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Experiencing God in a foreign land

Counted, Victor

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Chapter 3

Place Attachment in the Bible: The role of attachment to sacred places in religious life¹²

Abstract

This paper examines the role of place attachment in religious life by analyzing various significant place events in the bible, using analysis of biblical discourse. The paper looks at various biblical places, and explores the implications of approaching these sacred settings in terms of place attachment theory. In the Old Testament we focus on Mount Sinai, Canaan, and Jerusalem, and in the New Testament on Galilee, Jerusalem, and on view that Christianity, to some extent, transcends place attachment. The nature of the attachments to these places is diverse and varied in interesting ways. The claim is that place attachment theory can make a valuable theoretical contribution to an analysis of the role of place in the bible, as an addition to the growing literature on the psychological interpretation of the bible.

Introduction

This paper makes a novel contribution to psychological biblical exegesis. Recent years have seen a growing body of literature on psychological approaches to the interpretation of the Bible (e.g. Ellens & Rollins, 2004; Kille, 2001; Rollins 1999; Rollins & Kille, 2007). In offering guidelines for psychological biblical exegesis, Watts (2007) suggests that is important to recognize the wide range of psychological approaches that can be employed in biblical interpretation, to supplement rather than ignore what can be learned from conventional Biblical scholarship, and to avoid the kind of reductionism

¹ Corresponding Author: Victor Counted, School of Social Sciences and Psychology, Western Sydney University, Australia; Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Groningen, Netherlands

² Co-author: Fraser Watts, School of Psychology, University of Lincoln, England

that makes the bible nothing but a matter of psychology. Though psychoanalytic and Jungian psychology have predominated in psychological biblical exegesis, a wide variety of psychological paradigms have been employed. In this paper we propose that place attachment theory (cf. Low & Altman, 1992; Giuliani, 2003; Korpela, 2012), as a framework for examining people-place relationships in environmental psychology, provides another valuable psychological approach to interpreting the Bible.

There has recently been growing interest in the emotional connections that people develop toward places, with growing use of the concept of place attachment and attachment-based religiosity (Low & Altman 1992; Hernandez, et al., 2007; Counted & Zock, in press). Florek (2011) defines place attachment as a positive affective bond established between an individual and a place. Place attachment is influenced by personal, community, and environmental factors, enabling it to serve as magnet that draws people into a symbolic relationship with a place, and such socialization can facilitate affectionate bonds between a religious believer and a place (Counted & Zock, in press). Place attachment is a notable feature of contemporary religious life, but biblical accounts suggest that it is also an ancient phenomenon. This paper examines how certain biblical places have played a unique role as places that have afforded certain attachment and care-giving advantages to those drawn to them.

Place as a Sacred Attachment Setting

Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth (1989) describe the development of an attachment bond as arising from an early contact relationship with a primary caregiver. They reason that attachment interactions shape our needs for security and emotional meaning in our relationships with social others. Attachments keep us connected to key relational figures, and internal working models provide mental representations of ourselves in relation to attachment figures and are developed through activating triggers such as mental states, environmental demands and opportunities, parent-child bonding experiences, and various bodily stimulations. When people are deprived of quality attachment by an attachment figure they seek ways to compensate for such loss of relationship, looking for a “stronger” and “wiser” substitute attachment figure. Relationships with attachment figures are maintained by the functions they serve in relation to a particular goal, providing a target for proximity, serving as a safe haven and

secure base for physiological needs, being a response to experiences of loss and separation, and serving as a source of emotional strength and support in times of difficulty (cf. Counted, 2016b; Counted & Zock, in press).

Attachment theory can be extended to show how a relationship can develop between an individual and a place (Low & Altman, 1992; Korpela, 2012). Ainsworth (1989, p. 711) defines an “attachment” as an affectional bond which shapes a “relatively long-enduring tie in which the partner is important as a unique individual and is interchangeable with none other”. There is thus no limit to what an attachment experience may look like, nor who or what can be an attachment figure. An attachment to a place can serve as an affectional bond, and confer advantage to a person in relation to their felt needs. As with attachment to a person, people can seek proximity to a place to which they are attached; it can also serve as a secure base and safe haven. Cognitive representations of places can keep people connected to them as relational spaces. Place can thus play the role of an exalted attachment figure in this context considering the needs we have that can be met by particular spaces and our reciprocal attachment needs in such settings (cf. Hay, 1998; Fried, 2000; Korpela, 2012; Scannell & Gifford, 2014).

Human geographers and environmental psychologists describe a ‘place’ as a space that qualifies people's relationship with their natural environments, and shapes individual and collective activities, and emotional meanings (cf. Canter, 1977; Relph, 1976; Stokols & Shumaker, 1981; Stedman, 2002; Smaldone, Harris, & Sanyal, 2005). Physical, psychical, or conceptual characteristics not only help to define a place, but also contribute to the creation of meanings associated with it. These meanings often take the form of the perceptual and emotional understanding of a place, as perceived by the people associated with it. Gustafson (2001) reasons that such meanings hinge around self, others, and the environment. These meanings are often "implied by physical settings combined with what a person could bring to it" (Najafi et al. 2014, p. 285). The features of a place can shape people's identity (Proshansky et al., 1983) and enrich the human experience (Gustafson, 2001), as people develop self and group identities in a given space (Davenport & Anderson, 2005).

Most people have experienced some form of affective bonding with places that are related to their past or present experience, places where they love to be, or about which they dream (Giuliani, 2003). Giuliani refers to this as “childhood places” (p.137);

Relf (1976) calls them “significant places” or “fields of care” (p. 1). According to Relf we live in “a world that is filled with significant places” (p. 1). These kinds of significant places are often represented and idealized through our daily lives in relation to our goals and affective needs. Fried (1963) refers to this kind of places as “residential environments”. Pellow (1992) calls it “compounds”. Rivlin (1987) and Gans (1962) both saw such significant places as “enclaves”. Other names used to refer to this kind of places are “sacred places” (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004), “religious places” (Bowen, 2002), “homes” (Marcus, 1992), and “graffiti” (McAuliffe, 2012, 2013). These studies emphasise how places can act as emotional refuges under ideal circumstances, assuring identity, a sense of well-being, and providing other psychological benefits (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Marcus, 1992; Brown, Perkins, & Brown, 2003). Scannell and Gifford (2014) saw place attachment as a multidimensional process that cannot be reduced to a mere cause and effect relationship. Similarly, Rollero and De Piccoli (2010) contend that attachment to significant places depends on the reciprocal relationship between behaviours and experiences.

