

**Hebrews 12:18-29**  
**September 18, 2016**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Two weeks ago I introduced this passage of Scripture by using an analogy of being a part of a homeowner's association. A HOA is formed to enforce the deed restrictions and protect the value of the community assets, one of which is your home. So when you become a resident within a community that has homeowner's association, you are agreeing to do your part to be a good citizen who honors the rules of the HOA for the greater of good of the community.

**Transition:** Today we will continue the theme that we are citizens of God's kingdom and there are some guidelines we need to follow to help us function in this community well. Because God is over His kingdom, He has certain "homeowners association" rules of conduct. All of us CAN show our highest respect and reverence to God BY exercising the RESPONSIBILITIES He gave us to be exemplary citizens in His kingdom. So we will pick up where we left off and look for other responsibilities we have to be exemplary citizens of God's Kingdom. Let's read it.

**BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Heb 12:18-24]**

V.18:

- You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm;

V.19:

- to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them,

V.20:

- because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned."

V.21:

- The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."

V.22:

- But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly,

V.23:

- to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect,

V.24:

- to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

**Process Observations/Questions:**

Q v.18-21: What scenario is the author referencing in these verses? [X-REF Ex 19:10-22 – When the Lord called Moses for the giving of the Law.]

Q: How did the Israelites feel when it was obvious that God descended upon Mt. Sinai? [Afraid, they trembled!]

Q: We just read how the “whole mountain trembled violently” in v.18. Has anyone in here ever been in an earthquake? [Two weeks ago my friends in KS were lighting up FB with a bunch of “did you feel that?!!” Most everyone were still in their beds early in the morning when this happened. Their beds started to move, loose items fell off shelves, hanging light fixtures were swinging, and many expressed fear. I happened to be sitting in my Lazy-Boy chair in the master bedroom having my quiet time, and I happened to notice that two sets of blinds started to move laterally. The a/c didn’t just come on, nor has it been known to cause blinds to move laterally when it does turn on! I just thought, “That was odd.”]

Q: I want you to imagine being one of the Israelites on the day God called Moses up to the top of Mt. Sinai. How would you have felt if you saw smoke billowing up like smoke from a furnace and then felt the “whole mountain tremble violently?” [We’d be just like them! Is the earth getting ready to open up swallow me? Is something getting ready to fall on me and crush me to death?]

Transition: The author took his readers down memory lane to establish that their forefathers had a relationship with God through the Old Covenant where there was the giving of the law. The relationship specified in the Old Covenant was that of Israel’s being God’s possession, or His special treasure. They were going to be set apart as a holy nation. And from that point on, they had to keep the Law, and when they sinned or broke it, the priests had to go before God and atone for the sins of God’s people by shedding the blood of unblemished animals.

Q v.22-24: The author then proceeds to tell them why they have it so good! He contrasts Mt. Sinai and the giving of the Law with the heavenly Mt. Zion and the blessings of grace in the church (see Ex. 19:10–25; 20:18–21; Deut. 4:10–24) that came with the New Covenant. Let’s start tagging them...

- They got to be a citizen of Mt. Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. [Mt. Zion represents the New Covenant of grace in Jesus Christ (see Gal. 4:19–31); The heavenly city is God’s Mt. Zion (see Pss. 2; 110:1–2, 4). This is the city that the patriarchs were looking for by faith (Heb. 11:10, 14–17)]
- You are now a member of the church of the firstborn where “thousands upon thousands of angels gather in joyful assembly. Your names are written in heaven. [He described the “citizens” that make up the population of this city. Innumerable angels are there. The church is there, for believers have their citizenship in heaven (Phil. 3:20) and their names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20).]
- You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect (the Old Testament saints).
- You have come to JESUS, the mediator of a New Covenant (the One who shed His blood for us), which speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Q: What does the author mean when he says that Christ’s blood speaks “better things than that of Abel” (Heb. 12:24)? [Abel’s blood spoke from the earth and cried for justice (Gen. 4:10), while

Christ's blood speaks from heaven and announces mercy for sinners. Abel's blood made Cain feel guilty (and rightly so) and drove him away in despair (Gen. 4:13–15); but Christ's blood frees us from guilt and has opened the way into the presence of God. Were it not for the blood of the New Covenant, we could not enter this heavenly city!

