

Hebrews Chapter Twelve

In chapter twelve we learn that the children of the King, (Christians), have a better kingdom than what the nation of Israel enjoyed. In this chapter a great contrast is made between Mount Sinai (representing the Old Covenant) and Mount Zion (representing the New Covenant). This Mount Zion is analogous to the New Jerusalem described in Revelation chapter 21.

The race of faith (verses 1-2)

The chapter begins with the word, “therefore”. This serves to focus our attention back on chapter eleven where the examples of faith are highlighted. Taking these Old Testament heroes as an example we are instructed to lay aside the weight and the sins which so easily ensnare us. This action is taken in conjunction with the running with endurance of the Christian race.

There are many references to the Christian life being a race (1 Corinthians 9:24-25; and Galatians 2:2 are examples). We are told to run with endurance and to look at Jesus. He is our great example. Jesus is described as the author and finisher (or, as John described Him in Revelation, the Alpha and the Omega) of our faith. He is the one who endured the cross on our behalf. He is the one who despised the shame of the cross on our behalf. He is the one who for the joy set before Him willingly gave His life on the cross. We must emphasize and reflect upon the fact that Jesus went to the cross so that all of us would have a way to be saved. This is what was joyful to Him. Jesus went to the cross to save each one of us individually. After this was accomplished, He sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Romans 14:9).

The discipline of God (verses 3-11)

The writer then turns our attention to discipline, or the problem of suffering and sadness in the life of a Christian. We know that bad things happen to good people. Christians are not immune from cancer, divorce, sickness, death, and tragedy. Yet, we are reminded that God uses these types of things to discipline us and bring us closer to Him.

The writer asks us to consider Jesus, who endured such hostility from sinners. We cannot imagine the things that Jesus went through on our behalf, but we should gain strength from His example. By considering Jesus we can avoid becoming weary or discouraged in our souls.

We are reminded that we must strive against sin, yet the Hebrews to which the letter was originally written had not striven to the point of bloodshed. We can understand this since we live in a nation where we are free to practice our faith, but we can never cease to strive against sin.

The writer states that the Hebrews have forgotten the exhortation found in Proverbs 3:11-12, which speaks to them as to sons. If they endure chastening God will treat them as legitimate children, however, if they do not, then they will be counted as illegitimate. The writer uses the example of our human fathers who disciplined us according to their good pleasure, and states that we paid them respect. Since this is the case, surely God is worthy of more respect than our human fathers (Jeremiah 5:3). Our human fathers chastened us as seemed best to them, but God chastens us for our profit, so that we can become partakers of His holiness. If we endure God's chastening we are promised the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

Spiritual vitality (verses 12-17)

The writer now turns his attention away from individuals and toward the church. We are instructed to strengthen the weak and make straight paths for our feet. We are told to pursue peace and holiness, and warned that a lack of holiness will prevent us from seeing the Lord.

We are told to look carefully for the three “lests”. These lests are “lest you fall short of the grace of God”; “lest any root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble”; and “lest there be any fornicators or profane persons like Esau”. Each of these “lests” indicates a problem within the church. It starts off with falling short of the grace of God as a result of not strengthening the weak, not pursuing peace, and not pursuing holiness. Once this happens in a congregation any minor thing will be blown out of proportion. This allows the root of bitterness to spring up and cause trouble. Finally, the congregation is so far gone that it is filled with fornicators and profane people like Esau.

But why is Esau used as an example? It is because of his lack of diligence with regard to his inheritance. In Genesis 25:29-34 we find that Esau practically gave away his inheritance for a common meal. Anytime that Christians fall short of the grace of God, they are in danger of giving away their inheritance in heaven, perhaps for a lot less than Esau received. Another aspect of Esau that focuses our attention is his lack of repentance. A lack of repentance will keep Christians from enjoying the fruits of their faithfulness.

Mount Sinai compared with Mount Zion (verses 18-24)

The Old Covenant was an earthly covenant. It was delivered by God through Moses at Mount Sinai. This mountain could be touched (Exodus 19:12); it burned with

fire (Exodus 19:18); there was blackness, darkness, and a tempest (Exodus 19:16); and there was the sound of a trumpet when God descended to the mountain (Exodus 19:1-25).

The sight was so terrible and frightening that the children of Israel begged that they could be spared from hearing the voice of God (Exodus 20:18-21). The people of Israel could not endure the demands and conditions of the Law of Moses, nor can these things be endured today. The quotation in verse 20 comes from Exodus 19:12-13 and describes the penalty of death for any animal that even touched the mountain. The quotation in verse 21 comes from Deuteronomy 9:19 and describes the reaction of Moses to the presence of God. All of these aspects show that the scene at Mount Sinai was frightening and terrifying. The writer uses Mount Sinai as an example of what we have not come to. We have something better!

In verse 22 the writer states, “But you have come to Mount Zion”. The New Covenant is superior to the old, just as Mount Zion is superior to Mount Sinai. Mount Zion is also described as “the City of the Living God” and the “Heavenly Jerusalem” (Hebrews 13:14). This city is the same one described by the Apostle John in Revelation 21:9-27, it comes down from heaven. Angels are inhabitants of this city as well.

The writer tells us that we have come to the general assembly and church of the firstborn. The inhabitants of this city have their names registered in heaven (Revelation 3:5). We have also come to God, the judge of all (Revelation 20:11-15) and to the spirits of just men made perfect (Revelation 5:9-10).

Furthermore, we have come to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant (Hebrews 8:6) and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than the blood of Abel. In Genesis 4:9-10, God stated that the blood of Abel cried out from the ground where it had

been spilled by his brother Cain. The blood of Abel spoke of vengeance and justice. The blood of Jesus speaks better things, it speaks of salvation.

There is no comparison between Mount Sinai which represents the Law of Moses, the earthly covenant, and Mount Zion which represents the Law of Christ, the heavenly covenant. There is no reason why anyone should want to place themselves under a fleshly law that consisted of commandments which could not be endured, and yet today there are numerous people who feel that they must keep the Law of Moses. We who are followers of Christ have received something far better!

Listen to the heavenly voice (verses 25-29)

The writer of Hebrews implores us not to refuse him who speaks. The one who spoke on earth was God at Mount Sinai, and we know that those who refused His voice did not escape. How much more shall we not escape if we fail to hear the one who speaks from heaven (Jesus).

There is a new dispensation. The voice of God shook the earth at Mount Sinai, but now God has promised to not only shake earth but also heaven. The quote in verse 26 comes from Haggai 2:6. This prophecy is explained in verse 27 where the writer specifically states, “this once more” indicates the removal of the things that are shaken. This means that the Old Covenant is being taken out of the way so that what cannot be shaken may remain. The earthly things are removed that the heavenly things remain.

The writer tells us that we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken (Matthew 16:18). In response to this great gift we are warned to have grace to serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. We should fear God who is a consuming fire.