

The Believer's Blessed Position Under the New Covenant

Hebrews 12:18-29

Hebrews 12:18-29 - *For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest,¹⁹ and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore.²⁰ (For they could not endure what was commanded: "And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow."²¹ And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.")*

²² *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,²³ to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,²⁴ to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.*

²⁵ *See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven,²⁶ whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven."²⁷ Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.*

²⁸ *Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.²⁹ For our God is a consuming fire.*

Background Notes

The final warning to the Hebrews was given in these verses. This warning passage began as early as verse 12, but it became quite specific by verse 25: *"See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven."*

God did not include these warning passages in Hebrews to scare true believers. They were included to warn people who only profess to be believers to make sure of their salvation.

The possibility of "turning away" or "falling short" was a particular problem with the Hebrews to whom this epistle was written, as we have already mentioned many times in our study of the epistle. However, the writer to the Hebrews was convinced that most of his readers were true believers: *"Therefore since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken" (v28)*. Throughout the epistle, the writer often said he was convinced that most of his readers were true believers.

So the warning passages of Hebrews were not written with the majority of Christians and evangelical churches in mind – either then or today. It was written for those people who call themselves Christians, and may even think they are Christians, but they are still not true believers.

Doctrinal Points

1. Christians have not come to Mt. Sinai.

In Hebrews 12:18-29, the true believer's position and privileges were stated. They were first stated negatively and then positively, using two mountains as a figure or as pictures. We have not come to Mt. Sinai - we have come to Mt. Zion. What's going on with these two mountains?

Mt. Sinai was the mountain where the Law was given to Moses. What an awesome sight that was! And what an awesome event that was! There was thunder and lightning, smoke and earthquake, loud trumpet sounds and the voice of God! Read Exodus 19-20 for the account of this event.

No one was allowed to touch the mountain. Even animals had to die if they ventured on the area of Mt. Sinai. Why? The reason was that God is holy and man is not holy, so the way of approach to God was not open. Even Moses was exceedingly afraid and trembled (v21). Aren't you glad that you didn't live under the Old Testament Law?

When we hike up Mt. Sinai on our Holy Land study tours, I'm always glad to think that we don't live under the Law in B.C. times. As you know, the actual location of Mt. Sinai is not known, and is hotly debated, but that's not the point here. The point here is that Christians have not come to Mt. Sinai – praise the Lord!

2. Christians have come to Mt. Zion.

Verse 22: *“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.”* In contrast to Mt. Sinai, Mount Zion symbolizes our position in Christ under the New Covenant, with all the associated blessings and privileges that are ours as true believers.

Notice that we **have** come to Mt. Zion, not that we **will** come to Mt. Zion. This is our position **now**. Of course we will receive our resurrection bodies in the future, and we will literally reign in the New Jerusalem that has come down from Heaven. So the names “Mt. Zion” and “City of the Living God” and “Heavenly Jerusalem” seem to be more than just symbolic of our present position. They speak of what will be literal in the future.

Notice seven wonderful things that we come to in association with Mt. Zion.

a. The City of the living God (v22).

“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (v22). In Revelation 21:2 the apostle John wrote: “Then, I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

b. An innumerable company of angels (v22).

When we get to Heaven, I believe we will be able to communicate with the holy angels. After all, they are serving us right now (as we’ll see in Hebrews 13). Can you imagine the stories that the guardian angels would be able to tell?

c. The Church of the firstborn (v23).

The term “*firstborn*” speaks of a position of special honor and privilege. The Church is the body and bride of Christ - what a blessed position of amazing privilege! And all believers who have ever lived will eventually be reunited in the heavenly city - and there will be no personality clashes or theological disagreements there! We’ll all be joyfully praising together in that glorious city of God.

d. God, the Judge of all (v23).

For true believers who are serving the Lord to the best of their abilities, this is a very encouraging truth. You may be discouraged now, and you may not have been recognized or thanked for what you’re doing for the Lord now - but you will be then! You will have the praise of God, and everyone will know it.

God is not only the Judge of all; He’s also the Vindicator of all. For mere professing believers, however, the truth that God is the Judge of all should serve as a warning to them, to make sure of their salvation. I think the writer to the Hebrews surely had God as Judge in mind, as he thought of those people in the congregation who were on the verge of turning away from Christianity.

e. The spirits of men just made perfect (v23).

The “*spirits of just men made perfect*” were the Old Testament saints who were justified because they believed God. Romans 4:3 says that “*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.*” God was able to justify believers in Old Testament times because Jesus would eventually die for the sins of the world - and God is not bound by time.

In the future, those Old Testament believers will be perfected and glorified in their new resurrection bodies – and so will we! I wonder what it will be like to talk with Noah and Abraham and Elijah and all the other Old Testament saints. It’s going to be great!

Notice, by the way, that ***the Church is the distinguished from the Old Testament believers***. The Church did not begin in the Old Testament - it began at Pentecost. Christians – members of the Church – are distinct from the Old Testament saints.

f. Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant (v24).

Just think - we will see Jesus some day! We will see the One who gave His life for us, the One who made all our blessings and privileges possible. What a wonderful truth, and what a wonderful prospect!

g. The blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than the blood of Abel (v24).

The blood of Abel cried out for vengeance, but the blood of Christ that covers us *“speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”* The blood of Christ speaks of God’s mercy and grace; it speaks of forgiveness of sins; it speaks of peace with God; it speaks of cleansed consciences; and it speaks of free access into heaven.

Christians have not come to Mt. Sinai. Christians have come to Mt. Zion.

Practical Application

Why invest in that which will not remain?

In verse 26 the author quoted from the prophet Haggai: *“Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.”* There will be a great shakeup in the future, and verse 27 indicates that only those things that have eternal value will remain.

So the logical question we should all ask ourselves is this: Why invest in things that will not remain? What are we doing with our time and our talents and our money? If you could view yourself right now from Heaven, would you change your investment priorities?

Look at verses 28-29: *“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.”* Everything that is not of eternal value will be burned up! Read 1 Corinthians 3 regarding the “testing fire.”

Then why do we invest in things that will not remain? Why not *“offer to God an acceptable service, with reverence and awe”* (v28 NASB)?

We can use our time and abilities and earthly possessions to serve ourselves - or we can use them serve the Lord. So why not do the logical thing? Why not invest in those things that will remain? –In those things that will survive the testing fire? – In those things that have eternal value?