This notion of attachment to significant others coincides with the relational theology of humanity which have been advocated by theologians in the past. Scholars like Moltmann, Barth, Grenz, Gunton, among others, come to mind. In particular, Moltmann (1979, 1991) and Grenz (2007) both describe the activities and nature of a relational God in their theses. The history of the Triune God, as Moltmann (1991) describes it, points to how God created the world and invited His creatures to partake in this creative activity and have dominion over the earth (cf. Gen. 1:28) through the agencies of the Son and His Spirit. We see this relationality in God’s interaction with Adam and Eve, and through His covenant with Israel and all creation throughout the Bible. It actually appears to be the message of the Bible. From the beginning, God has presented Himself as a relational force as He instructs, expects, and responds to creatures through different strings of relational activities in the Bible.

This covenant relationship with creatures conveys a sense of God's dynamic relationality, in which humans created by God are relational beings and thus stand in a particular kind of relationship with God, other humans, non-human creation, and the earth. Theologically, humans have a strong sense of connection to earth, having been created from the dust of the earth in Genesis 2:7. Based on the creation story in Genesis,

there is a sort of inherent tie to earth, a theological bond developed with earth as the locus of God's creative power. The creation of mankind from the dust of the earth represents a very symbolic moment in history, functioning as a key element of humanity's relational web within time and space. This makes place attachment or attachment to earth an important topic that essentially conveys a sense of relational theology that affirms two key ideas: how God affects His creatures and how creatures affect God in time and space. The same panoply of knowledge for understanding relational theology can as well be used in the non-traditional application of attachment theory to place and God.

Place attachment is therefore an important topic for understanding the human experience both theologically and psychologically (Counted & Zock, in press; Scannell & Gifford, 2016). It is helpful to distinguish three different dimensions of the places to which people become attached (cf. Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001; Scannell & Gifford, 2010; Seamon, 2012, 2014; Counted, 2016b, 2016c). The first concerns the affective role and functions as the emotional attachment to the physical and natural elements of a place. These includes the material and environmental qualities of place, including any human-made elements and spatial configurations, e.g. buildings, street furniture, and pathway layout. Scannell & Gifford (2010) call this the "place dimension", since it explores the understanding of *what* the individual is attached to. The second-dimension concerns "lifeworlds" and the natural attitudes of a place, e.g. actions, routines, events, and understandings (Counted, 2016). It pays attention to how the attachment manifests itself in a given space and relies on the effects of behaviour (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). This often leads to place dependence and also known as the "process dimension". Thirdly, attachment to place can serve a cognitive function and be concerned with the unique character of a place, which enable people to forge place identity (Counted, 2016). Also known as the "person dimension", this third attitude towards place concerns *who* is attached, reflecting the fact that people-place experiences can be personal and symbolic to the individuals involved.

It is widely recognized that attachment to a Divine entity can function in a way that is analogous to attachment to a human person (Kirkpatrick, 2005; Granqvist, 2002; Granqvist, 2010; Counted, 2016; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016). God for example is perceived as older and wiser and as an omni-competent caregiver, and people can see

their attachment to God as providing them with a secure base and safe haven. Proximity to God can be sustained in various ways, including through prayer and through membership of a religious community. We suggest that proximity to God can also be achieved through proximity to places of religious significance. Sacred places play an important role in many faith traditions (Holm & Bowker, 1994), and Bonaiuto et al. (1996) show how natural environments and architectures can shape religious perceptions. Place attachments may play a particularly important role in religious life because God is not a tangible attachment figure in the conventional sense.

We will explore how attachment connections to places in the Bible can be understood through the lens of attachment theory, examining the nature and significance of a sample of four place attachments in the Bible (Sinai, Canaan, Jerusalem and Galilee). However, in exploring place attachment in the Bible, it is important to recognize that the Bible does not speak in one voice about the role of place (cf. Frankel, 2011). There are various different ‘theologies’ of place in biblical literature, and significant differences between the Old and New Testaments. Indeed, some of the most interesting issues arise from comparing different place attachments in the Bible with one another. There has been previous discussion of the significance of place in the Bible (e.g. Inge, 2003). Our task is to examine the contribution that place attachment theory can make to understanding the significance of place as a relational setting in the Bible.

Place Attachment in the Old Testament

Place attachment plays a very important role in the Old Testament even though this has often been ignored by Old Testament scholars due to the “narrowing influence of the New Testament on Christian theological study, including Old Testament theology as undertaken by Christians” (Goldingay 1987, p.12). Goldingay argues that “land is one of the handful of key themes in the entire Old Testament” (p.12) that requires our full attention when reviewing Old Testament theology. As is the case with the significance of the people of Israel, the theological importance of attitudes to the *land* of Israel is often treated as insignificant. The theme of land is important in the Old Testament as it is the theology, even though this has often been ignored (as a case study see: Child 1990, *Old Testament Theology in Canonical Context*).

