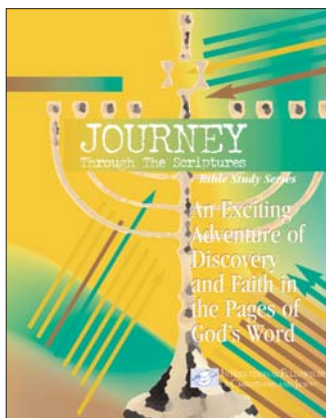


JOURNEY

Through The Scriptures



By Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein
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The Mountains and Waters of Israel

*Biblical Sites of Special Significance
in the History of Israel and Special
Importance to All People of Faith*

Mountain of God—Part 1

Exodus 3:1-10

In the sweep of human history, there are relatively few events that can truly be called world-changing. We are going to read about two such events in this study and the next—and they both occurred in the same location! This was “Horeb, the mountain of God,” another name for Mount Sinai. The angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush and God called to him, “Moses! Moses!” When Moses responded, “Here I am,” and hid his face in fear while waiting for God to respond, the course of Israel’s history and even world history was changed forever.

God’s instruction to Moses was to go back to Egypt and deliver His people from their slavery to the Pharaoh. The rest of Exodus 3 describes Moses’ very human attempt to avoid this overwhelming assignment. After all, he was a “wanted man” in Egypt, with a death sentence hanging over him. But Moses was standing on holy ground on Horeb. He was in the presence of the God of Israel, who would later ask the prophet Jeremiah, “Is anything too hard for me?” (Jeremiah 32:27). The answer, of course, is no—as Moses would discover.

Study Points

1. Mountain of God – Part 1
2. Mountain of God – Part 2
3. The “Gray-Haired” Mountain
4. Zion, The “City of David”
5. Mount of Olives and Messiah’s Coming
6. Another Miraculous Crossing for Israel
7. Two More Important Bodies of Water



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The Mountains and Waters of Israel

1. Moses was in the desert after having to flee Egypt following his failed attempt to deliver Israel on his own. What lesson was God teaching Moses in the desert?

2. Why was the bush Moses saw burning with fire—but not destroyed?

3. Why did Moses hide his face in fear when God identified Himself (v. 6)?

4. What do verses 7-9 teach us about God's concern for the trials and suffering of His people?

5. Why is it easy for us to identify with Moses' objections to the assignment God gave him?

Something to Think About:

Someone has said that God will never ask us to do anything that He has not given us the ability to accomplish. Sometimes, like Moses, we may feel inadequate for the task. But if there is nothing too hard for God, then there is nothing He will ask us to do that we cannot complete with His help!



The Mountains and Waters of Israel

Mountain of God – Part 2

Exodus 19:1-25; 34:1-5, 27-35

We cannot overstate the importance of the Law—the *Torah*—that Moses received from God on Mount Sinai (whose exact location is uncertain, although many believe it was in the southern Sinai peninsula). It was here that the Israelites truly became a nation, united under God’s Law and the leadership of Moses. Israel made camp at Sinai as God prepared to give them His holy Word. There is a Jewish *midrash* (a commentary on a Bible text) which suggests that the entire world, including all the animals and birds, heard God speak the Ten Commandments to Moses. Both Jews and Christians affirm the Commandments’ eternal validity.

It was also at Sinai that God forged a relationship with Israel that is still strong today. The power of this meeting between God and man is evident in the fact that Moses’ face was radiant and glowing when he descended Sinai to deliver the *Torah* to the people. Their sin with the golden calf (Exodus 32) had made it necessary for Moses to return and receive a new set of stone tablets. But his shining face made it clear that God had accepted him! The Israelites were afraid to come near Moses, and he had to cover his face with a veil while among them, removing it only to enter God’s presence.

1. Explain why God’s instructions to the Israelites regarding their conduct at Sinai were so rigid and even stern.

2. God gave Israel a second chance to receive the *Torah* and live by it. What hope does this give us in our relationship with God?

3. Why was Moses’ face radiant as he came down from Mount Sinai?

4. Why do you think the people were fearful of Moses when he came down from Sinai?

Something to Think About:

The Bible is explicit that Moses was different for having been with God. Even though we do not speak with God “face to face” as Moses did, we too should also be different after experiencing God and His majestic, holy presence.

