

Mountains to *Move*

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Preface



This work is a sequel to another book about the life and teachings of Jesus. It is a continuation of the story of the early church and the many obstacles it confronted. On one occasion during his ministry, Jesus told the apostles that if they had faith as great as a mustard seed, they could say to a mountain, “Get up and be cast into the sea,” and it would be done. In the light of all the beautiful figures of speech that Jesus used, this one seems to follow that course. There would be no great value in moving a mountain into the sea or anywhere else, so what could he have meant? The contention of this work is that he was talking about the great hindrances, the almost impossible barriers that would confront the apostles and others in the early church. Some of them were external, and some had to do with internal attitudes. In fact, the very size of the daunting task would make many feel that it was futile to even start. If the figures are anywhere close to accurate, about 120 individuals were being asked to go out and conquer the world. That looked impossible, not only because of the fantastic odds they faced, but because of the many racial, cultural, and religious obstacles that they were to face. Instead of talking about literal mountains, Jesus was probably indicating that, with faith, they could accomplish tasks that appeared to be overwhelming. They confronted much opposition, but with faith and the empowering of the Holy Spirit, they did move mountains.

This work will use the New Revised Standard Version of the New Testament as the base material. There are several reasons for this choice. First, the text is translated from the best Greek texts available, using recent manuscript discoveries. The use of textual criticism is an ongoing effort, and therefore offers the best texts available. Second, living languages are constantly changing. The King James Version may present some beautiful old English, but the message may be blurred because of language changes. Once, just after the Revised Standard Version came out and numerous arguments were being offered against it, I was talking with a man about the need for new translations. He told me, “If the King James was good enough for Paul, it is good enough for me.” Needless to say, the discussion

ended at that point. When that type of ignorance prevails, there is little possibility of learning. Ignorance simply means a lack of knowledge and understanding, and every person is ignorant in areas where expertise is lacking. It is not the same as mental inability or stupidity. So the claim for constant diligence in making better translations should be obvious. As an example, in I Thessalonians 4:15, where Paul discusses the concept of resurrection of the dead and the return of the Lord, the KJV translates the verse as, "We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep." In the modern era, "prevent" has lost its former meaning and now means "to stop" or "hinder." But any student probably knows that in 1611 C.E., the term "prevent" meant "to go before." So from the KJV the verse seems to indicate that, in some sense, Paul was saying that in no way could those who are alive hinder those who have already died, as if literally (and that was the thought in those days) it meant that those who are alive could stand on the graves or bar the doors of a tomb and keep the resurrection of those who have died from happening. That was not Paul's message, but language barriers can distort the message.

This work, then, is an effort to show some of the problems the early church faced and to demonstrate how those issues were solved. It will use as a framework the book of Acts, and when issues arise such as those that brought about the book of Galatians and the Corinthian correspondence, it will include them. The scripture texts will be indicated but will not be printed. This is a running narrative of what appears to have been happening in the early church. Often, one hears someone say that they would like to have lived in the early days of the church, when there were no problems. That kind of statement betrays a lack of knowledge about the struggles, both internal and external, that beset the early church. What follows is a result of a class taught in two different universities and to numerous church groups. There will always be a great debt owed to my college and seminary professors and to many insightful students who contributed to this study through many penetrating questions.

It will become evident that, to this writer, the kind of exclusiveness and the legalistic position that developed from the time of Ezra became a huge impediment. While one can sympathize with Ezra and perhaps sense how legalism developed, the experience of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph had been that of faith and following in obedience. Most likely such a rigid legalistic system was never God's intention, for all genuine devotees had followed in faith. In one sense, "legalism" hijacked fundamental Judaism and, therefore, presented a major mountain for the pioneer followers.

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