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The Earthly Sinai and the Heavenly Tziyon

12: 18-29

The earthly Sinai and the heavenly Tziyon DIG: What is the point of the comparison between Mount Sinai and Mount Tziyon? What key principle for the Hebrews does Esau illustrate (Genesis 25:29-34)? How does this contrast sum up the author's argument throughout the book? What happens to those who refuse to heed God's voice from Mount Sinai (verses 19, 25 and 3:17)? From heaven (25-27 and 1:2)? What is our reward and appropriate response (verse 28)?

REFLECT: For more insight about how to endure, read Psalm 42. What do you learn from the psalmist about how to persevere in difficult times? What other truths from Hebrews 12 are illustrated in this psalm? If you are believer, you have come to Mount Tziyon and the City of the living God, the heavenly Yerushalayim. How often do you think of heaven? What can you do to focus on heaven each day? How can your life better reflect your true citizenship?³⁸¹

The glory and supremacy of **the Messiah** is the great theme of **Hebrews**. A hostile Jewish community doubtless told the **Hebrew** believers in **Messiah** that they had turned their backs on **Ha'Shem**. They were probably taunted for having foolishly forsaken **Jerusalem** and the Temple, where **ADONAI** promised to meet **His** people. In response, the writer placed a **God-sized** vision before these believers. They received not only an understanding of **Messiah's** unparalleled, exalted character, but also a deeper awareness of the privilege they had been given to worship **Him** and enjoy **His** fellowship.

The great issue in spiritual warfare is **the glory** of **ADONAI**. The Adversary is intent on depriving **God the glory He** deserves. Unless we perceive **the glory** of **YHVH**, our worship will be the worse for it. As a result, we cannot live with the personal and spiritual fulfillment to which **His glory** calls us. If that's not bad enough, our service to **the Lord** will also be impeded, for where that is no dynamic worship, there is also little dynamic service.

For the people of Isra'el, **the glory** of **the LORD** was originally something quite visible. His majestic presence terrified them at Sinai (see the commentary on **Exodus Dg - Moses Spoke and the Voice of God Answered Him**), but was a powerful reminder that **He** was

with them. **His** presence with them at the Tabernacle during the many years of wilderness wanderings. Generations later, when the Philistines captured the ark of the Covenant, the cry, **Ichabod**, was heard: **The Glory had departed from them (First Samuel 4:21-22).**

The Temple in Yerushalayim, with a centuries old history of **God**-ordained rituals and sacrifice, was the place where **the Sh'khinah glory** dwelt. It was only a few years after the letter to the **Hebrews** was written, that the Romans would burn down Temple after a tragic and humiliating siege of **the City of David**. It was a destruction that **Messiah** had foretold: **Do you see all these great buildings? As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down (Matthew 24:2; Mark 13:2; Luke 21:6).**

Yet even before the Temple's destruction (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ, to see link click Mt - The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple on Tisha B'Av in 70 AD**), many children of Abraham had come to see the radiance of **God's glory** in a new and living way: **ADONAI** had revealed **His** unique splendor in **the Person of His Son, the exact representation of His Father (1:3)**. To see **YHVH**, you only needed to behold **His Messiah**. The foundation of the B'rit Chadashah is that **Yeshua**, who bears the very stamp of **God's essence**, has come into the midst of **His** people. As our perception of **Him** becomes fuller, so will our worship.³⁸²

The dilemma of those Jews in Messianic community to whom the letter was written was this, "Should I stay or should I go?" Should I stay and endure the persecution. Should I stay and look to **the City with foundations, whose architect and builder is God, the heavenly Jerusalem (11:10)**? Should I stay and place my faith in a better Covenant, a better Sanctuary, and a better sacrifice . . . better than the prophets, better than Moshe, better than the angels, and better than the Levitical priesthood? Or fall back to the **fear and darkness of Mount Sinai**? Those on the verge of accepting Yeshua, should not fear the persecution they might receive for believing in **Him**; but rather they should fear the judgement they would inevitably receive if they rejected **Him**. Their **fear** should not be coming to **Mount Tziyon**, but turning back to a burning **Mount Sinai**. The contrast is striking.