The notion of place attachment in the Old Testament starts with the story of a man being called to leave his place of attachment for a new *place* of promised. The command was “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you” (Gen. 12:1). The condition to leave his place of attachment came with a tremendous promise of greatness. God had promised him (Abraham) that he would be the father of many nations (cf. Gen 17:4-5) and had assured to give him a land flowing with milk and honey (cf. Gen. 17:8). Abraham later became the patriarch of the Jewish people through his son Isaac - the father of Jacob, from whose name-change the nation of Israel was born (cf. Gen. 32-35). The ancient Israelites are very much the people of their ‘Promised Land’ of Canaan, and of their temple in Jerusalem, which was located in the *place* promised to their ancestor Abraham. Both are very significant place attachments that are central to the religion and identity of the Israelites, and attachment to these places represents a fulfillment of a promise made by God with one man being asked to leave his place of attachment. The story of place attachment in the Old Testament can be said to begin with the covenant God made with Abraham, who later became the progenitor of the Israelites. However, the place attachment experience of the children of Israel as a nation became clearer at their encampment at the foot of Mount Sinai, though Sinai may have been more the source of longing for a secure place attachment than a place that fully met the Israelite’s desire for one.

Mount Sinai: the seat of authority, proximity engagement, and holiness

Mount Sinai is the site of important biblical place events. It was often referred to as the Mountain of God (cf. Ex. 3:1; Ex. 4:27; Ex. 18:5; 1 Kings 19:8). The first reference to Mt. Sinai in the Bible uses the designation “Horeb” (Ex. 3:1). Mt. Sinai was also referred to as “Paran” (Deut. 33:2). The location of Mt. Sinai is one of extraordinary difficulty and still remains one of the mysteries of the Bible “far more than any other problem of Palestinian Biblical topography” (Aharoni, 1962, p. 118). The Book of Exodus invites us into the personal journey of Moses as the leader of God’s chosen people, describing how he meets God on Mount Sinai and empowered to lead the Israelites in holiness (Ex. 19: 1-6).

After the experience on Mount Sinai, Moses came down to instruct the people to set themselves apart to be holy. This was based on the promise God made to Moses in

Ex. 19: 10, saying, “Go to the people. Today and tomorrow set them apart to be holy. Have them wash their clothes. And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day people will see the Lord come down on Mount Sinai” (Ex. 19: 10 - 12). God further warned Moses not to allow the people to touch the mountain, “Be careful that you do not go up on the mountain or touch any place around it. Whoever touches the mountain will be put to death” (Ex. 19: 12). In accordance with God's injunctions, Moses came down from the mountain to the people to set them apart to be holy, saying, for example, “Be ready for the third day. Do not go near a woman.” (Ex. 19:14). Ex. 19 further tells us that Mount Sinai was glorified in smoke because the Lord came down upon it in fire, as the whole mountain shook and dripped at the presence of God. The preceding place events became the basis on which God spoke to Moses in Ex. 20, issuing the Ten Commandments through which his people should measure their lives.

This place experience at Mount Sinai is significant for our understanding of place attachment in religious life. Mt. Sinai was revered as a seat of authority and holiness, and the place in which God revealed himself to his people. It is often referred to in the Bible as the “Mountain of God” (cf. Exodus 3:1; 1 Kings 19:8), demonstrating some kind of celestial attachment attribute. It is not clear exactly why Mt Sinai came to be associated with the presence of God, though mountains play a significant role in many religions (Eliade, 1957; Yano, 2008). It may be that Mt. Sinai was felt to be “closer to God”, as God was believed to dwell in the heavens, making Sinai the Mountain of God (Paprocki, 2011). One theory might be that God used Mt. Sinai for the purpose of building a relationship with his people, so that the attachment to the mountain could facilitate attachment to God. A place attachment to Mt. Sinai became important by virtue of the belief that relationship with God was achieved at Sinai.

Despite the huge importance that Sinai had for Israelites, their relationship to it is not a typical attachment relationship. Sinai is seen as a seat of divine authority, but it is approached with reverence and awe, rather than being seen as a place of safety and security. It is also not clear that the Israelites sought to maximise their proximity to Sinai. They take their lead from Sinai, but it is more a place of origin and a source of identity than a place to which they want to constantly return because they felt safe on Sinai. The place attachment to Sinai seems to be a rather ambivalent attachment; the

significance and importance of Sinai is never in doubt, but not as place that conveys safety and security.

The Land of Canaan: a place for quality attachment and identity development

Canaan functions as the focus of a place attachment much more straightforwardly than Sinai. The Israelites felt the need for a secure place attachment after their period of slavery in Egypt, and their delivery from it and their subsequent wandering in the desert. They were like an orphan, looking for a secure attachment, and finding it in Canaan. If the Israelites tended to cling to Canaan, and if their sense of identity is built around this particular land more than is the case with most peoples, it is perhaps because this place was not only sought and found after a period of place deprivation, but represents the fulfillment of a promise, and ultimately their salvation. *Place* in the context of Biblical history functions as an evidence of God's unswerving covenant commitment. This was seen in the fulfillment of the covenant God had with Abraham to give him a *place* of promise which was realised through the conquest of the Land of Canaan by the children of Israel through the leadership of Moses and his successor, Joshua. This was the first step towards God's grand plan of *place* attachment which was intended to bring about the salvation of Israel and secure their attachment with God through the person of Jesus, as will be made clearer in subsequent pages.

The biblical story of Moses leading the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and toward a land 'flowing with milk and honey' which God had promised their ancestor, the land of Canaan, is a popular chronicle that is central to the identity of the Israelites as God's *chosen* people (cf. Ex. 33:3; Ex. 3:8; Deut. 31:20). The Promised Land is associated by many biblical scholars with a spiritual state of liberation from oppression. For example, Coogan (1978) and Dever (2006) propose that the journey from bondage in Egypt to freedom in Canaan symbolizes a people's journey from oppression to freedom. The Israelites rapidly developed a relationship with the Land of Canaan, and soon forged their national identity as a religious people in this significant place. Goldingay (1987, p.12; 2003) saw Israel as a "landed people", describing how the salvation and identity of the people of Israel were tied to the Land of Canaan. This perspective of identity formation and salvation was later clarified in New Testament

theology, as the gospels introduce a new paradigm shift that replaced emphasis on a particular “land” to a much more broadened emphasis to embrace the *world* through the person of “Jesus” who is the inheritance of the community of faith - the seed of Abraham (cf. Gal. 3:29).

