

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 19 – Year B

RCL Readings¹ – Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 116:1-8; James 3:1-12; Mark 8:27-38

ACNA Readings – Isaiah 50:4-9; Psalm 116:1-9 (10-19); James 2:1-18; Mark 9:14-29

Seasonal Introduction. The Christian calendar revolves around two principal feasts: Christmas (involving Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany) and Easter (involving Lent, Easter, and Pentecost). However, throughout the year there are also smaller feasts. The 14th of September is a feast commemorating the Holy Cross. The Collect for Holy Cross Day echoes Mark 8:34. “Almighty God, whose Son our Saviour Jesus Christ was lifted high upon the cross that He might draw the whole world to Himself: Mercifully grant that we, who glory in the mystery of our redemption, may have grace to take up our cross and follow him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.”

Common Theme. It is not enough to speak the right words, we must be willing to live in accordance with those words. We will find ourselves in drastically different situations throughout our life: if we find ourselves facing death we should be willing to take up our cross and follow our Lord and master if we proclaim Him as such; if we face spiritual warfare we should be willing to persist in prayer and faithfulness as we turn to God; and if we are teachers, either in the church or at home, we should not let our words be both for good and evil.

Hebraic Context. The declaration by Peter that Jesus is the Messiah, also known as the Confession of Peter, occurs in all three of the Synoptic Gospels. Luke's account (Luke 9:18-20) does not record the location, but Mark and Matthew tell us this occurred in the region of Caesarea Philippi. Geography is theology—place and location matter to the narrative and add nuance and insight to the message of the story. Jesus could have asked this question of who He was to His disciples at any time and in any place, but Jesus deliberately chose Caesarea Philippi.

Caesarea Philippi is in the Golan Heights of northern Israel in the ancient territory of the tribe of Dan.² The city of Caesarea Philippi was predominantly a pagan Gentile city with the Jewish city of Dan not too far away. The city of Caesarea Philippi was nestled around a large rocky outcrop 100 feet high and 500 feet across. At the base of the rock was a limestone cave which sheltered a spring that is one of the important tributaries of the Jordan river and the Sea of Galilee.

Various temples and cults became associated with the area and were constructed at the bottom of the rock. Four of these major temples were: Pan, the nature god, the temple of Caesar

¹ Alternate RCL Readings: Proverbs 1:20-33; Psalms 19 or Wisdom of Solomon 7:26-8:1

² Today, Caesarea Philippi is called Baniyas, named after the Greek god Pan (during the early Islamic rule of the Levant, the name changed from Paneas to Baniyas as Arabic doesn't use the “P” sound). In Greek mythology Pan was a god of nature, often depicted as a Satyr—a half-man and half-goat. An inscription to Pan found here solidified the connection between the worship of Pan and the region.

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Augustus (representing human rulers as gods), Nymph the goddess of sex, pleasure and immorality, and Nemesis the goddess of vengeance. It was there, in this location of paganism representing nature, self deification, immorality, and violence that Jesus asked the question “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

Another feature of Caesarea Philippi is its location in the north. Historically the enemies of Israel have often attacked from the north. Prophetically the north was a place of fear and anticipation of the coming enemy. However the north had also become synonymous as a place of redemption.³ This idea that north was synonymous with hope and redemption was developed further in the Psalms. Psalm 75:6 says, “exaltation does not come from the east or west nor from the south”. The only direction left is the north.

David noted in Psalm 48 that the city of the great King lies to the north. And as the prophet Isaiah would declare, the northern lands of Zebulun and Naphtali would be the first in Israel to “see a great light”. This possibly explains why Jesus began His ministry in the Galilee after His initial 40 days in the wilderness and the baptism of John. It was in the north, in Caesarea Philippi, that Peter declared Jesus as Messiah and from there Jesus would set his face towards Jerusalem and redemption through His own sacrifice.

Isaiah 50:4-9a. This passage is the third of four “Servant Songs”, often thought to depict the career of the LORD’s servant. The four poems, Isaiah 42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-11, and 52:13-53:12, open and close with God speaking of His servant while the middle two speak from the perspective of the servant.

