

Mountains and Valleys

By Norman Holmes

As we walk with God our spiritual journey will lead us through many experiences. These are often portrayed by the different mountains and valleys that God's people encountered in the Bible. Mountains in the Scriptures usually represent uplifting events. To have a "mountain-top experience" can mean encountering glory, victory, revival, and many other blessings. On the other hand, valleys usually represent trouble, discouragement, and other difficulties where we are "down" either emotionally or spiritually. To help us to navigate more skillfully through life we will consider four mountains and then four valleys in the Bible which show us important spiritual experiences that we may enter into.

MOUNT NEBO—THE PLACE OF VISION

After the Israelites had left Egypt and were drawing near Canaan, they came to Mount Nebo, which overlooked the Promised Land. There the Lord showed Moses all of the land that the Israelites were to inherit, Deut.34:1-4. Just as mountains naturally offer the best view of what is ahead in a journey, when we are lifted into the heavenlies during "mountain-top experiences" the Lord can give us visions of His future plans, Rev.21:10 & Mic.4:1-2.

About 100 years ago a young coal miner in Wales (west of England) named Evan Roberts received a vision from the Lord that was his spiritual "Mount Nebo." He told a friend, "I have a vision of all Wales being lifted up to heaven. We are going to see the mightiest revival that Wales has ever known... We must get ready. We must have a little band and go all over the country preaching." Suddenly Evan stopped and with piercing eyes he said to his friend, "Do you believe that God can give us 100,000 souls, now?" The presence of the Lord so gripped his friend that he could not help but believe. A few weeks later Evan was given the open door to start some evening services, and within two more weeks the roads into town were jammed with people flocking to the revival. The Spirit of God moved throughout Wales in mighty power, and history records that within one year over 100,000 souls were saved.

MOUNT CARMEL—THE PLACE OF REPENTANCE & REVIVAL

In the time of Elijah the Israelites had backslidden into sin & idolatry. At God's direction, the prophet gathered the nation to Mount Carmel where he had a contest with the false prophets of Baal. When Elijah's prayers were miraculously answered by fire from heaven, all the people repented and turned back to the True God, 1 Kgs. 18:37-40.

In modern times God's servants have sometimes had their own spiritual "Mount Carmel" experiences. Many anointed evangelists, pastors, and missionaries have challenged the powers of darkness in public spiritual confrontations. These have repeatedly resulted in God's miraculous intervention while the fire of God's Spirit has brought repentance to the people. Let us pray for the Spirit and power of Elijah to anoint more of God's servants today to help prepare the nations for the Second Coming of Christ, Mal.4:5, Lk.1:17, 2 Kng.2:14-15.

THE MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION—THE PLACE OF GLORY

In the Gospels we can read about the mountain where Peter, James, and John saw Christ revealed in glory. This greatly impacted their lives, so much so that in their elderly years Peter and John were still thinking and writing about this mountaintop experience, 2 Pet.1:16-17 & Jn.1:14. Christ even now desires to lift His disciples into heavenly places where we can have our own Mount of Transfiguration experiences. In John 17:24 He prayed, *"Father, I desire that those You have given Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me, because You loved Me before the foundation of the world."*

I clearly remember a time when I was a new Christian and was walking along a quiet country road, worshipping my Heavenly Father with all my heart. Suddenly I found myself caught up to heaven, hidden with Christ in God. There I was beholding the glory that the Father had given Christ before the world was created—a glory that filled the heavens. I also heard a voice from the Majestic Glory as He declared with the loving admiration of a father, "This is My beloved son with whom I am well pleased."

This mountaintop experience helped transform me from being a former rock musician and hippie into becoming an effective servant of God. May we each increasingly see the glory of Christ, and be changed from glory to glory into His image!

MOUNT ZION—THE PLACE OF WORSHIP AND AUTHORITY

In the Old Testament we often read about Mount Zion, which was a fortress hill in the city of Jerusalem, 2 Sam.5:6-7. After David captured it and made it his capital, Mount Zion became famous for two reasons: it contained the throne of the king and the Ark of God. The throne speaks of authority, while the Ark of God speaks about worship, as the Ark was the center of worship in the tabernacles of both Moses and David.

