

HEBREWS

The Danger of Departing
12:18-29

Introduction

The world of the first century Jews was about to be severely **shaken**. The Romans were marching on Jerusalem, coming to put down a rebellion against their rule and authority. General Titus' men would burn and destroy both Jerusalem and its Temple, killing over a million Jews. The Jews would be scattered all over the earth for almost two thousand years.

Jesus prophesied this shaking. He told His disciples, "**Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down**" (Matthew 24:2).

As bad as they would be shaken in the first century, God spoke of a further, future shaking:

Hebrews 12:26 ...but now He has promised, saying, "*Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.*"

This further, future shaking encompasses the seven-year Tribulation on earth which will severely shake the world in preparation for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to establish His kingdom.

The shaking of the world is to be expected. **You can remain stable while everything is shaking around you.** You're told how in verse twenty-eight, which says,

Hebrews 12:28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which **cannot be shaken**, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

Stability comes from looking beyond the world to "receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken." Looking beyond the world you can "have **grace**, by which [you] may serve God..." **Grace** summarizes all the spiritual resources available to you as a believer who must remain on the earth and endure some shaky times - both politically and personally - while waiting to receive the kingdom.

The writer used geography as a metaphor to encourage his readers - and us - to have grace to endure. He compared two mountains, Sinai and Zion. We'll organize our thoughts around these places and see two things: #1 You Will Have Grace To Serve In A Shaky World If You In Dwell In Zion, and #2 You Won't Have Grace To Serve In A Shaky World If You Depart For Sinai.

#1 You Will Have Grace To Serve
In A Shaky World If You Dwell In Zion
(v18-24)

The political world is certainly subject to great upheavals, but moreso is **your personal "world."** I want you to think more in terms of your personal world as we look at these verses.

The personal world of the Hebrew Christians was awful. They were being severely persecuted by their Jewish families and friends. Some of them were contemplating going back to the Temple to offer sacrifices according to the Jewish law. Throughout the Book of Hebrews the writer has been telling them to endure, rather than end, their persecutions. He does it again here using geography as a metaphor. Going back into Judaism would be like going back to Mount Sinai. Let's take a look at what happened there.

Hebrews 12:18 For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest,

Hebrews 12:19 and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard *it* begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore.

Hebrews 12:20 (For they could not endure what was commanded: "*And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.*")

Hebrews 12:21 And so terrifying was the sight *that* Moses said, "*I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.*")

Sinai is the mountain on earth where God gave the Law to Moses for Israel. It was a scene of *Terror! Tempest! And Trumpet!*

1. The people were in terror. The mountain could not be touched by man or beast. Death was the penalty for willful disobedience or the accidental touch by an animal. The Israelites backed away from the mountain. Even Moses was frightened by the awesome display of God.

2. There was tempest - a thick storm cloud with a strong wind accompanied by thunder, lightning, and earthquake.
3. A trumpet sounded, blown by an angel, growing louder and louder.

This scene at Mount Sinai represents life lived under the Old Testament law. The law itself was glorious, being an expression of the infinite holiness of God. But in expressing God's infinite holiness it exposed mankind's inherent sinfulness. **No one could ever hope to measure up to the righteousness required by the law.**

The Hebrew Christians were thinking of returning to life under the law. They thought that they could continue as Christians but go through the motions of the Law. It would be like trying to be in two places at one time. Metaphorically, it would be like moving to the terror, tempest, and trumpet of Mount Sinai.

It is so important in your Christian life to have a biblical analysis of things. Sin easily deceives us. We deceive ourselves - usually by thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to and concentrating on what we think we "deserve." We need to let God's Word put things into their proper perspective.

The Hebrew Christians were told that they dwelt in Mount Zion and, therefore, should not depart for Mount Sinai. The Mount Zion the writer was talking about is described in verses twenty-two through twenty-four:

Hebrews 12:22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,
Hebrews 12:23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,
Hebrews 12:24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of* Abel.

Mount Zion is one of the hills upon which the city of Jerusalem is built. The writer, however, is *not* talking about the earthly Mount Zion and Jerusalem. He is talking about a "heavenly" Mount Zion and a New Jerusalem. In chapter eleven it was described as a future city that God is building in heaven. It is most fully described in the Revelation of Jesus Christ. It is being built in heaven; it comes down out of heaven to hover over the earth during the kingdom age and

then forever after God creates a new heaven and a new earth. It is the place Jesus has gone to prepare for you.

Wherever these Hebrew Christian might *physically* live on the earth, *spiritually* speaking they were to see themselves as already living in the heavenly Mount Zion and the New Jerusalem. The physical world around them might be shaking; they were to remain stable by drawing upon the resources of grace that belonged to them by rights of their heavenly citizenship.

You **dwel**l in this heavenly city by **dwelling upon** its description. It is described in six ways.

First, you dwell upon "an innumerable company of angels." The Book of Hebrews had a lot to say about angels in the opening chapters. You learned that they are ministering spirits; that is, God sends them to minister to you when necessary. In chapter thirteen the writer will tell you, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

This is not to encourage you to focus on angels! It is simply to remind you that there is more to reality than your shaky world. There is an unseen but very real realm behind the things going on in your life. It's a realm God governs with power and authority. What happens in your world is temporary and is for your ultimate good and God's glory.

Second, you dwell upon the "general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven." The term "firstborn" is plural and designates all the believers of what we call the Church Age, from the Day of Pentecost until the Rapture of the Church. Of interest is the phrase "registered in heaven." **Your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life.** You are enrolled in heaven. When your earthly world is shaken you are secure in eternity.

Third, "God the Judge of all" is there. You are to dwell upon the reality of standing before the Judgement Seat of Jesus Christ to receive your rewards for your service on the earth. It is a great encouragement to remember that this life is passing away and that

the things you endure for the sake of your Lord will remain forever. You are to live for future rewards and not for temporary relief.

