

Reflections

reading notes

JULY 2005—*Important Places*

When Jesus met with the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4), she said, “Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship” (4:20).

Jesus said, “Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father. Ye worship that which ye know not: we worship that which we know; for salvation is from the Jews.”

Think with me for a moment of other significant places of the past and present. For the ancient Greeks, Delphi was as important a place as can be imagined.

Since the eighth century BC, the Greeks believed that the god Apollo spoke through the priestess, the Pythia, at the shrine in Delphi, the spiritual heart of Hellenistic civilization. Situated on the southern slopes of Mount Parnassus, with the Gulf of Corinth below, the shrine was believed to be at the center of the world. Inscribed on the portals of the Delphic shrine were two expressions of wisdom aspired to by the ancient Greeks: “Know thyself” and “Nothing to excess.” Consultants would journey to the oracle to seek counsel, relying upon Apollo’s superior insight. Individuals sought advice on personal matters, such as marriage or vocation. Even cities beseeched the oracle prior to important ventures, such as waging a war or adopting a constitution (p. 56, *Socrates against Athens*, Colaiaco).

For many philosophers, Athens is the starting place. Some have argued that at no other time was the soil as ripe as it was then to produce thinkers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.

Consider the impact the mere mention of Mecca has on the Islamic world. It is the place where Muhammad was born. It is a place toward which Muslim’s bow and pray every day. It is the place countless thousands travel every year as they make their holy pilgrimage to the religious capital of their faith. It is the holiest of Muslim cities. And because it is holy only Muslims are allowed to enter. It is where their story begins.

For the Christian, Jerusalem marks the beginning of our story. The Old Testament prophets foretold it would begin in Jerusalem (Isa. 2; Joel 2; Micah 2; Dan. 2), and Luke validates the claims of the prophets with the history recorded in Acts 2.

Where does your story begin? The beginning point you choose, whether it be Delphi, Athens, Mecca, Salt Lake City or Jerusalem will determine how your story ends.

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