



Hebrews 12:18-29

¹⁸ For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest ¹⁹ and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. ²⁰ For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." ²¹ Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." ²² But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, ²³ and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

²⁵ See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. ²⁶ At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." ²⁷ This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸ Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, ²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire.

SUMMARY

The author's aim in this passage is to remind his readers of just how privileged they are. They needed this because the difficulties of living the Christian life was taking its toll on them, and returning to their former life of Judaism was sounding appealing.

To underscore their privilege, the author contrasts two mountains. The mountains represent two covenants and, by extension, two different ways of approaching God. The first is Mount Sinai (vv 18-21), where God gave Israel the law through Moses.

One feature of Sinai the author highlights was how much of a sensory experience it was. God's revelation involved a mountain that could be *touched*, fire that could be *seen*, and a trumpet and a voice that could be *heard*.¹ Yet to touch the mountain meant death (v 20), what they saw terrified them (v 21), and hearing God's voice was too much for them (v 19; Exodus 19:12-22; 20:18-21). In short, this mountain represents a relationship with God that can be described as terrifying and distant.

But that's not the kind of relationship Christians have with God. After describing what mountain his readers *haven't* come to, he describes the one they *have*: Mount Zion (vv 22-24). And the contrast is sharp. Instead of terror, there's joy (v 22). Instead of distance, there's access to God himself (v 23). And whereas Abel's blood cried out for God's judgment, Jesus' blood calls for God to be gracious to us (v 24). Because the sin that made God unapproachable has been removed, we can joyfully approach him.

The choice should be an easy one for the readers: do you want God to be approachable or not? Do you want your relationship with him to be marked by terror or joy? The wrong choice will have severe consequences. If judgment fell on the Israelites who refused God when he spoke from Sinai, how much greater judgment will fall on those who refuse him when he speaks his greatest and final revelation? (vv 25-27; Hebrews 1:1-2; 2:1-3)

Remembering their privileges, the Hebrews (and we today) should find security knowing that we are inheriting a kingdom that can't be shaken (v 28). Instead of treating that inheritance flippantly, as Esau did (vv 16-17), we should be thankful for it and worship God with reverence.

¹ The sensory language is probably here because the readers missed having a physical temple they could go to and having a high priest they could see. But as he's written elsewhere (Hebrews 8-9), these physical aspects of worship are merely shadows of a currently-unseen but superior reality.

DISCUSS

"Terror" and "distance" described Israel's experience with God at Mount Sinai. Does God ever feel distant to you? Do you ever find yourself afraid to pray to him?

"Joy", "nearness", and "acceptance" are words that describe the Christian's relationship to God. Would you use these words to describe your relationship to him? Why or why not?

Christians should be the most thankful people around (v 28; 1 Thessalonians 5:18). How can you grow in your thankfulness to God this week?

The Hebrews were to "not refuse him who is speaking" (v 25). How does God continue to speak to us today, and what might refusing him look like?