However, between Isaiah 49:1-6 and 50:4-11 is a narrative of consolation.⁴ Yes, Israel had fallen away and the consequence was severe chastisement through the Assyrian (and soon the Babylonian) conquest and exile. He asked several rhetorical questions, “Can a woman forget her nursing child?” The answer is that, yes, in this world of sin and horror even a mother might not have compassion for her child. But, hallelujah, God would not forget His children—he would bring them back from captivity. “Where is your mother’s certificate of divorce?” Of course, God gave no certificate of divorce—God is a faithful God who keeps His covenants. The context for verses 4-9 is that clearly God has neither abandoned nor divorced Israel, despite their sin they remain His people and He will be faithful to His covenantal promises to the Patriarchs.

³ Leviticus 1:11 commanded the Israelites to offer their sacrifices to the north of the altar. No explanation was given as to the reason for this. In terms of the order of worship and the methodology of sacrifice, the worshipper began his restoration process with the Lord from “the north”.

⁴ Isaiah 49-50 is one of the seven *Haftarot* of Consolation—seven readings from the Prophets that are read on the Sabbaths following the 9th of Av (the day marking the destruction of the Temples in Jerusalem). They are read to remind people of the grace of God following the clear chastisement of God and leading up to Yom Kippur, the most solemn day in the Jewish calendar.

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The person speaking is unclear, it could, of course, be the prophet (Isaiah) but it could also refer to the Messiah.⁵ In order to console the people of Israel, the servant was given “the tongue of those who are taught” and an ear “to hear as those who are taught.” Many have ears to hear but not as one taught, not as a true disciple.⁶ In hearing and speaking, there was an action—the servant helped those who were weary.⁷ He was also able to maintain his faith even in the midst of the worst of trials.⁸

Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel all speak of people with ears who do not hear, people with eyes to see and yet they do not see. This isn't acceptable—not listening to God as a disciple will result in punishment. But God's servant would also suffer because of those who would not listen. Isaiah 50:6 gave a glimpse of what God's servant would suffer. Isaiah 53 would go into even greater detail. And the Gospels recorded the punishment Jesus endured from the Romans. The question for us is, if Jesus heard the voice of God, then spoke that word to us, do we hear the word of the Messiah? This song painfully revealed the rejection that the servant would suffer. Do we cause His suffering or are we able to endure our own trials because we are His disciples?

⁵ Mark 15:19, along with Matthew 26:67, seem to reference Isaiah 50:6 in relation to Jesus' obedience to God in the midst of His trial.

⁶ Several translations, particularly the NASB, translate לַמּוֹד (limud) as disciple. *Talmud* (instruction and teachings on the Scriptures) and *talmidim* (students, disciples) are both related to the word. The Greek translation used παιδείας (paideias), the training, education, and particularly the discipline in raising a child.

⁷ Isaiah 50:4 uses a word only found once in Scripture, לַעוֹת (la'ut). Most often translated as sustain, comfort, or speak, it seems likely that it was simply a misspelt word in the Masoretic text. When comparing the same passage with 1QIsaiah and various translations such as the Latin Vulgate, it could be something like “to answer” from ענה (ana). Regardless of the precise word used, Matthew 11:28 stated that Jesus does sustain those who are weary and heavy-laden.

⁸ The servant, or the Messiah, was to be a scholar—well-trained in the Word of the LORD. Instead of ignorance towards God's Torah, the servant looked to it and could turn to God through His word in all seasons.

Jesus, even as a child, was incredibly well studied in the Torah and throughout His life He lived by it. As an adult, He was able to fight against Satan by the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And as Jesus went to the cross, he did not turn backwards nor rebel—in His moment of worldly disgrace, Jesus was not disgraced at all. If Jesus, who has a greater relationship with God than we can imagine, was a disciple of the Scriptures surely we too should be knowledgeable as His disciples.

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Psalm 116:1-8.^{9 10} The Psalmist started the Psalm as many Psalms, calling out to God in praise and hope from a place of deep distress. Neither the author nor the specific event was mentioned, allowing this call to be appropriate for anyone needing to speak of the Lord's goodness even in times of trouble and anguish. As every Israelite was supposed to remember themselves in the story of the Passover in Egypt, God's deliverance from a place of slavery and death, this should have been immediately relevant for every man, woman, and child. The response by the psalmist, and any who saw God's redemption, was to "walk before the Lord in the land of the living".

Verse 12 is a rhetorical question: What can I return to the Lord for all His goodness to me? Obviously, nothing. We are servants of the LORD—the maker of all things who gave us all that we have. But also, obviously, we must give Him something. The psalmist vowed to take up the "cup of salvation". In the Passover Seder that was developing in the 2nd Temple Period, this was the cup of blessing.¹¹ The Psalmist gave God thanks and blessing for all that God did—to do otherwise, in Jewish tradition, was to be a thief.

