

## LIFE Bible Study: Hebrews 12:18-29

**For Discussion:** What are some of your long-term goals? How difficult is it to plan and live for a goal that won't be realized for many years? What helps you to focus and stay on track in pursuing those goals, even when you are presented with competing interests?

### Read Hebrews 12:18-29

**For review:** In Hebrews 12:1-17, the author continued to urge his readers to live out their faith with endurance, pointing them to those who, like Jesus, not only withstood great trials for their faith, but deliberately chose them over worldly comfort. To help his readers view their trials correctly, the author used the image of earthly fathers, highlighting both the necessity of discipline and the edification that it can bring about. Hardships and difficulties, rather than being a sign of God's rejection, are a validation of a person's sonship and a sanctifying act of His love. After concluding the section with examples of people who miss out on God's blessings, the author gives a final description of what that blessing is and a last warning to not despise it for worldly things as Esau had done (v.16-17).

**In writing about his readers' experience of their faith, the author makes a comparison between two mountains. What are the two mountains that the author references (Ex. 19:10-20)?<sup>1</sup> How is the scene around each mountain described, and what mood do those descriptions evoke?<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:10-11) and Mount Zion (v.22).

<sup>2</sup> Sinai	Zion
A place that can be touched (i.e., <u>earthly</u> ) (v.18) – Ex. 19:10-11, Deut. 4:11	Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the <u>heavenly</u> Jerusalem (Synonymous names) (v.22)
Blazing fire (v.18) – Ex. 19:18, Deut. 4:11, 5:22-26	Innumerable angels in festal gathering (v.22)
Darkness (v.18) – Deut. 4:11, 5:22-23	The assembly of the firstborn (v.23)
Gloom (v.18) – Deut. 4:11	God, the judge of all (v.23)
A tempest (v.18) – Ex. 19:16, 19	The spirits of the righteous made perfect (v.23)
The sound of a trumpet (v.19) – Ex. 19:13b, 16, 19	Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant (v.24)
A voice (v.19) – Deut. 4:12, 5:22-27	The sprinkled blood (v.24)
The earth shook (v.26) – Ex. 19:18, Jud.5:4-5	

<sup>2</sup>The people feared (v.19) – Ex. 19:16, 20:18-21, Deut. 5:4-5

<sup>2</sup>Moses feared (v.21) – Deut. 9:19

<sup>2</sup>God cannot be approached (v.20b) – Ex. 19:12-13a, 23-24

<sup>2</sup>Sinai: The fire, darkness, gloom, and tempest convey a mood of fear, threat, and danger => The scene is more solitary. God keeping people at a distance.

-Sinai is where God is seen through manifestations of His power in creation, not directly – This display is terrifying.

-God's pronouncements at Sinai were unbearable for the people. The emphasis of the Exodus quote is God's unapproachability, even for animals (v.20).

-Moses himself, God's representative for the people, could not handle His presence at Sinai. He spoke face to face with God (Ex. 33:11), but the scene even made him tremble with fear.

<sup>2</sup>Zion: The festal angels ("in joyful assembly" – NIV84) and congregation of people in the presence of God and Jesus convey a mood of celebration, worship, and closeness => The scene is more communal, many gathered together around God.

-Zion is where God is seen personally – This is inviting.

-People are intended to have permanent residence in Zion and worship God there because it is His heavenly city.

-Jesus' superiority as mediator can be seen vs. Moses. He can fully be in God's unshielded presence, unperturbed.

**Based on the descriptions and imagery of each scene and the reactions of those present, what do each of the mountains represent (v.24, Deut. 4:13-14)?<sup>1</sup> What is the significance of being called to Mount Zion rather than to Mount Sinai for a person's relationship with God?<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Sinai: God's law and the old covenant were given on Mount Sinai => The old covenant results in judgment and wrath.

-Mount Sinai is earthly (v.18).

-The signs at Sinai show God's unbearable, overwhelming *power* and *holiness* (v.19, 21, Deut. 5:22-27, **Isa. 6:1 & 5**).

<sup>1</sup>Zion: God's grace and the new covenant are represented by Mount Zion => The new covenant results in salvation.

-Mount Zion/the city of the living God is heavenly (v.22).

<sup>1</sup>The two mountains are both true and accurate portrayals of God, they show different facets of who He is. The author separates the two as different experiences of relating to Him.

-God is dangerously holy to those who are unholy and is rightly to be feared. However, for those who are pure, God's overwhelming holiness is instead desirable and a cause for worship.

