**Upon This Rock**

**Mountains: What They Reveal & Represent**

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**INTRODUCTION**

This message could easily be called “Sermon on Mountains.” We know of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. May I suggest to us that there was another sermon preached from a mountain by God the Father in the Old Testament.[[1]](#footnote-1)

In **Deuteronomy 4:33** Moses asked Israel:

“Has any nation ever heard the voice of God speaking from fire—as you did—and survived?”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Bible commentator Benson, puts it like this:

“Never was there such a sermon preached before or since, as this, which was here preached to the church in the wilderness. For the preacher was God himself.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

The significance of mountains is not so much the mountains themselves, but the events that take place on them. Mountains are mechanisms through which God reveals Himself to man. These revelations can influence how we perceive God, ourselves, and our approach to possessing our inheritance in Christ. Let us look at what mountains reveal, what they represent and how we should respond considering these revelations.

**REVELATION**

What God has made known to us in His Word.

1. **God Reveals Himself: *Read Exodus 19:16-25***

* **God reveals His nature and attributes:[[4]](#footnote-4)** This text teaches us about the nature or essence of God—these are the essential elements/features which make Him God—His Spirituality [God is Spirit], His Immensity [God is above and beyond the created world: bigger than the universe; bigger than emblems; Solomon said the heaven of heavens cannot contain God][[5]](#footnote-5), His Self-Existence and His Eternity.[[6]](#footnote-6)
* **God’s Spiritual nature is revealed**— God is Spirit[[7]](#footnote-7) which means He does not have a physical body [incorporeal] and He is invisible. Albeit He reveals Himself to our senses through physical/perceptible elements—this is a theophany.[[8]](#footnote-8)
* When God spoke to Israel out of the fire from Mount Sinai, Moses said they heard His voice and words but did not see a form—image or likeness. Therefore, they were forbidden to make images of idols to worship (Deuteronomy 4:16) Consistent with His Spiritual-nature God is alive, and He is a person—Who speaks.[[9]](#footnote-9)
* **The attribute of God’s holiness:** God told Moses to have the people [Israel] consecrate [“set apart as sacred by purifying”][[10]](#footnote-10) themselves to meet Him on the third day.[[11]](#footnote-11) They had to wash their clothes (v10) and be ready (v11) to meet with God. God descended upon Mount Sinai so that the people would hear His voice and believe Him forever (Exodus 19:9). It is important that when He shows up, we do not miss what He is revealing to us.
* As a matter of precaution God says to Moses, “*Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, ‘Be careful that you do not approach the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain is to be put to death”* (Exodus 19:12, NIV). Whoever breached the barriers God would “break forth upon them”[[12]](#footnote-12) which means—He would break violently upon them suddenly in judgment.[[13]](#footnote-13)
* David captures this when he said, “*God hath broken in upon mine enemies by mine hand like the breaking forth of waters*” (1 Chronicles 14:11, KJV).
* One Bible commentator[[14]](#footnote-14) asserts that these barriers represent the restraining effect of God’s laws upon man—thus preventing him from sinning and incurring the wrath of a just and holy God.
* ***The attribute of God’s Goodness:*** God calls Moses to the top of Mount Sinai to replace the tablets of stone—broken because of Moses’ anger at Israel’s idolatry. God came down in a cloud and “proclaimed” His name (Exodus 34:5-9). In Exodus 3 God reveals Himself to Moses as “I AM that I AM”—I exist. Now He is revealing His goodness [compassion, grace, patience, kindness, and that He is overwhelmingly merciful and faithful][[15]](#footnote-15).
* The attributes of God flow from His nature and help us to understand Him better. The goodness[[16]](#footnote-16) of God is here revealed.
* This, according to author Henry Thiessen (2006), *“includes such qualities as God’s holiness, righteousness, and truth as well as his love, benevolence, mercy, and grace”* (p. 85). God therefore enlarges Moses’ concept of Who He is[[17]](#footnote-17). Moses responded by worshipping and praying to God. Revelation requires a response!
* ***On a mountain, God the Father reveals that Jesus is God***:

On the Mount of Transfiguration Peter, James and John accompany Jesus and revelation takes place (Matthew 17:1-8). Jesus was “transfigured”[[18]](#footnote-18)—His face was shining with a brightness like the sun, and His clothes were glowing, and Moses and Elijah appeared (vs. 1-3). In this interaction the law and the prophets were bearing witness to Jesus.[[19]](#footnote-19) Elsewhere Jesus said, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.”[[20]](#footnote-20)

* Something amazing happens, God the Father comes down at the top of the mountain in a bright cloud and speaks. He endorses Jesus, proclaims His Sonship, and commands obedience to Him.[[21]](#footnote-21) This word “hear” in Matthew 17:5 which in the Greek means to hear with appropriate actions following what is heard, is in the imperative mood—it is a command to perform an action given by one in authority, not merely a suggestion or a good idea.[[22]](#footnote-22) The disciples’ response was to fall on their faces in fear (v6).

