

Moving Mountains: And Other Hard Things for the Natural Human to do
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Isaiah 40:3-4 mentions valleys being filled in and mountains being brought low. When I want to visualize a physical example of something that is like what Isaiah describes in these verses, I think of the Castaic to Tejon route of Interstate 5 in southern California (colloquially called the Ridge Route or the Grapevine). With a reasonably powered car and favorable traffic and weather conditions, the motorist can comfortably traverse this 40-mile segment of eight-lane mountain freeway at the posted speed limit of 65 miles per hour. Building this segment of highway was very difficult. To prepare the roadbed, mountains were cut through, and the removed soil was used to fill nearby canyons. Many heavy-duty machines were used for many years to complete the massive earthworks. Over 57 million cubic yards of dirt were moved. That amount of dirt is more than 13 times the amount of concrete in Hoover Dam, on the Colorado River.

In the New Testament, we learn that the fulfillment of the prophecy of **Isaiah 40** is through John the baptizer. **Luke 3:3-6** confirms,

And he (John the baptizer) went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough ways smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.' "

It was prophesied of John the baptizer that he would move mountains, yet nowhere do we read that he, Jesus, or any of Jesus' disciples ever physically moved mountains or physically prepared any type of path or road. So, how did John the baptizer move mountains?

Let's continue to look in **Luke 3**, continuing to **verses 7-9**,

Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

John knew that some of those who came to him might have been interested in forgiveness, but they had no intention of making any significant changes to their sinful ways. True repentance is more than just saying we're sorry that we sinned and asking God to forgive us. We must also change from our selfish, sinful ways. We must bear fruits worthy of repentance. If we do not bear good fruit, we will be cut down and thrown into the fire. John moved mountains by encouraging people to change their hearts with God's help and to bear good fruit. Let's look at how he did that. **Luke 3:10-11**, *"So the people asked him, saying, 'What shall we do then?' He answered and said to them, 'He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.'"*

In John's instructions, he is helping the people to move the "mountain" of selfishness by redirecting some of their "soil" of time and resources toward those in the "valley" of need. In doing so, they are showing care and compassion toward their neighbor. This can benefit the hearts of both the giver and the

receiver and make both hearts more receptive to the truth, forgiveness, obedience toward, and salvation of Jesus. These types of actions show love toward our neighbor and love toward God. They please God.

John gives further instructions to two specific groups of people in **Luke 3:12-14**,

“Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Collect no more than what is appointed for you.” Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, “And what shall we do?” So he said to them, “Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages.”

God cares how we treat other people. It can be easy to take advantage of others when we are in a position to do so, particularly when such practices are common among other people in positions similar to ours. And when we start a habit of not treating everyone honestly and fairly, it can be very difficult to stop that habit, especially if we’re receiving a financial or other benefit. If we truly desire to bear fruit by treating others the way God wants us to, we need to pray to God, believing that he will act, and we need to forgive trespasses against us. Then, God can forgive us and help move our “mountain” of selfishness and sin into the sea. (see **Mark 11:12-14** and **Mark 11:20-26**)

Also, when we treat everyone with care and compassion, people will notice that there is something different about us in a positive way. They can see God’s love through us. He will be glorified. Often, an opportunity can present itself to share the gospel. This can happen more successfully if we truly are concerned for others and they can clearly see that concern.

Without the help of powerful machines, it would have been virtually impossible for humans to move the mountains between Castaic and Tejon in order to prepare the roadbed for that segment of Interstate 5. Similarly, without the help of the all-powerful God, it is impossible for us to move our mountains of sin and selfishness that can make our path to glory so difficult, or even impassable.