In the New Testament we read about a much higher Mount Zion. Revelation 14:1-3 tells us about the Mount Zion in heaven, which is the center of God's worship and His throne. Just as the Israelites ascended the holy hill of Mount Zion to meet with God and seek the king's favor, in our times of worship we can also spiritually ascend into heavenly places where we can gain authority from the throne of God (study Ps.2:7-9, Is.35:10, Is.51:1-2, Ob.21, Ps.110:2, Is.2:3-4, Is.25:7-8, & Ps.102:16-21). I saw an example of this while conducting a pastors' seminar at the city of Baguio in the

Philippines. During that time we had unusual breakthroughs into high worship, and I told the pastors that we would see visible results from our break-throughs. A few days later the vice-president of our ministry led a man to Christ who was the owner of the largest group of prostitution houses in Baguio. This man immediately closed them down and put up signs outside that read, “This house is closed—Jesus is Lord.” I believe that it was through the power of worship that this victory was first gained in the heavenlies, and then through evangelism it was enforced upon the earth.

MOUNTAIN LESSONS

Some important truths we can learn from mountains include:

☞ Mountain-top experiences have the power to transform a person, or church, or even a nation. As God’s people are lifted into greater heavenly encounters we will also be able to impact the world in greater ways.

☞ A mountain-top experience enlarges our vision and perspective. This can help guide and strengthen us as we go through the valleys of life. Paul could endure great sufferings because of his vision of the glory that would follow, Rom.8:18.

☞ The mountain-top (of Zion) is our goal and destiny. Hebrews 12:22-23 tells us, *“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are written in Heaven, and to God the judge of all.”*

VALLEY EXPERIENCES

In the Scriptures, valleys have the opposite meaning of mountains. Valleys usually speak of trouble, sorrow, opposition, and other difficulties.

In 1 Kings 20 we read about two battles where the Syrians came to attack the people of God. In the first battle, Israel defeated the much bigger army of Syria on a hill. The Syrians then chose to fight the second battle in a valley. They thought that Israel’s God was only a god of the mountains, not a god of the valleys, and could only give the Israelites victory in his small local territory. Therefore in verse 28 the Lord said He would give victory to Israel, to prove He was also the God of the valleys!

This spiritual principle still applies for God’s people today. The devils say, “We cannot defeat the Christians when they are on the mountain-tops, so we will defeat them in the valleys.” However, the Lord wants to show us He is more than just the God of the mountains—He is also the God of the valleys! The Lord can give us victory through all the difficulties of life, just as He gives victory in times of blessing.

THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES— THE PLACE OF SPIRITUAL DEATH & HOPELESSNESS

In Ezekiel chapter 37 the prophet was given a vision about a valley full of dry bones. We normally think that God gives glorious heavenly visions, but in this case, Ezekiel had a vision of a cemetery!

In Ezekiel 37:11 the Lord explained that the vision typified His people, who had lost their hope and were spiritually dead. God asked him in verse 3 if there was any hope for these dry bones to live again, and the prophet wisely answered by saying, “*O Lord God, You know.*” While something may look hopeless in the eyes of man, God can see things very differently!

The first step to remedy this problem began in verse 4 when the Lord told Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones. As the prophet obeyed, the bones began rattling as they moved together to reform skeletons which then developed muscles and skin and became human bodies. Then the next step towards victory began in verse 9 when the Lord told Ezekiel to prophesy that the wind of the Spirit would breathe upon them and bring them new life. The end result was that in verse 10, “*breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army.*”

When we look at the body of Christ around us, there are times when it looks like a cemetery full of dry bones. The people are disconnected, spiritually dry, and have sometimes lost hope. Yet even so, the powerful word of God can begin to bring new unity and strength. The fresh winds of the Spirit can then begin to blow until the resurrection power of Christ causes His restored people to arise as a mighty army! Fourteen years ago my wife and I were facing a discouraging time in the ministry. Most of our ministry team had moved on to other places and nations, and we were considering shutting down our small Bible school of 12 students. But the Lord spoke clearly to us to keep the school going, and in blind obedience we followed His word. On the second Tuesday of the next school semester, the Spirit of God visibly swept like a wind into the classroom. It physically laid us all prostrate on the floor, and spiritually recharged our ministry and transformed our “dry bones” into an army. The results are that we now have eight Bible schools with over 550 students preparing for the ministry, while the Spirit of God continues to move among us in beautiful ways.

