



"That this world is a playground instead of a battleground has now been accepted in practice by the vast majority of fundamentalist Christians."

—A.W. Tozer

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The High Places (Part Six)

As [God](#) promised in [Leviticus 26:30](#), the pagan high places of Israel and Judah were destroyed long ago. Their gods have essentially passed into history, although remnants of their cult still live in holidays like [Christmas](#) and [Easter](#). Thus the high places might appear to border on the irrelevant for us today, except that the apostle Paul instructs us that "these things happened to them [ancient Israel] as examples, and they were written *for our admonition*, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" ([I Corinthians 10:11](#); emphasis ours throughout). Though we will probably never be tempted to burn incense to a pagan god on top of a hill, the high places of old still contain instruction and warnings for us in these end times.

The critical point of the high places is that they facilitated idolatry; they were instruments by which Israel was led away from God. They introduced a belief system and a perspective of life contrary to the abundant life that God intended for His people.

Statistically, whenever two options exist—one good and one bad—in time, some people will always chose the bad option. Adam and Eve chose the bad option immediately! In wanting the best for the Israelites, God commanded them to destroy the bad options—alternatives to Him that were by definition supremely inferior—to safeguard their future. They only half-heartedly obeyed, and beginning with Solomon's official sanctioning of the high places, the alternatives to true belief—the true way to live—became increasingly accepted. The God who redeemed them from Egypt and provided their every need was gradually squeezed from their minds, replaced by gods and ways of worship, thinking, and living that were probably very popular but were also directly opposed to eternal life.

We find ourselves in a parallel circumstance, surrounded by behaviors, beliefs, and cultures opposed to God. We can liken the pagan high places to outposts of [the world](#) in our lives, and just as God commanded Israel to destroy the high places upon entering the land, upon our conversion, we, too, became responsible to root out those outposts so that the true religion would be unimpeded. Yet, the

apostles' repeated warnings about the unrelenting dangers of the world teach us that we probably did not tear down all of our spiritual high places initially or that we allowed some to be rebuilt over time. Resisting the world's influence is a full-time obligation for those whom God has redeemed!

The Parable of the Sower shows us that "the *cares of this world* and the deceitfulness of riches" will tend to "choke the word"—the truth—that sanctifies us ([Matthew 13:22](#); [John 17:17-19](#)). Paul exhorts the congregation in Rome, "*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing [renovation] of your mind*, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" ([Romans 12:2](#)). He includes a brief anecdote to Timothy that Demas, a man mentioned in two other epistles as being involved in God's work, "has forsaken me, *having loved this present world*" ([II Timothy 4:10](#); see [Colossians 4:14](#); [Philemon 24](#)). No one is immune! The apostle James defines "pure and undefiled religion" as "to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and *to keep oneself unspotted from the world*" ([James 1:27](#)), and strongly warns his audience that "friendship with the world is enmity with God" ([James 4:4](#)). John likewise warns us:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. *If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. ([I John 2:15-17](#))

The Bible does not give a simple definition of "the world," yet we know that it is in opposition to God and His way of life because its source is [Satan](#) the Devil. The specific aspects of the world that may draw us away from God can vary from person to person and even throughout a person's life. Regardless of the exact application in our lives, one lesson from the ancient high places is clear: Leaving them intact welcomes spiritual weakness and estrangement from God. Further, if we tolerate these outposts of the world in our individual realms, the lives we risk are not just our own—those who look to us as an example of how to live may be the ones to reap the whirlwind, as we saw with King Jotham in Part Five.

For Israel and Judah, the high places led the people away from God and toward Baal, Ashtoreth /Astarte/Easter, Molech, and a host of other gods. For us, the outposts of the world will be more deceptive and the stakes—eternal life—far higher. If we have spiritual high places in our lives, we probably do not [see God](#) as clearly as we could. His voice may be drowned out by the noise of this world. We may not fully trust Him to provide for us or to direct our steps. Our Bible study may have lost its appeal; our interest in the riches of God's Word may be flagging. Our prayer time may become shorter or sporadic—perhaps done out of rote habit rather than a heartfelt desire to know the Father and the Son.

Perhaps we have become embittered with our lot in life or envious of what everyone else seems to have. Perhaps the spiritual riches we *already* have seem of little immediate value, like Esau selling his birthright or Israel nullifying her covenant with the Most High God. Perhaps our thoughts are anchored in the material and the temporary or focused on the surrounding culture. All these indicate that the world is encroaching into our lives, changing our attitudes, distracting us, and threatening our high calling. They signify that a high place needs to be torn down.

In the New Testament, the world is contrasted with the Kingdom of God—the Kingdom into which true Christians have already been conveyed ([Colossians 1:13](#)), and which will be formally and dramatically [established on earth](#) when [Jesus Christ](#) returns. But until this present world is

overthrown, we are engaged in a war for our hearts, our loyalties, our time and attention. The danger is not that we should be killed, but that we should be enticed to neglect the salvation that God has begun in us ([Hebrews 2:1-3](#)), that we could give up on eternity with the Father and the Son by letting the world squeeze us into its mold ([Romans 12:2](#)). If Christ overthrows this world at His return—and He will—what will happen to those who love the world and its things, who resemble it rather than the Messiah? This is what happened to Israel and Judah: They loved the world around them so much that they imitated it, which meant turning their backs on God.

Jehoash, Amaziah, Uzziah, and Jotham did what was right in the sight of God, as least for part of their lives. Overall, they were not bad kings, especially compared to the likes of Ahaz, Ahab, and Manasseh. However, God points out that each failed to remove the high places as He had commanded, leading to Judah's eventual captivity.

However, we need not follow their negligence, for God has already given us the means to overcome the world—our [faith \(I John 5:4-5\)](#). True faith in the Father and the Son will motivate us to remove anything from our lives that might hinder our relationship with them. True belief will cause us to "seek first the [kingdom of God](#) and His righteousness" ([Matthew 6:33](#)), and have the presence of mind to resist the world's outposts before they can be established in our lives. God is quite willing to help us remove any high places in our lives if we are willing to make the effort.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Christian and the World \(Part One\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Scripture uses the term "world" in numerous ways. Overall it is a negative connotation, describing the cultures of this world since Adam and Eve, directly under the influence of the prince and power of the air (Ephesians 2:2, 6:12). The entire world and its cultures are in disobedience to God because of Satan's influence. The world is in deadly antagonism against God, against the way of God, and the people of God because the spirit generated by the unseen prince of this world. It is essential that we stay awake and keep our guard up.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[The World, the Church, and Laodiceanism](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The seventh and last of the attitudes within the church, Laodiceanism is the attitude that dominates the era of the end time. It seems more natural to think that this attitude would be the least likely to dominate in such terrible times—that it ought to be obvious that the return of Christ is near. But Christ prophesies that it will occur. In fact, it indicates the power of Babylon! Why does Babylon dominate the church in the end time? Because it dominates the world, and the Christian permits it to dominate him!

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