The Mountains and Waters of Israel

The “Gray-Haired” Mountain *Deuteronomy 3:8-11; Psalm 133:1-3*

Viewing the beautiful, snow-covered peaks of Mount Hermon in northern Israel is one of the breathtaking sights that await a visitor to the Holy Land. Towering some 9,200 feet above sea level, it is the highest point in Israel. A cluster of three distinct peaks of about the same height, Mount Hermon was the northern boundary of the Promised Land as recorded by Moses, and also the farthest point north in the conquest by Joshua (see Joshua 11:17).

The “dew of Hermon,” the snow melt that the psalmist referred to poetically, runs down the mountain’s western and southern slopes, forming several streams and rivers that flow down to become the source of the Jordan River. Mount Hermon was considered a sacred site, its name meaning “a consecrated place” or “a sanctuary.”

Unfortunately, the mountain was used for the worship of the Canaanite god Baal during the period of the judges (Judges 3:3 calls it “Mount Baal Hermon”), and many temples and shrines have been found there. Hermon’s peaks are covered with snow for much of the year; another name for it translates as “the gray-haired mountain.”

1. How were the Israelites under Moses able to conquer the powerful kingdoms that held the Promised Land as far north as Mount Hermon? (Hint: Read Deuteronomy 3:3.)

2. What can we learn from Israel’s experience in Deuteronomy 3 about the “mountains” and other obstacles we face in our lives?

3. Our unity as Jews and Christians who share the same spiritual roots is compared to the refreshing “dew of Hermon” in Psalm 133:3. In what ways can we be refreshed by this unity?

4. List three ways that you can help strengthen the unity we share as Jews and Christians.

Something to Think About:

The refreshing dew of Mount Hermon has been flowing for thousands of years—truly a symbol of both the Lord’s goodness to Israel and His desire for the spiritual unity the psalmist longed and prayed for. Pray that as members of *The Fellowship*, we will stand together on the common ground of our heritage while respecting the differences in our faith communities.



The Mountains and Waters of Israel

Zion, The “City of David”

Psalm 125:1–126:6; Joel 2:32; Micah 4:7

Mount Zion is one of the largest, oldest, and most significant sites in Israel. This mountain, which is the southeastern hill of the city of Jerusalem, was a Jebusite fortress that King David captured over 3,000 years ago and made his capital. Mount Zion became so identified with David that it was called the “city of David,” and is believed by many to be his final resting place. Mount Zion was also considered to be the dwelling place of God—perhaps because it is the tallest locale in Jerusalem, looking out over the entire city.

As the verses above show, the name Zion came to be used not only of Jerusalem, but of Israel herself. The Bible is full of references to Mount Zion, with the name appearing over 150 times in the *Tanakh*, or Bible. The meaning of the term is uncertain—it may mean “stronghold”—but there is no doubt about God’s promises concerning Israel as represented by Zion. God promises to pour out His blessing on His people from Mount Zion, and that it will stand in strength forever. The Bible also speaks of the Lord forming a wall of protection around those who live in Zion. It is easy to see why this mountain holds such an important place in the Bible and in Israel.

1. Why did the Lord choose to “dwell” on Mount Zion?

2. What symbolism is there in the fact that Mount Zion is the tallest point in Jerusalem?

3. In what ways do the words of Psalm 125 give peace and comfort to God’s people today?

4. Both Joel and Micah prophesy a future day when the remnants of Israel will return to Mount Zion—speaking of the Holy Land—and come under God’s protection. What can we do to support this prophesied ingathering of Israel?

Something to Think About:

Many times the Bible uses objects such as mountains to symbolize the power of God. The picture of Mount Zion towering over Jerusalem paints a strong word portrait of a powerful, all-knowing God who cares about His people and watches over them from a superior vantage point. Spend a few minutes thanking God that He is ever watchful over His people today.

The Mountains and Waters of Israel

Mount of Olives and Messiah's Coming Zechariah 14:1-21

The Mount of Olives is a truly significant location in the Scriptures. This two-and-a-half mile stretch of land across the Kidron Valley from Jerusalem is not only important in Israel's history, but according to the prophet it will be the place to which the Messiah comes to deliver Israel from her enemies and rule. Zechariah said the Mount of Olives will be split in two at that time and form a great valley, through which the people may flee their attackers. God will secure and protect Jerusalem, and the worship of the true God will be universal.

