

**Text:** Hebrews 12:18-25

**Title:** Do not Reject God!

**Truth:** The greater spiritual privileges in this era make rejection of God an even worse offense than it was in the Old Testament, so we must not reject God.

**Date/Location:** Sunday December 11, 2011 at FBC

## **Overview**

Verses 18 and 22 are the structural keys to understanding the passage.

Verse 25 gives an important consequence or implication of them.

This passage is somewhat like Hebrews 10:26-31. There, the comparison was between rejecting the Law of Moses and rejecting the person and work of Jesus Christ. Rejecting the Mosaic Law was bad enough, but rejecting Christ is ten times worse. In 12:18-25, the warning also reminds us of the holiness of God and what an encounter with Him is like, but it adds a comparison of the situation under the old covenant with the Christian's marvelous privileges in Christ. The effect of the author mentioning our privileges in Christ heightens our subsequent responsibility to listen carefully to God.

In these verses, we are given a reason to pursue peace and holiness and watch out for unbelief and worldliness creeping into the church.

## **I. The Mt. Sinai Revelation and Its Message, 18-21**

### **A. Seven Descriptions of Mt. Sinai, v. 18-19a**

These descriptions tell us what the symbol of Mt. Sinai is all about. The historical account is found in Exodus 19-20 and Deuteronomy 4-5.

1. The mountain that may be touched. It was a physical, tangible place.
2. The mountain that burned with fire. It was seen and smelled.
3. Blackness.
4. Darkness.
5. Tempest.
6. Sound of a trumpet. It was heard.
7. Voice of words.

### **B. Fearful Response of the People, v. 19b-21**

1. The people begged not to hear God's words any more.

Moses was their mediator.

2. They were afraid due to the strict command not to touch the mountain.

God's holiness is emphasized by physical separation of distance between the people and God. It was a capital offense to violate the presence of God, and thus His holiness. Even seeing God caused God's people to think they would die, as in Judges 13:22. The mountain was tangible, but it was not supposed to be touched. What do we have today? We have something not touchable, but we don't have that same kind of fear because God invites us to come to Him through Jesus.

3. Even Moses was full of fear.

### C. Meaning of Mt. Sinai

There is an emphasis on the physical senses being overwhelmed with utter fear. Furthermore, there is an emphasis on God's holiness.

Theologically, Mt. Sinai does not offer even a glimmer of hope that the sin problem will be dealt with. It emphasizes God's holiness and man's separation from God, without offering a solution for sin.

## II. The Mt. Zion Revelation and Its Message, 22-24

A. Corresponding to the seven descriptions of Sinai and the giving of the Law, there are seven descriptions of Mount Zion.

These descriptions tell us what Mt. Zion means, what its significance is.

1. City of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. See Heb. 11:13-16. This is related to the future manifestation of the kingdom of God, and ultimately to the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:2.
2. Innumerable company of angels in a festal gathering. This last phrase indicates a special occasion or celebration. The mood is entirely different than the fear of Mt. Sinai.
3. The church of the firstborn whose names are inscribed in heaven. That is, the church which belongs to Jesus, all believers since Acts 2 forward.
4. God the Judge of all. God has not abdicated His role as judge.
5. Spirits of just men made perfect. These are Old Testament believers.
6. Jesus the mediator of the new covenant.
7. The blood of sprinkling. This refers to Jesus' sin-cleansing blood. The sprinkling applies the blood and may be seen as a ratification or establishing the basis of the New Covenant.

Like the previous list of seven items, this one ends with a "speaking" thing. There it was the voice of words coming down from God on the mountain. Here it is the sacrificial blood of Christ that is associated

with things so much better than even Abel's sacrifice (which in turn was better than Cain's sacrifice).

## B. Meaning of Mt. Zion

We do not have a physically tangible place we must come to meet with God. Our relationship with God is not initiated or continued on the basis of a fearful response of our five physical senses.

Rather we come to God in a spiritual fashion, through the gospel that we believe and trust. So, when we became saved, that is when we "came" to the city of God. We joined the angels and the saved of all ages in the presence of God and our Mediator, Jesus Christ. We become members with them of the heavenly family of God at that time.

The atmosphere is one of joy and privilege instead of fear. However, we must not eliminate the fear of God entirely. We deal with the *same* God who is the main character in Exodus 19-20. At the same time, there is a vastly different character to our approaching of God in this age because of the work of Jesus Christ. If Jesus is rejected, then there is nothing except a fearful expectation of judgment (Heb. 10:27, 31).

Theologically, Mt. Zion symbolizes that God has dealt with sin in a complete fashion and can welcome people into His presence.

The contrast between Mt. Sinai and Mt. Zion is like the contrast between the earthly tabernacle and the heavenly one in Hebrews 9:1-15. The old tabernacle was part of a system that could not perfect the conscience, that was shadowy, that had repeated sacrifices, and that only provided a relationship to God at a great distance. The new covenant is a system that reverses all those conditions and establishes a once-for-all sacrifice for sins, total forgiveness, and a cleansed conscience.

## III. The Consequent Duty of the Christian, v. 25

The Christian has so many better things than the OT saint: better cleansing blood, that of Christ (12:24); a Savior better than the angels and Moses and Levi; a better hope; and a better covenant. He does not come to Mt. Sinai but to Mt. Zion with all its great celebration of the work of Christ.

As a result, the Christian has a lot more responsibility than the OT saints did. Look up Luke 12:48 to flesh out this thought that greater privilege brings greater responsibility.

But more to the point of this passage, it is everyone who has to deal with this reality. Even those *who are not yet Christians* today have to reckon with this thought: if God would dole out capital punishment back in the day for violating His holiness and not listening to the word of His mediator Moses, what do you think will happen today for someone who rejects God and the sacrifice of Christ?

Now God speaks from heaven through the blood of His Son that offers full cleansing from sin. The better provision is matched with a more stern judgment. So we have here another warning against apostasy (turning away from the gospel).

What an encouragement to continue in the faith!

## **Conclusion**

The basic message of these verses is that Christians are not approaching God through fire and darkness and wind, but rather are approaching the dwelling place of God where there are angels and saints of all the ages, with Jesus and His sin-cleansing blood. This kind of privilege demands that we pay the utmost attention to His word, not refusing Him or His message.

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