

PILGRIMAGE OF HOPE FROM THE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE¹

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1. Introduction

The Church in all parts of the world, at all times, was open to adaptation and has undergone cultural change. It has adopted ritual journeys from Judaism, which could have been part of the Canaanite ritual journeys to the high places and sanctuaries. These ritual journeys were part of the faith expressions of the Church from the 4th century. During the Jewish pilgrim festival of the Pentecost, the first ones to hear the Apostles preaching and to become members of the Church were pilgrims to Jerusalem from all over the diaspora (Acts 5:12). They had come to the presence of the Lord in the temple looking up to the lord in new hope for the journey of life that went on and on (Ps 123-131). All pilgrimage, all over the world, in all religions, are undertaken in hope.

Generally, people of almost all cultures look upon life on earth as a “journey” and we speak of the goal toward which they are moving.² The people of Israel was not an exception to the rule. There were several sacred sanctuaries in the land, which they flocked to for various purposes, which had a sacral nature. These sacred sites had obvious attractions for the pre-temple Israelites. Much of their cultural heritage related to these sanctuaries is still visible on the pages of the scripture. These sacred sanctuaries were connected to ancient ways, which were trodden for centuries prior to their destruction as indicated by Amos: “The high places of Isaac will be destroyed, and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined; with my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam” (Amos 7:9).

2. The Journeys of the Patriarchs

Throughout Scripture, there are stories of hundreds of journeys that the people of God as a whole and the members individually undertook. Some of these journeys can provide us with a picture of the intricacy of the relationship between the existential exigency of the people, their hope in God and the overall hand of God to be found in the his for our salvation. The reflection invites us to refrain from our short-sighted scurrying, deepen our trust in the creator and protector whose ways are beyond our understanding and to make the journey of life in hope and take in the marvel of God’s creation as we go.

The biblical pilgrimage begins with Abraham who trusts in God and travels in hope from Ur of the Chaldees to the land of Canaan (Gen 12:1-9) and from there to Egypt (Gen 12:10-20) and back to Canaan.³ Abraham⁴ built altars for sacrificial worship at Shechem, Bethel and Hebron; he planted a tree and worshipped God at Beersheba and prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac on an altar he built on mount Moriah. He gave a tenth of all to Melchizedek, priest of God Most High in Salem. The symbolic possession of the land of Canaan by Abraham during his sojourn was by an act of building two altars, one at Shechem and another at Bethel.⁵

¹ Published in *Jeevadhara* LIV/322/2024, pp. 27-53

² L.E. Frizzell, “Pilgrimage: a Study of the Biblical Experience”, in *Jeevadhara* 71 (1982), 359-367, 358.

³ Frizzell, *Pilgrimage*, 358.

⁴ There are two rival ancestral stories found in the Old Testament: the cycle of Abraham, which elevated the place of Hebron in the south as the site of the ancestor, and the cycle of Jacob, which identifies Shechem and Bethel in the north as the sites of the first ancestor. Moshe Weinfield, *The Promise of the Land*, Oxford: University of California Press, 1973, p. xvi.

⁵ N.P. Lemche, *The Canaanites and their Land: The Tradition of the Canaanites*, Sheffield, JSOT, 1991, p. 100.

All these cultic sites have a long history. The ancestors worshipped God in various places in the land, which later on, became very important sanctuaries in Israel and people visited these shrines in pilgrimage. The altars that the patriarchs built foretold the sacrificial worship of the Israelites, the gift that Abraham gave the priest at Salem signified the later tithes and various offerings and the intervention of the angel at the altar on Mount Moriah would forbid human sacrifice for all times.

As per the command of Isaac, Jacob journeys to his people to take a wife (Gen 28-29) and travels back to the land of the promise. After his dream, he acknowledged the sacred nature of the place, which he called Bethel (House of God),⁶ and prayed for safety on his journey, with the pledge of tithe on his return (Gen 28:18-22). On the way from Haran to Bethel, he wrestles with God and obtains his blessings (Gen 32-35). Then God said to Jacob, "Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau" (Gen 35:1). In the hope of a better life, Jacob journeys to his son Joseph in Egypt and when he reached Beersheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. Jacob's hope is fulfilled as he and his household find a far better life in Egypt with his son (Gen 42-46).

The book of Exodus is the story of the journey of the people of God in hope under the leadership of Moses who leads them out of Egypt. The journey of the people was marked with various kinds of divine encounters that mark the desert itself as a shrine in which they were formed into one people. The journey had a purpose and the purpose filled them with hope despite the despair they exhibited from time to time, some of which cost them dearly. The destination of the journey was the Promised Land, which they entered under the leadership of Joshua. The taking of Jericho marks the entry to Canaan where Abraham's line comes full circle. The hope of the people is fulfilled as God's promises are never forgotten.

3. The Biblical Pilgrimages

The book of Ruth marks yet another journey undertaken by Naomi accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, out of Moab back to Bethlehem where Rachel's tomb was situated, with those returning there. This journey undertaken both in hope and utmost loyalty has far reaching implications in the light of the monarchy and the Davidic Messiah.

Inadvertently, Saul makes a journey out of Gibeah to Samuel in Ramah in the hope finding an ass, but the Lord has a far greater surprise waiting in store for him, for the Lord had revealed to Samuel: "About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him ruler over my people Israel; he will deliver them from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked on my people, for their cry has reached me." (1 Sam 9).

After God rejects Saul as king, Samuel makes a journey from Ramah to Bethlehem to anoint David son of Jesse king (1 Sam 16). Subsequently, David, ordered by the Lord, journeys to Hebron where Abraham had settled and by the oaks of Mamre, had built an altar to the Lord (Gen 13:18).⁷ After the days of Solomon, his son Rehoboam is also called to make a journey from Jerusalem to Shechem, where the Lord had appeared to Abraham and had promised him the land and he had built an altar to the Lord (Gen 12:6-8). And there to accept his mantle as king (1 Kings 12:1).⁸

4. Multiplicity of Pilgrim Centres and Sanctuaries

⁶ Eventually, Bethel became a sanctuary and an important pilgrim centre in the northern kingdom of Israel after the division of the united Israel.

⁷ In Hebron, David had to be accepted by the northern tribes as their king.

⁸ It is at this meeting that the young Jeroboam messed up and his decisions led to the division of the Kingdom of Solomon.

