

# MOUNTAINTOP MOMENTS

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MEETING GOD IN THE HIGH PLACES



ED ROBB



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# BASE CAMP

Listen, my children, and you shall hear  
Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,  
On the eighteenth of April, in Seventy-Five;  
Hardly a man is now alive  
Who remembers that famous day and year.

He said to his friend, "If the British march  
By land or sea from the town to-night,  
Hang a lantern aloft in the belfry-arch  
Of the North-Church-tower, as a signal-light,

One if by land, and two if by sea;  
And I on the opposite shore will be,  
Ready to ride and spread the alarm  
Through every Middlesex village and farm,  
For the country-folk to be up and to arm."<sup>1</sup>

These words from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem "Paul Revere's Ride" intrigued me when I was a boy. Such action and suspense! The poem tells the story of an impending attack by the British Army in April of 1775. It's a creative chronicle of the events that immediately led up to the Revolutionary War. A churchman was posted in a high place—the steeple tower of the Old North Church in Boston—to alert the patriots of the enemy's approach.

A signal code using lanterns had been established—one lantern in the steeple would signal the British army's choice of the land

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route, while two lanterns would signal the route “by sea” across the Charles River. When the American patriot Paul Revere observed the two-lantern signal from his lookout post, he mounted his horse immediately and made a daring midnight ride through the countryside to warn his fellow patriots and call them to arms.

What about this adventure wouldn't capture the imagination of a young boy from West Texas? It was splendid. On the dusty, windswept plains where I grew up, high places were in short supply. A church steeple would surely have been the highest place around—a good place from which to signal important, life-saving messages to the people living nearby. And we did have a church in our little town. On Sunday mornings I sat and listened as my dad, a Methodist pastor, told fascinating stories about how God delivered important, lifesaving messages to his people from the high places in the Old and New Testaments. Not from church steeples but from *mountaintops*.



Some of my happiest childhood memories come from time spent in the mountains on family vacations. Our family didn't live near any mountains; not even close. The nearest mountain range was the Rocky Mountains, and getting there wasn't easy. It required a long, hot two days of traveling. And there were *seven* of us crammed into the car—my parents and five children. As you can imagine, that made for a very long trip! But we made the effort. We knew the experience would be worth it.

Something within us calls us to the mountains, doesn't it? Maybe it's the fresh air that fills our lungs and helps to clear our minds. Perhaps the higher elevations help us gain perspective in our lives. Certainly our view changes—we are treated to a panoramic revelation of what cannot be seen from the ground. And sometimes that revelation can speak to us in a deeper sense. Whatever calls us, there seems to be an innate sense of God's presence when

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we climb to a high place—as if somehow we draw closer to the Almighty because we are nearer the heavens. The psalmist tells us:

*From heaven the LORD looks down  
and sees all mankind;  
from his dwelling place he watches  
all who live on earth—  
he who forms the hearts of all,  
who considers everything they do.*  
(Psalm 33:13-15)

Since the beginning of biblical history, mountains have played a great role in the story of our faith. God always knew where the enemy was encamped. As he watched over the journeys of his beloved chosen people, he knew when their paths were straight and faithful and knew when they were being led astray. And when God needed to offer correction, strategy, encouragement, or life-saving warnings, he often signaled his children from a mountaintop.

*Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned."*  
(Exodus 3:1-3 ESV)

*I will turn aside.* Just as God did with Moses, whenever he desired an encounter with his people, he sent a signal to turn them aside—to *look up* and *come up* into his presence to receive his message. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, Scripture tells us God has signaled his people from the mountaintops with his

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voice, fire, thunder, clouds, and in person—in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

In this book we will turn aside to encounter our God on several important mountaintops. Our journey will take us through two Middle Eastern countries and through both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible—from the days of Abraham to the time of Jesus—more than two millennia. Some of these summits might be quite steep, but together we will make the effort. The experience will be worth it.

To encourage each of you as we set out together, I offer this prayer as written in Scripture:

*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.*

*He will not let your foot slip—  
he who watches over you will not slumber;  
indeed, he who watches over Israel  
will neither slumber nor sleep.*

*The LORD watches over you—  
the LORD is your shade at your right hand;  
the sun will not harm you by day,  
nor the moon by night.*

*The LORD will keep you from all harm—  
he will watch over your life;  
the LORD will watch over your coming and going  
both now and forevermore.*

*(Psalm 121)*

Ready to leave Base Camp? Let's begin our ascent.

