



EXPERIENCING GOD IN THE
MOUNTAINS
(8 BIBLE STUDIES)

EXAMINATION
BIBLE STUDIES

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THE SMALL PRINT

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Your Commitment

I would encourage you to make a commitment to attending your group regularly. I realise that sometimes there are things that get in the way, but do prioritise studying the Bible with other. This will involve sacrifice, and effective use of your time, but I really believe that in doing so you will get the most out of studying the Bible and praying together in your small group.

Your Contribution

What you put into the group is going to determine what you get out of the group. I encourage you to contribute honestly to the discussion and workings of the group. I understand people come from different backgrounds with unique personalities & life experiences. But, we all have a big part to play, so I encourage you to be fully present and take ownership of your group.

Your Preparation – Topical Studies

These materials are primarily for use in preparing and/or leading the group discussions but they will also be useful in keeping your thoughts together in one place. The materials firstly provide you with a series of passages so that you can identify and highlight recurring themes and note down your own thoughts and questions. Secondly, the materials include questions designed to provoke thought and help you think through what the passages meant both at the time it was written and also what it means for us now. Because these studies are topical there is a much stronger progression of thought (than there would be in a passage-based study). The dangers of such studies are that discussion can move quite far from the Bible. Yet this it is still the best way of covering broad subjects like this.

I would really encourage you to make use of these materials, as doing so will help you contribute and get the most out of the group discussions. The materials are however only “tools”, they are there to help you and not to restrict you or force you to think in a certain manner. I want to see God speaking to you through these passages and if the questions or notes do not help you, then don't use them!

I have included within these materials an introduction to the book. Make of this what you will, but I hope that it is helpful in getting you started with these studies!

Your Leadership

Here are some useful pointers in how to lead your Bible study group. Be aware that included in this study guide are more questions than you can possibly ask and/or answer in one session. They are not designed to be used rigidly, and there will rarely be a need to ask every question! Make sure that you spend some time praying at the start and ensure you read & re-read the passages as much as possible. In relation to the passages, then consider the suggested questions with an open mind. There is rarely “a single right answer” and I would encourage you to share your thoughts with your group.

I have also included a number of quotations from relevant Christian literature, most of which are readily available online if you want to do further thinking or study. My prayer is that as you study together you would grow to love Jesus and experience Him more deeply.

I would appreciate your feedback and suggestions on how to make these materials even better!

Steve McClure, Spring 2019

INTRODUCING “EXPERIENCING GOD IN THE MOUNTAINS”

Those of you who know me know that one of my great loves is the mountains but I'm not sure how such a love came about! I can remember visiting the very high mountains of Switzerland aged 12 and feeling amazed. Equally however, I can remember climbing Helvellyn (in the English Lake District) with my family and gratefully giving up before reaching the top. It wasn't therefore until I met my wife Debbie that my love of the mountains really took off and we began visiting the mountains of the Lake District and later Norway on a regular basis. My love of the mountains has always been countered by a fear of heights; I particularly struggle when there is a steep drop. In some ways it's not a rational fear, but it does give me a deep respect for the mountains. Whilst mountains are safe (in that they don't obviously move), there is also danger. We can enjoy them, but we must respect them!

Mountains have served as places of refuge, hideaways and natural boundaries between areas, countries & locations. 'Gods' have often been associated with mountains and it is probably no surprise that in the Bible this is no different. Indeed, mountains are frequently mentioned in the Bible (several hundred times in fact) in a variety of capacities. These studies will look at some of the most significant mountain top experiences recorded for us in Scripture:

Finding God in the mountains

In my experience mountains are places where God seems to be particularly close. Mountains are places that proclaim the grandeur, the magnificence and the awesomeness of God. I am reminded by their scale of how in comparison, I am a mere speck! David says something similar when he considered the heavens (the work of God's fingers), and the moon and the stars (which God has set in place). As I look to the mountains, they point me to God. Indeed, it is actually God Himself who I find in the mountains. The Psalmist writes *"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."* **Psalm 121:1-2**

Mountains appear strong, steadfast and unshakeable. The Psalmist says: *"As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people both now and for evermore"* (Psalm 125:2). By and large mountains do not move, well at least not noticeably anyway! They are part of God's creation but often appear to be in the minds of the Biblical writers. Why? Firstly, because mountains are symbols of eternity and point to God (e.g., Deut 33:15) and secondly because the characteristics of mountains actually point to an even greater reality, in the character of God. In Isaiah 54:10 God says, *"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you.* **Isaiah 54:10**

The thought of mountains shaking (r trembling is enough to put terror into any of us and yet it is God Himself who is described as shaking those same mountains (Exodus 19:18). In contrast it is not the mountains but rather His character and in particular His unfailing love and Covenant of Peace which are described as unshakeable.

