

## “In a holy place” is in the courtyard of the Tabernacle

*Peter Schmidt. 2021. Quotes by NASB.*

In English Bibles, we encounter the expression “in a holy place”. In Hebrew, this is *בְּמִקְוֹם קֹדֶשׁ* *b<sup>3</sup>māqôm qādōš*.

### Where is this unspecified “holy place”?

It is not “the Holy Place”, the front room of the Tabernacle.

Lev. 6:9 [English 16] identifies the place with the courtyard of the Tabernacle when it says:

What is left of it [the grain offering] Aaron and his sons are to eat. It shall be eaten as unleavened cakes in a holy place; they are to eat it in the court of the tent of meeting.

Compare Exod. 29:31-32, where a ram’s flesh is boiled “in a holy place”, and then eaten “at the doorway of the tent of meeting”.

Note also that in Lev. 10:12-13, Moses first requires that the grain offering is eaten “beside the altar”, and afterwards he speaks of “a holy place”.

### Where does the phrase occur?

It occurs in two constructions. The second one is easily missed in an automatic search.

(1) *בְּמִקְוֹם קֹדֶשׁ* *b<sup>3</sup>māqôm qādōš* (preposition+noun + adjective)

Exod. 29:31; Lev. 6:9 [English 16], 19[26], 20[27]; 7:6; 10:13; 16:24; 24:9.

(2) *בְּמִקְוֹם הַקֹּדֶשׁ* *bimqôm haqqōdeš* (preposition+noun in construct + article+noun in absolute)

Lev. 10:17; 14:13 (2 times).

The second noun, *קֹדֶשׁ* *qōdeš*, has a broad range of meanings in other verses.

With the exception of Lev. 16:24, all these references are about eating holy food, or related issues.

According to Milgrom (AB, vol. 1, pp. 392-394, 852, 1049), the two phrases are equivalent, and mean “inside the Tabernacle court”. Other commentators do not make a distinction either (Harrison, TOTC<sub>1</sub>; Hartley, WBC).

### How does this phrase differ from “in a clean place”?

What about those parts of the offerings that were eaten by the family members of the priests? Did the family have to come to the sanctuary to partake of their share in the offerings? No, they did not. Lev. 10:14 states:

The breast of the wave offering, however, and the thigh of the offering you may eat in a clean place [*בְּמִקְוֹם טָהוֹר* *b<sup>3</sup>māqôm tāhôr*], you and your sons and your daughters with you.

Milgrom, in a longer discussion, comments (619):

This phrase must indicate a place outside the sacred precincts ... As the entire priestly household is eligible to eat from these prebends ... , the most obvious “pure place” is the priest’s home.

Levine (JPSTC), Hartley (WBC) and Gane (NIVAC) do not comment. Hieke (HTKAT) follows Milgrom, and also points to Rabbinic sources saying that it could be the camp. NJPS actually translates “you ... may eat in any clean place”. In other contexts, the phrase מקום טהור *māqôm t̄hôr* ‘clean place’ also occurs in Lev. 4:12; 6:4; Num. 19:9, always together with the phrase מחוץ למחנה *mihûš lammaḥ<sup>a</sup>neh* ‘outside the camp’. Those verses are not discussed here.

### How can the phrase be translated?

Consistency is desirable. Since both phrases refer to the same area, they can also be rendered with the same words. The second phrase is definite though (“the holy place”).

Spot checks at Lev. 6:9 for phrase (1), and at Lev. 10:17 for phrase (2) show the following:

(1) Lev. 6:9: In the English versions, “in a holy place” is the standard rendering. **This might leave the reader wondering what kind of places qualify** (“in some/any holy place”?). But in reality, there is agreement that only the court is in view. Perhaps the Hebrew phrase is indefinite, because the courtyard is a wider area and inside this area the particular place was not prescribed? In any event, **clarifying the meaning is recommended.**

NJPS and NIV11R do this by saying “in the sacred precinct / in the sanctuary area”. This works well in Lev. 6:9, where the identification with the courtyard follows. Either one relies on the reader remembering this in later references, or one specifies by saying “in the court of the Tent”. This translation has the disadvantage of losing the word for ‘holy’. **Perhaps the best combination is “in the holy courtyard”.**

KJV’ “in the holy place” should not be followed, because it risks being mistaken as the Holy Place inside the Tent.

(2) Lev. 10:17: A good model is NIV11R “in the sanctuary area”. This is also consistent with its translation for (1). Useful are also NRSV and NJPS with “in the sacred area”, but they are not consistent with what they use for (1). Similar is REB 89 with “in the sacred place”.

GNTD “in a sacred place” loses the definiteness. NASB “at the holy place” has the problem again that it could be taken as “the Holy Place” in the Tent. With NET08 “in the sanctuary”, it is not clear whether that is outside or inside the Tent, therefore it is not a good model. ESVUS16’s “in the place of the sanctuary” is not an elegant wording in my view. T4T “near the Sacred Tent” is a possibility, but I find NIV’s solution or the wording with “courtyard” preferable.