

Comfort My People: Isaiah 40 and the Exaltation of the Valleys pt 2 by Ward Fenley

Though this chapter does predict the appearance of John the Baptist before the coming of Messiah, the focus of this article will be to address the significance of the exaltation of the valleys and the bringing low of the mountains. For a presentation on the person and timing of Elijah (or John the Baptist), please see [The Signal of John the Baptist](#).

Throughout Scripture God addresses the contrast of the proud and the humble and even speaks of the results:

James 4:6 But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

Matthew 23:11-13 But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted. 13 But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

In that last passage, Jesus points out the proud God so often addressed in the Old Testament, and that is the self-righteous. The *proud* does not necessarily refer to one hungry for power or some ruthless monarch. Even though those people certainly experience pride, as do all of us, the problem of self-righteousness has been an issue since the garden when Adam and Even believed they could gain eternal life through their own effort. That is the height of self-righteousness, namely, seeking eternal life through trying any other means than the grace of God.

So how does all of this help explain the *exaltation of the valleys* and the *bringing low of the mountains*? When we examine the Scriptures we begin to see that God uses metaphors and similes to describe people. Many of us are familiar with passages that speak of God's people as trees planted by streams of water (Psalm 1:3), or as the planting of the Lord (Isaiah 61:3). We even see people described as various kinds of animals ranging from wolves, to sheep, even to bears and lions (Daniel 7:4-5). Even in Daniel 12 we see the prophet identifying the righteous as shining like the stars (vs.3). It shouldn't be surprising, therefore, that God uses valleys and mountains to describe the humble and the proud, respectively. This isn't to say that mountains always stay mountains. Mountains, as the text says, can be brought low, or humbled. Here is an example of where mountains appear to represent men:

Psalms 76:3-5 There brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle. Selah. 4 Thou art more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey. 5 The stouthearted are spoiled, they have slept their sleep: and none of the men of might have found their hands.

In this next passage we see mountains representing the nations that would attack Israel but have to flee after God gave Israel victory:

Psalms 114:1-7 When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of

strange language; 2 Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion. 3 The sea saw it, and fled: Jordan was driven back. 4 The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs. 5 What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back? 6 Ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams; and ye little hills, like lambs? 7 Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob;

Perhaps with even more clarity, God shows mountains as those He would destroy:

Psalms 144:3-8 LORD, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him! or the son of man, that thou makest account of him! 4 Man is like to vanity: his days are as a shadow that passeth away. 5 Bow thy heavens, O LORD, and come down: touch the mountains, and they shall smoke. 6 Cast forth lightning, and scatter them: shoot out thine arrows, and destroy them. 7 Send thine hand from above; rid me, and deliver me out of great waters, from the hand of strange children; 8 Whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood.

This whole passage wouldn't be understandable if we were to interpret this literally. Why would God shoot arrows at mountains? But the Psalmist explains what the mountains are: They represent vain man and those who would lay charges against God's people. The Psalmist prays that God would deliver him out of great waters (the seas roaring); the hand of strange children; whose mouth speaks vanity. But Jesus predicts these mountains and vain men who accuse God's people would be brought low. Therefore, since the time frame of the prophecy in Isaiah 40 is the Messianic time frame, it is no wonder that God says He will bring low the mountains. He would miserably destroy the wicked Pharisees who would bring accusations against those cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. Even Jesus said to His disciples that if they would have faith and pray, the mountain would be removed and cast into the sea. In Revelation we see their prayer was answered. Here are the passages together:

Matthew 21:21 Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.

Revelation 8:3-8 And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. 5 And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake. 6 And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound. 7 The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up. 8 And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood;

Their prayers were fulfilled when the mountain of the prideful Israelites were scattered among the nations (the sea). The sea frequently represents the nations,

heathen, or Gentiles:

Isaiah 60:5 Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee.

When Jesus calmed the wind and the sea, it was certainly literal. But what did the raging sea represent:

Jude 1:10-13 But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves. 11 Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. 12 These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; 13 Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

Psalms 2:1 Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?

Jeremiah 51:55 Because the LORD hath spoiled Babylon, and destroyed out of her the great voice; when her waves do roar like great waters, a noise of their voice is uttered:

Psalms 46:2-3 Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; 3 Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah.

Once we see the context of these metaphors, we can properly identify the mountains within the Messianic context of Isaiah 40:

Isaiah 40:4 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:

Obviously the question should be raised: How was this accomplished? Throughout the context in Isaiah we see the Gospel:

Isaiah 40:5-9 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. 6 The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: 7 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. 8 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever. 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!

We are familiar with the good tidings of the Gospel as mentioned by Isaiah elsewhere:

Isaiah 52:7 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!

Paul confirms this as the Gospel:

Romans 10:14-17 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! 16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? 17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

God calls flesh *grass*. The context here is specifically related to the Jews. The prideful Jews were as grass that would wither and as mountains that would be brought low. It is through the Gospel that this takes place. It is also through the Gospel that the valleys would be exalted. The Gospel was the good news to those who were brokenhearted as a result of their sin. They were humbled and knew that they could not attain eternal life by their own merit or deeds. However, it was the prideful Pharisees who believed in their own merit and good deeds, who had, according to Paul, not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God:

Romans 10:3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

The Pharisees had become mountains and had exalted themselves. These Jews were rebuked in the book of James and encouraged to humble themselves:

James 4:6-10 But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. 7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. 9 Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

When James encourages these prideful Jews to humble themselves, he is merely echoing what Paul wrote. They both wanted their brethren to submit themselves to the righteousness of God so that in the end God would lift them up or exalt them. That is, God would give them eternal life. This is why the people of God can come *boldly* to the throne of grace. They have been brought near to God through the blood of Jesus Christ. The Gospel brings the humble heart to the heavenly abode of God. According to Isaiah God promised this:

Isaiah 57:15 For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the

contrite ones.

The reviving of the spirit of the humble is eternal life. Those of faith (or reliance upon God) are the humble ones, hence, "the just shall live (or be revived) by faith" (Habakkuk 2:4).

Faith is the evidence that God has humbled the heart and brought it near to Himself and exalted it into the position of a king and a priest. For He has made us kings and priests unto our God:

Revelation 1:5-6 And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, 6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Revelation 5:9-10 And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; 10 And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

But this blessing only comes upon those who first are valleys. Valleys represent the humble, poor in spirit, the brokenhearted. Through recognizing our inability and His ability to save us, He takes our faith in His work rather than ours and through that gift of faith grants us entrance into the holiest of all, or His everlasting kingdom.