

**Mount Sinai or Mount Zion
Hebrews 12:18-24**

When I was about 11 or 12 years of age I had begun to collect U.S. coins. And I was quite the enthusiast. One day, a school friend of mine, who had just begun to collect coins, showed me his collection of Lincoln Head pennies. And one of the pennies he had in his collection was a 1909 S. It was not the 1909 S V.D.B. but it was still a fairly rare and valuable penny and it was a penny I did not have. And I wanted that penny.

So what did I do? I offered him a deal. **I would give him five pennies that he did not have in his collection, if he would give me that one single penny that I did not have in my collection.**

Was I offering him a good deal? No! I was offering him a terrible deal. Was I doing this because I cared about him? No! I was doing this because I cared about me and I wanted his penny. This was not one of my finer moments.

So did he take my deal? Yes, he did! Why? He took my deal because he did not know the value of what he possessed! He undervalued his penny. And because he undervalued his penny he was willing to exchange his fairly rare and valuable penny, for my five relatively worthless pennies.

Professing believers today can do the same thing! How? Not by exchanging an undervalued penny for five relatively worthless pennies, but rather by exchanging Christ and the pursuit of Christ for something else of far lesser value

This is exactly what some of the original recipients of the Book of Hebrews were in danger of doing.

They had made a profession of faith in Christ. And they also displayed some evidence that the faith that they had professed was indeed a genuine faith. But now, in the midst of a great persecution, the genuineness of their professed faith, at least in respect to some of them, was now being brought into question.

So how was it being brought into question? It was being brought into question because some of them were actually contemplating turning away from Christ and the pursuit of Christ to return to Judaism or some form of it or in other words, some of them were actually contemplating exchanging Christ and what He was offering them for Judaism and what it was offering them.

Would the author of Hebrews have considered this to be good exchange? No! He would have considered it to be an absolutely horrific exchange, for if they had in fact

done this he would have viewed them as having exchanged the joy filled life of the New Covenant for the terror filled life of the Old Covenant.

I believe this will become very clear to us this morning as we once again return to our ongoing study of the Book of Hebrews and begin our examination of Hebrews 12:18-24.

So now let me read this passage for you and I will be reading from the NASV. And this is what it says, "**For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, (19) and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. (20) For they could not bear the command, "If even a beast touched the mountain, it will be stoned." (21) And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I am full of fear and trembling". (22) But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, (23) to the general assembly and church of the first born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, (24) and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel."**

Based on these verses, did the author believe, that if his readers turned away from Christ to return to Judaism, that they would be exchanging the joy filled life of the New Covenant for the terror filled life of the Old Covenant. Yes! I believe he did!

MESSAGE

What did the author seek to do in these verses, in order to make this thought come alive for his readers? The author in Hebrews 12:18-24 contrasted the terror of Mount Sinai representing the Jewish way of life under the Old Covenant with the glories of Mount Zion representing the Christian's joyful way of life under the New Covenant.

This is a contrast that we need to understand, for if we do not understand this contrast we may one day find ourselves in the same danger as the original recipients of this letter so now let us begin by looking at this contrast.

We will begin by looking at what the author said about the first mountain which is introduced to us in Hebrews 12:18-21 as an unnamed mountain. So what mountain was this? The original recipients of this letter would have immediately known that this mountain was Mount Sinai. How would they have known this? They would have known this because they would have recognized that **Hebrews 12:18-21** was simply a very brief summation of what Moses had already said about this mountain or in other words Mount Sinai, in far greater detail, in **Exodus 19:1-25**.

If we truly want to know what the original recipients would have known about Mount Sinai and how it might relate to the Old Covenant and to the terror of the

Jewish way of life under the Old Covenant, then it probably would be good for us to consider what the original recipients of this letter would have known about Mount Sinai from **Exodus 19:1-25** rather than just looking at this author's brief summary in **Hebrews 12:18-21**.

So what would they have known about this mountain and the significance of this mountain from Exodus 19:1-25? The original recipients of the Book of Hebrews would have known that Mount Sinai was the place where the nation of Israel agreed to enter into a covenant with God before they received the Mosaic Law from God (Exodus 19:1-9).

How would they have known this? They would have known this, because this was all described for them by Moses in **Exodus 19:1-9**.

And what would they have known from these verses? (1) They would have known that three months after the children of Israel exited Egypt they arrived at Mount Sinai, based on **Exodus 19:1**. (2) They would have known that Moses after arriving at Mount Sinai immediately ascended the mountain, based on **Exodus 19:2**. (3) They would also have known, based on **Exodus 19:3-5**, that after ascending the mountain that God told Moses to speak the following words to the children of Israel, "**Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; (6) and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Sons of Israel.**" (4) And they would have also known that after Moses spoke these words to the children of Israel, they responded by saying to Moses, "**All that the Lord has spoken we will do!**" based on **Exodus 19:7,8**.