THE VALLEY OF BACA—THE PLACE OF SORROW

Psalm 84:6 tells about the Valley of Baca. From the original Hebrew, *Baca* means *weeping*. The Bible says that there is a time to weep (Eccl.3:4) as we all experience seasons of sorrow. However, Psalm 84:5-7 NASV explains God’s purpose for the valley of weeping in this way: “*How blessed is the man whose strength is in You, in whose heart are the highways to Zion. Passing through the valley of Baca they make it a spring... They go from strength to strength, every one of them appears before God in Zion.*”

The first thing we want to note is where this valley leads us to—meeting with God on Mount Zion. In the natural, often the best way to climb up to a mountaintop is through the valleys! James 4:10 gives us a spiritual counterpart to this truth when we are told, “*Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will lift you up.*”

However, the next thought we want to consider is that we should not stay in the valley

of weeping for too long. Psalm 84:6 says that we are to pass *through* the valley of Baca, just as we are told in Psalm 23:4 that we are to walk *through* the valley of the shadow of death. We need to have it fixed in our hearts that our goal is not to *stay* in the valleys — our goal is

Mount Zion, Heb.12:22! Yet if our hearts are fixed on pressing on in God towards the mark of the high call of God, there will be valleys to pass through, including the valley of weeping.

Psalm 84:6 goes on to tell us, “*Passing through the valley of Baca they make it a spring.*” Times of sorrow can be used of God to unlock hidden springs of joy and refreshing in our hearts. As the Lord Jesus said in Luke 6:21, “*Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.*” After these springs of refreshing are released verse 7 tells us that we will travel onwards from “*strength to strength*” until we meet with God in Zion.

An illustration of this is shown to us in the life of Horatio Spafford, a Christian lawyer who had four beautiful daughters. While his daughters were on a vacation their boat sank & all four drowned. At the place of this calamity, their grieving father wrote the words of the now-famous hymn, “It is Well with My Soul.” From his personal valley of weeping God gave him a spring of refreshing that has encouraged millions of Christians to press on through their own spiritual valleys.

THE VALLEY OF ACHOR— THE PLACE OF DEFEAT

In the book of Joshua there is another valley that God’s people experienced. *Achor* from the Hebrew means *trouble*, and it became the name for a valley where the Israelites experienced and then remedied a defeat, Josh.7:24-26.

Joshua’s army had been defeated by a small enemy force because an Israelite soldier had sinned against God. There are times when a ministry or church experiences trouble or defeat because of hidden sin. As Hebrews 12:5-10 teaches us, God disciplines us to bring us into holiness. God allows us to experience trouble and defeat because He loves us, and will use the difficulties to lead us to repentance and cleansing.

After Joshua dealt with the problem of hidden sin at the valley of Achan, the Lord brought Israel’s army back into victory. Centuries after this, the Lord said in Hosea 2:15 that He would again bring His people into a valley of Achor to make it become “*a door of hope.*” Every time we experience trouble and defeat because of sin, the Lord will also open a door of hope for us to find new repentance, cleansing, and victory, Jud.16:22-30. This valley of trouble can also lead us to the mountaintop if we will respond correctly to the discipline of God.

As an example, the USA experienced its lowest valley during the American Civil War. The southern Confederate states had separated themselves because of their strong support for slavery, but the northern USA states, who were mostly against slavery, did not formally repent or renounce it. When the northern USA armies (which were much larger and better equipped) began the war having a series of defeats, President Lincoln recognized that God was not fighting for the nation because the sin of slavery had not been dealt with. He wrote shortly after the end of the war, “On many a defeated field there was a voice louder than the thundering of a cannon. It was the voice of God, crying, ‘Let My people go.’ We were all very slow in realizing it was God’s voice, but

after many humiliating defeats, the nation came to believe it as a great and solemn command. Great multitudes begged and prayed that I might answer God's voice by signing the Emancipation Proclamation [to free the slaves], and I did it, believing we never should be successful in the great struggle unless the God of Battles has been on our side." History records that from about the time of this proclamation the northern USA states began to win the war, and the reuniting of the nation in healing and righteousness was the end result.