The Psalmist wouldn't simply stop with words though, for words alone are meaningless or outright lies if not backed up by action. The psalmist also would fulfill his oaths to God. One common vow, often made daily before the Lord, was the proclamation of the *Sh'ma*—an oath of loyalty to God from Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

This too, obviously wasn't enough when compared to the goodness of God. The psalmist would also bring sacrifices of thank offerings to the Lord. He would do so publicly—not to show off, although it would show that the Psalmist was, indeed, loyal to God, but in communion with the others who came to worship God.

While the psalm celebrates deliverance from death, the psalmist also acknowledged that death is still a reality for the people of God. When that day does arrive for death to take the saints, the Lord is there and holds their deaths as something precious and not something to be

⁹ ACNA includes 9-19

¹⁰ Psalm 116 is one of the six psalms, Psalm 113-118 known as the Egyptian Hallel. Hallel, like Hallelujah comes from the verb to praise. This collection of psalms has been thought to be used by the Jewish people when celebrating the three pilgrim festivals of Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot. After the destruction of the second Temple, they were incorporated into the liturgy of the Passover Seder, known as the *Haggadah* (the Telling). The author is not provided, only that they are a "servant" of the LORD.

¹¹ We not only don't have an author, we also don't have a date for Psalm 116. However, several Psalms were written in the exilic as well post-exilic periods. We also don't know precisely when wine became part of the Passover Seder. It was certainly common in the time of Jesus and commanded in the Mishnah as part of the Seder. But, while the four cups of wine in Genesis 40 and the four promises of God in Exodus 6:6-7 are often mentioned in relation to the four cups of wine in the Seder, it was likely that the tradition developed during the exilic period into something more formulaic by the end of the 2nd Temple period.

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overlooked. “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints”. We, as His servants, should be willing to return to God all the good that He has given us—including our lives.

James 3:1-12. James continued his message about the tongue through the discussion of teachers. Teachers play a vital role in the Church today, as they have done throughout history. But, as vital as a teacher's role is in the church, their tongues have so often throughout history poisoned everything good they had previously worked to create.¹² This isn't a critique of a profession but rather a sober warning to those who desire to teach the household of faith.¹³

Our words have consequences, and what we teach will bear fruit for good or for evil within the community. James says that those who instruct the people of God should take that responsibility most seriously because they have a stricter accountability to God the judge. The majority of this passage illustrates the power of the tongue. Words may appear innocent and inconsequential at first but, like sparks that start forest fires and rudders that guide ships, their effects can have far-reaching repercussions. James concluded this passage by echoing Jesus' teaching that we will be known by our fruits (Matt 7:15-20). Our words can both bless and curse, but they should not do both. A freshwater spring should only produce good, clear water, not brackish muck. Our true character is known through the fruit of our actions and in the words that we say.

Mark 8:27-38. The Gospels are finely crafted texts. They recorded not only what Jesus said but also the location where he said it. Location is important as geography is often connected to theology.¹⁴ Jesus intentionally went to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. It was a very pagan and Hellenistic location, a long day and half journey from the Sea of Galilee—it was also the capital of Herod Philip, one of the Herodian Tetrarchs. This well known pagan, idol-worshipping city was where Jesus asked His disciples the fundamental question, “Who do people say that I am?”

¹² As teachers are such a vital role, it would be prudent to choose good teachers. The apostle Paul provided some advice on choosing good leaders for our communities in his letters to Titus and Timothy. In those epistles he described the characteristics for good leaders. While being charismatic and knowledgeable is certainly important to teaching, having a college degree or being the foremost authority on a particular theology wasn't the most important quality of a teacher—the character and faithfulness of the applicant were far more important.

¹³ This holds true for everyone in the church. [Too] many pastors and famous teachers might have become infamous for their prideful downfall, but more people are hurt in the church every day as parents teach one thing and proceed to stumble as they cause a metaphorical fire to erupt in their own house through their own unrighteousness.

¹⁴ See Hebraic Context.

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The disciples' answers varied, perhaps Jesus was a reincarnated John the Baptist (nevermind that they were only six months apart in age and worked simultaneously for some time).¹⁵ Others mentioned that, perhaps, Jesus was Elijah—the forerunner of the Messiah.¹⁶ This would imply that some disciples thought they were living within the end times.

