

Sinai Vs Zion  
Hebrews 12:18-29

Our original audience faced criticism, ridicule, economic loss, imprisonment and perhaps martyrdom for choosing Jesus over the Temple.

In this passage, the writer warns them that something far more terrible awaits those who refuse Jesus.

Every human will be judged by one a single criterion: “Is your name in the Book of Life” or have you chosen to approach God on the basis of your own works.

It’s either your works or Jesus’s works. It’s either Sinai or Zion.

**Revelation 20:11-15** - *Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. <sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. <sup>13</sup> And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. <sup>14</sup> Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. <sup>15</sup> And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

Our text last week encouraged readers to look to Jesus (1) in their struggle against adversity and discouragement. They were told to “Consider him” (2) who also endured hostility.

They were also encouraged to consider their trials as “discipline of the Lord” (5) knowing that it “yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (11).

For these reasons, the writer encouraged them to “lift your drooping hands...” (12-13), “strive for peace” (14), “obtain the grace of God” (15) or live “unholy” like Esau (16).

And now, the author continues his encouragement by reminding his readers that

**First: No More Sinai. No More Law. 18-21**

The author is recounting Israel’s encampment at Sinai. At Sinai, God stripped away the noise and confusion of Egypt and positioned his people in the middle of the desert without distractions so that they could see him and only him.

God redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt. At that point in redemptive history, Israel met with the Lord on earth. God had to descend from heaven and commune with the nation on a mountain. However, as Exodus 19 tells us, the Lord did not meet with the whole nation but only with its covenant mediator—Moses. The people were left below and could approach the holy mountain

only after a period of cleansing. Even then, barriers were set up to keep anyone who was even potentially unclean from touching the mountain and causing the holiness of God to break forth and destroy the camp (vv. 10–15).

And what did they see or hear?

**Exodus 19:10-13a & 16-25** – <sup>13</sup> *the LORD said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments <sup>11</sup> and be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. <sup>12</sup> And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, ‘Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death. <sup>13</sup> No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast or man, he shall not live.’<sup>16</sup> On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. <sup>17</sup> Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. <sup>18</sup> Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. <sup>19</sup> And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. <sup>20</sup> The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. <sup>21</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, “Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the LORD to look and many of them perish. <sup>22</sup> Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them.” <sup>23</sup> And Moses said to the LORD, “The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for you yourself warned us, saying, ‘Set limits around the mountain and consecrate it.’” <sup>24</sup> And the LORD said to him, “Go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest he break out against them.” <sup>25</sup> So Moses went down to the people and told them.*

In the beginning, Adam and Eve enjoyed personal fellowship with god. But after the Fall, the ground became cursed (Gen 3:16-19) and God cut off direct fellowship with humanity (3:22-24).

God did not intend to leave us outside of the garden forever. The Tabernacle and Temple reminded people of the Garden of Eden while also looking forward to the New Jerusalem.

Through those ‘distant’ experiences, God spoke in types and shadows that looked forward to a comprehensive and final redemption.

It is understandable that the people were afraid. God wrapped himself in thunder clouds of darkness which caused the ground under them to tremble. In response, the people also trembled.

**Exodus 20:18-19** - *Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid<sup>[d]</sup> and trembled, and they stood far off<sup>19</sup> and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.”*

Sinai, representing judgement and punishment and the Old Covenant was literally a mountain of fear. Why?

Because seeing God without any mediator, any covering for our sin, should make us afraid.

The law is a mirror that reflects our hearts. By it, we know that we have sinned and offended God. As a result, we tremble like Hebrews before Sinai.

The apostle Paul learned this...

**Romans 7:7-11** - *Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." <sup>8</sup> But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. <sup>9</sup> I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. <sup>10</sup> The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. <sup>11</sup> For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.*

And then declared,

**Galatians 3:10-11** - *For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." <sup>11</sup> Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith.*

But... thanks be to God...Paul continues

**Galatians 3:13-14** - *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—<sup>14</sup> so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.*

Which brings us to.....

### **Second: And Now, Mount Zion. 22-24**

The Mountain of the New Covenant is Mount Zion, representing the heavenly Jerusalem.

Ever since David conquered it as a Jebusite stronghold –

**Palm 132:13-14** - *For the LORD has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his dwelling place: <sup>14</sup> "This is my resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it.*

Under the New Covenant, we once again have direct access to God, by God...

Two thousand years ago, God tore the veil that separated us from himself. As a result,

**1 Timothy 2:5** - *For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,*

And it is for this reason that the book of Hebrews has been written; that the readers will hold fast to Christ who is the only access to God.

a) Mount Zion

Sinai was covered with clouds, but Zion is a city of light. Sinai is untouchable but Zion is approachable. Sinai was forbidding and terrifying, Zion is inviting and gracious.