1. **God Reveals His Will:[[23]](#footnote-23)**

* **Commandments on Mount Sinai:** God called Moses up to the top of the mountain and gave him instructions for the children of Israel. The Commandments were Israel’s constitution and governed the moral, ceremonial, and civil aspects of the nation. It revealed God’s desire for relationship with His covenant people Israel. Israel’s status and identity is validated through their obedience to Yahweh.[[24]](#footnote-24)
* On the mountain God gave Moses detailed instructions concerning the following:
* Donations for building the sanctuary (Exodus 25:1-9)
* The Ark of the Covenant—symbolic of God’s presence among His people (Exodus 25:10-22)
* The Mercy Seat—symbolic of God’s throne of mercy before which atonement for sins would be made by the high priest on the Day of Atonement[[25]](#footnote-25)
* Furnishings[[26]](#footnote-26) for the tabernacle—God said, “Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle,[[27]](#footnote-27) and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.” (Exodus 25:9, ESV).
* It was from a mountain that **Jesus gave His famous sermon**[[28]](#footnote-28), which included detailed instructions for how the Kingdom of God operates and how the citizens of the Kingdom should conduct themselves. This parallels Moses dispensing the law received on Mount Sinai to Israel—Jesus here dispenses the laws of the Kingdom of God.

1. **God Reveals Our Hearts:[[29]](#footnote-29)**

* **Abraham on Mount Moriah**: The Bible says: “*And Abraham picked up the knife to kill his son as a sacrifice. At that moment, the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” Yes,” Abraham replied. “Here I am!” “Don’t lay a hand on the boy!” the angel said. “Do not hurt him in any way, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld from me even your son, your only son.*”[[30]](#footnote-30)
* **Israel on Mount Carmel:** The prophet Elijah asked, “How long are you going to be paralyzed by indecision? If the LORD is the true God, then follow him, but if Baal is, follow him!" But the people did not say a word.”[[31]](#footnote-31) After preparing the sacrifice Elijah prayed this: “Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD, are the true God and that you are winning back their allegiance.”[[32]](#footnote-32) After the fire fell, the silence broke—a people who had a divided heart “threw themselves down with their faces to the ground and said, "The LORD is the true God! The LORD is the true God!"[[33]](#footnote-33)

**REPRESENTATION**

**Mountains Are Places of Worship[[34]](#footnote-34)**

**Worship of Yahweh—God:**

* In ancient Israel worship occurred on high places. This was common during the days of Samuel the prophet and King David—sacrifices were offered in these places.[[35]](#footnote-35) One such place was Gibeon where Solomon along with others worshipped God.[[36]](#footnote-36) It is here that God appears to Solomon in a dream and Solomon asks for wisdom. God gave him wisdom, riches, and honor.[[37]](#footnote-37)
* Solomon built the temple of God for the worship of God on Mount Moriah[[38]](#footnote-38). It was on Mount Moriah that Abraham was about to sacrifice his son Isaac when God intervened and provided a substitute sacrifice.[[39]](#footnote-39)
* Moses’ response to God’s revelation on Mount Sinai was to bow down and worship.[[40]](#footnote-40) Revelation requires a response of worship to the true and living God!

**Worship of Idols:**

* King Jeroboam was known for this. For fear of losing the kingdom to David’s descendants, rather than allowing the people to go to Jerusalem, the designated place of worship, he created an alternate system of idol worship by putting two golden calves in Bethel and Dan for the people to worship. He also made high places and ordained high priests of people who were not Levites.[[41]](#footnote-41) “this thing became a sin”[[42]](#footnote-42)
* In Jeremiah 3:6 God calls attention to backsliding Israel’s unfaithfulness to Him—on the high mountains and every high hill, the nation bowed down to other gods.[[43]](#footnote-43)

**Mountains Are Symbols of Strength & Safety:[[44]](#footnote-44)**

**Symbol of Strength:**

* Those who trust in God are like Mount Zion which cannot be uprooted or shaken but remains stable, consistent, and enduring.[[45]](#footnote-45) The one who trusts in Yahweh anchors his soul to the unchangeable God and draws from Him a peace that transcends understanding.[[46]](#footnote-46)

**Symbol of Safety:**

* God has and will forever surround His people like the mountains surround Jerusalem.[[47]](#footnote-47) This suggests safety, security, and protection. Our response should be one of assurance and thanksgiving to God.