This question of 'Who do you say that I am?' is a question that we are all required to answer. In Caesarea Philippi, many tongues would have confessed that Caesar was lord or that nature and pleasure were lord. We are surrounded by a secular culture that no longer recognizes truth for what it is. And in this secular society we, like Peter, are required to confess that Jesus is the Messiah—not only a prophet, or a miracle worker, or a good teacher and generally all-around nice guy, but the Messiah and Lord!¹⁷

Jesus, in response to the confession of Peter, turned to the book of Daniel to explain what would soon happen—the son of man would suffer and die. In Daniel 7, the Son of Man approached the throne of heaven and was acknowledged by the Ancient of Days and given the dominion of the kingdoms of the world. Later, Jewish traditions linked the Son of Man with the Messiah. However, perplexingly to many, the Messiah in Daniel 9:24-26 is 'cut off', indicating a sudden death.¹⁸

Jesus' plain teaching regarding the Son of Man's impending end shook the messianic expectations of the disciples. According to the more popular view in the early first century this was not something that the Messiah was supposed to do. Redemption and God's Kingdom meant the overthrow of the oppressor, not suffering at the hands of the oppressor. And surely

¹⁵ Judaism believed that the soul is eternal and survives beyond death. Traditionally, this belief was taught in relation to the World to Come and a physical resurrection of the body. However, a lesser held belief related to the transmigration of the soul—that is, not all souls immediately returned to heaven but would sometimes pass into other humans. In modern Judaism, this is known as גלגול נשמה (*galgol n'shama*) with roots coming from Kabbalistic Judaism and, sadly, reincarnation is a common belief among certain groups in Israel.

¹⁶ Malachi 4:5 is quite clear that Elijah will come before the Day of the LORD, which, itself, is commonly associated with the coming of the Messiah.

¹⁷ Messiah, or *Christos* in the LXX, was originally used in Leviticus to describe the high priest as the anointed priest of God. Later, it was also applied to the king as the LORD's anointed. During the 2nd Temple period, the term shifted from a simple descriptor for an ordained position into the title for the hoped for redeemer (a specific individual rather than whichever person holds a specific position). Both the Psalms and Daniel played a large role in this transition, but, even though the Messiah was not a common term in the prophets, it also became attached to many prophecies. The promised one who would come to save Israel and usher in the end of days and the world-to-come.

¹⁸ The day of the LORD, or the end of days, that the Messiah would usher in wasn't necessarily a good time even for Israel. But the Messiah would also suffer before He came as the Son of Man. See also Mark 13 and 14:60-65

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the one with all authority from God wouldn't be rejected or suffer—He certainly would not be killed.

Almost predictably Peter, having publicly acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah—the Son of Man who was given everlasting dominion—rebuked Jesus. The relationship between a rabbi and student was already supposed to be filled with diligence and obedience from the student. A student was not greater than his master, and yet Peter's response was even worse in relation to his previous statement. And so Jesus rebuked Peter for only thinking about the things of man.¹⁹

Contained within the call of discipleship is the paradoxical teaching of Jesus. The path of salvation involves self-sacrifice and not personal ambition and power. The Messiah himself would demonstrate this through His suffering and death and so bring redemption and life everlasting. To the world, it does seem foolish to say that life will come from death, yet for a follower of Jesus, a resurrection life can only proceed from a dying life. From a place of idolatry and cultural power Jesus made His declaration and followed through on turning His face towards Jerusalem to walk the way of the cross. He is our example.²⁰

ACNA Readings

James 2:1-18. James continued to speak of religion that is meaningless from his discussion on widows and orphans. God neither shows partiality nor takes bribes (Deuteronomy 10:17). We who profess to believe in Him and walk in His ways, then, should also not show partiality. Within the family of God, there are men and women, rich and poor. James highlighted and rebuked the preferential treatment of rich and poor members of God in the assembly.^{21 22}

Our admiration for those who have achieved financial success should not come at the expense of our treatment of those who have not.²³ James reminded us, as does much of Church history,

¹⁹ We too have a master, a king—the creator of the universe. Jesus has told us what to do and yet, too often, we presume to tell Jesus what is right. Sometimes we choose to say that our culture is better than His commandments, sometimes we presume that our prayers are more important than what God is doing, and often I assume that my way and my thoughts must be the way and thoughts of God.