As the ark was the main cult object of the people of Israel, the place where the ark was installed became what one may call the central sanctuary – first at Shechem and through various developments, finally at Jerusalem. Although the exact route of the journey of the ark from Shechem to Jerusalem cannot be sketched from the biblical data, and their chronological succession as the central sanctuary is not demonstrable,⁹ yet, the centre to which the ark was attached was Shechem; afterwards it was transferred to Bethel, then Gilgal, then Shiloh and finally Jerusalem.¹⁰ The fact that only these places are mentioned does not mean, of course, that there were no others. At Nob there was a sanctuary where Abimelech was the priest and where David ate the ‘showbread’ laid before Yahweh. Hebron, the city where David was anointed king (2 Sam 2:4) had a sanctuary of Yahweh. This sanctuary, however, is not mentioned in the narratives of the later period. The story in the Book of Judges tells us of a shrine at Dan where Jonathan, son of Gershom served as a priest. The shrine seemed to have remained there until the exile (Exod 5:3. 7: 16.26).

Isaac and Jacob worshipped God in the places where Abraham had worshiped him. Isaac built an altar at Beersheba (Gen 26:23). Jacob encountered God at Bethel twice and there he raised a stone pillar. All these instances point to the need for and importance of sanctuaries where the people of the land could come in pilgrimage and could worship their God. All these sites became shrines and pilgrim centres of cultic and administrative activities in the monarchical period.¹¹ Ahlström opines that Bethel and Shiloh were the two most important cultic and pilgrim centres for the Israelites.¹²

During the monarchical period, even though they do not loom very large, these sanctuaries must have formed more and more the centre of religious and social life and the pilgrimages that the people made contributed to the social and political cohesion. “The discovery of a royal sanctuary at Arad founded apparently during Solomon’s reign, proves that the establishment of small temples on the borders was an accepted practice designed to represent the kingdom’s sovereignty in those regions.”¹³ It was at these sites that the agricultural and family feasts were celebrated. and in a later period, on particular occasions people would come there in pilgrimage to seek the blessings of the priest. There, in special circumstances, these pilgrims would make a personal offering in fulfilment of a vow, in order to expiate sins or to alleviate a sickness.¹⁴

5. The Patriarchal Pilgrim Sanctuaries

In the following discussion, we are making a journey through the ancient historic pilgrim routes across the Canaanite landscape, like Shechem, Bethel, Gilgal and Shiloh prior to the centralization of worship at the sanctuary in Jerusalem. All these sanctuaries were related to the patriarchs and the early Israelite settlers of the Promised Land maintained and emotional connection to them.

5.1. Shechem

⁹ H.D. Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, Edinburg: T&T Clark, 1991, p. 58.

¹⁰ G.J. Wenham, “Deuteronomy and the Central Sanctuary”, in D.L. Christensen (ed.), *A Song of Power and the Power of Song*, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1993, 94-108, p. 96.

¹¹ A.J. Dearman, *Religion and Culture in the Ancient Israel*, Peabody: Hendrikson, 1992, p. 14.

¹² G.W. Ahlström, *The History of Ancient to Palestine from the Paleolithic period to Alexander's Conquest*, (JSOTSS 146), Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993, p. 336.

¹³ Y. Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible; A Historical Geography*, A F Rainey (trans.), London, Burns & Oats, 1979, p. 323.

¹⁴ T.C. Vriezen, *The Religion of Ancient Israel*, London: Lutterworth, 1963, p. 83.

Shechem, one of the principal Israelite pilgrim centres of the pre-monarchic period,¹⁵ was the first Hebrew settlement in Canaan and its sanctuary became the spiritual centre of the Yahweh federation.¹⁶ The Hebrew tribes under Joshua assembled at Shechem.¹⁷ Modern archaeological excavations show that the earliest known tripartite temple existed in Shechem.¹⁸ It was situated in the valley between the mountains Gerizim and Ebal. Shechem was a very important place from a very early age where the Israelites in pilgrimage.

Shechem figures, as the site of Abraham's first altar and it was here that God first promised him that his seed should possess the land.

Abraham continues his journey until he reaches Shechem, or rather, he arrives at the place of Shechem... in the days when Canaanites lived in the land, a note which actually points towards the later conquest and extirpation of the Canaanites as described in the book of Joshua. Only in Shechem can Abraham receive the confirmation that he has arrived at the right spot: 'I give this land to your descendants' (Gen 12:7).¹⁹

According to Gen 33:18, Shechem was the first place Jacob owned and there he built an altar. The shrine in Shechem claimed not only to have been the place visited by Abraham and Jacob (Gen 33:2) in the dim past but also to have been the sanctuary whose erection was commanded by Moses (Deut 27) and executed by his successor Joshua.²⁰ The prominence of the sanctuary was centred on the covenant renewal that Joshua celebrated there with the people, a religious event that culminated with the burial of Joseph's bones in the tract of land that Jacob had bought from the father of Shechem to which Stephen made an allusion in Acts 7:16.

Following the division of the kingdom, Jeroboam's journey to Shechem alludes to the fact that this sanctuary enjoyed a place of primacy in Israel. On account of the step taken by Jeroboam, in the monarchic period, for the biblical authors who were from Judah, Shechem became the symbol of rebellion against the divinely instituted political unity of Israel. After the Assyrian deportation, Shechem seems to have lost its glory as a sanctuary. In the prophecy of Hosea, "As the robbers lie in wait for a man, so the priests are banded together; they murder on the way to Shechem, yea, they commit villainy" (Hos 6:9), Shechem's faded glory is clearly seen.

5.2. Bethel

Bethel was strategically located at a crossroads between Ephraim and Judah.²¹ It formed one of the greatest and most important Israelite sanctuaries in Canaan (Am 7:10). Under the Canaanites, Bethel was dedicated to El, one of the major deities of the Canaanite pantheon. After the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites, it became an important site, second only to

¹⁵ W.G. Dever, "Monumental Architecture in Ancient Israel in the Period of the United Monarchy" in I. Tamoo, *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon*, Tokyo: Yamakawa-Shupansha, 1982, 268-306, p. 277.

¹⁶ R.E. Tappy, "Shechem", in D.N. Freedman, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, Grand Rapids: Michigan, 2000, 1200-1203, p. 1200, notes that situated in the strategic pass between mount Ebal and mount Gerizim, Shechem became a centre of religious activity within the region of Samaria.

¹⁷ K. Brinker, *The Influence of Sanctuaries in Early Israel*, Manchester: Manchester Press, 1946, p. 148.

¹⁸ Ahlström, *History*, p. 197.

¹⁹ Lemche, *Canaanites*, p. 107.

²⁰ Brinker, *Sanctuaries*, p. 150.

²¹ R.T. Anderson, "Bethel", in D.N. Freedman, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, Grand Rapids: Michigan, 2000, p. 170.

Jerusalem in frequency of mention in the Hebrew Bible.²² It was the heartland of Israel where some of the old Israelite traditions developed. It was here that the people of God celebrated the Lord's gift of the land to them.

