

Advent 1, November 30, 2025

ISAIAH 2:1–5. (EHV)

This is the message that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

This will take place in the latter days:
The mountain of the LORD'S house will be established
as the chief of the mountains.
It will be raised above the hills,
and all nations will stream to it like a river.
Many peoples will come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob.
Then he will instruct us about his ways,
and we will walk in his paths."
For from Zion the law will go out,
and the LORD'S word will go out from Jerusalem.
He will judge between the nations,
and he will mediate for many peoples.
Then they will beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into blades for trimming vines.
Nation will not lift up sword against nation,
nor will they learn war anymore.
O house of Jacob, come,
and let us walk in the light of the LORD.

At 29,032 feet above sea level, Mount Everest on the border between China and Nepal is chief of the mountains on planet Earth. To put its height into perspective, you would need to throw another three Harney or Black Elk Peaks on top of the present one to match Mount Everest.

With its unsurpassed height comes unsurpassed mystique. Among climbers heights greater than 26,000 feet are called the death zone. Mount Everest has over 3,000 feet of death zone. Its peak has only one-third the oxygen available at sea level. As a result there have been 405 deaths recorded on Mount Everest to date, or about three deaths for every hundred times someone reaches the summit.

Mount Everest is chief among the mountains of the earth, but today Isaiah wants you to imagine yourself as having reached the summit of another mountain that has surpassed it. Today God wants us to behold an establishment beyond all the hills and mountains.

Isaiah sees a vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem. He sees a vision that illustrates the latter days in a way that the people of Judah can understand.

"This will take place in the latter days: The mountain of the LORD'S house will be established as the chief of the mountains. It will be raised above the hills." The mountain where the Lord's temple stood was called Mt. Moriah or Mt. Zion. It was on an elevated part of the same mountain where Jerusalem stood. The Lord wants the people of Judah to imagine this mountain shooting up to the sky so that it is chief among all the mountains, raised above all the

hills, taller than Mt. Hermon in northern Israel, taller than Mt. Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, taller than Mt. McKinley in Alaska, yes, even taller than Mt. Everest between China and Nepal.

Isaiah says the mountain of the Lord's house will be established in the latter days. When you say that something will be established at a certain time, that could mean one of two things. It could mean that it will begin to be established and finish being established at that time, or it could mean that it will already be established by the time that time comes. What Isaiah means is the second option. By the time the latter days he is talking about arrive on the scene, the mountain of the Lord's temple will already be firmly established as chief among the mountains.

So actually, God does not want the people of Judah and Jerusalem to imagine the people living in the latter days getting to watch the temple mount shoot into the sky, but to imagine them seeing it already fixed high in the sky.

That would be a fascinating picture all by itself, but the Lord wanted the people of Judah to let their imaginations run even more wild: "It will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it like a river." As they gaze at this established mountain, he wants them to imagine rivers forming and coming out from not just every continent, but from every nation within those continents. Those rivers flow from all over the world and lead to this new chief mountain in Jerusalem. There, at the foot of the mountain, all the rivers converge into one and— even more amazing than the picture of all these rivers flowing there from all over the world— this one converged river then flows uphill! It flows up to the very top of the mountain where the Lord's house sits.

And if that were not enough, these rivers don't consist of water, they consist of people, people from all nations streaming to this high elevation. "Many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. Then he will instruct us about his ways, and we will walk in his paths.'" Can you imagine how shocking this would have sounded to the people of Judah? Formerly, only the people of Israel and Judah would have said to each other, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD," together with a smattering of foreign converts, usually from neighboring nations or foreigners living within their nation. That's why the Lord's house is also called "the house of the God of Jacob."

But now the Lord tells them that in the latter days *many* peoples will say this. People from *all* nations will say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD." The Jewish people were formerly the majority of those who gathered for worship at the temple, but in the latter days they will be the minority, outnumbered by Gentile worshippers.

And why do these new worshipers go there? "He will instruct us about his ways, and we will walk in his paths." The temple of Jerusalem was not just a place of worship, but it was a place of instruction, as we see from the account of the boy Jesus in the temple, when Mary found him "in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions." So in the latter days, people from all nations will stream up to the mountain of the Lord to be taught by the Lord about his ways.

The "ways" of the Lord often designate the ways that distinguish him from all the false gods of the earth. So they designate especially the ways of his grace and love, the ways by which he decided from eternity to send and sacrifice his Son for our rebellion. People from every nation will want to learn these ways so that they may walk in God's paths. They will confess that up until they have gone up to the mountain of the Lord and are taught by him there, they will not

have not walked in God's paths, but in the paths of false gods. Only when they become familiar with God's grace can they truly walk in his paths and do what is right.

There are some Christians today who think that this prophecy should be understood literally. They think that a day is coming when the mountain where the temple stood in Jerusalem will actually shoot up into the sky, and that people from all nations will actually go and climb it in order to be taught at the site of this new temple. But Isaiah does not mean this literally. He is using this as a picture to describe how things will be in the latter days.