So why did the children of Israel respond this way? They responded this way because they truly believed that they would be able to obey God and keep His covenant!

Why would they have believed this? They would have believed this because they truly thought they were good enough and strong enough to actually obey Him and to keep His covenant. So now let me ask you this question.

Because of this strong belief, what would they have been their feeling, when they initially agreed to this covenant in Exodus 19:17,18? They probably would have been feeling joy! But this is not what they should have been feeling! Why? When they agreed to this covenant, they had not put themselves in a position to be blessed by God but rather to be judged by God.

God using Mount Sinai helped them to see this very quickly. And did the original recipients of the Book of Hebrews know about how God used Mount Sinai to do this? Yes!

The original recipients of the Book of Hebrews would have known about how God had used Mount Sinai to turn Israel's initial joy into **terror** (Exodus 19:10-25).

So how would they have known this? They would have known how God used Mount Sinai because Moses had made it known to them in great detail in **Exodus 19:10-25**. **What things would they have known?**

(1) They would have known, that after the children of Israel agreed to this covenant, Moses alerted them to the fact that God in three days would be manifesting Himself to them from Mount Sinai, based on **Exodus 19:11** (2) They would have known that in preparation for this manifestation, Moses was instructed by God to consecrate them and to warn them, that if they or any animal, crossed the boundary line, that would be set around the mountain, while God was on the mountain, they would be most certainly be put to death, based on **Exodus 19:10-15**. (3) They would also have known that God did in fact manifest Himself to them from Mount Sinai after three days, just as He said He would, initially in a dark cloud, with flashes of lighting and thunder and then with a loud heavenly trumpet blast, that caused the people of Israel to tremble based on **Exodus 19:16,17**, and then in the violent shaking of Mount Sinai and even louder and louder heavenly trumpet blasts based on **Exodus 19:18,19** which then finally culminated with God speaking directly to them and to Moses from Mount Sinai **based on Exodus 19:20 - 20:17**. What did God speak to them? He recited to them, most likely in a very thunderous voice "**The ten commandments**".

How did the people respond to God when God began to speak the Law to them in this way? The Children of Israel based on **Exodus 20:19** responded by speaking to Moses and saying to Him, "**Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die.**"

Were they terrified? Yes! Was Moses terrified? Yes! How do we know this? We know this because the writer of Hebrews tells us this in **Hebrews 12:21**.

So why were they all terrified? They were all terrified because, as God manifested Himself to them from Mount Sinai, they knew from that day forward, that they would not be able to keep the law but that God would also be judging them by the Law. And this was terrifying to all of them!

Why did God enter into this covenant with them if He knew His covenant with them was going to produce this sense of terror in them? This is why: God entered into this covenant with Israel in order to help lead them to Christ so that they through faith in Christ might receive from Him the gift of salvation made possible through His death (Galatians 3:24).

What does **Galatians 3:24** tell us? It tells us this: "**Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.**"

So now let me ask you this question? Did this author believe that the original recipients of the Book of Hebrews, after having been prepared by the terror of Law, actually had come to Christ and therefore actually had been justified by faith? Yes! He did!

What did the author say to them, in the very first words of Hebrews 12:18 just before his brief description of Mount Sinai? He said this to them, "For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched" or in other words they had not come to Mount Sinai".

So if they, because of their faith in Christ, had not come to Mount Sinai what mountain did this author believe, that they had they come to? And what covenant did he believe that they had come to? And what did he believe would be their experience on this mountain and under the covenant?

He believed: His readers had come to Mount Zion through faith in Christ and were now under the **New Covenant** and would be able to enjoy the blessings of that covenant.

How do we know this? We know this because, after he told them that they had in fact come to Mount Zion at the beginning of **Hebrews 12:22**, which they would have understood as referring to the habitation of God, based on **Psalms 134:13,14**. He then tied the joys that they would come to on this mountain with the New Covenant in the list of joys he provided them in **Hebrews 12:22-24**.

Now let us consider this author's list of joys that he believed individuals would come to on Mount Zion if they have faith in Christ.