The ark of the covenant was established in Bethel²³ after the conquest (Judg 20:18-28). During the time of Samuel, the sanctuary flourished. During the monarchic period, and to be precise, during the rift between Judah and Israel, Bethel rose to its glory. It was there that the people went in pilgrimage to consult the Lord in the reign of the judges (Judg 20:18). But there is no mention of the ark remaining in Bethel for long. Prophet Samuel went to Bethel in pilgrimage year by year and he judged the people of Israel there (1 Sam 7:16). There are historians who hold the view that the god of Bethel during the time of Samuel could have been the god Bethel.²⁴ Again there is a mention of people going in pilgrimage to God at Bethel to offer their sacrifices there (1 Sam 10:3).

Although when David made Jerusalem his capital and it became the sanctuary attached to the royal palace, the attention of the people was drawn to it because of the presence of the Ark. However, after the division of the kingdom, when Jeroboam chose Bethel as one of the two chief shrines of the Northern Kingdom, parallel to the one in Jerusalem, the shrine was set in glory. Jeroboam made this choice because of its traditional associations with the patriarchs. Gradually, Bethel became the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom (Am 7:13). The shrine reached the peak of its glory when a prophetic guild chose it as the centre of their activity. Elijah and Elisha are said to have associated with the place (2 Kings 2:2).

From the days of Jeroboam the Yahweh of Bethel was worshipped under the representation of a bull. In a certain period, Amos and Hosea severely criticised the belief and the cultic practices of Bethel (Am 4:4; Hos 4:15).²⁵ It is the golden calf placed in the sanctuary that invited such criticism. Scholars see this move of Jeroboam from different angles. While some see it as a calf worship, others look at it as Jeroboam's attempt to give Yahwism a syncretic flavour. Yet others hold that a gold bull was installed as a pedestal on which Yahweh could stand victorious.²⁶ "Despite the pictorial representation in the form of a bull, it was Yahweh that was worshipped at Bethel. This is deduced from the fact that Jehu, who was no doubt a zealous worshipper of Yahweh, did not remove the images from Bethel.²⁷ But Hosea seems to call the sanctuary a house of iniquity because of these bulls placed there (Hos 10:5).

Even when the northern kingdom fell, the sanctuary at Bethel was not destroyed. During the Assyrian occupation of Israel, Bethel continued to be the centre for religious activities of the remnants in the land. The Assyrian king seemed to have spared it and at the request of the

²² R.K. Harrison, "Bethel", in E.M. Blaiklock (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archeology*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Regency, 1983, p. 98.

²³ H. Ringren, *Israelite Religion*, D. Green (trans.), London: SPCK, 1966, p. 158, notes that although it was a very important sanctuary, there is much vagueness regarding the presence of the ark in Bethel. The fact that the later rabbinic tradition, while mentioning Shiloh and Gilgal and Nob-Gibeon as places where the tabernacle or ark were stationed, does not say anything about Bethel is in itself sufficient reason to doubt the authenticity or historicity of Judg 20:27.

²⁴ Ahlström, *History*, p. 427.

²⁵ Jerusalem was upstaged by the prominence given to the sanctuary at Bethel along with Shechem that were set up as arrival sanctuaries by Jeroboam so that people of Israel in the north might stop going to Jerusalem in the south in pilgrimage.

²⁶ B. Mazar, "Yahweh Came out of Sinai", in A. Brian (ed.), *Temples and High Places in Biblical Times*, Jerusalem: Nelson Geluk School, 1981, p. 83.

²⁷ Brinker, *Sanctuaries*, p. 171; see also H. Tadmor, "Traditional Institutions and the Monarchy: Social and Political Tensions in the Times of David and Solomon" in I. Tomoo (ed.), *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and other Essays*, Tokyo, Yamakawa: Shupansha, 1982, 239-257, p. 255.

people (2 Kings 17:9-12). The sanctuary at Bethel continued to function uninterrupted until Josiah demolished the altar at Bethel, and terminated whatever cultic role that the sanctuary played after deportation of the inhabitants of the northern kingdom (2 Kings 23:15).

5.3. Gilgal

According to the sanctuary legend for Gilgal (Josh 4), it is extremely likely that it was here that Israel's first acts of worship in the new land took place. Gilgal was tied historically not only to these covenant renewal traditions but also to the events related to the conquest of Canaan, which demonstrated Yahweh's power to deliver the land into the hands of the Israelites and his faithfulness to his promise to lead Israel in the conquest of Canaan.²⁸ It was here that the Israelites erected a memorial consisting of twelve stones to commemorate the crossing of the river Jordan. Down through the years, there was an annual celebration of Israel's crossing over to Canaan²⁹ was held at Gilgal (Josh 4:19).

At Gilgal the captain of the host of Yahweh' appeared to Joshua and commanded him to put off the shoes from his feet for the place he stood was holy (Josh 5:13-15). Also, it was here that the younger generation of the Israelites were circumcised. The place was considered very important also because after the Passover celebration when the Israelites ate from the produce of the land, the manna was said to have been ceased (Josh 11:11-12). According to Soggin, "Gilgal is a Benjaminite sanctuary, and it is from there that all the expeditions leave, all the ceremonies and all the rites connected with the crossing of Jordan... take place here; it is again in the sphere of this sanctuary that the processions connected by the texts with the fall of Jericho also take place."³⁰

At the end of the time of the Judges and during the time of Samuel, Gilgal became an important pilgrim centre. Gilgal, along with Bethel, was the shrine that Samuel visited on his annual judicial visits (1 Sam 7:16). At the time, it was a sanctuary where sacrifices were offered: "So all the people went to Gilgal... there they sacrificed peace offerings before the Lord." (11:15). The centrality of the place is also indicated by the fact that it was here that both the coronation (11:15) and the rejection of Saul (15:23) as the king of Israel by the people took place. "The old Benjaminite sanctuary at Gilgal was doing service as a religious centre in Saul's day (1 Sam 11:15) and was in use even in David's time. Later thrown into the shade by Bethel, it was nevertheless an important sanctuary up to the time of Amos and Hosea."³¹ But after the monarchy was established and Jerusalem had become the centre of religious activity, Gilgal was referred in a negative fashion by the prophets: "Enter not into Gilgal, nor go up to Beth-aven..." (Hos 4:15).

On the basis of the archaeological findings there is a lot to be said for the thesis that Gilgal was a typical sanctuary of ancient Israel. There is no mention of a temple at Gilgal but it is estimated that there was an altar (Hos 12:12) and sacrifices. This could well be a characteristic mark of a primitive Yahwistic sanctuary.³² Although right from the entry to the Promised Land, Gilgal served as a centre of pilgrimage for the people of Israel, the centrality of Jerusalem and the fall of Israel led to the eclipse of the sanctuary.