Mountain top experiences in the Bible

Throughout the Bible mountains have been a place where God has met with His people in special ways. I know that there are all sorts of places where God meets with His people but to me it does

seem like a particularly significant proportion of these occasions happen on mountain tops. For me some of the stand-out names in this list would be as follows:

- *Mount Horeb* where God meets with Moses through a burning bush and calls Him to go and rescue God's people from Pharaoh (Exodus 3-4).
- *Mount Sinai* where Israel camped for some time while God gave Moses the Ten Commandments and the Mosaic law.
- *Mount Moriah* is the place where God told Abraham to go and sacrifice His son Isaac (Gen 22). Interestingly, it was also the place where God turned aside His wrath at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite and where Solomon subsequently built the temple (see 2 Chronicles 3:1).
- *Mount Ararat* was the resting place of the Ark after the flood (Genesis 8:1-5).
- *Mount Carmel* was the location of Elijah's famous victory over the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18).
- Blessings are proclaimed from *Mount Gerizim* and curses from *Mount Ebal* (Deut 27).
- Aaron, Moses and Saul all died on mountains at *Mount Hor* (Numbers 20), *Mount Nebo* (Deuteronomy 34) and *Mount Gilboa* (1 Chron 10:1-12) respectively.
- In the New Testament, Jesus also does some significant things on mountains. He often went up on a mountainside by Himself to pray (Matt 14:23). He also spent time being tempted on a mountain with Satan offering Him all the Kingdoms of the world (Matt 4:8-9). He fed huge crowds from a mountainside (Matt 15) and Peter, James and John got a glimpse of His glory at the *Mount of Transfiguration* (Matt 17). Jesus preached the 'Sermon on the Mount' (Matt 5-7) and various events happened at the *Mount of Olives* including Jesus' triumphant entrance to Jerusalem (Matt 21:1-11) and Gethsemane (Matt 26:30-46).
- Finally, there are many references to *Mount Zion* which was the location of the City of David and the temple Mount in the Old Testament and is used metaphorically to refer to the heavenly Jerusalem, God's holy, eternal city in the New Testament (Hebrews 12).

Lift up your eyes to God!

So, as you see, mountains are a common theme in the Bible! God is not confined to any particular mountain even though He is closely associated with *Mount Sinai* and *Mount Zion* in particular. Sadly, mountains all too often also became sources of Israel's idolatrous worship practices. Still, mountains throughout scripture, have always carried a sense of God's presence and as we have seen, have served as places of special worship and meeting with God.

Psalms 121 is a 'songs of ascent' (Psalms 120-134) and therefore used by travellers to Jerusalem. This psalm is much loved by people relying upon God during literal journeys as well as in life's challenges. In v1 the psalmist hints that he is in the midst of a difficult and/or uncertain situation. He is however able to affirm hope and demonstrate faith in God's concern, even though the situation is one of uncertainty and/or difficulty. The encouragement of the Psalm therefore, is to lift our eyes up to the mountains, to lift up our eyes up to God. Perhaps you too need to escape to the mountains. I pray that each of us would have mountain top experiences where we see more of who God is and what His heart is for us and our world. For me mountains are a symbol of hope because they point me to God. I pray therefore that as we look to the mountains that they would fill each of us with Hope...

**To God be the glory.
Steve McClure, Spring 2021**

STUDY 1: GOD OF THE MOUNTAINS – PSALM 121 & ISAIAH 40

INTRODUCTION: We begin our journey through *Experiencing God in the Mountains* with a look at Psalm 121 which urges us to lift up our eyes. Then Isaiah 40 contrasts the Sovereign LORD with the mountains He has created. We'll see how mountains point to God and stage some key encounters.

SETTING THE SCENE: What is your experience of mountains? What do you understand of their relationship with their creator? In what ways do (or have) the mountains pointed you to God and why?

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LIFTING UP OUR EYES (PSALM 121:1-2): In what or whom do people look to for help (see Additional Quotes 1)? The songs of ascents were sung by travellers en-route to Jerusalem: why do you think the mountains prompt the Psalmist to ask where his help comes from (v1)? Why is the answer, that it is the *Maker of Heaven of Heaven and Earth* (as opposed to Jerusalem or the temple) so significant?

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THE HELP GOD BRINGS (PSALM 121:3-8): In what different ways do these verses say that God will help His people? What do we learn about the character of God from these great promises? To what extent can you identify with experiencing God and the help that He brings?

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GOD'S COMFORT (ISAIAH 40:1-8): The judgment & warning of chapters 1-39 conclude with a prophecy about Judah's exile: in what ways do v1-2 strike a very different message and tone? What is this voice calling in the desert (v3-5 quoted in Matt 3:3) and how do the mountains and valleys *make way for the glory of the LORD*? How do you understand the message brought by this voice in v6-8?

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TO WHOM WILL YOU COMPARE (ISAIAH 40:9-26): What kind of picture does this section paint about God and how do the various contrasts (inc. mountains) help build up this picture (v9-17)? What does the passage have to say about how God's greatness surpasses all idolatry (v18-24)? What might be the impact of us lifting up our eyes and looking to the Heavens (v25-26)?

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THE STRENGTH OF THE LORD (ISAIAH 40:27-31): The chapter ends with some encouraging words about God (v27-28) and about how He helps those who hope in Him: what do you think it means to hope in the LORD? What is your experience of how God gives strength to the weary, the weak and the faint? How does the analogy of soaring on wings like eagles encourage and challenge you?