Frankel (2011), in *The Land of Canaan and the Destiny of Israel*, highlights the importance of Canaan as a significant place for the destiny of the nation of Israel. According to Frankel, the defining moment of the creation of the nation of Israel is the gift of the promised land of Canaan by Yahweh (cf. Genesis 17:8). The land of Canaan was associated with the identity of the Israelites, showing how they found it, lost it, and regained it. This made life in this biblical place ‘practically axiomatic for the constitution of Israel’ (Frankel, 2011, p.3). According to Frankel, the Hebrew Bible appears to reflect and to promote a “national-religious faith system in which national life on the land [of Canaan] constitutes a vital, indeed indispensable, element” (2011, p. 17). Frankel reasons that the identity of the people of Israel is coterminous with their inhabitation of this biblical place. However, despite Israel’s attachment to Canaan, Frankel says that their relationship to it is conditional rather than absolute. Staying in Canaan actually requires obedience to the covenant ratified at Mount Sinai, which is subject to maintaining a proximity relationship with God and keeping his law. Essentially, attachment to Canaan highlights anew the ideals of a religious life, and does so in new contexts and places.

Attachment to the land of Canaan appears to have what Granqvist, Mikulincer, & Shaver (2010) call normative attributes of attachment, wherein perceived relationships with substitute attachment figures tend to “meet the defining criteria for attachment relationships and hence function psychologically like other attachments (e.g., providing a safe haven in times of threat or distress and serving as a secure base for risky or challenging endeavors)” (p. 51). The land of Canaan as a substitute attachment-like figure is here functioning as a demarcated resource, arising from two main factors; it is both an ideal place for Israel’s religious existence as the people of God, and a place in which they could fully live in covenant with God (cf. Frankel, 2011). Hence, becoming detached from this biblical place means falling away from Israel’s “normative mode of national existence without, at the same time, ceasing to be Israel” (p. 70). We see Israel taking on a new mode of existence while in exile as a “penultimate state” (p. 70).

The story of attachment to Canaan as a significant biblical place demonstrates how the identity of the people of Israel was defined by their occupation of the land of Canaan, given its attachment advantage as a sacred place for safety, religious freedom, and practising proximity-seeking behaviours with God. This biblical place facilitated the identity formation process of the people of Israel, while also functioning psychologically as an attachment setting, creating a felt sense of security. This was an experience that was rooted in their close relationship with God. Canaan is thus pictured as a special place, with the specific ethical requirement of maintaining proximity to God in order to sustain attachment to the place. In a non-academic article written, Shlomo Riskin of *The Jerusalem Post* writes,

Canaan the grandson of Noah forfeited his right because, instead of following in his grandfather's paths of righteousness and wholeheartedness, he chose to destroy his grandfather's ability to pass these values on to succeeding generations. Abraham, unlike Noah, succeeded in parenting a grandson – Jacob-Israel – dedicated to righteousness and justice (Riskin, 2014, ¶11).

This statement by Riskin carries a warning, suggesting that the physical and spiritual descendants of Abraham will be privileged to live in the promised land of Canaan only for as long as they subscribe to such an ethical lifestyle of forging their identity based on God's standards while maintaining proximity to God. The religious identity development and spiritual maturity of the people of God is identical with their inhabitation of the land of Canaan, which represents a fulfillment of promise as a place 'flowing with milk and honey' and having all of the attachment qualities they seek. Equally, their relationship to this utopian safe haven is subject to their proximity to God, as they uphold the ideals of godliness, expected of God's people and required for their walk with God.

Jerusalem: a safe haven for spiritual cleansing and restoration

Another significant Biblical place to consider is Jerusalem, raising the question of what it represents for the people who are drawn to it and what qualities it has that other places in the Bible lack. Also referred to as 'Zion' (cf. Jospe, 1995), Jerusalem is considered to be a significant place, including the Temple Mount and later known as

Jerusalem the holy city. According to Korb (2010) Jerusalem came to be considered the epicentre of the world; a sacred place where God resided. This symbolic representation of Jerusalem as a sacred safe haven is mostly because of its historical significance. The origin of the religious significance of Jerusalem can be traced back to the time of King David who struggled to capture the city in 1000 B.C. by defeating the Jebusites and making it the capital of Israel (cf. 2 Samuel 5:8). Although King David tried to build the Jewish temple in this conquered city, it was his son Solomon that later completed the Jerusalem Temple in 950 BC (cf. Lacey, 2009).

In the Old Testament, Jerusalem is not only referred to as a holy place but also represents the presence of God on earth. This is partly because of the installation of the Ark of the Covenant inside the temple built by King Solomon in Jerusalem. 1 Kings 8:11 tells us that the glory of God filled the temple in Jerusalem when the Ark of the Covenant was moved there by King Solomon, and continued to fill the place. Jerusalem is seen as the place in which the “House of the Lord” stood (cf. 1 Kings 6:1-27). This House of the Lord symbolizes the presence of God on earth, and provides a link between heaven on earth. Centuries later, the prophet Ezekiel in one of his visions saw the glory of God leave the Temple before its destruction by King Nebuchadnezzar in 583 BC (cf. Ezekiel 10:18-19).

In many ways, the temple at Jerusalem replaces Sinai as the seat of God’s presence, following a common change from associating God with a mountain to associating him with a temple (Eliade, 1957). For the Israelites there is direct link in the tabernacle which was originally created at the foot of Mt Sinai, and which was carried in the Ark of the Covenant by the Israelites on their wanderings, until it came to rest in Jerusalem and was installed in the temple. Attachment to the tabernacle can’t quite be seen as place attachment, but it clearly did function in many ways as an attachment relationship; it was important for the Israelites to maintain proximity to it, and it conferred safety and protection as a talisman might do. It provides an attachment transition between Sinai and the Temple in Jerusalem.