²⁸ J.R. Vannoy, *Covenant renewal at Gilgal*, Cherry Hill, New Jersey: Mack Publishing Company, 1977, p. 83.

²⁹ G.H. Davies, "Worship", in G.A. Buttrick (ed.), *The Interpreters' Dictionary of the Bible*, Nashville: Abington Press, 1962, 879-883, p. 880.

³⁰ J.A. Soggin, *An Introduction to the History of Israel and Judah*, London: CSM, 1993, p. 172

³¹ Th. C. Vriezen, *The Religion of Ancient Israel*, London: Lutterworth, 1963, p. 84.

³² Vriezen, *Religion*, p. 84.

5.4. Shiloh

Only in the case of Shiloh can a good case be made for having been the central sanctuary of all Israel.³³ Shiloh was the chief northern shrine in the premonarchic period³⁴ and “was the main centre of Israelite worship. Before the division of the land, when the tabernacle was set up in Shiloh, it became the religious centre.”³⁵ Moreover, the place was occupied during the days of the Hebrew kings so that Jeremiah’s reference to its destruction would seem to be an allusion to the events closer to this time.³⁶ (Jer 7:12-15; 26:6-9).

During the period of the Judges, the house of God (i.e., the tabernacle), including, of course, the ark of the covenant (1 Sam 4:3-4), remained at Shiloh (Judg 18:31; 1 Sam 1:7, 24; 3:15) apparently for a relatively long time.³⁷ Shiloh, was associated with the traditions of the wilderness cultus. Not only was the tent shrine located at Shiloh but the other major features of the priestly cultus like the camp, the ark, the priesthood of Aaron, the altar and the ephod were formed there as well.³⁸ Hannah came to this sanctuary in pilgrimage with intense hope of becoming a mother and she was favoured by the Lord (1 Sam 1:9-11). Later it was here that prophet Samuel was dedicated to the Lord in the presence of Eli the priest (1 Sam 1:28). The sanctuary at Shiloh held an annual feast of the Lord to which the people of Israel used to gather in pilgrimage. (Judg. 21:19).

The death of Eli, the priest at Shiloh, and the death of his reprobate sons in the battle marked the beginning of the decline of the place as a sanctuary. The lost ark never seems to have returned to Shiloh. For some time, the ark was given shelter at the central sanctuary of the tribes at Shiloh. It disappeared in the battle with the Philistines.³⁹ Later, David secured the return of the ark, which was the most important Israelite cultic symbol, and installed it in his royal capital, Jerusalem, and the ancient shrine of Shiloh seems to have gone back to be used as a non-Israelite cultic high place.⁴⁰

Although Shiloh had been important for the tribes for its central location, and had functioned as a place of pilgrimage, as in the case of Shechem and other sanctuaries, it did not go back to the patriarchal times nor had any patriarchal tradition connected to it. Instead, like various other sanctuaries, “... before Shiloh became an Israelite shrine, it had been the site of an old Canaanite cultic centre... The early Israelite tribes may even have worshiped together with the non-Israelites at the shrine at Shiloh, before the Ephremite hill

³³ G.J. Wenham, “Deuteronomy and the Central Sanctuary”, in D.L. Christensen (ed.), *A Song of Power and the Power of Song*, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1993, 49-108, p. 98.

³⁴ D.G. Schley, “Shiloh”, in D.N. Freedman, *Eerdmans’ Dictionary of the Bible*, Grand Rapids: Michigan, 2000, 1210-1211, p. 1210.

³⁵ A.C. Myers, “Shiloh”, in A.C. Myers (ed.), *Eerdmans’ Biblical Dictionary*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1987, 941-942, p. 941.

³⁶ J.A. Thompson, “Shiloh”, in E.M. Blaiklock (ed.), *New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology*, Michigan: Regency, 1983, 1220-1223, p. 411.

³⁷ R.F. Youngblood, “Shiloh”, in Willem A. VanGemeren (ed.), *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 4, Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996, p. 1221.

³⁸ D.G. Schley, *Shiloh, a Biblical City in Tradition and History* (JSOTSS 63), Sheffield: England, JSOT Press, 1989, p. 11.

³⁹ However, Vriezen, *Religion*, p. 83; cf. Averbek, *Sanctuary*, p. 713 note that the Philistines probably destroyed the Ark of the Covenant. The Psalmist’s view that long before Solomon built his temple in Jerusalem, “He (the Lord) abandoned his dwelling at Shiloh, the tent where he dwelt mortals...” (Ps 78:60), corroborates this view. Vriezen reads Jeremiah alluding to this misfortune in Jer 7:12 and 26:6. Much later, Jeremiah told the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go Shiloh and see its destroyed ruins as a stark reminder of the fact that the Lord had destroyed the place where he himself dwelt when they had occupied the land (Jer 7:14).

⁴⁰ Schley, *Shiloh*, p.198; Vriezen, *Religion*, p. 83

fell totally into Israelite hands."⁴¹ The account of Ephraim's sanctuary at Shiloh - shrine, ark, tent and sacred fire, rooms, altars, festal chamber, elaborate cultus and organised priesthood - shows Israelite participation in the Canaanite religious practices (1 Sam 3:9).⁴² At any rate, as the story of the birth of Samuel and his dedication would indicate, as long as the sanctuary functioned, it was a highly effective pilgrims centre.

5.5. Beersheba

Beersheba is another ancient city where Abraham, Isaac and Jacob lived for a long time. In Gen 21:23 there is a mention of Abraham establishing a sanctuary there. There, Jacob halted to offer sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac (Gen 46:2). Throughout the later period the sanctuary maintained its significance. Samuel's sons judged there in the days of Judges (1 Sam 8:2).

The importance of Beersheba could be deduced from the fact that Samuel's sons were appointed judges at the sanctuary (1 Sam 8:2). People of early times seem to have had a taste for journeying in pilgrimage to distant shrines. Amos describes the northern Israelites going to worship at distant Beersheba (Am 5:5).⁴³ It is noted that there was a horned altar there.⁴⁴ At the time of king Josiah, the sanctuary was destroyed (2 Kings 23:8). Again in assessing the cultural history of southern Palestine down to the 7th century BC, the artefacts found at Beersheba are of special interest for the historian of religion. A limestone horned altar has been found in the excavations.⁴⁵ Most of the paraphernalia and ideas of the nation's official cult should be found in Beersheba even if certain prophets and the later pure-Yahwistic circles did not accept some of the phenomena (Amos 5:5; 8:14).⁴⁶

6. The Notion of Cultic Centrality

A sanctuary was the cultic space where the Israelites offered their various kinds of offerings and sacrifices to the Lord. There were open-air sanctuaries and housed sanctuaries in Israel. The divine promise which says in every place where I cause my name to be remembered, I will come to you to bless you (Exod 20:24) endorses a plurality of shrines historically attested by the Book of Judges and Samuel. The people of God in the Promised Land lived in enclaves and each clan may have had its own sanctuary, which was within comparatively easy reach of all the members and they went to these shrines in pilgrimage.⁴⁷ Foreign sanctuaries (Is 16:12), legitimate sanctuaries (Josh 24:26) and illegitimate sanctuaries could be found in the early life of the Israelites until the whole attention was turned to the one single sanctuary in Jerusalem."⁴⁸

⁴¹ Schley, *Shiloh*, p.191; see also Ahlström, *History*, p. 368.

