Jerusalem, Alexander of Cappadocia (cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.11.2). Those early pilgrims were primarily drawn to the Holy Land by biblical-exegetical and archaeological interests. Only in the 4th century CE can one speak of an institution of pilgrimage in the narrower sense. One of the prerequisites for this development would have been the major Constantine memorial buildings. A first report from an anonymous pilgrim from Bordeaux dates to ca. 333 CE and offers an itinerary for those who intend to travel to Jerusalem. In this report, the dominance of places known from the HB/OT is remarkable. As a rule, the sites remain virtually undescribed. Rather, the report offers information on the distance and the options of accommodation in between the various locations. A detailed travel account is provided by the ascetic Egeria, who around 400 CE illustrated her impressions when visiting the holy places. In the second part of her pilgrimage report she describes the liturgy in Jerusalem, which would “always fit both time and place.” According to the pilgrim’s own words, her constant inquiries pertaining to biblical sites led to some locations being identified for the first time (cf., e.g., Egeria, *Itinerarium* 5.12; 16.3). Consequently, the anonymous pilgrim of Placentia (today: Piacenza), who traveled to Jerusalem around 570 CE, offers a more precise “holy topography.” In his time, the worship of saints and relics was much more closely connected with the holy places than at the time of Egeria.

4. Pilgrim Sites in Medieval Times. In medieval times, holy places were increasingly related to penitential practices in Western Christianity. Holy places made the rapid and comprehensive acquisition of indulgences possible. Accordingly, the institution of pilgrimage was intensified especially in Rome. There, in the year 1300, a holy year was proclaimed for the first time, which provided opportunity to grant indulgences on a large scale. Due to the victory of the Seljuks in the Battle of Manzikert in 1071 CE, the Holy Land was hard to access. As a consequence, the crusaders, on the one hand, attempted to capture the holy sites. On the other hand, this development furthered the establishment of holy sites in Western Europe. Especially the pilgrimage to the remains of James, son of Zebedee, in Santiago de Compostela (Spain) flourished since

the 11th century CE. Holy places increasingly became places of cultural exchange. Pilgrimage accounts, such as the one by Felix Fabri (d. 1502) multiplied the knowledge of foreign cultures in Western Europe substantially.

5. The Critique of Holy Places during the Reformation. During the Reformation the understanding of the institution of pilgrimage as meritorious work was criticized. Martin Luther, in his *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation (An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation, 1520; WA 6:437–38; cf. also WA 10/3:235–36)*, criticized justification by works, rather than pilgrimage as such. In Protestant areas, holy places soon lost their significance. Yet, there remained, e.g., the veneration of miracle wells.

6. Holy Places in Present-day Palestine. Today, the preservation of holy places is largely the responsibility of the Custodia Terrae Sanctae operated by Franciscan monks. On the Orthodox side, the “fraternity” of the Hagiotaphites feels especially responsible for the preservation of the holy sites. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher has been maintained by Muslims ever since the Ottoman period.

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Andreas Müller