²⁰ Our response to “Who do you say that I am?” has eternal consequences. First, we have to answer the question correctly. But second, we must follow through and not deny Jesus, ashamed of His way in a world that is utterly resistant to the truth. Rather we must deny ourselves and follow in His example.

²¹ The believers, as part of the twelve tribes living in diaspora, were Jewish and were meeting in the Synagogue (συναγωγὴν) according to James 2:2. This was, and continued to be, the place of study and fellowship for many in the early Church.

²² In Leviticus 19:15, just before what James would shortly quote, there is also the statement that preferential treatment should not be given to the poor above the rich.

²³ If we are to honour someone in our community it should not be the ones who have temporal riches because of their temporal riches but rather those who do the work of God regardless of whether they

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that it is the poor who respond most readily to the Gospel. Wealth should not be a hindrance to the Good News—sadly, many times it can be.²⁴ To make his argument that we should show no partiality, James quoted from Leviticus 19, “Love your neighbour as yourself.”

James calls this the royal law.²⁵ As one of the two precepts that the entirety of Torah and the Prophets is fulfilled in, it is certainly important to the one who commanded it—the King of all creation, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile. The poor are just as much our neighbour as the rich and need to be treated as equals and in equal fashion. What we say and profess to believe should be supported by our behaviour, and this is not limited to the equal treatment of people.

This passage of Scripture teaches that not only should we avoid discrimination and practice egalitarianism, but it highlights the contrast between a living faith and a lifeless faith. This is summed up in James' question: can faith without good works save you? Our faith in the Lord should be expressed in our behaviour through *imitatio Dei*, the imitation of God. We should endeavour to imitate all of God's character and embrace all of God's instructions in Scripture.

James also warns us to guard against selective obedience of God's commands. Obeying the command not to murder does not give us license to disobey the command against adultery. God cares about His whole law, including the prohibition against favouritism. Our behaviour should support our words in all things. James provided the example that we cannot simply say to people, ‘be warm or be fed’ and expect them to be so. To fail a brother or sister in the most simple of good deeds, like giving food or shelter, reflects the heart of someone without a living faith. That is a serious statement! Faith alone saves, but that faith must be a living faith—after all, even the demons believe.

Mark 9:14-29. The incident in which the disciples failed to heal a boy possessed by a spirit was recorded in all the Synoptic gospels. Each account notes that this occurred after the transfiguration and all confirm that there was a large crowd. However, only Mark referenced the disputes between the disciples (likely those who had not gone up the mountain with Jesus) and the scribes. Jesus turned to them and asked what the dispute was about.²⁶

have temporal riches or not. God will not judge us by our IQ or business acumen. Rather, we are all called to love our neighbour as ourself with practical, actionable love.

²⁴ See Matthew 19:16-30

²⁵ There doesn't appear to be any other literature detailing this particular title to Leviticus 19:18, however, Jesus had previously said it was like unto, “Love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, and might.” And Paul also stated, “The whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” Most Jewish scholars in the 2nd Temple and Mishnaic period understood the importance of Leviticus 19:18. See also Hebraic Perspective.

²⁶ It is not clear who Jesus asked, the disciples, the scribes, or the crowd. Regardless, it wasn't the disciples that answered, but rather someone from the crowd.

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Apparently, the failure of Jesus' disciples to cast out the demon had resulted in an argument with scribes. Exactly what the argument was is not explained but the commotion attracted the attention of Jesus and a large crowd. Jesus criticized those around Him for their inability to exorcize the evil spirit—not only couldn't the disciples free the child but neither could the scribes who they were debating.²⁷

Mark didn't include all the details about the destructive nature of the demon on the child's life right from the beginning, as Matthew did, but emphasized that the spirit within the boy made him mute.²⁸ When Jesus admonished the "faithless generation". Just as before, it is not obviously apparent who Jesus was chastising—the disciples, the scribes, or the crowds. Each group actually showed faith in one way or another. The disciples followed and learned from Jesus, they went to synagogues and studied the Torah, as did many in the crowds. Many scribes would have spent their lifetime pursuing the practical way to follow the Torah. Faithless, it would seem, means something other than having no faith at all. The distraught father summed up the tension for us when he appealed to Jesus, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

After Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and raised the child up, the disciples went to Jesus in private to ask Him about their failure with the evil spirit. Jesus replied that the demon would only leave through prayer.²⁹ The foundation of faith and belief is a prayerful relationship with the Lord. Studying God's word is excellent. Community worship is wonderful and appropriate. These things must not be ignored, however prayer is essential to a living relationship with the living God. This isn't speaking of a prayer, but prayer that lasts through the night—continually devoting oneself to prayer. This is faithful prayer.³⁰

Hebraic Perspective. Following a failed attempt by the disciples of Jesus to cast out a demon from a spirit possessed boy, Jesus proceeded to chide them on their level of faith as a "faithless generation". In the parallel passage from Matthew, He then declared that should you possess faith as small as a mustard seed (which is quite small indeed), then you could say to a mountain 'move' and it would move. Jesus finished by stating that, "Nothing will be impossible for you."