⁴² Davies, *Worship*, p. 880.

⁴³ A.C. Welch, *The Code of Deuteronomy: A New Theology of its Origin*, London: James and Clarke, 1924, p. 37.

⁴⁴ Ahlström, *History*, p. 703.

⁴⁵ B.C. Cresson, "Beersheba", in D.N. Freedman, *Eerdmans' Dictionary of the Bible*, Grand Rapids: Michigan, 2000, p. 161.

⁴⁶ Ahlström, *History*, p. 726.

⁴⁷ Welch, *Code of Deuteronomy*, p. 36. But in the days of the entry to the Promised Land, the whole congregation of the people of Israel is seen assembled at Shiloh setting up the tent of meeting there (Jos 18:1). The conflict between the tribes after their entry and the debate that ensued clearly indicates that no other altar was allowed in the land except Shiloh (Josh 22:9-34). But much later, one finds the Lord forsaking his dwelling at Shiloh because the people provoked him to anger with the plurality of their high places (Ps 78:58-60). One can deal with this tension keeping in mind the attempts of the later generation to centralise the cult in Israel.

⁴⁸ R.E. Averbeck, "Sanctuary", in W.A. Elwell (ed.), *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1996, 713-714, p. 713.

As one goes through the pages of the Old Testament, one finds a tension between the demand for a single altar and the existence of many altars in Israel. If one considers this demand as a later development where the Deuteronomic redactor makes a plea for a single sanctuary, the multiplicity of the altars, sanctuaries, holy places and temples could be seen as part of the development of the cult to be focused later in one place.

7. Jerusalem, the Central Sanctuary

The journey of the ark ends in Jerusalem, which became the central sanctuary much later. But the journey was a slow one taking centuries for it to reach Jerusalem.

As soon as David captured the city of Jerusalem, he moved the ark into the city.⁴⁹ He made the transportation of the ark to Jerusalem a pilgrimage that marked the consolidation of David's rule.⁵⁰ For David said: "The Lord the God of Israel, has given peace to his people; and he resides in Jerusalem forever." (1 Chron 23:25). As the ark signified the central sanctuary in Israel, not only Jerusalem became the central sanctuary,⁵¹ but it also legitimised and asserted the kingship of David over Israel. "The ark's triumphal entry into Jerusalem would signal that Yahweh now had become the main god of Canaan. He is Elion, the highest one over all the gods⁵² and the *elohim*, used in plural i.e., all the household gods.⁵³ This would mean that the religion of Israel even in the time of David, was heavily influenced by a Canaanite worship, but Yahweh was assigned a position of pre-eminence as a national deity.⁵⁴

In order to give the worship of Jerusalem the central status in his kingdom, and to make Jerusalem the pilgrim centre of the land, David seems to have accommodated the worship of other deities that were worshipped throughout the kingdom.⁵⁵

Storm and fertility deities always played an important role in this country. They were worshipped in the Solomonic temple and the religion of this temple was an expression of the beliefs of the country; thus Baal and Asherah were also worshipped in Jerusalem during the reign of David. Of all gods, Yahweh was the newcomer who rose to supreme power under David. The religious form of the capital with Yahweh as the main god, in the divine assembly was the official religion of the whole kingdom.⁵⁶

Pilgrimage to the city was also given a political colouring.

8. The Royal Sanctuary

⁴⁹ Soggin, *History*, p. 68.

⁵⁰ J.R. Linville, *Israel in the Book of Kings* (JSOTSS 272), Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1979, p. 118; also see J.J.M. Roberts, "Zion in the Theology of the Davidic-Solomonic Empire", in I. Tomoo, *David and Solomon*, 93-108, p. 100.

⁵¹ It is important to note that one never finds any previous mention of Jerusalem in connection with any ancient cultic site.

⁵² Ahlström, *History*, p. 471.

⁵³ A.E. Draffkorn, "Ilani/Elohim", in *JBL* 76 (1957) 216-224, p. 219.

⁵⁴ Soggin, *History*, p. 68. According to Dever, *Architecture*, p. 304, the excavators claim to have found two large cultic installations of the 10th Century BC, which "have been interpreted as actual full-scale temples, though in both cases we should prefer to regard them merely as local sanctuaries no doubt, Israelite, if not truly Yahwistic."

⁵⁵ M.W. Hamilton, "Pilgrimage", in D.N. Freedman, *Eerdmans' Dictionary of the Bible*, Grand Rapids: Michigan, 2000, p. 1058, notes that "Jerusalem stature as a pilgrimage site owes much to the royal ideology associated with the Davidide dynasty."

⁵⁶ Ahlström, *History*, p. 478.

In the Ancient Near East, the king was given almost the status of God. In Ps 45:7 the king is even addressed as God. Ps 21:5 promises the king eternal life.⁵⁷ So the king could decide about the cult and festivals, build altars and sanctuaries, promulgate cultic laws, and appoint priests in the sanctuaries.⁵⁸ As the royal sanctuary, in Jerusalem, his capital, with all the paraphernalia, David founded a state religion and to complete the picture, he appointed Zadok, the head priest (1 Sam 8:17). David helped to establish the power and wealth of the Jerusalemite priesthood in fundamental ways that lasted to the very destruction of the temple.⁵⁹ They oversaw the cult, worship and the pilgrimages.

“Once the construction of the temple had been completed by Solomon, he assembled the leaders of Israel (1 King 8:11) as a result of which the ark was brought up from the city of David and deposited in the Holy of Holies.”⁶⁰ The temple became both a royal chapel and a national shrine.⁶¹ The temple was the spiritual centre of Judaism for about a thousand years.⁶² However, as the book of Kings makes it clear, throughout the period of monarchy, worship continued apparently quite legally at shrines outside Jerusalem as had been the case in the days of Samuel and Judges. From the perspective of Judah, all these shrines and cultic places seem to have been permitted for so long as they were not intended to be substitutes for Jerusalem, which had become the central sanctuary. However, Israel in the north, had their own pilgrim centres.

