

1. Hebr. 12:1-13 warns us not to rebel against God when we are chastened by Him. Vss. 14-17 and 25-29 continue that warning and encouragement. Vss. 18-24 could be considered a grand parenthesis in this warning section, vss. 12-29. These vss. speak of the proper motivation of the Christian. It is not the fear and dread which the children of Israel experienced at Mt. Sinai but rather the joy and confidence experienced by those who have approached Mt. Zion. The Law threatens us and shows us our sins. The Gospel comforts us and covers our sins. The Gospel makes us loyal and faithful to the Lord and causes us to run the race of life as we ought run it. This section comprises two sentences: vss. 18-21 and vss. 22-24. Both begin with the verb "you have approached." "For" is explanatory. It introduces the reason for which we do not endure. It is answered by the word "however" in vs. 22. The word "Sinai" is not mentioned here but is plainly implicit in the text. The details of vss. 18-21 are taken from Deut. 4 and 5 and Ex. 19 and 20. The seven details mentioned here in vss. 18-19 are attendant to the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai. The Mosaic Law involved also the ceremonial law which is called the "elements of the world" in Galatians and Colossians. This law not only reminded the people that they were sinful but also contained shadows of the Gospel which were to be fulfilled in Christ Jesus. This law tended toward the physical, tangible and touchable. The Temple in Jerusalem was a tangible thing. It was a shadow of the Christ Who was to come. When He said to His enemies: "Destroy this temple" etc., He meant Himself as the fulfillment of the Temple. The Sabbath was a temporary thing. It denoted rest. It was fulfilled in Christ and therefore is no more. The writer of vs. 18 in our text says: "You have not approached that which can be touched." Now there follow four items which were attendant to the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai: the blazing fire, darkness, gloom and storm. The writer is not saying that the people of the Old Covenant had nothing but the Sinaitic Covenant. We know from chapter 11 that they had more than that. They had also the Abrahamitic Covenant. The Sinaitic Covenant is the Law of God. The Abrahamitic Covenant is the Gospel of God. The former shows us our sin. The latter shows us the grace of God. The former condemns. The latter comforts. Israel lived in the time of promise, we, in time of fulfillment.
2. Vs. 19: When the people heard the sound of the trumpet and God Himself speaking they became terrified and asked that nothing more be said. This is how man reacts to the Law of God. See Gal. 3:19-24; 4:1-3. The writer of our text says: "You have approached more than that." Vss. 20-21 explain vs. 19. The point is that the Law threatens punishment. It holds out no hope of salvation. Moses was a highly privileged man but vs. 21 tells us that he trembled and was exceedingly afraid when God spoke to the people on Mt. Sinai. He was a sinner, saved by grace.
3. Vs. 22 begins with Mt. Zion, the symbol of the Kingdom of God, the Gospel, which came to us through Jesus Christ. It is called the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. The writer is speaking about the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, both those on earth and those in heaven. Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:20. At Gal. 4:26 Paul calls it "The Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all."
4. Vs. 23 clearly speaks of the inhabitants of heaven: those who are first-born because they are of Christ THE first-born, Col. 1:15, those who are the elect of God (see Ex. 32:32; Ps. 69:28; Is. 4:3; Dan. 12:1; Lk. 10:20), those for whom God judges, those just souls who have reached their goal.
5. Vs. 24 speaks of Christ the Mediator Who fulfilled all. He was murdered but His blood does not cry for vengeance as does Abel's blood. His blood cleanses us from all sin and pleads for us before the throne of God in heaven.
6. In the wilderness Israel rejected this Mosaic Covenant and were lost. The writer asks: "How much greater won't your punishment be if you now reject the New Covenant of Jesus?"

Theme: DO NOT TURN AWAY FROM HIM WHO SPEAKS FROM HEAVEN (vs. 25)

Introduction: Hebrews was written during the Neronian persecutions.

Christianity was forbidden but Judaism was permitted. Jews who had become Christians were tempted to return to Judaism and abandon Christ. This whole epistle says: DO NOT DO THAT. Our text comes to grips with this problem directly. It asks: "If Israel did not escape after refusing the voice that spoke on earth, how much more will we not escape if we turn away from the voice which speaks from heaven?"

I-Israel Turned Away From Him Who Spoke on Earth, Vss. 18-21

A-Mt. Sinai is the symbol of the time of the law and promise. We know from the last four books of Moses that God gave the Covenant of the Law through Moses to Israel on Mt. Sinai. It comprised three kinds of law: moral, ceremonial and political. The moral law, the ten commandments, showed them their sin. The ceremonial law was the system of shadows which prefigured Christ. The political laws governed Israel as an earthly kingdom. Vss. 18-21 show us how frightened Israel was when God spoke to them from the mountain. Even Moses was so afraid that he said: "I am full of fear and trembling." That is the moral law. Vs. 18 mentions "that which can be touched." That hints at the ceremonial law, the law of ceremonies. For example: circumcision, sacrifices, the Temple, etc. These things pointed forward to Christ.

B-But Israel did not see the fulfillment of what Mt. Sinai foretold. Gal. 3:23-25 reads: "But before faith (fulfillment) came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor." The Mosaic Law and its era led people to Christ, the Savior. They believed the promises about Him. Jesus said of that time: "Many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it." Lk. 10:24. David and Isaiah longed for the fulfillment but did not experience it.

C-Israel lost everlasting life by turning away from the Mosaic Covenant in the desert. This was a great tragedy. But how much worse if we now turn away from Christ Who has fulfilled all!!

II-Let Us Not Turn Away From Him Who Speaks to Us From Heaven, Vss. 22-24

A-Mt. Zion is the symbol of the time of fulfillment. Vs. 22

1-It is the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem, a festival host of myriads of heavenly angels. The book of Revelation gives us glimpses of this. It is not a forbidding scene as was Mt. Sinai. It is an inviting scene. By faith we are already citizens of heaven. By faith we are heirs of eternal life.

2-It is the throng of the heavenly, first-born elect of God. It is the throng of the heavenly justified people who have reached their goal. It is the presence of God Who judges in favor of the believer. This is what we call the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the church on earth and in heaven. Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:20.

3-It is the Mediator of the New Testament, Jesus, whose blood does not cry for vengeance as does Abel's but whose blood cries for our pardon and forgiveness.

B-All of this we have approached by faith in Jesus. Jesus once said: "Everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required." Lk. 12:48. Prophets and kings longed to see and hear what we see and hear. Our loss will be greater if we abandon this New Testament. Let us not be like the dog in the fable. He stood on a bridge with a piece of meat in his mouth. When he looked at his shadow in the river he let go of the meat he had, thinking that he would gain more. But by doing so he lost everything.

Conclusion: Only one thing is required of us and that is that we remain faithful unto death. Let us never give up our faith and confession.