

## An Unshakable Kingdom, Part 1 (Hebrews 12:18–29)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (11/12/2017)

### Introduction

1. The primary aim of the Hebrew epistle is to encourage believers to perseverance in their profession of the gospel after having their faith shaken by difficulties.
  - a. There must be a negative aspect to encouragement, which is warning of the consequences of falling away.
    - 1) Watch against an evil heart of unbelief, the sin that so easily entangles.
    - 2) Watch against placing undue value on Judaism with its Mosaic institutions.
    - 3) Watch against discouragement and fear arising from afflictions and persecutions.
  - b. The positive aspect of encouragement rests in the superior excellence of the New Covenant, demonstrating the greatness and glory of the founder and perfecter of the faith.
2. The text before us is not new material but a recapitulation of the previous arguments in new dress.
  - a. The final comparison of Judaism with its superior fulfillment in Christianity is set forth in the contrast of two mountains.
    - 1) One is temporal and earthly; the other is celestial and spiritual.
    - 2) Mountains symbolize supernatural authority and spiritual conflict (Gen. 22:14; Isa. 2:2, 3; Psa. 48:1; 68:11, 12; 78:54; 87:1).
  - b. Here also two ages are declared (Eph. 1:21; Matt. 12:32; 1 Cor. 2:6, 8); the first is gloomy and terrifying, and the second is glorious and festive.
  - c. In many respects, the contrast parallels Galatians 4:21–31.
3. Our passage explains the exhortation of verse 15: *“See that no one fall out of the race by failing to appropriate the grace of God. . . . For you have not come to what may be touched.”*
  - a. The Hebrew Christians were seeking to return to the Mosaic system (Mount Sinai).
  - b. The apostle explains that they have not come what can be touched literally, but to what was vastly superior and non-temporal.
  - c. *“Come to”* is a technical term to describe access to the sacred in response to God’s call (Hebrews 4:16; 7:25; 10:1).
  - d. Thus, the apostle shows that New Covenant believers’ sacred access to God on Mount Zion was vastly superior to that of the Old Covenant saints on Mount Sinai.

### I. Mount Sinai

1. Mount Sinai is where God gave the law, and it symbolizes divine sovereignty and awful justice without mercy.
  - a. We see here nothing to suggest reconciliation of the Sinner to his Holy God.

- b. We see nothing to lessen the severity of the law.
- c. We find no promise of grace to assist in the performance of what the law required.
- d. God is seen as infinitely holy, just, and severe; while man is condemned in sin, misery, and death.

## 2. Mount Sinai's terrifyingly holy character

- a. It is a fiery mountain (Ex. 19:18) symbolizing the consuming fire of divine jealousy (Deut. 4:24; note Heb. 12:29).
- b. The mountain was covered with gloomy and thick darkness (Deut. 5:22, 23) representing the hopelessness and despair of our condition before Him under the law (Job 37:19).
- c. A tempest of wind, lightning, and thunder roared on the mountain to agitate mind, heart, and conscience, giving no rest in spite of self-efforts (Psa. 50:3; Isa. 29:6; Jer. 23:19; Isa. 57:21).
- d. A deafening and alarming trumpet blares, announcing the near approach of God and summoning His people to appear before Him (Ex. 19:17).
- e. Finally, there is literally "*a voice of words*," God's speaking directly, giving to them the ten words (commandments, Psa. 29:4, 5), but that voice does not evoke comfort, only terror (vv. 19, 21).

## Application

1. Mount Sinai must be approached before one can come to Mount Zion.
2. The purpose of the law is to reveal sin and its dreadful effects in condemning the sinner, placing him under the penalty of Divine wrath (Gal. 3:19–29).
3. Moses could not fully comprehend the glory of God's revelation of Himself in Exodus 34 until he first saw the frightening aspect of His sovereign holiness on Mount Sinai and experience the terror of His wrath against Israel's sin in the golden calf.
4. Salvation is by grace alone, but God always takes the sinner to Mount Sinai and its awful scenes before introducing His glorious grace in which the sinner finds hope and faith.
5. One cannot be truly saved who has not been hopelessly lost, despairing of any comfort and peace. Only then does the glory of Christ's redemption and gracious salvation appear in its rightful setting.
6. Sadly, much of the evangelical gospel message neglects this important truth and seeks to appeal to the sinner's carnal nature, seeking to comfort him against conviction, diminish any perception of God's just anger against sin, and to persuade him to believe on a loving and tolerant Savior. This is false grace and a false gospel.