9. The Post Division Northern Pilgrim Centres

The post division Israel had the prophet Elijah making a pilgrimage to Mount Horeb (Sinai) the “Mountain of Elohim” at which the Ten Commandments were given by God (Exod 3:1; 1 Kings 19:8). There, God reveals himself to the prophet (1 Kings 19). Since the prophet chose this mountain to take refuge in as he was fleeing Jezebel. The journey that Naaman, the commander of the army of the king of Aram, from Syria to Samaria to be healed by the God of Israel (2 Kings 5), must be considered a pilgrimage undertaken in great hope for a healing at the hands of a man of God who was introduced to him by a Hebrew girl.

10. The Deuteronomic Reform

The programme of the Deuteronomic reform written down in chapters 12-19 of Deuteronomy demands that only one central and official sanctuary should exist. It was Hezekiah who even went a step further trying to add to Jerusalem’s central status by making it the sole sanctuary. In the days of Josiah, undoubtedly there was a further move to make Jerusalem the sole sanctuary when he declared that the people were not to offer their burnt offerings wherever they chose but “...only at the place that the Lord will choose.” (Deut 12:4-14). This decree, coupled with the destruction of the other sanctuaries like Bethel, further promoted the primacy and singularity of Jerusalem as the sole cultic and centre.

In addition to the Psalmists, the later prophets call it the naval of the world. After the exile, when the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus, king of Persia (Ezra 1), a massive pilgrimage is seen as the people of Judah, exiles in Babylon, journey to the city of the Lord in exceeding joy, great hope and enthusiasm. The journey was made in great hope to reach the long-lost Promised Land. Several prophets saw Jerusalem as the centre of spiritual attraction as they envisioned the coming of the nations in pilgrimage to worship the one God in Jerusalem (Is

⁵⁷ Soggin, *History*, p. 68.

⁵⁸ Ahlström, *History*, p. 477.

⁵⁹ R. Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist*, Part Three, 2 Samuel, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993, p. 93.

⁶⁰ R.L. Braun, “Solomonic Apologetic in Chronicles”, in *JBL* 92 (1973) p. 508.

⁶¹ P.J. King, “Jerusalem”, in D.N. Freedman, *ABD* 3, New York: Doubleday, 1992, 747-766, p. 754.

⁶² Soggin, *History*, p. 74.

2:2-4 Mic 4:1-4; Zech 14:16). Thus, not only the temple of Jerusalem, but also the city of Jerusalem assumed a holy nature to be called the *holy city*, *eternal city* and so on. In the 1st century BC, the borderline between the temple and the city were rather vague and the city of Jerusalem attained the importance and sanctity of the temple.

11. The Biblical Pilgrimage

The fundamental tenet of the Zion tradition is that Yahweh chose Jerusalem for his dwelling place. Implicit and explicit references of Jerusalem as God's city and God's residence are found in the Psalms. The Psalms were generally sung by the people in their homes and by the choirs in the temple in Jerusalem. There are several psalms that praise the temple of Jerusalem. Yahweh founded his sanctuary like the earth and built it like the heavens (Ps 48:69); but also he founded Zion (Ps 48:9) and built Jerusalem (102:7).⁶³

11.1. The Pilgrim Festivals

As per the command of the Lord, the people of Israel celebrated 3 primary festivals in addition to a few other feasts (Exod 23:14f.). People from all parts of Palestine were to come up to the great city for these feasts, especially to the Passover in the spring, commemorating the events of the Exodus, the Feast of the Pentecost, fifty days later, and the thanksgiving Feast of Tabernacles in the autumn (Deut 16:16).⁶⁴ The lunar timing of these festivals is significant from a pilgrimage point of view. Within Pesach, celebrated in the home, the night-time is a key element with the full moon ensuring there is ample light for the miraculous deliverance of Israel from the hand of the Egyptians. Succoth (Tabernacles) happens six months after Pesach, which celebrates God's provision for Israel whilst they were travelling to the Promised Land, and for his provision within the Promised Land. Again, the moon is full for Succoth and the festival which entails living in 'succah' or booths that are open to God's sky is very much night oriented.

On these festive occasions, companies of happy people from various parts of the country journeyed on foot and many of them met together on the way and continued their pilgrimage of hope. The hope bolstered their happiness, which, in turn, made the long way seem easy. Psalm 84 gives us a picture of such a company that is journeying up to Jerusalem and the temple.

11.2. The Pilgrim Songs

Pilgrimage was the occasion for dancing and singing (Ps 42:4). A section of the fifth and final book of the psalter includes 15 psalms (120-134) that are often called the *pilgrim psalms*, or the *songs of ascent* talk about going up to Jerusalem in pilgrimage. There are psalms that the people sang as they journeyed, deal with the issues of the hopes and hopelessness in life. They were sung in connection with the annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem for the pilgrim festivals. The titles of these psalms "A Song of Degrees" or "A Song of Ascent" indicate their use is in connection with the pilgrimages, a time when the Jews ascended to the sacred Holy

⁶³ Roberts, *Zion*, p. 99. M.J. Buss, "The Psalms of Asaph and Korah", in *JBL* 82 (1963) 382-392, p. 385, notes that Psalm 78 reveals considerable interest in the northern kingdom but in such a way as to justify the centrality of Jerusalem at the expense of Shiloh or Ephraim in general. The Psalm may well have been adopted or formulated by former Israelites from the north in order to clarify the reason for their new worship in the south.

⁶⁴ Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (The Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library), 1999, p. 472, notes that although all the adult males were required to travel to Jerusalem for the pilgrim festivals, "it is difficult to know how widely the law of the 3 feasts was observed in Jesus' time. Many Jews living outside Palestine may have made the pilgrimage only once in a lifetime and many Palestinian Jews may have come only once a year."

City of Jerusalem, especially during the pilgrim festivals, which were joyous occasions for the people. In the case of the pilgrim psalms, the holy city of Jerusalem is a major theme. Zion, the Temple, and thrones are repeatedly praised in these psalms.

Ps 120 expresses distress from living among strange people. The psalm that follows immediately invites the pilgrims to hopefully look up to the hills of Jerusalem. In Ps 122, we have the happy invitation to go to the temple and make a hopeful prayer for peace in the Lord's house. Ps 123-131, depict the intensification of people's hope as they look to the Lord in trust as the pilgrims journey on. They hope for peace in the Lord's house and pray for blessings for their own homes and for their harvests, which come from the Lord. Ps 132 reminds the pilgrims of the arrival of the Ark of the Covenant led by David, the same event celebrated in Ps 24.⁶⁵ As we reach Ps 134, the pilgrims have reached the end of their journey, and they lift their hands up high to bless the Lord in his sanctuary.