# 1

## MORIAH: MOUNT OF PROVISION

*Delight yourself in the LORD,  
and he will give you the desires of your heart.*

*Commit your way to the LORD;  
trust in him, and he will act.*

*(Psalm 37:4-5 ESV)*

As we begin our journey, I'd first like to make a stop to visit an iconic symbol of our nation. Our trip takes us deep into the Black Hills of South Dakota, where we enter the Mount Rushmore National Memorial. Four sixty-foot-tall faces set into the mountain's granite peak create quite the breathtaking display. A quick test before you read on—do you know the identity of these four figures?

If you answered that the faces are those of four presidents—George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln—you'd be correct. This awe-inspiring memorial features the visage of leaders who are believed to represent the birth, growth, development, and preservation of our country.

With this in mind, what if we had a scriptural Mount Rushmore? Which great leaders represent the birth, growth, development, and



preservation of our faith; and whose faces might be carved into this mountain?

Setting Jesus aside for a moment, let's start with the New Testament. Who would *you* put on a scriptural Mount Rushmore?

Two of the apostles come to my mind immediately—Peter and Paul. Not only did Peter walk on water literally, but Jesus also proclaimed that Peter was the rock upon which he would build his church (Matthew 16:18). Paul wrote the letters that comprise half of the New Testament and are primarily responsible for bringing the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ to both Jew and Gentile.

Who would represent the Old Testament on our scriptural Mount Rushmore? This may be more difficult to narrow, since the Old Testament is home to so many giants of our faith. Moses? Elijah? David? Or maybe Isaiah?

We certainly can't leave out Abraham—the one whom God chose to begin the restoration of an intimate relationship with humankind. God even refers to Abraham as his *friend* in Isaiah 41:8. Following Yahweh's personal, divine calling, Abraham began to practice monotheism, the belief and worship of one God, and rejected the pagan, polytheistic culture that surrounded him. He is uniquely claimed as the father of three faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Yes, Abraham deserves a place on our scriptural Mount Rushmore. The story of his fascinating life and relationship with the Almighty is found in the Book of Genesis and is set in the mountainous region of Moriah, in ancient Israel.

Have you ever investigated your genealogy? Maybe you have tried one of those DNA tests from ancestry websites. Maybe you discovered something surprising about where your ancestors came from or even to whom you are distantly related; for instance, a former US president, famous actor, or even royalty.

Abraham's interesting genealogy is laid out carefully in

*Moriah: Mount of Provision*

Genesis chapters 5, 10, and 11. He was a direct descendant of another pivotal figure in biblical history: a man who was obedient to God—a man who built an ark—a man named Noah. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Abraham, first known as Abram, was born through the generations of Shem.

As we read through the stories in Genesis about the lives of Noah and Abraham, we discover several striking similarities in the character of these two men. Both were obedient to God. Both trusted God. Both answered God's call, even when the call seemed impossible. And these stories also reveal a pattern that points to the very character of God himself.

We learn that it is God who takes the initiative; God who pursues us; God who is working for our salvation; God who is giving us his promise; and God who is making plans for our provision. As New Testament people, we already know the end of this story. Right? The salvation story: God's mighty plan for redemption, which culminates in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But God began the salvation story thousands of years earlier, when he called Abraham. Genesis chapters 11-21 teach us that Abraham was a man who was called to follow God. A man with whom God made a covenant. A man whose offspring was promised to be too numerous to count. A man who would live a life of obedience.

Now, in chapter 22, we find Abraham in the land of Moriah. Abraham had been faithfully following God. He had heard God speak to him, promising he would have an heir and that his offspring would be more numerous than the grains of sand on the earth or the stars in the sky. But a lot of time had passed since Abraham first heard that promise, and he began to doubt and question God. I can just imagine his prayerful conversations with the Almighty: "God, I have no son to call my own, to bear my name, no son with my wife Sarah. You said you had a plan. You said my descendants

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would be as numerous as the stars, and I thought it was a good plan. I was all in. But now I'm one hundred years old."

*Abraham doubted, yet Isaac was born.*

God also spoke to Abraham's wife, Sarah. I imagine their conversation went a similar way. God promised Sarah, "I will give you a son." Sarah replied, "Let's get real, God. I'm ninety years old, way past the childbearing years—it's not going to happen."