**Mountains Are Given as Inheritance:[[48]](#footnote-48)**

**Obstacles to Access: Enemies**

* Under Moses’ leadership, Israel defeated two Amorite kings on the east side of the Jordan and took mountainous territories from them.[[49]](#footnote-49)
* Joshua fought long and hard with kings to take mountains. He took Mount Halak and Mount Hermon, Hebron, and the hill country of Judah.[[50]](#footnote-50) The Bible says: “*So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord had spoken to Moses. And Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal allotments.”*[[51]](#footnote-51)
* As we take our mountain, it is important that we lay claim by faith ONLY to the things that are in God’s will for us. John says this: “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.”[[52]](#footnote-52)
* To get his mountain [Hebron] Caleb had to defeat the Anakims—the giants that the other ten spies feared and before whose eyes they seemed to be grasshoppers. Caleb “drove out”[[53]](#footnote-53) —dispossessed to possess his inheritance. There is a difference between the mindset of a grasshopper and a giant slayer—a different spirit,[[54]](#footnote-54) a tenacious faith, a boldness, an undaunted and unflinching posture in the face of danger and a trusting confidence in the ability of Almighty God.

**Right to Access: God’s Promises—Right of Entitlement**

* Joshua and Eleazar [Aaron’s son] both received a share of the hill country of Ephraim as their inheritance.[[55]](#footnote-55) Israel gave Joshua the land he requested because God commanded it. Joshua asked for a share of the mountain—Ephraim.[[56]](#footnote-56)
* In Deuteronomy 1 Moses stated that God intended to give Israel mountains as their inheritance. He said *“Go up, take possession, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has told you. Do not fear or be dismayed”*[[57]](#footnote-57) How will you respond to what God has spoken to you? Will you fear or will you have faith and take it?
* Caleb asked for a mountain because God told him 45 years prior that it would be his[[58]](#footnote-58) and Joshua gave him Mount Hebron as his inheritance. Caleb said this, *“It may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out just as the Lord said.*”[[59]](#footnote-59) Caleb admitted his strength and readiness for war[[60]](#footnote-60), but strength without God is failure. It is the presence of God with us that empowers us to possess what He has promised us.[[61]](#footnote-61) We cannot do it without Him.

**OUR RESPONSE**

***God revealing Himself:***

* Our response should be awe and worship as we understand who God is, what He is like and a renewed sense of reverence for the holiness and majesty of God. Let us worship God alone!
* As God revealed Himself in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, our response should be to recognize Jesus as God and obey His Words.

***God revealing His Will & Our Hearts:***

* Introspection and repentance as we see where we have missed the mark and decide to obey His Word and will for our lives.

***Mountains as symbols of strength:***

* Our response should be a firm trust, confidence and a sense of safety and security in God our Protector—faith and not fear.

***Mountains as inheritance:***

* Our response should be an awareness of purpose, destiny, sonship, and the possibility of overcoming obstacles to possess our inheritance. ***CLOSE:*** PRAY for the saints and unsaved.

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**Endnotes**

* <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/exodus/19-16.htm>
* <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h3381/kjv/wlc/0-1/>
* <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h6942/kjv/wlc/0-1/>
* <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h6555/kjv/wlc/0-1/>
* <https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Exd/Exd_019.cfm?a=69022>
* <https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/exo/34/1/t_conc_84006>
* <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3339/kjv/tr/0-1/>
* <https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Mat/Mat_017.cfm?a=946001>
* <https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/mat/17/1/t_conc_946005>
* <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h3727/kjv/wlc/0-1/>
* <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h1116/kjv/wlc/0-1/>
* <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/psalms/125-1.htm>
* <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h3423/kjv/wlc/0-1/>

**Reference**

Thiessen, H. C. (2006). Lectures in Systematic Theology. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