11.3. The Sentiments of the Pilgrim

The pilgrim psalms capture a few sentiments that would have been prominently on the minds of the pilgrim journeying to the feasts. Similarly, some of the psalms were sung as the priests ascended the steps within the temple.⁶⁶ Hamilton refers to the picturesque *songs of ascents* that capture the religious feelings of the community coming to the temple in Jerusalem.⁶⁷

1) Sentiment of Elation: As they walked, the pilgrims remembered and rejoiced at the divine care that they had received in the past as a nation, through the covenant with the Lord, or their perseverance in sustaining them and following the covenant stipulations.

2) Sentiments of Gratitude: Especially during the Feast of the Tabernacles, the pilgrims were grateful to God for the present material provision that God made for them in the most recent harvest or in the complete year of harvests.

3) Sentiments of Hope: As the pilgrims travelled, they hopefully exulted in Israel's anticipated glorious future in psalms, hymns and songs. This hope gave them an anticipated confirmation that the God who revealed in their spiritual past will continue to do so in their glorious future. He who was providing their sustenance is their spiritual rock. Despite the rock, they were not immune to struggles. The broken covenant had brought the enemies to their doorsteps, hardships were part of life and disunity was rampant in the society. However, as they made the pilgrimage, these psalms of hope that they sang hopefully, helped them stabilize themselves in their present circumstances.

The arrival of the pilgrim in the temple represents a holy nearness to the Lord. The inner sentiments of the pilgrim entering the temple are recorded in Psalm 84.⁶⁸ The worship of God in the temple assures the pilgrims of forgiveness and healing, with *shalom* expressing the manifold gifts of God who has chosen Jerusalem, the city of peace, as his dwelling place with Israel (see Ps 122:6-8; 125:5; 128:6).⁶⁹ Just as the temple was the life and holiness of Jerusalem, the Lord is the hope, life and holiness of the people of God.

The people of Israel expressed their undying hope in these Psalms. They learned to deal with the struggles of life – political, social, personal – with these songs of hope that helped

⁶⁵ Hamilton, Pilgrimage, p. 1058.

⁶⁶ J.L. Crenshaw, "Psalms, Book of", in D.N. Freedman, *Eerdmans' Dictionary of the Bible*, Grand Rapids: Michigan, 2000, 1093-1096, p. 1094.

⁶⁷ Hamilton, Pilgrimage, p. 1058.

⁶⁸ Frizzell, Pilgrimage, p. 358.

⁶⁹ Frizzell, Pilgrimage, p. 363.

them to respond to their struggles with a positive outlook and prepared them to behold the glory of the Lord who would fulfil their hope.

As the pilgrims go “up to Jerusalem”, which is a metaphor for our heavenward interior pilgrimage in life and worship, the temple is the special goal of the pilgrimage as mentioned especially by Pss 122, 127, 134. Reflecting on the pilgrim psalms, we gain an insightful glimpse into the heartfelt music of Israel’s pilgrims, and we learn of the parallels of their pilgrimages to our own heavenward journey. It is a journey up from the worldly states of life that have tarnished our hopes to a spiritual and heavenly state that fills our life with a sense of fulfilment.

11.4. The New Pilgrimages

As the temple was renovated by Herod, raising its visual glory⁷⁰ and as the pilgrims kept flowing to Jerusalem despite the ubiquitous presence of the Roman soldiers, in 1st century BC and AD, we take a look at the New Testament pilgrimages taking place in Jewish Palestine.

11.4.1. The Shepherds and Kings

According to the infancy narratives given by Matthew, the wise men embark on a journey that was demanded by the star of the king, for they had seen “his star” and were supernaturally navigated (Mt 2:1-12).⁷¹ They came to the city of David either from Persia, or Babylon or Arabia or the Syrian desert.⁷²

In the true sense of the term, they were on a pilgrimage of hope complete with the offerings that they would make before the one who was the destination of all journeys. They had “come to worship him.” Their intents were “wholly admirable” and “represent the best of pagan lore and religious perceptivity which has come to seek Jesus through revelation in nature.”⁷³ The hope that they had harboured as they were travelling was such that they “rejoiced exceedingly with great joy” as the star came to a halt (Mt 2:10). Matthew does not tell us of the joy that they experienced on entering the house and laying their eyes on “the child with his mother” – the fulfilment of their hope.

Although much shorter in distance, similar is the story of the shepherds who, having listened to the good tidings, make a firm resolve to travel. They make a pilgrimage to the manger in hope. At the arrival, their hopes were fulfilled and they bear witness to it (Lk 2:15-17).

11.4.2. The Family Pilgrimage

In the infancy narrative by Luke, we have two journeys undertaken by the parents of Jesus along with their son, which are pilgrimages per se. The first journey was undertaken by Mary and Joseph “when the time came for their purification” (Lk 2:22). Although the Book of Leviticus stipulates the time of purification (Lev 12:2-8),⁷⁴ when we consider the fact that walking between Nazareth in Galilee and Jerusalem would take about 30 hours at the least, covering a distance of about 148km, we assume that the parents of Jesus must have waited

⁷⁰ J.M. Miller, “Jerusalem”, in D.N. Freedman, *Eerdmans’ Dictionary of the Bible*, Grand Rapids: Michigan, 2000, 693-698, p. 696.

⁷¹ Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, p. 171-172, who discusses the possibilities of the star being a supernova, a comet or a planetary conjunction.

⁷² Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, p. 168-169.

⁷³ Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, p. 168.

⁷⁴ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX: v. 1* (Anchor Bible 28), New York: Doubleday, 1970, p. 424.

for a feast for the occasion⁷⁵ to fulfil the requirement. Although we do not know which feast they may have participated on the occasion, Biju Thekkekkara points to the possibility that the “Feast of Purification and its associated imagery related to the temple also fit well to the Lukan presentation of Jesus in the temple.”⁷⁶ They travelled to Jerusalem in the hope of “redeeming” their firstborn with a price of a pair of doves that he might bring about the “redemption” that Simeon was looking forwards to (2:38).

The second journey that the family made to Jerusalem after the birth of Jesus was undoubtedly on the occasion of the Passover, which was one of the pilgrim feasts. They travelled in group and the travelling party “consisted of at least relatives and friends from Nazareth.” Since the focus of the episode is Jesus’ relationship to the temple as the “father’s house”, Luke does not narrate what were the activities that the parents of Jesus were engaged in while in the temple as required by the pilgrimage. At any rate, the hope with which they had come to Jerusalem in pilgrimage was shattered as they became aware of the missing Jesus. The hopelessness of the three days is contrasted with the comfort of finding him in the house of the Lord, which again was shattered by the answer that Jesus gave Mary! Pilgrimage is a zigzag of a journey of life, which is always made in hope and it is the hope that gives strength to the limbs to carry the pilgrim through the rugged terrain of life.