There is an interesting ambivalence in the Old Testament about whether it was appropriate to build a temple. The general religious convention was to seek divine permission for temple building, and initially God denied permission to the Israelites and indicated that he did not wish sacrifices to be confined to one place. When David asked

permission through Nathan to build a temple it was refused (2 Samuel 7), though one can only speculate about the reasons for that. So, when a temple was eventually built, and the Ark installed, it was the end of a long period of desire for a fixed place that could be associated with the presence of God. As with the promised land of Canaan, that long search perhaps led to a particularly intense religious place attachment, and made the destruction of the temple and exile in Babylon all the harder to bear.

Place Attachment in the New Testament

The life of Jesus, as reported in the gospels, revolves around two places to which there is an attachment of different kinds, Galilee and Jerusalem. That is followed in the period after Jesus' earthly life by an interesting ambivalence about the importance of Jerusalem, and indeed of any place attachment at all. Both Jerusalem and Galilee are already within the 'Promised Land' given to Israel, and are also particular points of interest within the larger context of Canaan as a fulfillment of promise. Continuity with the Canaan attachment promise is reflected in attachments to Galilee and Jerusalem since they are already set within Canaan. Separation from the land of Canaan, as experienced by first century Jews during the occupation of the land by the Roman Empire, yielded conflicting results since the place was tied to their identity, security, and salvation (cf. Wright, 1992).³ Attachment separation from the place to which the people of Israel were once attached gave reason to the dismissive and anxious attitudes they had upon receiving a new *place* reality in the person of Christ, whom is introduced by the early apostles as a substitute attachment figure in the New Testament.

There has been less attention to place in the New Testament than in the Old, though W D Davies' *The Gospel and the Land* (Davies, 1974) is one important study showing a new *place* reality that transcends attachment to place. We will focus first on place attachment in the life of Jesus.

Place Attachment in the Life of Jesus

According to the Gospels the two key places in Jesus' life are the Galilee region of Northern Israel, including Nazareth where he grew up, and other Galilee towns such as

³ A special thanks to one of the reviewers for providing additional insights and comments for enriching this paragraph, and making case for the continuity of the canaan attachment in the New Testament.

Capernaum where he exercised ministry. All the gospels record his going from Galilee to Jerusalem at the end of his ministry, where he was crucified. Luke also records a childhood visit to Jerusalem, and John seems to indicate that there were three adult visits to Jerusalem. This raises interesting questions about whether there were place attachments to both Jerusalem and Galilee, and what form they took.

Important scenes for the illustration of Jesus' place attachment experience in Jerusalem are the events leading to his death and resurrection. These events are symbolic in the life of Jesus since some have likened them to be a fulfillment of prophecy (cf. Schwartzkopff & Buchanan, 1897). Jerusalem played a huge role as a sacred place in the New Testament during the time of Jesus, as we saw his arrest, trial, suffering, and resurrection happening in this Old City. Within the walls of the Old City are "stations" of the *Via Dolorosa* (way of suffering or painful way) to which Jesus walked during the events of His crucifixion and humiliation on route from His condemnation by Pilate to His burial. It seems Jesus had a painful experience in this city, which does not connote a sense of positive attachment. For the most part, the gruesome place experience explains why Jerusalem is symbolic for many Christians, pointing to a suffering Christ laying down His own life in a place of rejection. Jerusalem is not only the place of Christ's suffering, it also resonates a sense of emancipation from the clamps of sin and death through His resurrection (cf. 1 Corin. 15:55-57; Romans 6:8-10; Heb. 12:2). The Garden Tomb, a rock-cut tomb in Jerusalem, is believed by many scholars to be the place of the resurrection of Jesus (cf. Kark & Frantzman, 2010). The city of Jerusalem had both positive and negative impacts in the life and ministry of Jesus. The suffering and resurrection of Jesus in Jerusalem gave the early Christians a sense of pride and validity in the city, as they were commanded to stay there for the coming of the Holy Spirit who would empower them to preach and spread the gospel (Acts 1:4-5, 8,9). This sense of attachment to Jerusalem, even after the ascension of Jesus, triggered the growth of the early Christian Church as Christ's suffering and resurrection later became theologized as a ransom (for the world) by the apostles. Girard (2001) describes this triumphant ransom in his mimetic theory as "the inability of the prince of this world to understand the divine love" (p.152). Girard's theory can be used to understand Jesus' place attachment experience in Jerusalem as the outcome of a mimetic rivalry between the forces of good and evil which spotlights Christ's death and

resurrection, and unmasks the narrative of a scapegoat mechanism arising from a mimetic contagion, thereby using the devices of evil to defeat evil.

The *pride* of the Jerusalem place, amplified through the celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus amongst Christians, continued even to the Byzantine era, but became more prevalent since the Crusades and has remained so ever since. Christians associate themselves to Jerusalem with a sense of pride and recognises it as the most symbolic moment in Christian history. The place attachment experience of Jesus in Jerusalem has given the city an intergalactic aura of connection to Christians of all ages, drawing them to a significant place of promise that tells the story of a suffering and triumphant Christ.

Galilee is another significant place in the life of Jesus. The most obvious explanation of Jesus focus on Galilee is that Galilee was part of the identity of Jesus, who was a Jewish carpenter from Nazareth in Galilee (cf. Costas, 1982; Murphy-O'Connor, 2008). However, that only indicates one dimension of attachment, i.e. the place that Jesus was most drawn to, and there are other dimensions of Jesus' attachment to Galilee. Galilee also seems important for the other dimensions of attachment, concerning Jesus' participation in the lifeworlds of Galilee, and the contribution it made to his identity.

Given the highlighting in the gospels of Jesus' preaching and healing in Galilee it would be impossible not to consider Galilee as an important place of attachment for Jesus (cf. Matthew 13:1-2; Mark 4:1-2). The gospels of Matthew and Mark tell us that a very large crowd flocked around Jesus in Galilee as he began to teach beside the Sea of Galilee. Murphy-O'Connor (2008) claims that Jesus attracted far greater crowds and had more influence in Galilee than any other place. Another reason for the focus on Galilee may have been the arrest of John the Baptist. The gospel of Matthew says, "When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee" (Matthew 4:12). Similarly Mark writes, "After John was arrested Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God" (Mark 1:14). From these two passages one might infer that Jesus was drawn to Galilee because he felt compelled to continue what John had started, a ministry that was terminated with the Baptist's arrest (Murphy-O'Connor, 2008). Another scholar suggests that the focus on Galilee arose from it being a Jewish centre of

power, marking the space where God first had an encounter with the Israelites in the Old Testament as they forged their identity as the people of God (cf. Freyne, 1980).