Mount Sinai: The awesome appearance of **Mount Sinai** when **God** gave **the Torah** to the people of Isra'el demonstrated **His** holiness (**Exodus 19:16-20, 20:18-21; Deuteronomy 4:10-13**); however, **the Torah** was inaugurated in the context of **terror**. Going back to the Temple and the Levitical sacrifices would be terrifying, in essence, returning to **the ministry that brought death and condemnation (Second Corinthians 3:2-18)**.³⁸³

The writer then quotes from **Exodus 19:12-13** to show that **Mount Sinai**, where **the Torah** had been given, was **untouchable**. **You have not come to an earthly mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fires; to darkness, gloom and storm, to the sound of the shofar**, as had the generation that stood at its base (**12:18**). When **God** appears in the TaNaKh, **He** is often accompanied by **fire** (**Exodus 13:21; Judges 13:20; 1 Kings 18:38**); **darkness and gloom** (**Genesis 15:12; Exodus 10:21-22, 14:20; 1 Kings 8:12; Joel 2:31; Amos 5:18**); and a **storm** (**Nahum 1:3; Job 37:9, 38:1; Zech 9:14**).

When **YHVH** gave the Ten **Commandments** (**Deuteronomy 5:6-21**), called the Ten **Words in the Torah** (**Deuteronomy 4:13**), all the people of Isra'el heard **His voice**. And those words made the hearers beg that no further message be given to them (**12:19 CJB**), for they could not bear to hear what was commanded to them, **"Even if an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death"** (**Hebrews 12:20** quoting **Exodus 19:12-13**). The people only wanted **God** to talk to **Moshe** as their representative because they were **fearful** (**Deuteronomy 4:10-13, 5:20-25 and 18:16-17**). But **Moses** said: **ADONAI will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers. You are to listen to everything He tells you. Everyone who fails to listen to that Prophet will be completely cut off from the people** (**Deut 18:15-19 CJB**). According to **Acts 3:22-23**, **Yeshua** fulfills this prophecy.

Not only were the people **frightened** but **Moshe** was also. **The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I was terrified of the LORD's anger and fury"** (**Hebrews 12:21** quoting **Deuteronomy 9:19 GWT**). So the scene on Mount Sinai repelled even **Moshe**. However, by quoting a remark that **Moses** made not on **Mount Sinai** but upon returning and discovering the golden calf (**Deuteronomy 9:14-19**), the author of **Hebrews** show us that as a result of **Moses'** personal experience with **God**, he developed a healthy **fear** of **God** (**Proverbs 1:7, 9:10**), which lasted not only while he was receiving **the Torah**, but also afterwards - indeed throughout **his** life. The author's point (for us also) is that those who begin well with **Yeshua** should not fall away later.³⁸⁴ If the persecuted believers in the Messianic community returned to the Levitical system, they would return to a system that would only bring **terror, death**, and condemnation.

For many years Rabbi Sha'ul had been a student of **the Torah**. He knew the TaNaKh as few men of his time knew it. Yet until **Yeshua confronted** him on the Damascus road (see the commentary on **Acts Bc - Sha'ul Turns from Murder to Messiah**), he had never really understood the true meaning of **the Torah**. He had never looked squarely into it to see himself. He thought he was alive because of his obedience to **the 365 negative and 248**

positive **commandments** of **the Torah**. In seeing **Yeshua Messiah**, however, he saw himself reflected in the mirror of **the 613 commandments**. As a result, he said: **I was once alive outside the framework of Torah. But when the commandments really confronted me, sin sprang to life, and I died. The commandments that were intended to bring me life was found to bring me death! For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandments, deceived me; and through the commandments, sin killed me (Romans 7:9-11).**

Though he had been **circumcised on the eighth day, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, in regard to the Torah, a Pharisee, as for zeal, persecuting the Church, as for righteousness based upon the Torah, faultless (Philippians 3:5-6)**, he had never stood at the foot of **Mount Sinai**. He had **eyes, but had not seen**, and had **ears but had not heard (Jeremiah 5:21)**. He had not understood the clear unmistakable declaration of **Deuteronomy 27:26: Cursed is anyone who does not uphold (all) the words of this Torah by putting them into practice (perfectly)**. But in **Messiah** he came to understand it, and he quotes it to some **Galatians** who were beginning to fall back to the Temple and the Levitical system: **For all who depend on the legalistic observance of the Torah are under a curse, as it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything (perfectly) written in the Scroll of the Torah" (Galatians 3:10).**³⁸⁵