<sup>2</sup>What was previously off limits for people at Sinai has become accessible to all who are in Christ by faith at Zion.

-We are no longer barred from proximity to God's presence (Heb. 4:16, 10:19-22).

-Mount Zion includes the heavenly Jerusalem in which His people will dwell with Him.

<sup>2</sup>There is no fear in facing God as judge of all (v.23) because of the new covenant that is mediated by Jesus and inaugurated by His blood (v.24).

-The blood of Abel cries out for justice and vengeance (Gen. 4:10-11), but Jesus' blood brings atonement because it declares that justice has been satisfied and calls instead for forgiveness and reconciliation (Heb. 9:12-14).

-The judgment from God will be a positive one for those who are gathered in Zion. It is a joyful assembly ("church of the firstborn" – (v.23, NIV84)) with God's children where they belong (Heb. 11:10, 16, 13:14).

**When Christ returns there will be a shaking (i.e., judgment) not just of the earth but of the heavens as well (Heb. 1:10-12, 2 Pet. 3:10-13). What are the characteristics of the kingdom that will remain after this happens (v.26-28, Dan. 2:44)?<sup>1</sup> Given that the world as we know it is on its way out, what should you be living for now (1 Cor. 3:10-15)?<sup>2</sup> In what areas have you chosen what is perishable over what will endure, and how can you realign your priorities to invest in things of lasting value?<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>The kingdom that remains will be unshakable and eternal compared to the one that came before it.

-The final shaking will be a catastrophic judging of creation in a way that will never happen again (v.27 – "Yet once more") because what remains will no longer be susceptible to it (i.e., unshakable, imperishable, eternal).

<sup>1</sup>The things that are will be removed and replaced with something better. The coming kingdom will be pure and victorious above all other kingdoms (Rev. 21:1-22:5).

<sup>2</sup>What do you expect to gain from devoting yourself to the priorities that you have chosen? Why do they hold the appeal that they do for you?

-Invest in the kingdom that will emerge imperishable and full of worth.

<sup>3</sup>Esau had regrets when the outcome of his life choices finally landed (v.17). What in your life could cause you to have regrets in the end?

**On account of the eternal kingdom that the followers of Jesus are receiving, the author calls for a response of faithful worship. What makes worship acceptable to God?<sup>1</sup> What impact should the fact that God is a consuming fire have on us (Deut. 4:24)?<sup>2</sup> How does your life show that your citizenship is in the heavenly Jerusalem rather than in the world (Phil. 3:20)?<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Worship that is directed rightly to God (Heb. 13:15) and offered with reverence and awe are acceptable to Him.

-There should also be gratitude in light of all that we have received (v.28). Worship involves our whole lives (**Rom. 12:1-2**).

-“To worship or serve God *acceptably* means that believers regard every aspect of their lives as an expression of their devotion to him. Christian worship is not limited to prayer and praise in a congregational context... words and actions that flow from true gratitude are the worship that is pleasing to God. So serving God acceptably involves... being equipped by ‘the God of peace...with everything good for doing his will.’” –Peter T. O'Brien

<sup>2</sup>God's nature under the new covenant is no different than it was under the old covenant. Knowing who He is and what He has done (and will do) is important for informing our worship.

-Even though God's children are not in danger of the wrath associated with it, the fact that He is a consuming fire should make us revere Him and be in awe of Him.

-The warning that the author has repeatedly alluded to (v.25) must be received with recognition of God's character, especially His holiness. To disregard this final revelation is to show contempt for God's covenant blessings, which always comes with inescapable consequences.

<sup>3</sup>An absence of the outward reality brings into question the presence of the inward reality.

## Reflection and application

With vivid depictions of Mount Sinai and Mount Zion, the author contrasts the old and new covenants a final time, showing once again how much greater are the blessings that are promised to members of the new covenant. Whereas the old covenant was marked by separation from God and fear in His presence because of the lack of peace between a sinful people and their holy judge, the new covenant provides direct access to God, which is only possible because of the holiness that has been effected in its members by the work of Christ (Heb. 12:10).

The dichotomies of the two covenants and of the mountains of law and of grace are further paralleled in the contrast between the present kingdom, which is liable to being shaken, and the coming pure, unshakable kingdom, which is the inheritance of all who are in Christ by faith. Let us respond with an offering of grateful worship that recognizes God's burning holiness and the weight of judgment that we have been spared so that we can, in turn, love Him much for all that we have been forgiven to make us fit for such a kingdom (Luke 7:47).