One could also consider Galilee as a place that symbolised the oppressed and marginalised. Jesus himself relates the incident of Pilate “mingling the blood of the Galileans with their sacrifices” in Luke 13:1-3. Jesus’ compassion towards the Galileans as a marginalised people is evident, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things?” Historically, Galilee was the headquarters of major revolutionary movements against Roman oppression and as a result Galilean Jews were mostly crucified by the Roman soldiers than Jews of any other region. Many of the rebel Galilean Jews were crucified, and women and children sold into slavery (cf. Schurer, 1973, p. 332). Aside from this, Galilee was despised by ‘pure’ Jews and seen as the land of the rejected, outcasts, and foreigners. Schurer (1973) remarks that people escaping from the puritans of Judea would often run to Galilee. This was the same place where Jesus found Mary Magdalene and set her free of “demon possession” (cf. Luke 8:2).

The difficulties faced by Mary the mother of Jesus in Galilee should also be considered as part of the reason why this sacred place for the poor was central in the agenda of Jesus during his earthly ministry. Johnson (2009) suggests that studying the Galilean context of Mary’s life can provide rich material for understanding the significance of Galilee in the Bible as a significant place that helps us to locate the dynamism of God’s holy love in the Christian life. Johnson first presents Galilee as a social location that marks Mary’s time and place, serving as shorthand for the significance of God’s preference for the “lowly” of the earth. Gutierrez (1991) underscores the “lowliness” of Mary’s condition in his book *The God of Life* using the term *tapeinosis*, which connotes a state of oppression and affliction. Gutierrez argues that Mary’s *tapeinosis* drew God to look upon her with a gaze of affection, causing her spirit to leap for joy in Luke 1:52-53. Mary’s *tapeinosis* took place in Galilee as she struggled to explain the circumstances surrounding her premarital pregnancy to his betrothed husband Joseph (cf. McKenzie, 1985). Mary’s prophetic song in the gospel of Luke characterizes God’s intervention through an event that was considered scandalous (Ross, 1991).

He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty
(Luke 1:52-53).

Mary sounds like a prophet of the poor, and seems a marginalized person in this gospel of Luke. Johnson (2009) argues that taking Galilee out of this context of experience strips the text of its strength and meaning. The Galilean Mary in the text represents the hope of the marginalized as a “woman who has suffered and been vindicated” (Johnson, 2009, p.342). The experience of Mary in Galilee suggests this biblical place as a space where God meets with the “lowly” and “broken”; a care-giving target of proximity for the lowly. Given the different contextual theologies associated with identifying the Galilean space as a sacred place for reaching out to the lowly and oppressed, either through the ministry of Jesus or the life of Mary, shade light on the nature of God as One who freely reveals himself to those stuck on the underside of history as a source of hope and salvation. Taken together, attachment to Galilee signals an identification with the poor and marginalised in time and history.

Equally, the instruction of Jesus to his disciples in the gospels to meet with him in Galilee after his resurrection highlights this biblical place as a very important sacred space for Jesus. Matthew 26:32 reads, “After I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.” After the resurrection of Jesus, Mary Magdalene and a fellow mourner were instructed to notify the disciples that Jesus was going before them into Galilee where they would see him (cf. Matthew 28:7; Matthew 28:9-10). As the women were on their way to convey the message to the disciples, Jesus appeared to them for the second time and said “Greetings...Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me” (Matthew 28: 9-10). Matthew 28:16 later shows how the disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go, and they “worshipped him” there (cf. Matthew 28:17).

Jesus’ relationship with Jerusalem is clearly different from that of Galilee. Jerusalem is far from being a safe haven for Jesus; on the contrary, it is a place where, according to the gospels, Jesus goes to ‘suffer and to die’. If Jesus’ relationship to Jerusalem can be seen as an attachment relationship at all, it is best seen as an ambivalent, insecure attachment. Some have drawn a contrast between Galilee as a place of

revelation and redemption, and Jerusalem as a place of rejection. That comparison can be overdone, as Davies (1974) points out, but clearly Galilee is a place of safety in a way that Jerusalem is not. However, Davies is surely right that Jerusalem is the inevitable messianic centre. Galilee may be a safe place of origin and retreat, but Jerusalem has a magnetic draw that cannot be gainsaid. Its dominance is unmistakable, rather than like of Mount Sinai in the Old Testament, even if it is debatable in what sense, if at all, Jesus can be said to have an attachment relationship to Jerusalem.

Place Attachment for Early Christians

The New Testament also provides material relevant to the place attachment of early Christians in the period after the end of his earthly life. The secondary literature on the significance of place in early Christianity is not extensive, though Davies (1974) is again invaluable; Walker (1990) is useful too, and Inge (2003, chapter 2) provides a helpful summary. It is clear that there are two strands in the early Christians' place attachment in the New Testament period. One is a continuing attachment to the land where Jesus lived and dies, and especially to Jerusalem; the other is the idea that Christianity in some sense transcends place attachment. These two potentially conflicting strands are held in some kind of balance.