THE VALLEY OF REPHAIM—THE PLACE OF SATANIC OPPOSITION

The last valley we will briefly consider is shown to us in First Chronicles 14:8-17. Just after David was anointed as the new king of Israel, the Philistine army came to attack him in the valley of Rephaim, which translates from the Hebrew as the "valley of giants." In the Old Testament, giants often represent the principalities and satanic powers that the New Testament believer fights against, Eph. 6:12. Just as David faced new opposition from the enemy when he became king, we also will face new spiritual battles when the Lord brings us into new ministries. As the saying goes, "New level, new devil."

The valley of Rephaim is an actual valley on the southwest side of Jerusalem. When the Philistine Army came up from the lowlands to attack David, they camped in this valley of giants. David sought the Lord for the correct battle plans the two times the Philistine army came up to attack him from that valley, 1 Chron.14:10-16. He didn't just get a strategy from God that worked once, and then turn it into a formula that he would repeatedly try to follow. Like David, we need to seek the Lord and get the correct battle plans each time we confront the powers of darkness.

Centuries later the Scriptures again mention the valley of Rephaim as a place that God's people will have a very small harvest, Is.17:4-6. Where the power of Satan is strong, our evangelism and ministry attempts will be hindered and largely unsuccessful until we first deal with the satanic hindrances in the heavenlies. Yet when God leads us into battle and the angelic reinforcements of heaven go with us, as they went with David during his second attack, then we can be assured that the powers of Satan can be permanently broken in our own "valley of giants."

Years ago I helped establish a new temporary pastor in a church. It was announced that their regular pastor would have a three month vacation, but after the service he privately told me that he was going to permanently resign. He was very discouraged because several church leaders had become alcoholics, and all of his preaching and counseling was fruitless as he watched the church grow smaller and weaker.

That night, through the gift of the discerning of spirits (1 Cor.12:10), I saw that these church leaders had become the captives of a strong demonic spirit of drunkenness. The pastor's preaching and counseling could not get through to them, as the real battle was to first "bind the strong man," as our Lord Jesus explained in Matthew 12:29. I encouraged the pastor to not resign, but spend his vacation time praying with me to bind

this evil spirit.

After we prayed and gained the victory, the pastor returned to his church after three months. This time the spirit of God was able to penetrate the hearts of these leaders, and repentance and cleansing soon transformed the entire church. Within a short time church attendance doubled and the pastor was again joyfully leading a powerful, victorious church. In this “valley of giants” encounter the Lord gave them a mighty breakthrough, just as David had experienced in his own valley of Rephaim.

LESSONS FROM THE VALLEYS

Some of the important lessons for us to learn from the valleys include:

☞ A traveler spends more time in the valleys than on the mountain-tops. Do not think you are a failure, or backslidden, when you find yourself in a valley, 1 Pet.4:12-13, Ps.105:17-19, Rom.8:28.

☞ Valleys are often the fastest way to get up a mountain. By faith, press on with God! Ps.84:5 & 7, 2 Cor.5:7.

☞ Valleys are the best place to find water, Gen.26:19, Ps.84:6, Ps.104:10. In your valley of discouragement, look for a fresh release of the Holy Spirit in your life!

☞ We are to pass *through* valleys, not stay, live, and die in them, Ps.84:6 & Ps.23:4.

☞ Every valley has a way out that can lead us higher, Hos.2:15, 1 Cor.10:13, Rom. 8:35-37. Find out what spiritual valley you are in, and then ask God to show you how to get out of it!

☞ The enemy hopes to defeat us in the valleys, but it is there that God will show us His strength, 1 Kgs.20:28. The Lord is not only with us on the mountaintops, He is also the victorious God of the valleys!

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