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THE HIGH PLACES (2 KINGS 17:10-12, JEREMIAH 2:20, 3:6, 50:4-7): How do these passages cast a very different light on the association of mountains (*the high places*)? In Jeremiah 50 specifically, how do you react to the idea of God's people as lost sheep roaming over the mountains and hills?

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FINDING FAITH (HABAKKUK 3): Habakkuk's journey leads him from injustice to faith: what aspects of God's Sovereignty over creation does he recall (v1-15)? How do we see his faith that God can and will act? What do you notice about Habakkuk's state of being (v16-19)? What emotions does the analogy of the deer treading on the heights bring up for you? To what extent can you identify with him?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What similarities and differences do you see between the usages of mountains (sometimes called the *heights*) within the various passages we have looked at? How would you distil the challenges and/or encouragements arising from this study?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Thank God that He is the one who weighs the mountains on the scales and has no equal amidst all of His creation. Ask God to enable you to lift your eyes to Him, strengthen & renew your hope in Him and in faith be enabled to tread on the heights like the deer.

MEMORY VERSE: HABAKKUK 3:19

STUDY 2 – MOUNT HOREB: CALLED BY GOD – EXODUS 3-4

INTRODUCTION: Our first mountain stages Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush. God calls Moses to step up and lead His people out of Egypt. Moses responds with lots of excuses but does eventually submit to God. The challenge for us is how will we respond to God's call on our own lives.

SETTING THE SCENE: In what ways would you say that God has spoken and/or continues to speak to His people today (see Hebrews 1:1-2)? What have been your experiences of hearing God speak to you (or more communally to your Christian community) in the past?

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THE MOUNTAIN OF GOD (3:1-4): What do you imagine it would have been like for Moses on the *mountain of God* (v1) that day? What was it about the burning bush that caught Moses' attention? Why do you suppose that so many key encounters with God happen on mountain tops?

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PAYING ATTENTION: How do you respond to the apparent cause-and-effect relationship between Moses' willingness to pay attention and God's willingness to speak? Is there space in your life to allow you to pay attention to the places where God is at work? If not, how can you create such space?

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HOLY GROUND (3:4-10): Why does Moses initially respond to God by saying 'here I am' and 'hiding his face'? When you have experienced God's presence in the past, how have you reacted (e.g. ignorance, awe, reverence, shock etc)? What is the significance of how God introduces and describes Himself to Moses in these verses?

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CALLING: Why was or wasn't Moses an obvious choice for God to call to lead His people (see also Exodus 2:11-25)? In calling Moses to lead His people out of Egypt, what exactly was God asking

Moses to do (think about all God has been doing in Moses up to this point)? If you don't experience a 'burning bush' moment, how can you know God's purpose for your life?

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RESPONDING TO GOD'S CALL: Work through each of the five objections and excuses that Moses gives (see list below); how does Moses respond to what God has called him to and why? In each case how does God respond?

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#1 – WHO AM I? (3:11-12)

#2 – WHO ARE YOU? (3:13-22)

#3 – WHAT IF THEY WON'T BELIEVE ME OR LISTEN TO ME? (4:1-9)

#4 – WHAT IF I AM NOT GOOD ENOUGH? (4:10-12)

#5 – PLEASE SEND SOMEONE ELSE (4:13-17 & 6:28-7:6)

In what ways do you identify with Moses' stubbornness in the face of God's clear call on His life? In what ways can you trace Moses' response back to his beginnings (e.g., his confusion with identity, the tendency to define himself in relation to others)? Can you identify times when you have struggled with these kinds of questions in the light of God's leading or calling?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What does this mountain encounter reveal about the character of God and how He interacts with His people? How did Moses experience the great paradox of calling: *it is all about us* (because we have been called) and *it is not all about us* (because it is all about God and His work in us and through us)? How is God calling you to step up and step out?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share your own experiences of hearing God speak and prayerfully consider together how can you make space and time to listen to Him. Ask God to help you can pay attention to Him and respond to what He is calling you to do day by day.

MEMORY VERSE: JEREMIAH 20:9

STUDY 3 – MOUNT MORIAH: TESTED BY GOD – GENESIS 22

INTRODUCTION: On our second mountain Abraham weighs up how to obey God's command to sacrifice his son Isaac. He had waited 25 years for this unlikely son, who God had promised to be a blessing to many future generations for the salvation of the world. What a test this proved to be!

SETTING THE SCENE: How would you describe some of the experiences that have been particularly testing in your life? What was it that was being tested through these times and what was the outcome? What specifically has tested (or is testing) your faith in God?

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GOD'S PROMISES FULFILLED (21:1-7): After 25 years of waiting, in what ways do you think trusting God's promise was difficult for Abraham and Sarai (see also Gen 16:1-4, 17:17-18, 18:12-15)?

- The promise (Gen 12) – Abraham aged 75
- Ishmael born (Gen 16) – Abraham aged 86
- Promise repeated (Gen 17) – aged 99
- Isaac born (Gen 21) – Abraham aged 100

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How is the LORD's faithfulness demonstrated in these verses (v1-2)? How do these verses reveal their delight at God's faithfulness? How do you think they felt now that their waiting had come to an end? How does their testimony help you to trust God's faithfulness and believe His promises?

