

The Book of

# Hebrews

מֵאַנֶשׁ מִנִּמְדָּא דֵּא מִנִּי תֵּאֲקֵלָא  
צִמְאֵל לֵּל נִתְּאֲצֵרְחָ דִּרְתִּסְנִי סְק  
אֵת פִּקְלָא תֵּסְנִי סִרְבָּאֵל  
רֵדֵּ תֵּאֲ סִדֵּ תֵּאֲקֵסְנִי דִּמְמִצ  
תֵּאֲתִפְלֵשׁ נִ תֵּרְדִּנְהֵרְפֵר נִ רֵלֵד  
תֵּאֲגֵשׁ רֵלֵד מִלְּלֵצ סֵס תֵּלֵשׁ



# Outline of Hebrews

## “Jesus is Better”

- I. Jesus Is Better Than the OT Prophets (1:1-4)
- II. Jesus Is Better Than the Angels (1:5-2:18)
- III. Jesus Is Better Than Moses (3:1-4:13)
- IV. Jesus' Priesthood Is Better Than the Levitical Priesthood (4:14-10:18)
- V. Concluding Exhortations and Warnings (10:19-12:29)**
- VI. Epilogue: Final Exhortations (13:1-25)

# Outline of Hebrews

## **V. Concluding Exhortations and Warnings (10:19-12:29)**

- A. Exhortation to Draw Near, Hold Fast, and Encourage One Another (10:19-25)
- B. Warning: No Hope of Forgiveness for Those Who Turn from Christ (10:26-31)
- C. A Call to Persevere (10:32-12:17)
- D. You Have Come to Mount Zion Instead of Mount Sinai (12:18-24)**
- E. Final Warning: Don't Reject God's Word! (12:25-29)

# You Have Come to Mount Zion Instead of Mount Sinai (12:18-24)

<sup>18</sup> For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest <sup>19</sup> and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. <sup>20</sup> For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” <sup>21</sup> Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.” <sup>22</sup> But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, <sup>23</sup> and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, <sup>24</sup> and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

<sup>18</sup> *For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest...*

- Verse 18 begins with “*for*” reminding the readers that they have been urged to stay on the right road, pursue holiness, and live differently from Esau “*for*” they have come to a mountain that is *far superior* to Sinai.
- In the *first* portion of today’s text (verses 18-21) the author begins by telling the readers what they have *not* come to: they have *not* come to Mount *Sinai* but to Mount *Zion*.
- The author never *specifically* mentions the name “Sinai” in this text, but it is *clearly* in his mind.

<sup>18</sup> *For you have not **come to** what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest...*

- The Greek word translated here as “*come to*,” is often translated as “*draw near*” in the ESV and is one of the author’s **favorite** words:
  - The readers were told they should “*draw near to the throne of grace*” (Heb 4:16)
  - Jesus “*is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him*” (Heb 7:25)
  - The “*sacrifices [required in the law can never] make perfect those who draw near [to God]*” (Heb 10:1)
  - The readers were encouraged to “*draw near [to God] with a true heart in full assurance of faith*” (Heb 10:22)
  - Whoever would “*draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him*” (Heb 11:6)

<sup>18</sup> *For you have not come to what may be **touched**, a **blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest...***

- Mount Sinai is an earthly and visible mountain. It can be “*touched*”, but anyone who **did** touch it **when the Lord was present** would be put to death (Ex 19:12).
- Our author reminds us that when the Lord descended to speak with Moses, Mount Sinai was “*blazing [with] fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest*”:
  - *There were **thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled.*** (Exo 19:16)
  - *The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the **thick darkness** where God was.* (Exo 20:21)
  - *The mountain **burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom.*** (Deut 4:11)
  - *The LORD spoke... at the mountain out of the midst of the **fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice*** (Deut 5:22)

<sup>19</sup> *and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them.*

- The author continues to convey the **terror** and **dread** that cascaded down upon the Israelites who gathered near Mount Sinai during the time Moses was speaking to God.
- The sound echoing down the mountain was like a “*trumpet*” blasting, and the words spoken by God were so **terrifying** that the people **begged** Moses to be spared from hearing God speak:
  - *Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and **the sound of the trumpet** and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but **do not let God speak to us, lest we die.**” (Exo 20:18-19)*



<sup>19</sup> *and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them.*

- What the Israelites feared was ***imminent death*** upon hearing the words of the Lord:
  - *The LORD our God has shown us his glory and his majesty, and **we have heard his voice** from the fire. Today we have seen that a man can live even if God speaks with him. But now, **why should we die?** This great fire will consume us, and **we will die if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer.***  
(Deut 5:24-26 NIV)

<sup>20</sup> *For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.”*

- The Israelites near Sinai ***begged*** the Lord to stop speaking, for they couldn't endure the command that ***even an animal*** that touched the mountain would be stoned:
  - *Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast or man, he shall not live.* (Ex 19:12b-13)
- The author focuses on the command to execute animals in order to underscore the ***strictness*** of the requirements and the ***terror*** the people felt.
- ***Even animals*** which were not capable of understanding what was going on, ***were not to be spared from punishment*** if they happened to wander near the mountain and touch it.

