

The better country

by Douglas E. Cox

Where mountains and rivers are, there must be a land. If the mountains and rivers of prophecy are spiritual, rather than natural, the land they are associated with is spiritual also. In Hebrews it is referred to as "a better country."

At Bethel, Jacob dreamed of a ladder reaching to heaven, and angels ascending and descending on it. God promised to give him the land where he was lying. When he woke up, he said of the place, "this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." [Genesis 28:17]

The place he called Bethel, meaning house of God, was associated with the promise. In his old age, when he blessed Joseph in Egypt, Jacob said:

Genesis 49:26

The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren.

The saying implies that his blessings were lofty, and high, like mountains, and that there is a higher, spiritual level of meaning to the promises. The

reference to "the everlasting hills" suggests they were eternal. Natural hills and mountains are very durable, but they eventually pass away; spiritual ones don't. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." [Matthew 24:35]

In many scriptures, God is referred to a rock. Deuteronomy 32:4 says, "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he." Also see vs. 15, 18; 2 Samuel 22:3, 32; Psalm 62:7; 78:35.

In the New Testament, Jesus compared those who do his teachings to the wise man who builds his house upon a rock. [Matthew 7:24] The rock is contrasted with sand. The house built on rock withstands the winds, and the floods, that threaten to destroy it.

In Psalm 90:1, Moses referred to God as a dwelling place; he wrote: "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations." J. A. Alexander commented: "God is a home, a fixed or settled dwelling, even while they wandered in the desert."

The idea that God is a *place* where the saints dwell is present in Psalm 91:1, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." And in verses 9-10: "Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling."

The concept that God is a place where one may dwell underlies the promise God made to Abraham. God promised Abraham that his seed would be as numerous as the stars, and that he would possess the land where he was a stranger, and that in his seed all nations would be blessed. The promise of a land where his seed would dwell is part of the gospel. But possessing the literal land of Canaan was a type and shadow, and a token of something greater, not the full significance of the promise. God said: "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." [Genesis 15:1]

The history of Israel's possession of the land, dwelling there for a few centuries, and their ultimate loss of the land, is the theme of the Old Testament. The whole account is a metaphor. The prophets foretold a future restoration, which is fulfilled by those who come to Christ; in the New Testament, a "better country" is revealed for the saints.

Psalm 125:1 says, "They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever." Hebrews 12:22-4 says, "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God,

the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." Mount Zion abides for ever; it represents an eternal inheritance.

In the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, which Daniel interpreted, a stone cut without hands smote the metallic image representing human kingdoms, and destroyed it. He wrote: "the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth." [Daniel 2:35] Daniel wrote:

Daniel 2:43-45

And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay.

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.

The stone cut without hands represents Jesus, and his kingdom, which consumes all other kingdoms, and remains for ever. Isaiah wrote, "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this." [Isaiah 9:7]

The promised land was a type of the spiritual territory of Christ's kingdom. Those who are in Christ are "translated" into it. Paul wrote:

Colossians 1:12-14

Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us

into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.

Deliverance from the power of darkness implies dwelling in the light of the gospel and understanding God's word. Dwelling in the promised land corresponds to faith in Christ. The scriptures identify God with the land, and the city of Jerusalem, and the temple. Christ is the temple, and he reigns in the heavenly Jerusalem. He is also represented by the land. God promised Abraham that his seed would be as numerous as the stars.

Genesis 15:5

And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.

Abraham looked for a better county, a heavenly one.

Hebrews 11:16

But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.