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CALLED TO SACRIFICE (22:1-2): What is your immediate response to God's instruction to Abraham to *'take his son, his only son, whom he loves'* and sacrifice him as a burnt offering (see also Additional Quotes 2)? What do you notice from what Abraham does and doesn't say and do? I can think of a few things that I might say to God if He asked this of me; how do you think *you* would respond?

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A TESTING HIKE (22:3-8): What are the implications of God's command for Abraham? How might Abraham have felt as he and Isaac made the three-day hike to Mt Moriah? In what ways do you think Abraham's faith enabled him to obey (see v5 and Hebrews 11:17-19)?

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FAITH PROVED GENUINE (22:9-14): What did God learn about Abraham's faith from taking him through this test (esp. v12)? What are the "Isaacs" that you need to put on the altar and give God the central place in your life and what are the implications of doing so or not doing so (see Additional Quotes 3)? Why does Abraham call the place 'God will provide' (see v8 & v13)?

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How and why do you think that God tests us (see James 1:2-4, 12, Job 23:10, Isaiah 48:10, 1 Peter 1:6-7)? How do you think that Abraham experienced God in a deeper way because of what God took him through? What have you learned from the ways that God has tested your faith in the past?

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PROMISES OF BLESSING (22:15-18): How do these promises contrast with God's promises in Genesis 12:1-3, 13:14-17 and 15:1-21? Why do you think that these promises are so often repeated throughout Abraham's story and what are we to learn from them?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What parallels do you see between this account and what Jesus did for us on the cross? How did God *provide* for all of us in the latter (e.g., substitution, justice, punishment)?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER GROUPS: Thank God that He cares so much about growing our faith in Him, that He will use anything and everything to teach us to trust Him. Pray for one another that you would also experience God in a deeper way and that when tested your faith would also be proved genuine.

MEMORY VERSES: HEBREWS 11:17-18

INTRODUCTION: Mount Carmel is best known as the stage for the great confrontation between the prophet Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Elijah proposes a test to determine the true God. This scene of God’s victory contrasts starkly with the gentle whisper God speaks with shortly afterwards.

SETTING THE SCENE: What are the characteristics of a great military or sporting spectacle? How would you describe the feeling of being on either the winning or the losing side? How have you experienced God speaking out of things that are ordinary or extraordinary?

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DROUGHT & GOD’S PROVISION (1 KINGS 16:30:17:6): The key characters are Ahab son of Omri & Elijah (meaning *Yahweh is my God*) the Tishbite: what do we learn about them in 16:30-17:1? With this in mind, why does Elijah pray that there would be no more rain (see 17:1 & James 5:17-18)? As a result, why does God send Elijah into hiding and what impresses you about how God provides for him?

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GOD’S PROVISION THROUGH THE WIDOW (1 KINGS 17:7-24): When the brook dries up God sends Elijah to Zarephath where a widow had been instructed to feed him: why do you think she seems so unaware of this instruction and what kind of faith was required for her to obey (v7-16)? What impresses you about the way God provides and how He comes through for the widow’s son (v17-24)?

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SENT TO CONFRONT AHAB (1 KINGS 18:1-17): In 18:1-2 & 17 we see how God sent Elijah to present himself to Ahab before He would send rain again after 3 years: why does King Ahab describe Elijah as a troubler of Israel? What was Obadiah’s role in facilitating this exchange (v3-14 & 16)?

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WHOEVER ANSWERS, HE IS GOD (1 KINGS 18:18-24): How would you describe what it means to waver between two opinions (v21)? What are the parameters of the test Elijah lays out to determine who is God and why does he propose it? Why is it that in v21 the people said nothing, before declaring it to be a good plan in v24? (NB: Baal was thought to be the sky-god and lord of the weather)

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THE CONTEST ON MT CARMEL (1 KINGS 18:25-40): How does Elijah orchestrate events here to offer the prophets of Baal the greatest advantage and create the greatest spectacle (note esp. v27)? What impresses you most about the way Elijah prays to His God (v36-37)? How do you respond to the people's reaction and Elijah's subsequent instruction to seize the prophets of Baal (Deut 13:5, 17:2-5)?

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PRAYING FOR RAIN (1 KINGS 18:41-46): How would you contrast the Elijah in these verses with the man we see throughout the rest of this chapter (see confidence in v41 & 44b, face between his knees in v42 and persistence in v44a)? Why was Elijah's 14mile run to Jezreel so impressive (v45-46)?

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FLIGHT TO MT HOREB (1 KINGS 19:1-9a): How does Jezebel's reaction contrast with what we've seen so far? How do you understand Elijah's choice to flee 80miles south (v3) and to pray that he might die (v4)? How does God minister to Elijah (v5-9) before the 200mile, 40day trip to Mount Horeb?

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A GENTLE WHISPER (1 KINGS 19:9b-18): How does Elijah explain his frustrations in v10 (also v14) and to what extent can you identify with him? What do you make of the way God reveals Himself to Elijah and why do you think He does so (v11-13)? How might this encourage him to obey (v15-18)?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What stands out from the way that God reveals Himself on these mountain tops? Why do we so often fail to hear God (Additional Quotes 4&5)? What is most challenging about how Elijah interacts with His God? How are you seeing God's victory born out in your own life?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Thank God that He is the LORD, and He does not share His glory with another. Ask God to help you to see His power and experience His voice both in the ordinary and the extraordinary. Pray for your friends that they too would see the reality of God's power.