<sup>21</sup> *Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.”*

- Nor was the terror confined to **ordinary** Israelites.
- The author tells us that **even Moses** as the leader and deliverer of Israel **trembled with fear**.
- For the most part, the OT account emphasizes the **people** shuddering in terror rather than Moses (Ex 19:16; 20:18; Deut 5:5)
- The only **explicit** reference to Moses’ fear in the OT is found in the account of the golden calf (Deut 9:19).
- But the main point here is that what happened at Sinai graphically illustrates that under the old covenant believers couldn’t draw near to God.

<sup>22</sup> ***But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering***

- The ***contrast*** between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion is ***stunning***.
- The author paints in striking colors the difference between ***paralyzing terror*** and ***extraordinary joy***.
- Instead of coming to Mount Sinai, where there is fear and foreboding, the readers have ***joyfully*** “***come to Mount Zion***”.
- There is an already-but-not-yet dimension to the promise here, for they “***have come***” to Zion, but the ***fullness*** of Zion is not theirs yet.

<sup>22</sup> *But you have come to **Mount Zion** and to the **city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem**, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering*

- “*Mount Zion*”, historically, is **part** of Jerusalem that was originally captured by David (2 Sam 5:7), and eventually came to be identified **with** Jerusalem.
- In the OT, Mount Zion is often referred to as God’s “*holy mountain*” (Ps 2:6; 48:1-2; Joel 2:1; 3:17) where he “*dwells*” (Ps 135:21; Isa 8:18; 33:5; Joel 3:17,21).
- Here in our passage, “*Mount Zion*” is **equated** with:
  - *The city of the living God*
  - *The heavenly Jerusalem*

<sup>22</sup> *But you have come to **Mount Zion** and to the **city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem**, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering*

- The first two titles (*Mount Zion and to the city of the living God*) bring to mind Psalm 48:1-2:
  - *Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised in **the city of our God! His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great King.***
- The third title, “*heavenly Jerusalem*,” however, casts a new light on the others.
- The location of new covenant Christians’ worship is “**not**” on a mountain that “*may be touched*” (verse 18) anywhere on earth.

<sup>22</sup> *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, **the heavenly Jerusalem**, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering*

- The **apostle Paul** identified **Mount Sinai** and the Mosaic law that was delivered there with the “*present Jerusalem*” (Gal 4:25) – the center of the Judaism of his day, which **rejected** Jesus’ gospel of grace.
- Paul goes on to say in that passage, that **in contrast**, believers in Jesus can look to the “*Jerusalem above*” (= *the heavenly Jerusalem*) as their mother (Gal 4:21-31).
- Likewise, one of the **apostle John’s** visions in the book of Revelation identified the **earthly Jerusalem** in which “*their Lord was crucified*” with the “*great city*” that **rejected** God’s witnesses, (Rev 11:8).
- **By contrast**, in a later vision, John saw the “*holy city, [the] new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God*” (Rev 21:2).

<sup>22</sup> *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering*

- So in Jesus we now have access to the **better** sanctuary in the “*heavenly*” city of God.
- And, as mentioned earlier, there is an already-but-not-yet aspect to this access:
  - On one hand this heavenly city is something believers **anticipate** (Heb 11:10,16) – the “*city that is to come*” (Heb 13:14).
  - But there is a sense in which they have **already** “*come*” (perfect tense in the Greek) to that city and **are** (present tense) its citizens (Phil 3:20)!



<sup>22</sup> *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering*

- Believers have also come to “*innumerable angels in festal gathering.*”
- The heavenly city is inhabited by countless angels.
- The notion that there are thousands with God in the heavenly realms is rooted in the OT (cf. Deut 33:2; Dan 7:10; so also Jude 14; Rev 5:11).
- The word translated “*festal gathering*” is used in the OT for festivals where Israel worshipped the Lord (Hos 2:13; 9:5; Ezek 46:11), but here we have a picture of angels enthusiastically gathering to worship.