Jerusalem continued to play an important role throughout the New Testament as the sacred place associated with Jesus, and is more significant than Galilee. The arrest, trial, and suffering of Christ and his resurrection happened in Jerusalem. Khoury (1995) of the 'Center for Religious and Heritage Studies in the Holy Land' at Bethlehem University claims that the experiences of Jesus in Jerusalem are very symbolic for Christian pilgrims, and explain their place attachment to the holy city of Jerusalem. This makes Jerusalem a sacred place for Christians who are drawn to it as the place of spiritual cleansing associated with Christ's sacrifice on the cross. It leads them to remember the suffering Christ as the ultimate attachment figure, who inspires people to walk towards holiness, and experience the safety that comes from his presence and proximity. Jerusalem embodies the sacredness of the presence of the risen Christ, from which he will return to judge all of mankind of sin and reign forever (cf. Idinopulos, 1991; Isaiah 2:1-4; Isaiah 9:6-7; Isaiah 24:21-23; Joel 3:14-17,21; Micah 4:1-7; Zechariah 2:10-13; Zechariah 8:2-3; Matthew 25:31; Revelation 3:21). Attachment connections to

Jerusalem thus arise because it was perceived as a place of proximity to the holy presence of God, making it a focus for spiritual purification and Christian pilgrimage. Aside from the different historical reasons for attachment to Jerusalem (cf. Peters, 1993; Idinopulos, 1991; Aviga, 1980), the Bible points towards other reasons that made Jerusalem such a significant place of attachment for followers of the three major religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Nevertheless, there are factors in the New Testament that point towards transcending place attachment. There are seeds of this in the gospels. At a number of points, Jesus dissociates himself from the idea that salvation is for Jews but not Samaritans; he visits Samaria freely and mixes with Samaritans. However, his most explicit remark about transcending place attachment is when, in conversation with a Samaritan woman, he looks forward to the time when the Father will be worshipped “neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem” but “in spirit and truth” (Jn. 4: 21-4).

Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:20-24).

As seen in the above passage, the gospel of John introduces a new paradigm shift for understanding the theology of place attachment in the New Testament. This revelation seems to be moving God’s people from an ancient framework analogous to the Jewish traditions of the day to a cosmic, trans-spatial view that recognises God as a ubiquitous force - the king of the whole earth - so that every place is now seen as sacred. Thus making it feat to make a case for the missional agenda of Christianity, which is summarised in Mt 28:18-20 as making disciples of all nations, since Christ now has “all

authority in heaven and on earth”.⁴ This paradigm shift has huge universal implications as it presents the Christian faith as a trans-spatial faith that ought to be embodied as part of our being, as every believer becomes a resident space for the operation of the Holy Spirit in a world that needs healing. Paul speaks of this shift as he reminds the early Christians that their “bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit”, who is in them, whom they have received from God through the death and resurrection of Jesus (cf. 1 Corin. 6:19). Paul even takes this further, “You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies” (1 Corin. 6:20). The place attachment experience of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem gave birth to a new paradigm shift that embraces the uniqueness of the human being as the resident space of God. Secular philosophers like Badiou (1988) and Zizek (1989) also recognise this paradigm.

Badiou (1988), for example, talks about a place of ontology in his book *Being and Event*, referring to place attachment in this context as *the science of being qua being or being in itself*, a situation of being wherein an individual finds realisation and reconciliation with truth within themselves. In other words, all truth is post-evental. Similar line of thought is seen in Zizek’s (1989) idea of a place of *blindness*, where he describes a phenomenon as such subject to an uncanny experience “similar to the one summarized by the old oriental formula ‘thou art that’ [‘Tat Tvam Asi’]” (p.11). Zizek sees the ontology of place realised in the external effectivity of the exchange process within a place, calling it a misrecognition scene in which people are blind to the actual staging of their own thought and “the theatre in which your truth was performed before you took cognizance of it” (p. 11). Drawing from these two schools of thought, one could argue then that the aftermath of the attachment experience of Jesus in Jerusalem afforded Christians a sense of reconciliation with truth, in a way that their relationship with God can now be realised without any external place event or influences. On the contrary, Counted (in press) in his *Circle of Place Spirituality* thesis has argued that place is the product of an emotional attachment to God, on the basis that a relationship with God is often the outcome of one’s place experience and cannot be legitimately

⁴ A special thanks to one of the reviewers for recommending that we elaborate more on the NT teaching on trans-spatial faith whilst providing helpful lines to capture this thought. Most of the keywords used in this paragraph were copied from his/her peer-review comments.

realised without certain *triggers* (e.g. individual needs, intentions, emotion, motivation and personal experiences) in a place.⁵

Bartholomew (2011) concurs with the idea of a trans-spatial faith in his treatment of place in the New Testament, arguing that the idea of place in Christianity must embrace concepts such as new creation, being *in* Christ, the kingdom of God, among others. Bartholomew refers to God as a "co-inhabitant in place", since He dwells in the believer through the agency of His Spirit (p.31). Davis (1974) exceptionally treats the theme of place and trans-spatial faith in the New Testament magisterially. He saw the concept of place among the early Christians as a metaphor than as material reality, seeing Jesus as the replacement of place: it is in Him that Christians find their rest, not in a geographical place. This is often referred to as "place dependence" and "place identity" in environmental psychology (cf. Counted, 2016; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001), where an individual is drawn to activities, events, career opportunities, among others, that are in a place for their life- survival and continuity. As the individual is drawn to these understandings of place and depends on such place for their security, it often leads to place identity which is where the individual starts developing certain attributes of a place, e.g. accent, lifestyle etc. This ideology of place attachment is reflected in the attachment of the early Christians to Jesus whom they depend on as their 'inheritance' as a community of faith; it is in Him they find rest and peace in difficult times (cf. 1 Pet. 1:4; Heb. 3-4, 12:1-2; Eph. 1:3). Attachment to or dependence on Jesus leads to the development of a Jesus identity, which is a form of *place* (Jesus) identity where the Christian is conformed to the image of Jesus Christ as a 'new creation' for the sake of others (cf. Jn. 1:12; Eph. 1:5; Col. 2:9-10; 1 Cor. 6:17; 1 Cor. 12:27; 1 Pet. 2:9; Gal. 3:27-28; 1 Cor. 6:19-20). The New Testament concern with place is broadened to embrace the person of Jesus as the ideal locus of *place* which the Old Testament place theology ultimately reveals. Brueggemann (2002) even saw Jesus as the material reality of *place* attachment in the Old Testament theology. Therefore, to be in Christ and developing

⁵ Nonetheless, while we recognise a paradigm shift in the way the New Testament conveys the idea of place attachment, we wish to emphasize that place still plays an important role since one's religious life can be subjected to a *range of* place experiences. For instance, a sense of insecurity in a place can activate the need to stimulate attachment with an attachment figure who is wiser and stronger and can help in the process of emotional meaning-making (cf. Counted & Zock, in press; Counted, Watts, & Moustapha, in press).

attachment to the person of Jesus has replaced attachment to place as the ideal religious life (cf. Davis, 1974).