MEMORY VERSES: 1 KINGS 19:11-12

INTRODUCTION: At Sinai, Moses encounters the great power of God as He reveals His law to Israel (Ex 19-20). While Moses is up the mountain the people rebel, and he has to intercede for them on His return. Before proceeding, Moses seeks God’s assurance that His presence would still go with them.

SETTING THE SCENE (EXODUS 19): At Mt Sinai God reaffirms His covenant through His law: what would it have been like to experience this (v9-25)? What do the limits, the need for consecration and the extraordinary physical happenings teach us about the nature and character of God?

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BREAKING GOD’S COMMAND (32:1-6): Why do you think Israel is so quick to break the first two commandments (see 20:2-4)? Why was it so significant that they used the gold from Egypt (see 11:2-3 & 12:35-36)? Why did Aaron go along with it and how does he try to redeem the situation (v5-6)? Why are we so prone to making idols? What are some of the idols we make for ourselves today?

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GOD’S FIERCE ANGER (32:7-10): How do you react to the LORD’s assessment of the situation at the foot of the mountain? What does it mean to be ‘stiff-necked’? Why is God’s intent to destroy Israel such a surprise in light of the promises He had made to Abraham (Gen 12:2 & 15:13-21)?

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STANDING IN THE GAP (32:10-14): Why does God offer to instead make Moses into a great nation (v10b) and why does Moses turn it down (v11-13)? Does the phrase *God relented* (v14) mean that God changed His mind (see Num 23:19 & Additional Quotes 6)? Why is Moses’ role here so critical in working out His purposes (Ez 22:30 & Ps 106:23)? How is God using you to work out His purposes?

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MOSES’ ANGER (32:15-29, 35): Was Moses justified in breaking the tablets (v19) and making Israel drink the grounded gold (v20)? Why does Aaron lie (v22-24)? When has your experience of sin caused you also to react in righteous anger? How was God’s judgement carried out here (v27-28 & 35)?

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ATONEMENT (32:30-33:6): Why does Moses offer himself to make atonement for their sin? God tells them to head for the Promised Land, but says He would not go with them: why does this cause such pain to Israel? How has dealing with 'golden calves' in your own lives been painful and distressing?

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RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (33:7-11): What was the purpose of the tent where Moses met with God? How would you describe the relationship between Moses and God? What do you think it meant for Moses to speak with God *face to face* (v11,20)? Why did Moses enjoy such a close relationship with God? What would it take for you to develop such a relationship with God?

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SHOW ME YOUR GLORY (33:12-23): How do you respond to Moses' boldness in what he requests in v13, 15 & 18? Why does God say that He will grant these requests and how is this to happen? Would these things be enough to meet all of your needs?

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EXPERIENCING GOD'S GLORY (34:1-10, 29-35): How did Moses prepare to meet God (v1-3)? How do you respond (e.g., shock, awe, worship) to the way that God reveals Himself to Moses (e.g., shock, awe, worship)? What do we learn about the character of God (v6-8) and Moses' response (v8-9)? In 34:10-26, God renews His covenant with Israel: what was the impact of this experience on Moses?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER (2 COR 3:7-18): Paul also describes these events: in what ways is ministry under the new covenant more glorious than ministry under the old (2 Cor 3:4-18)? What is required of us if we are to reflect God's glory? How have you seen this transformation in your own lives?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share together about your own awareness of God's presence and your experiences of God revealing Himself to you. Pray for one another that God would give you a deeper taste of the quality and depth of relationship that Moses had with God.

MEMORY VERSE: 2 CORINTHIANS 3:18

STUDY 6 – MT OF TRANSFIGURATION: GOD’S PRESENCE & POWER – MATTHEW 17:1-13

INTRODUCTION: Jesus experiences His Father in different ways on mountains and notably here on the Mount of transfiguration. Three of the gospels record this incredible experience had by Peter, James and John as Jesus was transfigured before them and an audible voice testified that this was God’s Son whom He loved and with whom He was well pleased.

SETTING THE SCENE: Why do you think none of the Gospels identify this mountain (possibly Mt Tabor, Hermon & Meron)? The Greek word for *transfigured* means to *transform* or *change in form* (metamorphosis): how do you understand the impact of such an incredible transformation?

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THE TRANSFIGURATION (v1-2): Looking back at the context (see 16:21-28), why do you think Jesus heads up a high mountain with his inner circle (Peter, James & John)? How do you respond to the description of what happened to Jesus (v2)? As you consider what it was like to be there on the mountain with Jesus; what do you see, hear and feel?

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THE SUMMIT MEETING (v3): What is your response to Moses and Elijah (who lived 1,400 & 900 years earlier) appearing on the mountain? What might they symbolise or represent, and what similarities did their ministry share with Jesus’ ministry (see also Jude 9 & 2 Kings 2:11)? What do you imagine that the three of them could have been talking about (see also Luke 9:31)?