They will have come to the joy of **inclusion** in the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22 cf. Hebrews 11:13,16). So now let me read for you Hebrews 12:22 and see if this is not so. And what does it say? It says this, "**But you have come to Mount Zion the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...**"

How will those who have come to Mount Zion through faith have this joy of inclusion? When they came to faith in Christ they were joined to Christ. And where is Christ now? He is with His Father in glory, in the city of the living God and in the heavenly Jerusalem and therefore those who have come to Christ by faith are now with Christ spiritually in glory.

They will have come to the joy of **myriads of angels**, to the general assembly (Hebrews 12:22,23 cf. Revelation 5:11,12). So let me read for you Hebrews 12:22 and see if this is not so. And what does it say? It says this, "**and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly**".

How have those who have been joined to Christ come to this joy? Most scholars understand the Greek word for "general assembly" to be connected to festival of celebration. And who in this verse is pictured as celebrating? Myriads of angels!

So what is the author saying? When we come to Mount Zion, which is the habitation of God in Christ we will, spiritually speaking be in the midst of this celestial choir

composed of myriads of angels. And all we have to do to enjoy this celestial choir is to open up our eyes of faith.

They will have come to the joy of the church of the **firstborn** who are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23). Now let me read for you **Hebrews 12:23** and see if this is not so. And this is what it says, "**and the church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven**"

What does this mean? Of the nine New Testament occurrences of the word "firstborn", seven refer to Jesus (Matt. 1:25; Luke 2:7; Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 1:5). The term emphasizes the inheritance rights of God's children. In natural families they have only one firstborn. But in God's family every child of God, because of their union with Christ is God's firstborn, and therefore entitled to share in His inheritance. Today, there is a portion of the church of the firstborn already there and have already begun to revel in their inheritance rights.

If we have come to Mount Zion by faith can we can today open up our spiritual eyes by faith and see what they are now reveling in? Yes! And would that be a source of joy? Yes!

They will have come to the joy of a **judge**, who is God of all (Hebrews 12:23). Let me read for you **Hebrews 12:23**, "**and to God, the judge of all**".

So if we have come to Mount Zion by faith, which is the habitation of God, and open our spiritual eyes by faith, and we see God, the judge of all why would this be a joyful sight?

It is because we know that God, the judge of all, will one day at the proper time, make sure that every righteous deed done for Christ and in the power of Christ will be rewarded (Matthew 10:42, Gal. 6:9) and one day, also at the proper time, every unrighteous deed ever done by any unrighteous person will not go unpunished.

They will have come to the joy of the spirits of the righteous made **perfect** (Hebrews 12:23). Let me read for you **Hebrews 11:23**. And this is what it says, "**and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect.**"

What does this mean? The reference to "spirits" refers to all of the saints who have died and gone to heaven. They have not yet received their new resurrection bodies, which await the second coming of Christ, but their spirits are now perfect.

So if we have come to Zion by faith and if we choose to open up our spiritual eyes by faith what will we see? We will see those who have gone on before to heaven perfected or in other words perfectly righteous. The very thing that we are no longing for!

They will have come to the joy of Jesus, the **mediator** of a new covenant (Hebrews 12:24). Let me read for you **Hebrews 11:24**, "**and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant.**" The author uses His human name, Jesus, because it was as a man that Jesus

shed His blood for our sins as His Father's perfect sacrifice. And it was because of His blood sacrifice that He is now able to stand before God as the mediator of the New Covenant on our behalf.

If we have come to Mount Zion by faith and open up our spiritual eyes what will we see? We see Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant interceding for us before His Father!

They will have come to the joy of the sprinkled blood, which is better than the blood of Abel (Hebrews 12:24). Let me read for you Hebrews 12:24, "and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel".

What does this mean? The reference to Abel's blood is not a reference to the blood of Abel's sacrifice but rather to the blood of Abel that was spilt on ground when he was murdered and was crying out to God for vengeance and justice (Genesis 4:10).

So how is Christ's sprinkled blood better than Abel's blood? Abel's blood cried out to God for vengeance but Christ's blood sprinkled on those who have come to Christ by faith cries out "forgiven." For when Christ's blood was sprinkled upon them at the point of faith the debt they owed to God because of their sin was forgiven by God.

If we come to Mount Zion and by faith open our spiritual eyes what will we see? We will see the better blood of Christ sprinkled on the redeemed.

Conclusion

Why did this author draw such a sharp contrast between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion for his readers?

He did not want them by turning away from Christ back to Judaism to exchange the joys of Mount Zion for the terrors of Mount Sinai.

I hope that we would not be tempted to make a similar mistake by turning away from Christ to pursue something other than Christ.

May God give us the grace as God's children to not **undervalue** Christ and what He is offering so that we might remain faithful in our pursuit of Him until the end.