The Acts of the Apostles also indicates a good deal of debate about the extent to which the Jerusalem church should be the seat of authority for the emerging Christian movement, and whether gentile converts to Christianity should be expected to conform to Jewish customs. St Paul increasingly asserts a doctrine that all human divisions are transcended in Christ (Galatians 3: 27-9). That implies a degree of transcendence of Christian attachments to any particular place, though Christians have continued to build and consecrate sacred spaces for worship, and continue to reverence the places where Jesus lived and died. One way of reconciling these two strands, as Davies (1974) suggests is to associate Jerusalem and the Holy Land with the Jesus of history, and to see the Christ of Faith as being universal and transcending space and time. Luke's story of the ascension of Jesus (Acts 1: 6-11) can be understood as marking a final transition from the presence of Jesus being localised to transcending time and place.

Towards A Theology of Biblical Place Attachment

The notion of place in the Bible is a tricky one. When taken literally, this can lead to doctrinal complications. A good example is Ps. 90:1, "You Lord have been our dwelling place." A literal interpretation of the text suggests that God is a place deity. This was what Bartholomew (2011) warns about, urging scholars to rather have a well-thought-out conceptualisation of the concept of place and avoid interpreting *place* literally in the Bible. Thus the first step to a fine treatment of biblical place theology would be to refrain from the overly literal reading of *place* in the Bible.

An understanding of biblical place attachment raises basic theological questions about the conception of the nature of the God of the Old Testament and New Testament as a divine Force that reveals Himself within the context of place. Most events in the Bible happen in a significant place and God reveals himself in a way that is related to particular places and territory. Associations between God and place are close. For example, the worship of God in a foreign land suggests a departure from God, and raises questions about the possibility of cultic worship outside a recognized sacred place. In the Old Testament there is a perception that God establishes his affection and attachment bonding with his creation within a special place (Frankel, 2011, p.77-137).

On these grounds we submit that a theology of biblical place attachment will see the God of Israel primarily as a God of place. Furthermore, a theology of biblical place attachment will not only look at how the identity of the nation of Israel was defined in particular spatial settings, as rooted in the ideology of sustaining proximity to God, but will also reflect theologically on how “God's self-revelation takes place in history, in specific times, and places, rather than in the Platonic realm of eternal ideas” (Johnson, 2009, p.328). An analysis of biblical place attachment emphasizes that place experiences are not only biographical but are also profoundly theological in character, as the Bible reflects the *kairos* of the biblical figures involved. At the same time, their witness to this *kairos* keeps a sound link to biblical place as the locus of those gracious moments of encounter with God.

Time and place are closely linked in biblical theology, though place has received less attention than time. A theology of biblical place attachment will be linked to how history bears the key to divine engagement with the world. Examining key events in biblical history can reveal God on the ‘underside’ of human history, as people experience God as a source of hope and an ultimate attachment figure in times of oppression and meaninglessness, lest an emphasis on the “Transcendence of God” as “One” becomes separated from God’s creation. The theology of biblical place attachment pictures biblical history as the locus of God’s saving encounters with his creation, in a way that coheres with the belief that God is immanent to creation. Ellacuria (1993, p. 251) concludes that “The great salvific, revealing, and communicating acts of God have taken place in history” and thus underscore God’s immanence. God reveals himself on Mount Sinai, frees the Hebrew slaves from Egypt, leads them into the promised land of Canaan, vindicates an oppressed pregnant woman in the person of Mary of Nazareth, and is incarnate in the life of Jesus; all these point to moments, places, and concrete events “where the ineffable graciousness of God becomes usually present, knowable, and effective” (Johnson, 2009, p.339).

Though there is a strong case for the role of place attachment in the Bible, the attachments we have examined differ among themselves in interesting ways. In the Old Testament there are attachments to Mount Sinai, Canaan, and Jerusalem, but they are all of different kinds. Sinai is the seat of authority and holiness and a target for proximity engagement between God and the children of Israel. The Promised Land of

Canaan plays a very key role, and exile from it is both traumatic and idolatrous. Jerusalem is more of a cultural creation, but becomes a very important source of identity. In the New Testament, both Galilee and Jerusalem play significant roles in the ministry of Jesus, but in different ways. Galilee seems to be a safe haven for the lowly and oppressed, but Jerusalem had a special magnetic draw for a messianic figure. After Jesus' death, there is an interesting ambiguity about where the disciples will find him again, whether Jesus had gone ahead of them to Galilee, or whether they should wait in Jerusalem for the gift of the spirit. As Christianity develops there is also an interesting balance between a continuing reverence for Jerusalem as the locus of Jesus' death and resurrection, and the belief that Christianity transcends attachment to any particular place.

Conclusion

In this exploration of place attachment within biblical narrative we have provided a psychological approach to interpreting the Bible while making a case for a theology of biblical place attachment. This was done by adopting attachment theory as a springboard for examining the role of place attachment in the Bible and analyzing various significant place events in the Bible. Pointing to the spatial engagements of the God of the Bible with humanity has allowed us to explore the nature of God's imminence and mystery as a transcendent Force experienced within the context of *place*, while recognising that belief in the Christian God transcends attachment to any particular place. We have argued that God's divine nature is not safeguarded by placing him beyond time and space, but by recognizing his involvement in human history as he embraces everything freely on the human underside of history.

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