

After speaking of God's purpose in chastening us (vs. 5-11) and how it compels us to live holy lives before God (vs. 12-17), the writer of Hebrews now points out that our relationship with God is not based on a limited earthly encounter, such as Israel had at Mt. Sinai (vs. 18-21). Instead, we are under a better covenant in which we are able to enter into God's presence in heaven (vs. 22-24). Thus we are under an even greater responsibility to listen to and obey God's voice (vs. 25-29).

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18 For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, 19 And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which *voice* they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more:

**“For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched...And the sound of a trumpet”** – The writer of Hebrews refers to Israel's encounter with God at Mt. Sinai when the first covenant was established between them and God (Ex. 19-20). The presence of the LORD was manifested through intimidating signs such as fire, blackness, lightning, thunder and the sound of a trumpet. The writer seems to be emphasizing the physical and material nature of the mount “that might be touched” in contrast to the spiritual Mt. Zion that is in heaven (v. 22).

**“and the voice of words; which *voice* they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more”** – In addition to the physical manifestations of God's presence, Israel also heard Him speaking from the mountain. They were so intimidated by His voice and the other signs that they begged for Moses to be the one who spoke the words of the LORD to them instead of the LORD speaking to them directly (Ex. 20:18-19).

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20 (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: 21 And so terrible was the sight, *that* Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:)

**“For they could not endure [bear; carry] that which was commanded”** – Not only could they not endure the intimidating presence and voice of God, but they could not endure the law of God that was being given. They could not keep God's law perfectly because of their own sinful nature (nor can we).

**“And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart [javelin; spear]”** – God is holy and pure and God's holiness is so unapproachable that no man or beast was allowed on the mountain to defile it. If they did, they were to be killed (Ex. 19:12-13).

**“And so terrible was the sight, *that* Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake”** – Israel had entered into a covenant with the LORD to obey Him but Moses knew that Israel would never be able to remain faithful to the LORD. He had seen their rebellious nature and feared that God would eventually destroy them because of their disobedience. **Deut. 9:19** “*For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure, wherewith the LORD was wroth against you to destroy you. But the LORD hearkened unto me at that time also.*”

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22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, 23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,

Israel's encounter with the LORD at Mt. Sinai marked the establishment of Israel's covenant with the LORD, a covenant dependent on their ability to keep the Mosaic Law. The writer of Hebrews has declared that his readers (the Jews) are no longer coming to an earthly mountain where the presence of God had come down while still remaining unapproachable because of their sin. Instead, the LORD has provided new way to approach Him that depends, not on sinful mankind's feeble abilities, but on the sacrifice of His Son.

**“But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem”** – These names all refer to heaven where God resides. Instead of God coming down to an earthly place to meet with men, through Jesus Christ and the new covenant we can now come directly into His presence in heaven. The writer then lists other things present in heaven, perhaps to emphasize the holiness of the location.

**“and to an innumerable company of angels”** – The angels that did not follow Satan in his rebellion against God are in heaven as our fellow servants who constantly serve God.

**“To the general assembly [gathering for a public festival] and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven”** – Since “general assembly” and “church of the firstborn” are not both prefixed by the word “to,” it seems likely that these descriptions refer to the same thing. The church of the “firstborn” (Jesus Christ) would certainly gather in heaven to celebrate the salvation that they have received by grace through faith and the fact that their names have been written in the Lamb's book of life. **Luke 10:20**

*“Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.”* **Luke 15:10** *“Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”*

**“and to God the Judge of all”** – At the center of heaven is the throne of God, to whom all created beings are accountable. We are allowed to enter into His presence because of Jesus Christ (**Heb. 4:16** “*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*”).

**“and to the spirits of just men made perfect [complete]”** – If the writer is making a non-overlapping list, then this group is distinct from the “church of the firstborn” which are the NT saints. One commentator suggested that “the spirits of just men made perfect” are the OT saints who, like Abraham, were righteous because they believed God (**Gen. 15:6** “*And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness*”). If this list is not non-overlapping then this description may refer to all saints throughout history who have been redeemed through faith. They were just because of their faith and God made them perfect because of that faith.

24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than *that of* Abel.