What an amazing thing to say. And what a rebuke to His disciples for their lack of faith. This occurred shortly after Peter, James, and John had witnessed the glory of Jesus and heard

²⁷ Exorcists were uncommon but certainly were still known within 2nd Temple Judaism.

²⁸ Many considered a mute demon to be particularly difficult to exorcize as it was believed that the naming of the demon was important for the exorcism and, as a mute, it could not divulge its name. Later books, such as the Testament of Solomon, expanded this concept. When Jesus exorcized the spirit, He mentioned that the demon was not only mute but also deaf, and so wouldn't even hear the exorcist speak. And yet Jesus had no trouble showing His authority over the spirit.

²⁹ Some manuscripts added "prayer and fasting".

³⁰ See Hebraic Perspective on faith.

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God's voice on the mountain as Jesus was transfigured. But they still failed to expel the demon from the boy. How could they have such little faith after seeing and hearing the miraculous?

We often read this saying of Jesus, that with faith you can speak to a mountain and it will move, and think of the miraculous and instantaneous expansion of the gospel. A literal interpretation of Matthew's text implies that even a drop of faith should be enough for the believer to speak to the earth and have it move. The problem with taking this literally is that this has never actually happened.³¹ When we return the Gospels back into their historical context, what we call the Hebraic roots of the Christian faith, we realize that at the time of Jesus they had actually moved real mountains.

King Herod had ordered the construction of a desert palace fortress called Herodium. This construction involved the removal of an actual mountain in the hill territory of Judah, stone by stone, and relocating it to a new strategic location which was an artificial hill not far from Bethlehem. The process was long and arduous, requiring the application of new technologies and the overcoming of many obstacles, but it was ultimately successful.

In Jewish tradition when words first appear in the Scriptures, the context in which they appear will give that word a nuance and meaning that will always remain with that word. The word faith in Hebrew is *emunah* and first appears in Exodus 17:12. The Amalekites had been attacking the weak and elderly of Israel for some time as they travelled towards Mount Sinai to hear from God for the first time. The Israelites were no longer slaves, but they still had no idea how to fight against the Amalekites. And so Joshua was tasked with fighting the Amalekites while Moses stood on a hill and held his hands up. As long as Moses could keep his hands in the air, Israel would prevail. But whenever he could no longer hold his hands in the air the Amalekites started to prevail.

Exodus 17:12 says that Moses held his hands up "steadfastly". The word translated as steadfast here is *emunah*—literally, "his hands were faith until the going down of the sun". We learn from this that faith is not something that remains in your head as a system of doctrines and beliefs. We know that even demons believe that Jesus is the Son of God and yet they have no faith. In the Hebraic perspective faith is the persistent, steadfast application and walking out of belief and trust in the Lord.³²

³¹ Despite the clear evidence that many Christians are faithful and have faith in God, no one has ever visited the Pyrenees only to discover that they are no longer there. "Oh, those darn Christians are at it again, now would you please put that back!"

³² Try a quick exercise. Grab a staff, or a dumbbell, and hold it up for as long as you can.

Then look at your husband or wife, parents or children and put your arms back in the air. Remain faithful. It's painful, almost impossible. But you will do it to save their life until your arms collapse. When that happens, find someone to help you hold your arms up.

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Concerning faith and mountains, Jesus entrusted His disciples to remain steadfast and persistent in all that we do for the kingdom. The disciples had difficulty in casting out a demon from the child. They had cast out demons before. What they should not have done here was give up trying when they encountered resistance. A mountain might be large and looming, but it can eventually come down stone by stone and be rebuilt anywhere we choose, one stone at a time. With resolute steadfastness nothing is impossible for the people of God.³³

³³ While a literal interpretation of Matthew's text might imply that even a drop of faith should be enough for the believer to speak to the earth and have it move, understanding it in this Hebraic context is also quite literal and better fits what the disciples would have known.