Sinai was closed to everyone because no one can please God on Sinai's terms – perfect fulfilment of the law. Zion is open to all who trust in Jesus because Christ has met those terms on our behalf.

b) The City of the Living God

This is “the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God” (Hb 11:10).

We are now ambassadors on earth but will one day be residents of that city. In the interim, we are encouraged not to lose sight of Zion or its value

**Romans 8:16-18** - *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,<sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.<sup>18</sup> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*

c) Innumerable angels in festal gathering

**1 Peter 1:10-12** – *Of the which salvation the Prophets have inquired and searched, which prophesied of the grace that should come unto you,<sup>11</sup> Searching when or what time the Spirit which testified before of Christ which was in them, should declare the sufferings that should come unto Christ, and the glory that should follow.<sup>12</sup> Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they should minister the things, which are showed unto you by them which have preached unto you the Gospel by the holy Ghost<sup>[i]</sup> sent down from heaven, the which things the Angels desire to behold.*

These are the same angels who stood at Sinai ready to enact judgement on anyone who disobeyed God's warnings about the mountain

Galatians 3:19 - *Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary.*

These are the same angels who stood ready to rescue Jesus from the cross –

Matthew 26:53 – (Jesus to Peter in Gethsemane) – “*Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?*”

But in heaven...

**Revelation 5:11-12** - *Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands,<sup>12</sup> saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”*

d) The assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven

We are “*heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ*” (Ro 8:17, 29).

Jesus is our elder brother and “*the firstborn from the dead*” (Col 1:18).

e) God, the judge of all

As such, the readers of Hebrews should fear God more than those who presently persecute them. Why? Because only God can...

f) The spirits of the righteous made perfect

Only God through Jesus can make the readers right with God

- The problem

Isaiah 64:6 - *We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.*

- The solution

Just as God clothed Adam and Eve (Gen 3:21).

Isaiah 61:10 - <sup>10</sup>*I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,*

g) Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant

It is Jesus who has done all of this. And how?

h) The sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel

The blood of Abel is not Abel's blood but the blood of the sacrifice he offered. Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to God because it was offered in faith toward Jesus. It had no atoning power in and of itself.

On the cross, Jesus was "*making peace by the blood of the cross*" (Col 1:20).

Because of all of this –

### **Third: A Final Warning 25-29**

V 25 – "*See that you do not refuse him who is speaking.*"

The writer is discouraging his readers from returning to the Temple by reminding them of "*the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone...*" (2 Cor 3:7).

Our application is not to refuse Jesus as the Hebrews did in the wilderness and were condemned to live there until they died without entering the Promised Land.

Why not refuse him?

*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. <sup>26</sup> 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." <sup>27</sup> 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.*

Verse 26 refers to Mount Sinai and the trembling of the earth experienced by the Israelites (Ex. 19:18) that demonstrated the solemnity and responsibility of the old covenant. Yet this shaking was only a foretaste of the greater shaking to come. In verse 27, the writer quotes

Haggai 2:6 - *For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. <sup>7</sup> And I will shake all nations...*

and the promise God makes to shake the entire universe at the coming of His glory. When that happens, only that which is unshakable will remain. Thus, to abandon Jesus would be to trust in those things that, at His coming, will be destroyed.

When the Scripture speaks to

**Revelation 4:1-6** - *After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." <sup>2</sup> At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. <sup>3</sup> And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. <sup>4</sup> Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. <sup>5</sup> From the throne*

*came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God,<sup>6</sup> and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.*

It means that even though God's judgement is going forth from heaven and shaking the earth, the 12 foundations of heaven (Rev 21:14) aren't moved. Those judgements aren't for heaven but earth, and heaven is 'unmoved' by them

The sea remains like glass, without a wave or even a ripple.

**Revelation 15:1-2** - *Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.<sup>2</sup> And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands.<sup>3</sup> And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb,*

Note: Both Old and New Testament saints gather together to sing of what God did in the Old and New Testaments...what began at Sinai has ended at Zion.

The Song of Moses by the Brooklyn Tabernacle - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFAld7IPfA>

The questions to ask are, "What is shakable?" and "What is immoveable?"

**Matthew 7:24-27** - *“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.<sup>25</sup> And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.<sup>26</sup> And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.<sup>27</sup> And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”*

### **Conclusion:**

28-29 - *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,<sup>29</sup> for our God is a consuming fire.*