<sup>23</sup> *and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect*

- The human worshipers “*in heaven*” are introduced under **two** titles:
  - “*the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven*”
  - “*the spirits of the righteous made perfect.*”
- The term translated “*assembly*” (*ekklēsia*) typically refers to the “church” in the NT.
- In the Septuagint it is the term for the congregation of Israel assembled to worship in God’s presence (Deut 9:10; 31:30; Ps 26:12; 35:18; etc.).

<sup>23</sup> *and to the **assembly of the firstborn** who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect*

- The plural form of “*firstborn*” seems surprising, since we have heard God direct angels to worship his (singular) “*firstborn*” Son (Heb 1:6), the unique “*heir of all things*” (Heb 1:2).
- Esau’s shortsighted sale of his birthright has just reminded us that only **one** son in a family may enjoy the unique privileges of the firstborn (Heb 12:16-17).
- Yet **many** firstborn children of God make up **this** heavenly “*assembly*.”
- This is because all whom the unique divine and messianic Son calls his “*brothers*” share by grace in the Son’s inheritance (Heb 2:12; Rom 8:17).

<sup>23</sup> *and to the assembly of the firstborn who are **enrolled in heaven**, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect*

- Their names are “*enrolled in heaven*,” inscribed for eternal life in God’s book.
- This idea of people’s name being recorded in God’s book is referenced throughout the Bible (Ex 32:32-33; Ps 87:6; 139:16; Dan 12:1; Luke 10:20; Phil 4:3; Rev 20:12-15).
- It symbolizes God’s sovereign, specific, and irreversible electing love toward individuals.

<sup>23</sup> *and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect*

- Why would the author refer to God as “*judge*” in a paragraph that stresses the **joy** of coming into God’s presence?
- The hearers are reminded that they will be **vindicated** on the last day.
- This joyful fellowship is not to be taken **lightly**.
- God has not **relented** in his holiness.
- They come **boldly** to a throne where he bestows grace because of **Jesus** (Heb 4:16).

<sup>23</sup> *and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the **spirits of the righteous made perfect***

- The human worshipers in heaven are called here the “*spirits of the righteous made perfect*.”
- These are the OT people of faith on whose behalf God testified that they were righteous as they lived by faith (Heb 10:37-38; 11:2,39).
- That they are called “*spirits*” indicates that their bodies have not been raised in the final resurrection of the dead (Rev 6:9-11; 20:4) – for **final** state of perfection to take place they must wait until God is ready to raise us as well (Heb 11:40).
- Yet, in one sense they have already been “*made perfect*” — along with us— through the sacrifice of Jesus (Heb 10:14).
- Another example of already-but-not-yet!

<sup>24</sup> *and to **Jesus**, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*

- The author's list *climaxes* with the reference to Jesus.
- The joyful access to God described in the previous verses have been opened through the work of Jesus.
- The readers must not forsake Jesus and his priestly work, for they have come to Mount Zion instead of Mount Sinai.
- Mount Sinai was terrifying, but Mount Zion is comforting.
- Believers are already members of the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city.
- They have joined the assembly of angels in heaven and the church of Jesus Christ.
- They have come to God himself and to other righteous believers.

<sup>24</sup> *and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*

- Most importantly they have come to Jesus, who is “*mediator of a new covenant.*”
- He is not simply the mediator of a “*new covenant*” (cf. also Heb 9:15). He is also the mediator of a “*better covenant*” (Heb 8:6 cf. 7:22).
- The old covenant has been displaced.
- The readers must not forsake Jesus since they have come to one who has instituted and ratified a new and better covenant, one which guarantees an “eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15), for it secures complete and final forgiveness of sins (Heb 10:15-18).



<sup>24</sup> *and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to **the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.***

- The OT roster of faith opened with Abel's acceptable sacrifice and death (Heb 11:4), but the cause of his death – his brother's violence – was not mentioned.
- Now we hear an echo of God's accusation against Cain: "*The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground*" (Gen 4:10).
- The cry of Abel's blood was for **avenging justice**, but **Jesus'** blood intercedes for **mercy and forgiveness**.
- God "*the judge of all*," who sent his Son into the world to accomplish his will, offering his body as a sacrifice for others' sins (Heb 10:5-10), is pleased to grant the petition of that precious blood on our behalf.
- And so we may draw near with confidence and enter this heavenly assembly with joyful gratitude (Heb 12:28).

# Class Discussion Time



## **\*Class Discussion Time**

- In our passage today, verses 18-21 describes a kind of terror and fear of God that seems to be rarely felt by unbelievers (or even believers) in our day. Why do you think that is?
- Many times in our debates over old versus new covenant we get into debates over which laws still apply and which laws don't still apply.
- Do you think that maybe those who today want to still revel in the perceived glories of the old covenant and the Ten Commandments, etc. may have failed to grasp the point that the author is making in our text today? Why or why not?