1. Exodus 19 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Deut. 4:33, NLT [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Benson Commentary: <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/exodus/19-16.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Our response should be one of awe and worship as we get a clearer picture of Who God is and what He is like. This should awaken a desire in us to want to know Him more and walk more closely with Him. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 1 Kings 8:27 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Thiessen (2006) pp. 75-79. Lectures in Systematic Theology. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. He reveals Himself in theophanies [burning bush] [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Fire, smoke, earthquake, voice (Neh. 9:13): <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h3381/kjv/wlc/0-1/> ; The burning bush was one such example as well as the Angel of the Lord [Gen. 16:7-14; Exo. 3:2-5] (Thiessen, 2006, 76). Ref. Exo. 24:17; Exo. 34:2 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See Systematic Theology by Thiessen (2006) pp. 75-77. The writer of Psalm 96 tells us that the gods of the nations are idols [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h6942/kjv/wlc/0-1/> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Elsewhere God says, “be ye holy for I am holy” (Lev. 11:44, KJV). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Exo. 19:22, 24, KJV: Our response should be a renewed sense of reverence for the holiness and majesty of Almighty God. Let us not get familiar with Him. He is exalted, He reigns, and He is robed in majesty (Psa. 93:1) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h6555/kjv/wlc/0-1/> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Matthew Henry Commentary on Exodus 19: <https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Exd/Exd_019.cfm?a=69022> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/exo/34/1/t_conc_84006> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Exo. 33:19. Our response should be: “Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!” (Psa. 107:8, KJV). Isaiah says this: “I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD, and the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses” (Isa. 63:7, KJV). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Psa. 95:9 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. His appearance was changed and reflected the radiance of the Father. This verb in Greek is “μετεμορφώθη/metamorphoo” and is in the passive voice which means that Jesus, the subject in this verse is being acted upon by the Father. In other words, the Father changed the appearance of the Son to reflect “divine brightness”— See: <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3339/kjv/tr/0-1/> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Mat/Mat_017.cfm?a=946001> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. John 5:39, ESV [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Matthew, Mark, and Luke record this encounter: Matt. 17:5; Mk. 9:7; Lk. 9:35 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/mat/17/1/t_conc_946005>. Our response should be to recognize Jesus as God and obey the Words He has spoken to us. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Judgment: Our response should be one of introspection, repentance as we see where we fall short and obedience to His Word and will for our lives. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Exo. 19:5; Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:9; Eph. 1:14; Deut. 7:6; Deut. 14:2 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h3727/kjv/wlc/0-1/> [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Exo. 25:40 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Exo. 26:30 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Matt. 5-7 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See note above for introspection, repentance, and obedience [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Gen. 22:10-12, NLT [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. 1 Kings 18:21, NET; Matt. 6:24 [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. 1 Kings 18:37, NET [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. 1 Kings 18:39, NET [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Our response should be resistance of idol worship and a commitment to worship the One True God [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. 1 Sam. 9:12-25; 1 Sam. 10:5, 13. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h1116/kjv/wlc/0-1/> [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. 1 Kings 3:2-14; 1 Chron. 16:39; 1 Chron. 21:39; 2 Chron. 1:3 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. 1 Kings 6; 2 Chron. 3:1-14 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Gen. 22:2,14 [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Exo. 34:8 [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. 1 Kings 12:31 [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. 1 Kings 12:30 [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Jer. 2:20 [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Our response should be a firm trust and confidence a sense of safety and security in God our Protector—faith and not fear. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Psa. 125:1 [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. McLaren’s Expositions: <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/psalms/125-1.htm>; Phil. 4:7 [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Psa. 125:2 [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Our response should be an awareness of purpose, destiny, and sonship. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Deut. 3:8 [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Josh. 11:16-21 [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Josh. 11:23, ESV [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. 1 Jn. 5:14-15, KJV [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Josh. 15:14, ESV: Hebrew: יָרַשׁ/yaw-rash <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h3423/kjv/wlc/0-1/> [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Num. 14:24 [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Josh. 24:29,33; Judg. 2:9 [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Josh. 19:49-50 [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Deut. 1:21, ESV [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Deut. 1:36; Josh. 14:9-12; Num. 14:24 [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Josh. 14:12, ESV [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Josh. 14:11 [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Exo. 15:17; Psa. 78:54-55, ESV: “And he brought them to his holy land, to the mountain which his right hand had won. He drove out nations before them; he apportioned them for a possession and settled the tribes of Israel in their tents.” [↑](#footnote-ref-61)