11.4.3. The Jesuan Pilgrimage

During his public ministry, according to the synoptic gospels, Jesus would make one journey to Jerusalem: “When the days drew near for him to be received up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Lk 9:51). This pilgrimage, which was deliberately undertaken by Jesus (Lk 18:31) was to celebrate the Passover in a way that would have far-reaching soteriological implications. In this pilgrimage of hope, through the arrest, the mockery, the flogging and the loss of life, Jesus was able to see the resurrection (Lk 18:32-33). It is the fulfilment of hope that made the pilgrimage to Calvary salvific; lack of fulfilment would have made it a tragedy.

In contrast to the synoptic gospels, the Fourth Gospel has Jesus going to Jerusalem on pilgrimage at least on three different occasions. He was at the temple in Jerusalem with his disciples during the Passover (Jn 2:13). The second pilgrimage that he made to Jerusalem was for the festival of the Tabernacles (7:10). The third and the final pilgrimage is made by Jesus along with a crowd of pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem (12:12-15). The Johannine Jesus, is in control of his destinies in Jerusalem and hence, he was confident throughout the “hour”, even as he “gave up his spirit.” (Jn 19:30b). The hope that had inspired his confidence throughout the “hour” made him shatter the power of the hopelessness that has gripped the world. This is the experience that Mary had as she came on a pilgrimage to the tomb. Every pilgrimage has its finality found in Jesus who transforms the pilgrim and fills her with hope that in turn becomes contagious as it is announced to others (20:18).

12. The Biblical Journey of Hope

Pilgrimage involves a sense of commitment to a purpose, discernment of means and orientation; and all of these impose limitations and sacrifices on the Individual.⁷⁷ However, these journeys are made in immense hope. For the pilgrims, the act of moving through landscapes, either from home to a sanctuary, or between various holy sanctuaries, is

⁷⁵ However, Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 425, raises the possibility that the parents may have come up to the temple from Bethlehem.

⁷⁶ Biju Thekkekkara, “Feast of Purification: A New Reading for *ai` h`me,rai tou/ kaqarismou/ aurtw/n* in Luke 2:22?”, in *StBiSl* 14 (1/2022), 49-66, p. 60. Thekkekkara, *Purification*, p. 57, contends that the “the author of Maccabees preferred ‘Purification’ to ‘Dedication’” (cf. 2 Macc 1:18).

⁷⁷ Frizzell, *Pilgrimage*, p. 359.

particularly imbued with spiritual significance. Despite the various attempts by the monarchs to abolish the institution, from time to time, the spiritual journey of hope by the pilgrims continued with these sanctuaries as their destination.

The long-distance journey on foot points to the hardships endured by the pilgrims, which were only alleviated by the hope of the spiritual rewards that would be obtained at the end of the pilgrimage. For the Israelite pilgrims, the journey to a sanctuary or the temple itself had a spiritual value that was given to it by the hope they carried,⁷⁸ and the arrival at the destination and the possible ritual that the pilgrims performed in the sanctuary and later got it performed in the temple. However, the early pilgrimage may have remained largely a destination-based phenomenon, especially after the centralization of the cult in Jerusalem.

The biblical figures who travelled to be close to Christ, like the mothers who brought their children to Christ in the hope for a blessing for their little ones made a pilgrimage. They desired a blessing that was gained in physical proximity in direct physical contact as Jesus would lay his hand on them (cf. Mk 10:13). In the biblical sense, a pilgrimage signifies the willingness to achieve and prolong such physical contact (*barakah*) gained in the destination.

13. The Eschatological Pilgrimage

The theology of pilgrimage has traditionally been built on the foundation of the biblical paradigms. The incarnational theology among the modern theologies gave it a modern touch with the help of Paul who in the Christic Hymn, sings how Jesus left heaven and crossed over to the earth (Phil 2:5-8) to live among us (Jn 1:1-3, 14). In addition, the theological reflections on pilgrimage recognises the need to relate salvation history to the journey of life that is made with an eschatological hope. We build upon the truth about God who descends (Jn 6:33) to be with his own (Jn 1:11), making it possible for us to experience Him through the mediation of Jesus who ascends back (6:62) to make us follow him (Jn 14:1-3). The eschatological journey is made in immense hope.

The pilgrimages to holy places and sacred shrines that we make today, draw their inspiration from the strength of hope that bolsters faith (Heb 11:1). It is the same faith reinforced by hope that makes us live and often makes us take those blind existential leaps.

Going on a pilgrimage would mean setting out on a journey towards the sacred 'distant', moving 'beyond' in search of God. It necessitates a venturing forth urged by hope. Christian pilgrimage is that which Mary and Joseph made breaking their journey back home (Lk 2:45). From the moment that they realized that Jesus was not with them, and they made a U-turn, and until they found Jesus in the temple, the only thought that occupied their mind was Jesus. What propelled their journey back to the temple was their *hope* of finding Jesus. This is the true image and meaning of Christian pilgrimage: to reach Christ by breaking through the cordon of all the obstacles that stand in the Christian way.

The understanding of the concept of pilgrimage discussed above could be further enhanced shifting our thoughts towards the worship 'in spirit and in truth' that Jesus teaches the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:24). The encounter with Christ becomes the centre of the theological meaning of pilgrimage regardless of place and furthermore, understood Christologically, he becomes the place and destination. Hence, in the meta-modernity, the meaning of a sacred place has to be reinterpreted Christologically to mean the person of Christ where the heaven and earth meet and the divine (Jn 1:51) and the human come together (Jn 10:30).

14. Conclusion

⁷⁸ Hamilton, Pilgrimage, p. 1058.

In this reflection on *pilgrimage* as a sacral journey, as the *destination* becomes a person rather than a place and hope becomes the *propelling factor*, it is important to notice the shifting balance in theological consideration of the differentiator in relation to the place, shrine and the fulfilment of the hope that is defined as the ultimate realization in both dimensions of pilgrimage, i.e., *from* and *to*. The existential predicament that one is making the journey *from*, and the ultimate reality that the pilgrimage is made *to* and the hope that fills the interstice between the source and the destination collectively work as the intense experience of pilgrimage.

In the New Testament terms, any genuine pilgrimage is made possible by the fact that God is the One who reveals and lends Himself to humans in a specific place, the temple (Lk 2:49b), which in its extended meaning, is the person of Jesus (Jn 2:19, 22). Moreover, God's presence became tangible and visible in Jesus (Jn 14:9) who becomes the destination of all Christian pilgrimages undertaken in hope.