Fourth, you dwell upon "the spirits of just men made perfect." These are the Old Testament saints. "Made perfect" means that they trusted in the coming of the Messiah to be the sacrifice and substitute for their sins and have been declared righteous, justified by God. They are described as "spirits" because they are in heaven awaiting the future resurrection when their spirits will be united with glorious, heavenly, resurrection bodies. You can review God's faithfulness toward these saints and draw examples and encouragement for your own earthly experiences.

Fifth, you dwell upon "Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant." Whatever is shaking around you, no matter how severe, Jesus is your Great High Priest in heaven. He is there before God's throne praying for you. From God's throne He dispenses mercy and grace to enable you to endure with joy. Within you is His Holy Spirit Who writes God's Law on your heart and Who fills you with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Sixth and last in this list, you dwell upon "the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of Abel*." Here is how the Hebrew Christians may have understood this phrase. In chapter eleven the writer said that "Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he testified that he was righteous..." Abel offered the blood of a lamb. The blood of Abel's lamb is being compared to the "blood of sprinkling." The "blood of sprinkling" is the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross. Abel offered a lamb; Jesus was "better" in that He was the final Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world.

Abel offered the lamb despite his brothers animosity toward him. Cain, his brother, killed Abel but God honored him. The Hebrew Christians were facing being killed by their brothers because of their faith in Jesus Christ. They should not back away from Jesus and return to the old sacrifices despite their brothers' animosity toward them. God would honor them - even in martyrdom.

Dwell upon these things and you will be **dwelling** in the heavenly Mount Zion regardless your earthly geography and the shaking going on around you.

#2 You Won't Have Grace To Serve
In A Shaky World If You Depart For Sinai
(v25-29)

We've discovered four warning passages in our study through Hebrews. This is the fifth and final warning:

Hebrews 12:25 See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more *shall we not escape* if we turn away from Him who *speaks* from heaven,

“Refuse” and “turn away” described their plan to return to Judaism. A return to Judaism would be a return to Mount Sinai; it would be a **departing** from the "grace to serve" God available by dwelling in Mount Zion.

The writer is talking about the history of Israel when he says, "for if they did not escape Him who spoke on earth." The Jews could not escape God's discipline when they disobeyed the law. The Hebrew Christians would not escape God's discipline should they try to obey the law. They might escape their persecution, **but they could not escape Gods parenting!** Earlier in the chapter the writer said, "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth."

At some point these Hebrew Christians must once-for-all look past relief from their persecutions to the promise of their future reward:

Hebrews 12:26 whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "*Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.*"

Hebrews 12:27 Now this, "*Yet once more,*" indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.

History is moving toward a cataclysmic but predicted end. God has "promised" to "once more... shake not only the earth, but also heaven." There is coming upon this planet, and the entire created universe, one final shaking like nothing ever before or after. Here is how it will all come down:

1. The Church Age believers will imminently be resurrected and Raptured to heaven.
2. Seven years of incredible tribulation will follow. The earth and universe will literally be shaken.
3. Jesus will return in His Second Coming and establish a one-thousand year kingdom on the earth. As glorious as it will be, the kingdom will end with the rebellion of unbelieving mankind against God's rule. The Lord will easily overcome the rebellion.
4. Then, with only believers remaining, God obliterates this universe, described as "those things that are being shaken." He creates a new heaven and a new earth, "the things which cannot be shaken." These will "remain" for all eternity. We will remain there for all eternity!

In the mean time you may have the enabling grace to endure any and all shaking in your world:

Hebrews 12:28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

"Grace" represents all the spiritual resources that are available to enable you to endure. Grace is available, **so let's have it!**

We don't have it because we don't want it. Grace can involve a toughness that we would rather avoid.

The apostle Paul is one who endured much shaking in his world. At one point he felt overwhelmed by what seems to have been a physical infirmity. He sought the Lord to end it; instead, the Lord provided grace to endure it. In Second Corinthians 12:9 you read,

2 Corinthians 12:9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

In another place Paul would write,

2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory,

Your trials, your tribulations, are always a "light affliction" when you remember the kingdom you are receiving in the future. You are

enabled *in* them and *through* them to "serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear."

You "serve God." The word "serve" can be translated *minister* or *worship*. You should look at your life like this: How can I worship God in the midst of my circumstances and be a minister to others?

"Acceptably" means *pleasing God*. Your primary motive in life ought to be to please God. It is not always life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. You will please Him if you conduct yourself with "reverence and godly fear." "Reverence" is a respect for the unseen purposes He intends. "Godly fear" is the understanding that your dreams and desires ought to be subordinated to God's Word.

There is a final encouragement to endure in verse twenty-nine:

Hebrews 12:29 For our God *is* a consuming fire.

This could mean any number of things:

1. We've just seen that God will destroy the earth and universe. He will literally "consume" it with "fire."
2. We've also seen fire at Mount Sinai, reminding us that God is holy and desires to produce holiness in our lives as we live on earth but dwell in Zion.
3. Finally, and I think this is what the writer had in mind, when you stand before Jesus to receive your rewards your life will be subjected to His fire. The fire will *ruin* everything not fit for eternity, but it will *refine* everything that was pleasing to God.

Maybe the verse encompasses all three of these consuming fires: Live a holy life, looking forward to your rewards, because the universes will eventually be destroyed and you will go on into eternity. In light of these consuming fires the Hebrew Christians ought to dwell in Mount Zion and not depart for Judaism and Mount Sinai.

Conclusion

You and I have our own personal "geography" - places in the world or in our lives that we can "depart" to when the world is shaken. Don't depart; let us have grace **imparted** to us.

