

Embellishing, or decorating the note in music, is similar to the embellishment of the furniture, art, and architecture of the Baroque period (1600-1750). In Baroque music, we sometimes find a motif that “just won’t quit.” With this *aria*, the tenor sings an exaggerated expansion of the word “exalted.” This is a *melisma*, a musical style in which many notes are sung to one syllable of a word. Key words are extended over several notes or phrases, almost stretched beyond recognition, which is similar to the ornate style characterized by the highly decorated pieces of furniture of the Baroque era.⁷ Notice how many notes are used for the word “exalted” in this *melisma*:

Did you count those notes? (I counted 48, not including the tied notes.) Singing this phrase requires the voice to exhibit tremendous control, flexibility, and agility to enable the phrase to sound fluid. It is definitely *virtuoso* passage work, requiring a great deal of practice for the tenor who sings this *aria*.

⁷ Randel, 498.

The *Contemporary English Version* of the Bible for this text uses these words:

Fill in the valleys;
flatten every hill and mountain.
Level the rough and rugged ground.
(Isaiah 40:4)

The valleys will be leveled, the mountains will be lowered, and steep heights and rough ridges will be filled in to create a smooth plain. Again, in his article in *The Interpreters' Bible*, Muilenburg tells us that “the poetry of the metaphors should not be linked with topography,”⁸ even though it is a natural assumption. These mountains and valleys simply represent difficulties that are political, psychological, and physical in the exiles’ lives. They are also metaphors for *our* trials in life, the vicissitudes of *our* daily existence. We know that it is the pebbles which cause the most trouble by getting in the way, making us stumble and fall. God can certainly write His purposes right with a crooked pencil. With God, impossible barriers will be conquered, and the King of Glory will come again.

Let us live with an air of expectancy, an air of confidence about some impending event, and an air of anticipating the profound change that is about to take place. It is hope that rises above the seemingly insurmountable truths of reality. God seeks to help each of us weary and wounded travelers. This thought is inherently democratic: it’s open to all. What are your obstacles of today that get in the way of returning to God? What mountains do you find insurmountable, or valleys too low? What rocky roads are tripping you up? What are the giants that block you from overcoming your personal mountains of fear, doubt, and worry?

This is eschatological imagery. A big word . . . eschatology. This word even sounds “other-worldly,” or “in the future.” The eschatological orientation of the verses suggests these themes of creation, history, and redemption; and the pictures are extremely powerful. Nature is being transformed at the divine event, with the hills and valleys participating. God is the central figure from the beginning to the end. Israel’s life and destiny are dynamically involved in the *events* through which God manifests Himself. The purpose of God is the dominant motif in these words, and there is tension until His will is ultimately fulfilled. We are near the END of our own ways and the beginning of His rule for us. When we perceive this dominant theme, the intent becomes apparent.⁹

⁸ Muilenburg, 426.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 388.