

# Coach House Church

# BEACONS

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## MOUNTAINS

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28TH JUNE 2021

When I was younger I attended Sunday School and one of my teachers, Norma Wilson, used to give us memory verses to learn. We actually enjoyed the challenge of learning a range of key verses and we collected points. And we all know what points make ...prizes of course.

Some of those verses were from Psalm 121:

**I lift up my eyes to the mountains –  
where does my help come from?  
My help comes from the Lord,  
the Maker of heaven and earth.**

So what does this mean? Why does looking up to the mountains mean looking for help?

In the Old Testament, there were people who did not worship the one true God. Instead they chose to worship other gods, called Baal or Ashtoreth. They believed that Baal was the sun god and that Ashtoreth was the moon goddess. They chose high places, so on hills and mountains, setting up statues, monuments or shrines as part of their act of worship.

You can find references in the bible, to God's instructions to the people of Israel to get rid of the high places. God warned about being distracted by the way other nations paid homage to images of gods. God instructed the Israelites to stand up for their own belief system, to put their trust fully in the one God of Israel and not to compromise. As they entered the promised land of Canaan, after spending 40 years in the desert, they were told: Destroy all their carved images and their cast idols, and demolish all their high places (Number 33:52).

Looking to the high places, to the mountain tops was no longer looking towards a shrine or idol that had no power or control over them.

In 1Kings 18, God's prophet, Elijah has a showdown with the false prophets of Baal and Ashtoreth. Verse 19 says: Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Ashereh, who eat at Jezebel's table."

That is a sizeable number of false prophets to gather together who were under the direction of Queen Jezebel. You will probably have heard about Jezebel, and not as a role model but rather as one who should be avoided at all costs. She was married to King Ahab of Israel, and the following condensed verses show how calamitous was this allegiance. I Kings 16: 30 begins: **30** Ahab ... did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him... he also married Jezebel ...and began to serve Baal and worship him. .... **33** Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to arouse the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him.

Not a great accolade! But it does show the level of opposition to Almighty God and why God was so adamant that the high places were to be destroyed. If you look at the end of Jezebel's life you'll see she came to a very messy end. She received no help from the high places. Psalm 121 asks 'where does my help come from?' and Jezebel looked in the wrong place.

Elijah, however, demonstrated the power of God as he gathered the 850 prophets together. Elijah's faith and trust in a Holy God was rewarded in dramatic style. He was not phased by the huge crowd of unbelievers. In fact, what happened was impossible by human standards, demonstrating the absolute power and authority of God over all creation.

You can read the story for yourself in 1 Kings 18. Basically, the false prophets built an altar on which to sacrifice a bull and Elijah built an identical one. The challenge was to call on god or God, to show power through sending down fire on the altar. Of course, Baal and Ashtoreth are false and, no matter how much the prophets wailed and shouted; nothing at all happened. Elijah, under no illusions of the ridiculous nature of their protestations, was even able to ridicule them with taunts: shout louder, maybe your god is asleep! Then, when it was Elijah's turn, he first doused the altar with water so it was drenched then he prayed to God:: 'Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. **37** Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.'

**38** Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. **39** When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, 'The Lord – he is God! The Lord – he is God!' ( 1 Kings 18)

Elijah's help did come from looking up, looking heavenwards.

But when I think of Mountains I also think how majestic and awe inspiring they are, a lasting example of God's perfect creation. The mountains shouldn't reflect powerless icons or evil deeds. They should reflect the authority and majesty of God the creator. For many, they symbolise power and a positive challenge, something to be conquered or overcome, just as Elijah demonstrated.

In the bible, great events happened on mountains. Think about Moses receiving the stone tablets on which were written the ten commandments, Moses experiencing the very presence of God as he passed him by on Mount Sinai. Exodus 19:3 says that God called to Moses from the mountain and later on it says:

**16** On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. **17** Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. **18** Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain<sup>[b]</sup> trembled violently. **19** As the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.<sup>[c]</sup>

How amazing is that! What an experience they had and they were in no doubt of the power of their God.

In Matthew 17, Jesus takes three of the disciples, Peter, James and John to the top of a mountain. Scholars think it was on top of Mount Herman. Here, the disciples witness a display of God's glory as Jesus was transfigured, had an amazing change of appearance. Jesus' face shone like the sun and his clothes gleamed white like light. Alongside Jesus appeared Moses and Elijah. Then in verse 5 it says: a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!'

The disciples experienced God's voice, commending Jesus to them, verifying him as the son of God. The presence of Moses as the law giver and Elijah as the prophet now connected and consolidated their

experience of Jesus with their knowledge of the Old Testament. This was the same God they had been taught about and now they had experienced directly the power of God, through Jesus. They were to be left in no doubt that Jesus was their Messiah, their Saviour.

We don't have to stand on top of a mountain to experience God. The same God who demonstrated his power to Moses and Elijah is only a prayer away from us. We just call out in the name of Jesus who delivers our prayers to his father in heaven. We look to our creator God, to our Saviour Jesus because that is where our help comes from.



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