**“And to Jesus the mediator [a go-between; arbitrator] of the new covenant”** – Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and man through the terms of the new covenant. The writer of Hebrews has already described this new covenant, based not on Israel’s ability to obey but on Christ’s sacrifice which gave us the new birth (Heb. 8:6-12). Christ ministers the new covenant to us through His role as our Great High Priest (Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14-15; 5:5, 10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:11).

**“and to the blood of sprinkling”** – Christ’s blood that He sprinkled on the heavenly mercy seat in order to atone for our sins. **Heb. 9:12-14** *“Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”*

**“that speaketh better things than that of Abel”** – Commentators acknowledge that the reference to Abel here seems odd and out of place and predictably they do not agree on the interpretation. Some believe the phrase “that of Abel” refers to the blood sacrifice that Abel made that was more excellent than Cain. They point to Heb. 11:4 where it says that Abel “being dead yet speaketh” and say that Christ’s blood speaks of better things than the “more excellent” blood sacrifice that Abel made. Others point out that the words “that of” are not in the original (italicized in the KJV) and the Greek reads “better things than Abel.” They believe that the writer is saying that Christ’s shed blood speaks of better things (forgiveness and redemption) than the shed blood of Abel, which cried out for revenge.

25 See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more *shall not we escape*, if we turn away from him that *speaketh* from heaven: 26 Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.

**“See that ye refuse [avoid; to decline the invitation] not him that speaketh”** – The context of the previous verse make it obvious that “him that speaketh” refers to Jesus Christ speaking through His blood that was sprinkled on the heavenly mercy seat for our atonement. The writer here says that we should beware that we do not decline His call to salvation through His blood.

**“For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth”** – Commentators also disagree on who the writer is referring to as “him that spake on earth.” Possibilities range from Abel, Moses, the OT prophets, and even the LORD Himself speaking from Mt. Sinai. The context seems to favor Abel, Moses, and the LORD at Sinai and the fact that what was spoken was binding seems to favor Moses and the LORD. Since it would be the LORD speaking both on earth and in heaven, the most likely candidate seems to be Moses, who spoke God’s law to the people. Those who refused to obey the law given through Moses did not escape punishment, which serves as a warning to us.

**“much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven”** – Just as those in the OT did not escape punishment when refusing to obey God, we will not escape if we ignore the salvation made available to us through the blood of Christ.

**“Whose voice then shook the earth”** – The voice of the LORD shook the earth at Mt. Sinai. This line equates Jesus Christ with God.

**“but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven”** – The writer quotes a promise that God made in Hag. 2:6. At Sinai the LORD only shook the earth, but God promised in Hag. 2:6 that He would shake the earth, the sea, and the heavens themselves. The implication is that listening to and obeying the voice of God has become even more important. Ignoring His offer of salvation will lead to destruction because there is no other means of salvation.

27 And this *word*, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

This future shaking refers to God destroying and removing the current heavens and earth so that they can be replaced by the new heavens and earth (2 Pet. 3:7, 10, 12; Rev. 21:1). The writer focuses on a phrase from the quoted verse: “Yet once more.” The writer points out that the LORD promised that He would not need to shake the heavens and the earth but one more time, implying that they will no longer exist. He also points out that the heavens and the earth refer to “things that are made” (the entire creation), meaning that the LORD will shake (destroy) all creation and the only things that will remain will be those things that cannot be shaken (things in heaven).

28 Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: 29 For our God is a consuming fire.

**“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved”** – We will inherit and be citizens of a kingdom that cannot be moved (an eternal one). **Dan. 7:14, 27** *“And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed....And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.”*

**“let us have [possess; hold onto] grace [favor; thankfulness]”** – Commentators are divided on this phrase. Some translate “grace” as “favor,” meaning that we should remain in God’s favor through obedience. Others translate “grace” as “thankfulness,” meaning that we should always respond to God’s grace in our lives with thankfulness through obedience, as the writer says next.

**“whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear”** – In light of the fact that God has graciously spared us from His judgment, we should express our gratitude by serving Him reverently and with fear (respect).

**“For our God is a consuming fire”** – Quoted from **Deut. 4:24** *“For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.”* God is not someone that we need play games with. We cannot fool Him and He will chastise us when we need it. **Gal. 6:7** *“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”*