**[Read Heb 12:25-29]**

V.25:

- See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?

V.26:

- At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.”

V.27:

- The words “once more” indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

V.28:

- Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,

V.29:

- for our “God is a consuming fire.”

**Process Observations/Questions:**

Q v.25: What responsibilities do you see as citizens of God's Kingdom? [See to it that you do not refuse Him who speaks.]

Observation: The author has reminded them that they have been enlightened by the superiority of the New Covenant in Christ, so it is crucial that they respond appropriately.

Q: So if they don't respond appropriately, what is the stern warning that follows? [If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?]

Q v.26-27: The author states, “At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” Unless you're an expert in the minor prophet of Haggai, you might be scratching your head. Let's **X-REF Haggai 2:6-9**. What does this prophet teach? [The scope of these words points to the future fulfillment at the time of the second coming of Christ. There will ultimately be a remaking of the heavens and earth which will follow the millennial kingdom. Now **X-REF Heb 1:10-12**]

Q v.28-29: After conveying all of this wonderful information, what does the author want these Hebrew Christians to do? [Be THANKFUL, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe!]

Q: What does he mean by “God is a consuming fire?” [X-Ref: 10:26–27. A believer who departs from his magnificent privileges will invite God's retribution.]

## **LOOK:**

What shall we do as we live in a shaking world? Listen to God speak and obey Him. Receive grace day by day to serve Him “with reverence and godly fear.” Do not be distracted or frightened by the tremendous changes going on around you. Keep running the race with endurance. Keep looking to Jesus Christ. Remember that your Father loves you. And draw on God’s enabling grace.

## **Close in Prayer**

### **Commentaries for Today’s Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 325-326). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

*Look up—the glory of the heavenly city (vv. 18–24).* The writer of Hebrews contrasts Mt. Sinai and the giving of the Law with the heavenly Mt. Zion and the blessings of grace in the church (see Ex. 19:10–25; 20:18–21; Deut. 4:10–24). He describes the solemnity and even the terror that were involved in the giving of the Law (Heb. 12:18–21). The people were afraid to hear God’s voice, and even Moses feared and trembled! God set boundaries around the mount, and even if an animal trespassed, it was slain with a spear (“dart”). Of course, God had to

impress on His people the seriousness of His Law, just as we must with our own children. This was the infancy of the nation, and children can understand reward and punishment.

What a relief it is to move from Mt. Sinai to Mt. Zion! Mt. Sinai represents the Old Covenant of Law, and Mt. Zion represents the New Covenant of grace in Jesus Christ (see Gal. 4:19–31). The heavenly city is God’s Mt. Zion (see Pss. 2; 110:1–2, 4). This is the city that the patriarchs were looking for by faith (Heb. 11:10, 14–17). The earthly Jerusalem was about to be destroyed by the Romans, but the heavenly Jerusalem would endure forever.

He described the “citizens” that make up the population of this city. Innumerable angels are there. The church is there, for believers have their citizenship in heaven (Phil. 3:20) and their names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20). “Firstborn” is a title of dignity and rank. Esau was actually Isaac’s firstborn, but he rejected his privileges and lost his blessing and birthright.

God is there, of course, and so are the Old Testament saints (“spirits of just men made perfect”). Jesus Christ the Mediator is there, the One who shed His blood for us. We learned that Abel is still speaking (Heb. 11:4); and here we discover that Christ’s blood speaks “better things than that of Abel” (Heb. 12:24). Abel’s blood spoke from the earth and cried for justice (Gen. 4:10), while Christ’s blood speaks from heaven and announces mercy for sinners. Abel’s blood made Cain feel guilty (and rightly so) and drove him away in despair (Gen. 4:13–15); but Christ’s blood frees us from guilt and has opened the way into the presence of God. Were it not for the blood of the New Covenant, we could not enter this heavenly city!

“Why is there so little preaching and teaching about heaven?” a friend asked me. And then he gave his own answer, which is probably correct. “I guess we have it so good on earth, we just don’t think about heaven.”