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PUTTING UP SHELTERS (v4): Why does Peter say that it was good for them to be there (4a) and to what extent would you say this was a selfish response? What do you think was Peter’s thought process behind his suggestion of putting up three shelters (4b and see also Mark 9:6)?

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THE VOICE FROM THE CLOUD (v5): In offering to put up three shelters, some argue that Peter was equating the 3 of them: how does the voice emphatically say otherwise? What impact would the voice have had both on Jesus and on the disciples? Why is it so important for us to listen to Jesus? On what other occasions does God speak audibly to Jesus, and why (see Matthew 3:16-17 & John 12:27-30)?

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EYEWITNESSES OF HIS MAJESTY (2 PETER 1:16-18): Peter mentions this mountain encounter in his second letter: what point is he making here and how does this example testify to that? What would you say that these verses demonstrate about the impact of this experience on Peter?

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AWE-STRUCK (v6-8): Why do you think that the disciples fall down at this point, rather than earlier on? Jesus often told the disciples *don't be afraid* (e.g., Matthew 10:31, 14:27 & Luke 5:10): why was this encouragement so important here? Why is it significant that when they looked up, they could only see Jesus? What role did Moses & Elijah play in this dramatic experience?

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ELIJAH COMES FIRST (v9-13): On the descent Jesus tells them not to speak of this until after His resurrection: why did Jesus ask this of them? Why then do the disciples raise the issue about Elijah having to come first (Malachi 4:1-5)? In what ways was John the Baptist's ministry like that of Elijah?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: To what extent do you agree that the transfiguration was not so much a miracle but the cessation of another (Additional Quotes 7)? How does the fact that Jesus turned his back on His glory (*descending* rather than *ascending*) cause you to worship (Additional Quotes 8)?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Thank God for this insight into the glory of Jesus' true presence and power. Ask God to impress the staggering implications of this experience into your hearts.

MEMORY VERSE: MATTHEW 17:5

STUDY 7 – MOUNT OF OLIVES: GOD’S PURPOSES: MATTHEW 26:30-46

INTRODUCTION: We often find Jesus praying at the Mount of Olives and it is also the place where He speaks at length about the end times. The garden of Gethsemane is thought to be on the western slopes of the Mount of Olives and is the stage for Jesus to pray and wrestle with all that lay before Him, before choosing 'obedience even unto death' when His enemies came for Him.

SETTING THE SCENE: How would you define God's purposes for us and our world? What do you most (and least) identify with about the purposes of God? Specifically, when do you find it most challenging to act in accordance with God's purposes?

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OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES (ZECHARIAH 14:1-9): Zechariah's prophecy focus' on a *day*: what things does he say will happen on this day and what does the scene he describes teach us? When do you think this prophecy has or will be fulfilled? The Lord's feet did set foot on the Mount of Olives (Matt 21:1): what is the significance of Matthew saying that Zechariah 9:9 was fulfilled at this time (21:5)?

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The other reference is in Ezekiel 10:18-19 & 11:22-23 (the mountain here is thought to be the Mt of Olives): why was the departure of the glory of the Lord so significant for Israel? Later in 43:1-4 (also Joel 3:17-19), Ezekiel sees the glory of the Lord return: what does this teach us about eternity?

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NEW TESTAMENT USAGE: Look up some of the following New Testament passages (Luke 21:37, 22:39-40, John 7:53-8:1,18:1-2, Matthew 24:3-25:46 & Acts 1:12): what kind of role does the Mt of Olives play in the life of Jesus? Why was this place so significant for Him?

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PETER'S DENIAL (MATT 26:30-35): Following the last supper Jesus and the disciples head out onto the Mt of Olives: why do you think Peter reacts so strongly to Jesus' prediction that they would all fall away on account of Him (v33, 35)? How might the events of Matthew 26:20-25 have impacted this?

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OVERWHELMED (MATT 26:36-38): Why did Jesus take only Peter, James & John to pray? To what extent can you identify with Jesus feeling *troubled* (v37) and *overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death* (v38)? What does Luke 22:44 add to this? What conclusions can we make about the fact that Jesus felt such strong emotions (Additional Quotes 9)? How can we model healthy emotions?

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MAY THIS CUP BE TAKEN (MATT 26:39 & 42): Why does Jesus ask God the Father to take this cup (all that lay before Him) away from Him? In saying *yet not as will, but as you will*, how is Jesus demonstrating and modelling submission, obedience and dependence to His Father? When have you struggled deeply with doing something that God had called you to do?

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WILLING SPIRIT BUT WEAK FLESH (MATT 26:40-41, 43-46): Why do Peter, James & John struggle so much to stay awake (see also Luke 22:45b) How might both they and Jesus have felt about their failure to do so? What might it look like for us to watch and pray in order to avoid temptation? Who could you ask to watch and pray for you in your darkest moments (Additional Quotes 10)?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: How has the example of Jesus at the Mount of Olives challenged you about developing healthy rhythms of life? What lessons can we draw from this encounter at Gethsemane about praying into the purposes of God even (or especially) when they are difficult?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Thank God for the lessons from the Mount of Olives about how we should pray humbly and submissively into the purposes of God for our lives. Ask God to give you the strength and perseverance to watch and pray so that you don't fall into temptation.