*Sarah doubted, yet Isaac was born.*

Our doubts, however justified, do not block God's provision, and his provision often comes suddenly. In a miraculous moment, everything changes.

Do you know anyone who has had a surprise baby? I'm referring to the couple whose children are teenagers, or off to college, and then suddenly, out of the blue, a baby is on the way! There's a spontaneous cry of "How did this happen?" They never imagined! They find themselves in shock. Maybe they even sink into a bit of a depression and worry, *People will think we are the child's grandparents!* Maybe you know a couple in a similar situation; and yet, after their child is born, their feelings take a wonderful and remarkable turn. The shock and fear turn into the greatest blessing of their lives that brings with it a love that is simply indescribable. That's what happened to Abraham and Sarah.

When the situation seemed humanly impossible, that's when God acted. He had a divine plan, and he made divine provision. At long last, Abraham and Sarah had a son, whom they named Isaac. Even the meaning of his name, "He laughs," points to the incredulity of his parents when told they would have a son at their advanced ages . . . they laughed! And now, instead of laughing with incredulity, they laughed with joy.

As time passed, and Isaac grew, don't you know Abraham and Sarah were devoted parents! They made sure Isaac had all

the advantages. They dressed him in the latest Gap for Desert Kids clothing. They put him in the local Music for Little Methuse-lahs program. They led the cheering section at every one of his sheepshearing or camel-racing contests. They undoubtedly taught him about the God of Abraham, who had miraculously brought Isaac into their lives. Without question, Sarah and Abraham loved this boy deeply.

Then, suddenly, in the middle of this wonderful love story, God spoke to Abraham again. Genesis 22:1-2 tells us,

*Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!"*

*"Here I am," he replied.*

*Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you."*

Just when everything was going along great, God *tested* Abraham. God tested his obedience; God tested his heart; and God tested his priorities. That's a sobering thought, isn't it? God actually *tests* us? I thought I was out of school—finished with testing. Are you telling me that there are tests in life? *Divine* tests? I'm not sure I like that idea.

Abraham was indeed tested, and Scripture tells us he has not been the only one. Consider for a moment the Israelites. When we read the story of the Exodus, we see they also were tested. God called Moses and sent him back to Egypt with a message: *Tell the pharaoh to let my people go.*

You know the story. God dramatically rescued his Hebrew children from slavery under the pharaoh. But achieving that freedom wasn't so easy. Leaving prosperous Egypt to wander out into the unknown wilderness—*that* was scary! Following the God of

# IT'S TIME TO LEAVE BASE CAMP...

Ed Robb has provided a creative expression of a core dimension of the Christian faith and way: our seeking God, and God seeking us. He writes in such a conversational style that we follow easily, yet do not miss the timeless truths of God-human encounters and their contemporary messages.

—**MAXIE DUNNAM**, President Emeritus of Asbury Theological Seminary and former world editor of *The Upper Room*

Wonderfully accessible and an excellent choice for small group study, personal devotion, and preaching, *Mountaintop Moments* provides powerful stories from Scripture with Ed Robb's personal travel experiences and his generous pastoral heart. —**JANICE RIGGLE HUIE**, Retired UMC Bishop (South Central Jurisdiction), currently serving the Texas Methodist Foundation

Many of the Bible's most important stories take place on mountains. ... Ed Robb masterfully takes the reader to these sacred places, helping us to find ourselves in these powerful stories, and ultimately to have our own "mountaintop moments." —**ADAM HAMILTON**, Senior Pastor of The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, KS

A spiritual guide for many over the years, Ed Robb becomes our guide through the mountains of the Bible, helping us connect the personal challenges and victories of our own lives with the timeless stories of Scripture. The view will take your breath away! —**JESSICA LAGRONE**, Dean of Chapel at Asbury Theological Seminary

Discover afresh the power of God's grace, love, and strength with this wonderful book! In a time when it feels like the world is trapped in the wilderness, Ed Robb calls us to experience the mountaintop moments where we can see broader landscapes. —**L. GREGORY JONES**, Dean of Duke Divinity School

With a marvelous gift of relating God's revelations in Scripture to our everyday lives, Ed Robb describes the mountains in the Holy Land where God encountered some of the heroes of our faith, all while illustrating how God still comes to us in the High Places of our lives. —**DR. KENT MILLARD**, President of United Theological Seminary

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