When the days are difficult and we are having a hard time enduring, that is when we should look up and contemplate the glories of heaven. Moses “endured, as seeing Him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27). The patriarchs endured as they looked ahead to the city God was preparing for them. One way to lay hold of God’s grace is to look ahead by faith to the wonderful future He has prepared for us.

***Look ahead—the unshakable kingdom (vv. 25–29).*** God is speaking to us today through His Word and His providential workings in the world. We had better listen! If God shook things at Sinai and those who refused to hear were judged, how much more responsible are we today who have experienced the blessings of the New Covenant! God today *is* shaking things. (Have you read the newspapers lately?) He wants to tear down the “scaffolding” and reveal the unshakable realities that are eternal. Alas, too many people (including Christians) are building their lives on things that can shake.

The “shaking” quotation is from Haggai 2:6 and refers to that time when the Lord shall return and fill His house with glory. As events draw nearer to that time, we shall see more shaking in this world. But a Christian can be confident, for he shall receive an unshakable kingdom. In fact, he is a part of God’s kingdom today.

What shall we do as we live in a shaking world? Listen to God speak and obey Him. Receive grace day by day to serve Him “with reverence and godly fear.” Do not be distracted or frightened by the tremendous changes going on around you. Keep running the race with endurance. Keep looking to Jesus Christ. Remember that your Father loves you. And draw on God’s enabling grace.

While others are being frightened, you can be confident!

**Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, p. 811). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

#### 4. THE FINAL WARNING ITSELF (12:18–29)

12:18–21. Vividly the writer pictured the situation at Mount Sinai where the Old Covenant was given and its awesomeness and fearful nature were described (cf. Ex. 19:9–23; Deut. 9:8–19).

12:22–24. The realities that pertain to New-Covenant people and to which they **have come** are even more impressive because they are **heavenly**. Not only is there the heavenly **city**, but there are also heaven-related beings, both **angels** and people, associated with it. The term **church of the firstborn** may mean the assembly of those whose inheritance rights are already won (since under the OT Law the “firstborn” was the primary heir; cf. v. 16). They have already gone on to the heavenly regions where the angels are. But above all, it is to **God, the Judge of all men**, that they have come—and there are some who indeed can stand His searching scrutiny of their lives (**the spirits of righteous men made perfect**; cf. 10:14; 11:40)—and to **Jesus the Mediator** (cf. 8:6; 9:15) **of a New Covenant** whose atoning **blood** does not cry for judgment as did Abel’s but secures the acceptance of all New-Covenant persons.

If the readers would contemplate these things properly, they would be awed by them and more inclined to fulfill their call to the highest privileges that the New Covenant can provide.

12:25. The contrast between the two covenants is now focused as a contrast between a warning given **on earth** and one that issues **from heaven** itself. Since those who refused the Old Covenant **did not escape**, how could those of the New Covenant who **turn away** expect to do so? (cf. 2:3) Here no doubt the author thought of the Speaker as none other than the Originator of the New Covenant who now sits “at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven” (1:3).

12:26–27. This is the divine **voice** which once **shook** only **the earth**, but will ultimately **shake not only the earth but also the heavens**. The reference to Haggai 2:6 was understood by the author as speaking of the ultimate remaking of the heavens and earth which will follow the millennial kingdom (cf. Heb. 1:10–12). What remains after this cataclysmic event will be eternal.

12:28–29. And such is the character of the **kingdom** which **we are receiving**. The words **let us be thankful** may be rendered “let us have [or, ‘obtain’] grace” (*echōmen charin*) and are likely a final reference to the resources of grace available from the great High Priest (cf. 4:14–16). This is confirmed by the words **and so** (lit., “through which,” *di’ ēs*) which remind the readers that this grace is required in order to **worship** (better, “serve,” *latreuōmen*, also used in 8:5; 9:9; 10:2; 13:10) **God acceptably** within the New-Covenant community. Failure to do so should be deterred by the concluding solemn thought that **our God is a consuming fire** (cf. 10:26–27). A believer who departs from his magnificent privileges will invite God’s retribution.