MEMORY VERSE: MATTHEW 26:41

STUDY 8 – MOUNT ZION: GOD’S DWELLING PLACE – HEBREWS 12

INTRODUCTION: The final mountain is Mount Zion which is normally understood as the temple mountain in Jerusalem: the place where God dwelt. Here in Hebrews 12 Mount Zion is described as *the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem*. This ultimate future mountain-top experience will not be one of fear (like Sinai) but one of great joy as we stand before the throne of God.

SETTING THE SCENE: Thinking back over the mountains we have considered in this series which ones have had the most impact for you and why? The NIV Bible includes 168 references to Mt Zion (sometimes just referred to as Zion): at the outset what is your understanding of this Biblical mountain?

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THE FORTRESS OF ZION (2 SAM 5:6-16, 6:1-5): Having become King over all Israel, how does God give David victory over the defiant Jebusites and their great stronghold? Why is David so eager to bring the Ark to Zion (now the City of David) even after his initial attempt ends in tragedy (6:6-11)? When it finally does arrive, why does David celebrate so lavishly (see 6:5,12-16, 22)?

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TEMPLE OF THE LORD (PSALM 48): Later the name Zion migrated to the site of Solomon’s Temple (2 Kings 6) which soon housed the Ark (2 Kings 8): how is Mount Zion described in Psalm 48? How is the relationship between God and Mount Zion described in these verses?

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A FUTURE ZION (REV 14:1-5 & ISAIAH 65:17-25): The Bible also gives us a picture of a future Zion: what are the characteristics of this place as described in these passages? What difference does (or should it make) to have this future picture of Zion in mind?

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MT SINAI & THE OLD COVENANT (HEBREWS 12:18-21): Hebrews is written to Jewish Christians in danger of falling back to their Jewish roots: how is Mount Sinai used to describe the mountain that we have *not come to*? As you live for Jesus, how are you encouraged that this is not our reality?

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MT ZION & THE NEW COVENANT (HEBREWS 12:22-24): Conversely how is Mount Zion used to describe the mountain that we *have come to*? Why is it significant that this is described as a current (rather than purely future) reality? What might be the dangers of coming to Zion with a Sinai mentality?

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GLORY OF THE NEW COVENANT (2 COR 3:7-11): Paul talks at length here about how the New Covenant is more glorious than the old: how would you summarise the comparisons that he makes in v7-11? Why does this bring great hope, boldness and clarity of sight in v12-18?

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UNSHAKABLE (HEBREWS 12:25-29): The writer to the Hebrews concludes, warning us against refusing the blessings of Mount Zion: what do you think this might look like in practice? God is going to shake things up (v26-27) but why is the Kingdom of God unshakable? What might it mean for you to respond in thanksgiving, worship and in reverent awe?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: If Mount Zion is about the dwelling place of God, how has this study served to encourage you to live in the reality of all that is ours under the New Covenant? In what ways does the Dallas Willard Quote encourage you towards this end (Additional Quotes 11)?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Thank God that the treasures of this final mountain can be ours in our present reality. Ask God to help you respond with a Mt Zion, rather than Mt Sinai mentality towards the God who wants to know us. Ask God to give us boldness to move forward in faith, hope and love.

MEMORY VERSES: HEBREWS 12:22-23a

APPENDIX – ADDITIONAL QUOTATIONS

QUOTE 1: “And as I’ve been thinking about Psalm 121 it’s struck me that most of us have lived most of the time as if we had an answer to that question – my help comes from the government when I need physical protection; my help comes from my money when I need financial security; my help comes from my friends when I need some fun; my help comes from celebrity culture when I need the hope of a better life – and in many ways they are good things that we can thank God for. But right now, they feel pretty shaky and uncertain – the financial crash of 2008; the sex scandals of the celebrity world; the succession of crises in democratic governments – and now Covid19, which ultimately is beyond the ability of any of us to control. So where does our help come from now? Where can we find security, peace, hope?” *John Risbridger, Devotional, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gl4S6k6JIY>*

QUOTE 2: “This boy is his son, his only son, Isaac, whom he loves. And he ties up his legs, binds his arms, so there will be no struggle at the end. Then he picks up his son—bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. He holds the same body that he held on the first day it came from Sarah’s womb, the little body that he held to feed and bathe and rock and tell stories...the little body he would check on at night to make sure it was still breathing, and hold sometimes just to laugh at the sheer impossibility of it all. He holds that body one last time, then he places it on the altar, on the wood. Finally, he reaches towards heaven with the knife in his hand, to destroy with a single move the life he had created; and with it all his hope and joy and future.” *John Ortberg, The life You’ve always wanted, Grand Rapids, Zondervan © 2002*

QUOTE 3: “The most painful times in our lives are times in which our Isaacs, our idols, are being threatened or removed. When that happens we can respond in two ways. We can opt for bitterness and despair ... Or else, like Abraham, you could take a walk up into the mountains. You could say, ‘I see that you maybe calling me to live my life without something I never thought I could live without. But if I have you, I have the only wealth, health, love, honour, and security I really need and cannot lose.’ As many have learned and later taught, you don’t realise Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have.” *Tim Keller, Counterfeit Gods, pg. 19*