That is clear from Jesus's words to the Samaritan woman at the well. The woman told Jesus, "You Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

But Jesus replied, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. . . . [A] time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth." It is also clear from the next words of Isaiah: "For from Zion the law will go out, and the LORD'S word will go out from Jerusalem." If all the nations are literally and actually going to stream to the temple mountain in Jerusalem to be taught there, then it would be pointless for the word of the Lord to go out from Jerusalem.

No, these words make it clear that this awesome scene illustrates how things will be in the New Testament, since the time of the New Testament, officially begun at Pentecost, is the time meant by "the latter days." The temple is a picture of the Christian Church, the home of the gospel. The mountain of the Lord's house isn't just where sacrifices were made; it is where *the* sacrifice was made, where Jesus was crucified for the sins of the world just outside of Jerusalem on the same mountain. When Jesus died and rose, the mountain of the Lord's house was firmly established. God's gospel promises were fulfilled, so that the gospel could be preached confidently to all.

So when Isaiah says that all nations will stream to the the mountain of the Lord, he means that the good news of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection will go out to all nations, and that people from all nations will believe it.

"He will judge between the nations, and he will mediate for many peoples. Then they will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into blades for trimming vines. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, nor will they learn war anymore." There is an ethical debate that continues to take place among climbers of Mt. Everest and among those who know about climbing practices on Mt. Everest. The debate is this: If you come across a climber in distress on the top of Mt. Everest, should you help him or her, or not? You see, some climbing groups have passed by climbers in distress. The reasoning is that if they divert some of their time and resources into helping the distressed climbers in such a dangerously fragile environment, it might actually result in more harm to the helping group.

That debate will continue, but one thing is for sure: The higher in elevation one goes on earth, the less love people have for each other and the more they look out only for themselves.

On *this* mountain, though, it's the exact opposite. For all the people in all the nations whose hearts the gospel reaches, there is going to be an amazing effect: Hatred and hostility will cease and love will reign. We also should not understand this in a physical way, as if there will be physical peace throughout the earth. Jesus himself says that there will be wars and rumors of

wars right up to the end of time (Matt. 24:6). But this is another picture, illustrating the peace that will exist among believers, within the Christian Church.

Think about it: Some of the most hostile nations to Christianity include Somalia, Yemen, Libya, and Sudan, because of Muslim extremists who live and hold sway there. Christians are persecuted and killed there. Yet if you traveled to one of those nations and found Christians who were united in faith with you, they would welcome you into their homes as if you were their own blood relation, even though they are citizens of a country that is hostile toward your kind.

Think about this gathering: If you were not Christians, you would not all be getting together on your own, say, for coffee or cards. There are vastly different personalities in this room, and yet here you are together, worshipping one Lord, one Christ, raising your voices together in praise, lifting your voices together in prayer, harmonizing in confession of sins and in creed. There is no hatred among true Christians; there is no war among them. When it comes to the Christian Church, swords and spears are converted into farming tools, instruments of war are converted into implements of peace.

God does all of this with nothing more than his word, the Holy Scriptures. His word judges between people of many nations and settles disputes for many peoples. What once separated them is removed by the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

How beautiful is the kingdom of God, friends! How exceptional is the Christian Church! How far it goes beyond all other mountains and hills! How far it surpasses all the other religions on earth! Only the religion of the Bible is worth swimming upstream for, yes, even when that stream flows up the side of a mountain. Every other religious mountain and hill is one that has not already been established. It is constantly in the process of being established on the sweat and blood, on the good works, of those who dwell there. And even after they have expended their sweat and blood for their entire life, their mountain doesn't even begin to approach the height and beauty of the one you are on.

Only here on the mountain of the Lord, only here in the Christian Church, do we learn of God's unfailing and unconditional love for us. Only here do we learn that he forgives our sins freely and for nothing, for Jesus's sake. Only here is our hostility toward God removed, when we learn that he loves us in spite of our natural hatred for him. Only here is our hostility toward each other removed, when we experience God's unconditional love for us, which moves us to love each other the same way.

Just as all the particles of water in a stream or river converge and flow together toward the same goal, so also the word of the Lord, when it goes out from the Christian Church, brings more people into the stream that rushes up to Mount Zion, so that they are united in one goal—to give glory to the God of their salvation.

I said that this picture was not to be taken literally, and it shouldn't be this side of heaven. But on Judgment Day, on the last day of the latter days, this picture will be a pretty accurate one even according to what we see. Believers from every nation on earth will be raised from the dead and they will all flow up and converge at the entrance to the gates of heaven, the eternal Mt. Zion. There they will stream in to be with Jesus Christ forever.

But in order to enjoy that establishment beyond this hills there, we must remain in the establishment beyond the hills here. We must make use of the word of God going out from Zion.

We must cling to it in faith. We must treasure the sacraments that are instituted by that word and connected to that word. For wherever these are found—the Word and the sacraments—there you will behold the establishment beyond the hills, the Holy Christian Church. And through faith in Jesus, whom the Word and the sacraments bring to you, you will not merely behold this establishment from afar. You yourself will be established on it; you will be a part of it.

And so we not only rejoice in *Jesus's* coming in his word, but we encourage *each other* to come: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. Then he will instruct us about his ways, and we will walk in his paths. . . . O house of Jacob, come, and let us walk in the light of the LORD.” Amen.