The Mount of Olives also figured prominently in the life and ministry of Jesus. He spent days praying on its hillside, and it was here that he was arrested. Today the Mount of Olives is a "must" stop for any visitor to Israel. It affords a spectacular view of the old city of Jerusalem, and the Dead Sea can be seen fifteen miles away. The tomb of David's son Absalom is also visible in the valley below.

1. Why would the Messiah split the Mount of Olives in two when He comes?

2. According to verses 6-11, what are some of the blessings that will come when Messiah rules over the people of Israel and the whole earth?

3. The prophet refers to all the nations observing the Feast of Tabernacles in the messianic age. Why is this feast appointed for the nations to observe in the coming age?

4. There is one other reference to the Mount of Olives, found in 2 Samuel 15:30 where King David was going up the Mount of Olives, "weeping as he went." Read this chapter and identify the event that caused David and those with him such grief.

Something to Think About:

God says He will split the kingdoms around the Mount of Olives and punish those that fought against Jerusalem and Israel. He also says He will surround and seal off Jerusalem and protect it. Many times this is what God is doing in our lives in a spiritual sense, but we do not always recognize it. He is sealing us off from our enemies and protecting us with His promise.



The Mountains and Waters of Israel

Another Miraculous Crossing Joshua 3:1-17

The Jordan River is perhaps the most important body of water in Israel, both in biblical times and today. Much of everyday life in the Holy Land relies on the steady flow of the Jordan from its source at Mount Hermon in northern Israel down the eastern edge of Israel to the Dead Sea—the lowest spot on earth at nearly 1,300 feet below sea level. The most prominent event involving the Jordan during this time period was its crossing by Joshua and the people of Israel as they entered the Promised Land after forty years of wandering in the desert. The Jordan was at flood stage when the Israelites reached it, making a crossing all but impossible.

However, Joshua told the people to follow the priests, who were carrying the Ark of the Covenant. As soon as the priests stepped into the water the Jordan stopped flowing, which allowed the entire nation to cross over on dry ground as happened earlier at the Red Sea—a second miraculous parting of the waters. Joshua 4 records that Joshua sent representatives from each tribe back into the river to retrieve stones and construct a memorial at Gilgal. He also instructed Israel to tell anyone who asked about the stones the story of God’s miraculous power in leading His people into the Promised Land.

1. Why did God lead Israel to the edge of the Jordan when it was at flood stage?

2. Why was it important for the people to follow the priests carrying the Ark?

3. Do you think it is important for us to have memorials in our lives as reminders of God’s power and answers to our prayers?

Something to Think About:

It is always good to be reminded of God’s faithfulness in our lives. Remembering what He has done can also help keep us from forging ahead on our own and forgetting to wait on the Lord. We must learn to discern and follow God’s leading.

The Mountains and Waters of Israel

Two More Important Bodies of Water Genesis 14:1-24; Numbers 34:10-12; Joshua 12:2-3; 13:24-28

Two of the most famous bodies of water in Israel are the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee. The Dead Sea derives its name from its most famous feature, the fact that it has no outlet and thus cannot sustain life because of its unusually high concentration of minerals. Interestingly, this large lake is never called the “Dead Sea” in Scripture. Instead, it is called the “Sea of Salt” among other names, and is mentioned most prominently in the battle Abram fought to rescue his nephew Lot and recover the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah. Some people believe that the remains of these ruined cities actually lie beneath the Dead Sea.

The Sea of Galilee is known as the “Sea of Kinnereth” in Scripture, named for the region around this beautiful lake. It is only mentioned a handful of times the Hebrew Bible, and then only as part of the eastern boundary of the Promised Land. But the Sea of Galilee is well known by Christians as a focal point of Jesus’ ministry—and both it and the Dead Sea are popular highlights on any tour of Israel!

1. Abram’s victory in the region of the Dead Sea over a confederacy of kings holds several important spiritual lessons. Why did Abram give a tithe of the spoils to Melchizedek?

2. Why do you think Abram refused a reward from the king of Sodom—to which, humanly speaking, Abram was entitled because of his brave actions?

3. Read Deuteronomy 29:22-25. How did Moses use the example of Sodom and Gomorrah to teach Israel the importance of being faithful to God’s covenant with them?

Something to Think About:

In addition to representing specific locations in the Holy Land, waters are also used in the Bible to symbolize the difficulties and challenges all of us face in life. Here is a promise from God’s Word that we hope will bring you comfort: “Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him” (Psalm 32:6).