Mount Tziyon: But you have come to **Mount Tziyon, to the City of the living God, the heavenly Yerushalayim**. This is **the City** in **heaven** that is destined to be the abode of all the redeemed. This is **the City** **Jesus** spoke about in **John 14:2-3**. In contrasting **Hagar and Sarah**, Paul tells us that **Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children**

(Galatians 4:25). He mentions two **Jerusalem's**. **Hagar** represented the first-century **Jerusalem**, a City enslaved to Rome and to the Levitical priesthood. **But Sarah**, on the other hand, pictured **the Yerushalayim that is above and free**. **She is the mother** of all the children of grace. This is **the City** that Abraham sought in **11:10**. The writer will mention it again in **13:14**. This is **the City** that **John** describes in **Revelation 21:1 to 22:5**. This will be the home of all the redeemed of every generation since Adam who either enter by resurrection or translation. To those believing Jews who were being persecuted, it was if the writer was saying, "Don't turn to back to Temple that will only bring **death and condemnation**. Endure! This **heavenly City** awaits you!" And to those unbelieving Jews who were on the edge of salvation, he was saying, "Don't return to **Mount Sinai**, come to **Mount Tziyon** and be saved!"

The angels are introduced here because **they** usually represent **God's glory** and ministers of **His** will. **You come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the assembly of called out ones of the firstborn**. It is **the firstborn** who receive the inheritance. Those believers were **heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ** who is **the firstborn among many brothers and sisters (Romans 8:17 and 29) whose names are written in heaven (12:22-23a) in the Lambs Book of Life** (see the commentary on **Revelation Fv - Nothing Impure Will Enter the New Jerusalem**).

On **Mount Tziyon** we can come into the presence of **ADONAI**, something incomprehensible to the Jew who only knew the **terrifying God** of **Mount Sinai**. After **Yeshua's** death on the cross, **the curtain of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51a; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45b)**, and the way into **YHVH's** presence was forever made open for those who trust in **His** atoning death. To come into the presence of **Ha'Shem** at **Sinai** was to die; to come into **ADONAI's** presence at **Tziyon** is to live (**Psalm 73:25; Revelation 21:3**). **You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the righteous of the TaNaKh made perfect**. To those persecuted Jewish believers, the writer declares that they will not be inferior to Abraham or Moshe or Elijah, because they will all be equal in **righteousness**, because our only **righteousness** will be our **Savior's righteousness**. The only way to get to **heaven** is to be **perfect**, and the only way to be **made perfect** is to have all of **Christ's righteousness** transferred to our spiritual bank account at the moment of faith (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Bw - What God Does For Us at the Moment of Faith**).

You have come to Yeshua the mediator of a New Covenant (see **Bw - The Results of Messiah's Sacrifice**), and to the **sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (12:23-24)**. The writer reminded those unbelieving Jews that salvation only

comes through **the blood of Yeshua**, not the Temple or its Levitical sacrifices. **The sprinkled blood of Jesus speaks better than the blood of Abel.** Abel's sacrifice of **blood** was acceptable to YHVH because it was offered in faith, but it had no atoning power - not even for **Abel**, let alone anyone else. **Messiah's blood**, however, is sufficient to cleanse the sins of everyone who has ever lived. **For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven**, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross (Col 1:19-20).³⁸⁶

There will be seven distinct entities present in the New Jerusalem according to Hebrews 12:22-24. First, there will be **thousands upon thousands of angels** in joyful assembly. Secondly, there will be **the Church of the firstborn (Acts 2:1-47)**, whose **names are written in heaven**. These are first century Jews who represent **the Church** all through the ages. They were **the firstborn** of more to come. Thirdly, **God, the Judge of all** will be present there and emphasizes **His** role as Judge. **God the Father** will someday judge all of **heaven**. Fourthly, **the spirits of the righteous made perfect**, or **the righteous of the TaNaKh** will reside there. They were **made perfect** by **the blood of Christ**. Fifthly, **Jesus the mediator of a New Covenant** will tabernacle there. Sixthly, there is **the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel**. **Yeshua** brought **His blood** into the Most Holy Place of **the heavenly** Tabernacle. That **sprinkled blood** is still visible on the mercy seat in **heaven** because that is where the original ark rests. While **Abel's blood speaks** continually on **earth**, **the Messiah's blood speaks** continually from **heaven**. And seventh, **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** will minister there.³⁸⁷

