

➤ **Read Hebrews 12:18–29.**

1. In verses 18–24 of this week’s passage, the writer of Hebrews presents his readers with two contrasting scenes. To what event in Israel’s history is the writer of Hebrews referring in the first one (vv. 18–21)? (Skim Exodus 19–24.)
2. How did God make his presence known on Mount Sinai? (vv. 18–19; see also Exod. 19:16–19; 24:15–17; Deut. 4:11–12)
3. What warning did God give that compounded the awe and terror of his holy presence? (v. 20; Exod. 19:12–13, 23)
4. How did the people, and even Moses himself, respond to such a terrifying scene? (vv. 19–21; Exod. 20:18–19)
5. The “mountain that can be touched” (v. 18) here represents the old covenant, the law handed down by God through Moses at Mt. Sinai. Based on what you have studied in Hebrews this year, and on your responses above, why do you think the writer says that the Christians reading this letter have *not* come to *this* mountain?

The Law

“The law was given to teach us our need for Christ. It was never intended to be the basis of our relationship with God.”¹

6. The second scene the writer presents, in verses 22–24, is strikingly different from the first. He begins with, “But you have come to Mount Zion” (v. 22). He is not talking about the earthly Jerusalem, the city of David. Look at the verses below to see what the Hebrew believers *have* come to. (Additional references are included below each verse. Mark the parts that enhance the picture the writer of Hebrews is giving us.)

v. 22a _____

In verse 22 the writer states “You have come” to indicate something that has already happened and is ongoing.² “Those who now live by **faith** and hope have *already*, in a sense, arrived at this heavenly city. They already belong there; in prayer and worship they are already welcome before God’s throne.”³

¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.... ¹³ All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. (Heb. 11:10, 13–16)

¹⁴ For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. (Heb. 13:14)

²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ... (Phil. 3:20)

v. 22b _____

¹¹ Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. ¹² In a loud voice they were saying: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” (Rev. 5:11–12)

v. 23a _____

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Pet. 2:9–10)

²⁷ Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life. (Rev. 21:27)

v. 23b _____

¹³ Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Heb. 4:13)

v. 23c _____

³⁹ These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, ⁴⁰ since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. (Heb. 11:39–40)

v. 24a_____

⁶ But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises. (Heb. 8:6)

¹⁵ For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. (Heb. 9:15)

⁵ For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all people. (1 Tim. 2:5–6a)

v. 24b_____

¹⁰ The Lord said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground. ¹¹ Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. (Gen. 4:10–11)

¹⁴ How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! (Heb. 9:14)

⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. (1 Jn. 1:7)

7. How do you as a believer in Jesus participate even now in the eternal reality described in the verses you just looked at?

8. Commentator N. T. Wright says, “At the centre of the contrast between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion, in fact, is the contrast between a holiness which is terrifying and unapproachable and a holiness which is welcoming, cleansing and healing.”⁴ What makes this welcome possible? (v. 24; Heb. 10:19–22)

9. Verses 25–27 speak of judgment. In that terrible scene at Mount Sinai, God spoke words of warning to Israel. Now the very same God also speaks words of warning from heavenly Mount Zion.
 - a. What does it mean to “refuse him who speaks” (v. 25)? (📖* Jn. 5:33–40)

 - b. What does the warning to believers mean in verse 25? (Consider Heb. 2:1–3.)

10. In verse 26 the writer quotes God's promise as recorded in Haggai 2:6, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens."
- a. When will that happen? (Mt. 24:42–44)
 - b. What will happen when earth and heaven are shaken? (v. 27; Rev. 6:12–17)
 - c. What will remain? (vv. 22, 27; Rev. 7:9–12)
11. There are many things that happen throughout our lives that shake our world. These are mere tremors of the ultimate shaking of all creation. But "we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken" (v. 28). How, then, should we live? (v. 28; 2 Cor. 4:18)
12. Our passage closes with the statement that "our 'God is a consuming fire'" (v. 29). Read 2 Peter 3:8–13 to see that while this can be terrifying, it also inspires worship and gratitude in those who believe.

*📖 For further study

¹ Walter A. Henrichsen, *After the Sacrifice: A Practical Study of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 172.

² Frank E. Gaebelin, Gen. Ed. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version of the Holy Bible in Twelve Volumes*. Vol. 12 (Hebrews through Revelation). (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 142.

³ N. T. Wright, *Hebrews for Everyone* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 163.

⁴ Wright, 161. Original spelling "Sion."