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Answer Key for: *The Mountains and Waters of Israel*

Page 2: Mountain of God – Part 1

1. God was teaching Moses that he could not deliver Israel by his own means and in his own time. Moses was learning to wait patiently for the Lord's means and timing.
2. In the Bible, fire was a symbol of God's powerful and awe-inspiring presence.
3. Moses realized that he was in the presence of the true God of Israel, the God who had shown His power and miracles to Moses' ancestors.
4. We learn from these verses that God is compassionate toward His people and not only takes notice of their suffering, but acts to bring them comfort and relief.
5. As noted in the study, Moses' reaction is very human. It is easy to feel overwhelmed when God asks us to do something that seems too difficult.

Page 3: Mountain of God – Part 2

1. The people were being brought into the presence of a holy God who was about to reveal His Law to their leader, Moses.
2. God's gracious dealings with Israel remind us that He is always willing to forgive and restore His people when they fail Him.
3. The radiance of Moses' face was the glory of God that could not help but be reflected in Moses as he stood in God's presence.
4. They may have been fearful because Moses' glowing face reminded them of the awesome presence of the God who demands holiness and obedience from His people.

Page 4: The "Gray-Hired" Mountain

1. They were victorious because the Lord gave their enemies into their hands by His great power.
2. We learn that nothing is too big for us to overcome in the name and the strength of the Lord!
3. Standing together in unity gives us a source of strength that none of us possesses alone. True unity can also refresh us because we have others to help us carry our burdens, even as we can refresh others by doing the same for them.
4. (1) Pray that 2,000 years of misunderstanding between our faith communities will be replaced by mutual understanding, dialogue, and cooperation. (2) "*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.*" (3) Promote Jewish-Christian understanding and seek the blessing of Israel among the people in your home, church, and neighborhood.

Page 5: Zion, The "City of David"

1. Because this is the place He chose as a homeland for His people, and the place where He set His holy name to be honored and worshiped.
2. Certainly its height may be symbolic of the fact that there is nothing and no one in all the earth as high and exalted as the God of Israel.
3. These great verses remind us that those who trust in God will be secure because God "surrounds" them with His protection. We are also reminded that evil will not ultimately triumph, and that God's desire for Israel is peace.

4. We can actually participate in the fulfillment of these and other prophecies by helping Jews from around the world return to Israel, as the Bible says: "*I will beckon to the Gentiles, I will lift up my banner to the peoples; they will bring your sons in their arms and carry your daughters on their shoulders*" (Isaiah 49:22).

Page 6: Mount of Olives and Messiah's Coming

1. Besides the stated fact that it will create a valley to allow the people of Jerusalem to escape their enemies, it could also be an unmistakable evidence of Messiah's supernatural power both to His people and to His enemies.
2. There will be perpetual light, and "living water" will flow from Jerusalem, possibly a reference to both physical and spiritual water. Also, the Lord will be recognized and worshiped over all the earth, and Jerusalem will be secure.
3. It is during this feast that Jews pray not only for the coming of Messiah and their redemption, but for the redemption of the world. In the days of the Temple, animal sacrifices corresponding to the nations of the world were also offered at this time. Thus the Feast of Tabernacles, or *Sukkot*, came to have a universal and messianic character, making it appropriate for all nations to observe in the messianic age.
4. David was fleeing from his son Absalom, who was rebelling against him and had incited many people to try and overthrow David.

Page 7: Another Miraculous Crossing for Israel

1. God was obviously preparing the people for another miracle that would give them a much-needed reminder of His presence and power as they entered Canaan to conquer and possess it.
2. The priests of Israel were God's representatives to the people, and as such they carried great spiritual authority. And the Ark was the symbol of God's presence, in this case clearly leading the people into the land He promised to give them.
3. Yes, first of all because God is worthy of our thanksgiving for what He has done. Also, we tend to forget what God has done in the past, so a tangible reminder can encourage us and give us new strength for the next challenge.

Page 8: Two More Important Bodies of Water

1. Because Melchizedek was a "priest of God Most High" and thus had the authority as God's representative to bless Abram and receive an offering from him.
2. Abram knew that if he accepted a reward from this king, it would perhaps lead the king and others to conclude that Abram gained his blessing from them rather than from God, thus diminishing the glory that rightly belonged to God alone.
3. Moses compared the judgment that would befall a person who violated the covenant to the judgment that fell on these two cities.