To those Jews who were intellectually convinced, but had not stepped over the line from knowledge to faith, **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** issues a final warning: **See to it that you do not refuse Him who speaks - the One who spoke through Moses** then and through **Yeshua** now. As the Sh'ma succinctly puts it: **ADONAI is One (Deuteronomy 6:4)**; therefore, anyone who rejects the **God of Yeshua** is also rejecting the **God of Moshe**. This point is made many times in the B'rit Chadashah (**Luke 16:29-31, 24:25-27; John 1:45, 5:45-46, 9:28-41; Acts 3:22-23, 26:22-23, 28:23-27; Romans 3:29-31, 10:4-10, Second Corinthians 3:6-16, Hebrews 3:1-6; Revelation 15:3**).

If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from Him who warns us from **heaven (12:25)**. The unbelieving Israelites who ignored **God** at **Sinai** did not enter the **earthly** Promised Land, and unbelievers today, Jew or Gentile, who ignore **ADONAI** when **He** speaks through **His**

Son from **Mount Tziyon** will not enter **the heavenly** Promised Land. Whether **God** speaks from **Sinai** or from **Tziyon**, no man who refuses **Him** will escape judgment.

At **Sinai**, **God's** voice shook the entire **earth**, but now **He** has promised, "**Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens**" (**Hebrews 12:26** quoting **Haggai 2:6, 21**). If unbelievers did not escape when the **earth** was **shaken**, how much more unlikely will they escape when both **the heavens** and **the earth** are **shaken**? **John** said it this way: **I watched as the sixth seal was opened. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned red blood, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place (Revelation 6:12-14).**

Commenting on the **Haggai** passage, the writer of **Hebrews** explains that **the words "once more"** indicate the removing of what can be **shaken** - that is, created things - so that what cannot be **shaken** may remain (**12:27**). Everything physical (what can be **shaken**) will be destroyed. Only the eternal things will remain. **YHVH** has prepared a new **heaven** and a new **earth**, which will include the holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of **heaven** from **God**, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband (**Revelation 21:1-2**). This is the **Kingdom** we will receive. It is a **Kingdom** that cannot be **shaken** because it is eternal, unchangeable and immovable. **We** will never be taken from it, and it will never be taken from **us**. **Therefore, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe (12:28).**

The penalty for rejecting **God** is **fearful**, since even though **He** is merciful to those who trust in **Him**, at the same time, "**Our God is a consuming fire**" (**Hebrews 12:29** quoting **Deuteronomy 4:24, 9:3** and **Isaiah 33:14**). The fire and smoke that was seen at **Ha'Shem's** presence at **Sinai (12:18)** were merely symbols of that **consuming fire** of holiness that destroys all persistent, inexcusable evil. It is **God Himself** who is the **fire** that unbelief has to deal with. Having made a profession of faith in **Messiah** as **High Priest**, anyone in the Messianic community who renounced their faith in **Yeshua** and returned to the Temple and the Levitical sacrifices for salvation would become **a consuming fire**. This is a ominous warning for us and for those we love today. Either you accept **Christ's** sacrifice, or you become the sacrifice on the altar of **His** wrath.

The choice is the same for everyone. Whether we are Jew or Gentile, to try to approach **God** by our works, is to come to **Sinai** and to discover that our works fall short and cannot save us. Whether we are Jew or Gentile, to trust in the atoning **blood** of **Jesus Christ** is to come

to **Tziyon**, where our **heavenly High Priest** will **mediate** for us and bring us to **the Father**, and where we find reconciliation, peace and eternal life (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ [Ms](#) - The Eternal Security of the Believer**). And if you have truly come to **Tziyon** and received all its blessings, it is inconceivable that you would want to hold on to **Sinai** in any way.³⁸⁸