

The mountains of Isaiah 40 & 41

by Douglas E. Cox

Isaiah said:

Isaiah 40:3-5

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

Making a highway in the desert, valleys being filled, and mountains being made low have to do with preparing the way of the Lord. Making the crooked straight, and rough places plain, is a metaphor that applies to our knowledge of God and His Word; “rough places” may represent difficult scriptures that need to be explained and interpreted.

A similar idea also occurs in Isaiah 57.

Isaiah 57:13-14

... he that putteth his trust in me shall possess the land, and shall inherit my holy mountain; And shall say, Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumblingblock out of the way of my people.

Isaiah wrote:

Isaiah 40:9

O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!

The high mountain must be similar in nature and kind, to those which he said would be made low. And in the following chapter, Isaiah says:

Isaiah 41:15-16

Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff; Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the LORD, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel.

The mountains and hills which are to be threshed must be of the same kind as those mentioned in chapter 40.

They are not literal mountains. Isaiah speaks of "the mountain of the Lord's house" which will be exalted to the top of the mountains, above the hills in Isaiah 2:1-3. The mountains that are made low, and which are threshed, and beaten small, or raised up above the hills, are figurative ones.

The mountains which are "made low" are not "enemies of Israel," as some commentators have supposed. Neither do they represent nations.

According to Isaiah, all the mountains are to be made low; they will be threshed, and beaten small by Israel, and hills will become chaff blown by the wind. Zion is encouraged to go to up into the high mountain. The height of mountains is connected to the lofty spiritual nature of the prophecies and promises they represent.

Isaiah 2:2 says the mountain of the Lord's house will be established in the tops of the mountains, and raised up above the hills. The Lord's house is God's kingdom, and family; those who believe in Christ are God's sons, and they are saints, together with the prophets and saints of all ages. This is the Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem of prophecy.

The Church is the Zion to whom Isaiah says, "get thee up into the high mountain."

The mountains of Isaiah's prophecies are symbolic, not literal. When Jacob blessed his son Joseph, he revealed the symbolic meaning of the mountains, by comparing his blessings to mountains and hills. 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.

Jacob's blessings include the blessings given to Abraham and Isaac which he inherited. He also received promises directly from God, for example in his dream at Bethel where God promised to give him the land of Canaan. Jacob realized that his blessings and promises were spiritual in nature. He compared them to the highest mountains because a high, spiritual meaning was attached to the promised land. It was a land where revelations of God would be given to man, typified by the ladder reaching to heaven and to God with angels ascending and descending on it. His blessings and promises were also durable, like mountains, and eternal, and so he associated them with "everlasting hills." The mountains and hills of the promised land represent the great spiritual promises of the gospel. German theologian H.A.C. Hävernick wrote in 1833 of

the mountains in Ezekiel 36 and Genesis 49:26, "the mountains are held to stand in relation to the promises of Israel as imperishable memorials of the patriarch's blessing."

In chapters 40 and 41, Isaiah refers to mountains metaphorically as symbols of God's promises.

The land God promised to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has a hidden spiritual meaning, one that is far greater than occupying the literal territory of Canaan. That is why in Hebrews, the promises of the Gospel are referred to as *better* promises. [Hebrews 8:6]

The revelations of God are represented by mountains, hills, and other geographical features, real and figurative, in the land of Canaan.

The message of John the Baptist was based on Isaiah's prophecy in Isa. 40:3-5, a prophecy that applies to the ministry of Jesus, and his continuing reign throughout the present age of the Church. Mountains were made low by events in the New Testament, that fulfilled O.T. prophecies and interpreted them in the light of the Gospel. The significance of the Mosaic legislation and the Levitical priesthood was diminished under the New Covenant. Believing Gentiles were "made nigh" to Israel's promises by the blood of Christ. Paul said:

Ephesians 2:12-13

That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

Jesus fulfilled many prophecies, and explained how they applied to himself. The New Testament explains many of the mysteries of the Old Testament Scriptures. Obscure scriptures being explained may be depicted by the mountains being "made low." Valleys filled could mean that missing revelations will be provided.

The promises that the mountains represent are obscured by the teaching that ethnic Jews dwelling in the literal land of Canaan or Palestine is all that the land promise involved. In the Gospel, it is revealed that the promise that Israel will possess the land of Canaan was but a shadow and a type of the greater and better promise of a better county, a heavenly one. [Hebrews 11:16]

Jesus said, Jerusalem is the city of the great king, and the light of the world. The holy city was raised up, and became a heavenly city, when Jesus ascended to heaven. Those who believe the Gospel are also raised up, in a spiritual sense, and "sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." [Ephesians 2:6] Those who suppose that the prophecies about Jerusalem apply to the earthly city fail to understand that since Jesus ascended to heaven, those prophecies apply to the heavenly city. Isaiah's prophecy that Zion and Jerusalem will be exalted to the tops of the mountains establishes the continuity of O.T. Jerusalem with the heavenly Jerusalem.

Jews living in Jerusalem in 70 AD probably thought that the prophecy of Zechariah 14:1-3 applied to them, and perhaps they hoped God would fight on their behalf, but they were disappointed. Zechariah's prophecies did not apply to the earthly city, but to the heavenly one.

The mountains represent the promises, and revelations, and prophecies that reveal God's righteousness. David said, "Thy righteousness is like the great mountains." [Psalm 36:6] Also, he wrote: "The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness." [Psalm 72:3]

How is God's righteousness like mountains? The mountains are prominent parts of the promised land, a symbol of spiritual promises to the saints. Paul said,

Romans 1:16-17

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

The gospel reveals God's righteousness; the great mountains are compared to God's righteousness. The gospel is contained in God's promise to Abraham, which is figuratively represented by mountains. Paul said:

Galatians 3:8

And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.

The promise, "in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed" [Genesis 28:14] was connected with high mountains by Jacob, when he blessed Joseph. The promised land was a type of the spiritual blessings promised to those who believe in Christ. Understanding the scriptures is one of these. [John 8:32] The mountains, as the most prominent, and highest parts of the land, represent the high and lofty revelations of God. Spiritual truths are hidden in prophecies, that need to be *threshed*, figuratively, for us to extract their true meaning. The saints are encouraged to go up to the high mountain, which represents these spiritual blessings, and God's righteousness. When the saints understand and believe these things, God's glory is revealed, as Isaiah said. Thus, when Jesus said, in Matthew 24:16, "let them which be in Judæa flee into the mountains," he meant we should flee to the *promises* of God, and God's righteousness, which is represented by high mountains, and revealed by the Gospel.