QUOTE 4: “Prayer is – listening for the still small voice of God. Listening with the ‘ear of our hearts’.” *Richard J Foster*

QUOTE 5: “Only after all the noise has spent itself do we begin to hear in the silence of our heart, the still, small, mighty voice of God.” *A.W. Tozer*

QUOTE 6: “God expects to be pleaded with; he expects godly believers to intercede with him. Their intercession is his own appointed means for bringing about his relenting, and if they fail in this respect, then he does not relent and his wrath is poured out. If we understand something similar to have happened in the life of Moses, we must conclude that Moses is effective in prayer not in the sense that God would have broken his covenant promises to the patriarchs, or in the sense that God temporarily lost his self-control until Moses managed to bring God back to his senses. Rather, in God’s mercy Moses proved to be God’s own appointed means, through intercessory prayer, for bringing about the relenting that was nothing other than a gracious confirmation of the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The really wonderful truth is that human beings like Moses and you and me can participate in bringing about God’s purposes through God’s own appointed means. In that limited sense, prayer

certainly changes things; it cannot be thought to change things in some absolute way that takes God by surprise or browbeats him into something he hadn't thought of." *D.A. Carson, A call to Spiritual Reformation, pg. 165.*

QUOTE 7: "Essentially this was not a *new* miracle, but the temporary cessation of an ongoing one. The real miracle was that Jesus, most of the time, could keep from displaying this glory. Yet John said, *We beheld His glory*. Peter wrote, *We were eyewitnesses of His majesty*." *David Guzik, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/matthew-17/>*

QUOTE 8: "The transfiguration was completed on the Mount of Ascension. If Jesus had gone to heaven directly from the Mount of Transfiguration, He would have gone alone. He would have been nothing more to us than a glorious Figure. But He turned His back on the glory, and came down from the mountain to identify Himself with fallen humanity." *Oswald Chambers, My Utmost for His Highest*

QUOTE 9: "We see Jesus' emotions most clearly and deeply just before his death...In Mark 14:33-34 Jesus is saying that sorrow and sadness are like a flood over him. The anguish is so overwhelming that it's crushing him to death. And no wonder! Because Jesus knew what awaited him the next day – the horror of crucifixion where he would endure the wrath of his Father. And this was decision time. And so it was not only understandable but right that he felt such anguish. Notice though that Jesus feels deeply, but is not controlled by his feelings. He is in great distress about what God is calling him to do, but he will still go through with it. However, his commitment to God's plans doesn't mean he denies how he feels." *Graham Beynon, Emotions: Living life in Colour, ©2012, p36.*

QUOTE 10: "When something drops into your life that seems to threaten your future, remember this: The first shock waves of the bomb are not sin. The real danger is yielding to them. Giving in. Pitting up no spiritual fight. And the root of that surrender is unbelief – a failure to fight for faith in future grace. A failure to cherish all that God promises to be for us in Jesus. Jesus shows us another way. Not painless, and not passive. Follow him. Find your trusted spiritual friends. Open your soul to them. Ask them to watch with you and pray. Pour out your soul to the Father. Rest in the sovereign wisdom of God. And fix your eyes on the joy set before you in the precious and magnificent promises of God." *John Piper, Future Grace, © 1995 Multnomah Books, pg. 308.*

QUOTE 11: "But the treasure we have in heaven is also something very much available to us now. We can and should draw upon it as needed, for it is nothing less than God himself and the wonderful society of his kingdom even now interwoven in my life. Even now we "have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to countless angels, and to the assembled church of those born earlier and now claimed in the heavens; and to God who discerns all, to the completed spirits of righteous people, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new agreement" (Heb. 12:22–24). This is not by-and-by, but now." *Dallas Willard, The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God, pg. 229.*

MEMORY VERSES

STUDY 1: GOD OF THE MOUNTAINS – PSALM 121 & ISAIAH 40

The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to tread on the heights.

Habakkuk 3:19

STUDY 2: MOUNT HOREB: CALLED BY GOD – EXODUS 3-4

But if I say, 'I will not mention his word or speak any more in his name,' his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.

Jeremiah 20:9

STUDY 3: MOUNT MORIAH: TESTED BY GOD – GENESIS 22

¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, ¹⁸ even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.'

Hebrews 11:17-18

STUDY 4: MOUNT CARMEL: GOD'S VICTORY & VOICE – 1 KINGS 17:1-19:18

¹¹ The LORD said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.' Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹² After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. **1 Kings 19:11-12**

STUDY 5: MOUNT SINAI: THE POWER AND GLORY OF GOD – EXODUS 32-34

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:18

STUDY 6: MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION: GOD'S PRESENCE & POWER – MATTHEW 17:1-13

While he was still speaking, 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!'

Matthew 17:5

STUDY 7: MOUNT OF OLIVES: GOD'S PURPOSES – MATTHEW 26:30-46

'Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.'

Matthew 26:41

STUDY 8: MOUNT ZION: GOD'S DWELLING PLACE – HEBREWS 12

²² But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³ to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.

Hebrews 12:22-23a