



## INTRODUCTION

Hebrews 12:18-29

One might dream of seeing the Arc de Triomphe, the Eiffel Tower, the Sphinx, the Great Pyramids, the canals of Venice and the Roman Forum in his lifetime, traveling the world to visit these incredible structures; or one could simply book a ticket to Las Vegas. In addition to housing replicas of all of the above, the “City that Never Sleeps” is also home to a facsimile of the Statue of Liberty. The Vegas Liberty is 2/5 the size of the actual Statue of Liberty, weighs 27,000 tons (compared to the 150 tons of the original structure), and is an infant compared to its older sister (19 years old compared to Lady Liberty’s 129).<sup>1</sup>

In 1886 President Grover Cleveland dedicated the completed Statue of Liberty. The statue had been proposed 21 years earlier by a French historian and professor Edouard De Laboulaye; the idea was to present the young nation a gift for its centennial anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.<sup>2</sup> The monument is located on Liberty Island, situated about one mile from Ellis Island. Millions of immigrants passed by the inspiring statue before making landfall in the United States.

## Watch It Bible Principles

Watch Bible Principles #21; Heb. 12:18-29 [www.villagebible.church/bibleprinciples](http://www.villagebible.church/bibleprinciples)

## Open it

1. Have you visited a national landmark? What emotions did it invoke - if any? Have you visited the Statue of Liberty and it’s copy in Las Vegas? How do they compare?

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.prestonwood.org/docs/default-source/Bible-Fellowship-Leader-Resources/hebrews/week-19---hebrews-12-18-29.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

<sup>2</sup> [www.cnn.com/2013/07/03/us/statue-of-liberty-fast-facts/](http://www.cnn.com/2013/07/03/us/statue-of-liberty-fast-facts/)



## Apply it

Hebrews provides another side-by-side look at the old and new covenants by comparing their reception by God's people—the old at Mount Sinai in fear and trembling and the new at Mount Zion in joyful celebration. The better covenant ushers us into a better kingdom from which we worship and serve our God in a better way.

Have you ever put a what-you-thought-was-clean-white-shirt next to a brand-new-white-shirt, only to discover that the “clean” one was more dingy than you realized? Side-by-side comparisons put things into perspective. The writer of Hebrews continues to adjust our perspective by laying the old covenant next to the new to help readers realize the startling difference between the two. The new covenant is clearly better— and we are better because of it. Washed pure and made sparkingly new.

This time the comparison is between the giving and receiving of the two covenants, the old at Mount Sinai and the new at Mount Zion:

Mount Sinai	Mount Zion
Old Covenant	New Covenant
Physical	Spiritual
Sacred Mountain	Heavenly Dwelling
Gloom	Joy
Terror	Festivity
God Hidden	God Accessed
God's Distance	God's Presence
Fear	Boldness

At the first mountain, the people could hardly stand the voice of God. His “words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them” (12:19). God's voice boomed the judgment of death for any person or animal that touched the holy mountain. It underscored the old covenant's inherent inability to deal with sin and make a way to enter God's presence.<sup>3</sup>

At the second mountain, the heavenly Zion, our God and the Judge of all (12:23), is surrounded by a joyous assembly of the “righteous made perfect” (12:23) by the sacrifice of Jesus. “For by a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (10:14). Now we hear God's voice in confidence, rather than dread. At least that is what the writer of Hebrews has been imploring us to do from the beginning: “... in these last days (God) has spoken to us by his Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world” (1:2). Therefore: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion” (3:15). In fact, verse 24 says that it's Jesus' blood that speaks “a better word.” This verse can be interpreted a number of ways, but one thing is sure: we can stand to hear the voice of God because Jesus' blood purifies our conscience of sin (9:14). His blood speaks our pardon (whereas Abel's blood spoke vengeance).<sup>4</sup> And that pardon means our sins are washed white-as-snow and we are made sparkingly new.

**8. How did the old covenant present a facsimile of the new covenant? What elements of the new covenant were present in the old? What elements were missing?**

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<sup>3</sup> O'Brien, Peter T. (2010), In *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter to the Hebrews* (p. 482). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co

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## 9. Why does the author characterize Mount Sinai so negatively? (verses 18-21)

Now let me try to paint this big picture again in broad strokes. If you look at the whole chapter, there are what you might call four peaks and four valleys. The peaks are exhortation (or right-doing), and the valleys are motivation (or right-knowing) - reasons to act this way. Let me summarize the four peaks of exhortation. Exhortation peak #1 (verse 1): Throw off everything that hinders and . . . run with perseverance the race marked out for you. Then comes the valley of motivation in verses 2-11. Exhortation peak #2 (verses 12-17): Be strong, make a straight path, pursue peace and holiness, and don't be like Esau who sold his inheritance for a single meal. Then comes the second valley of motivation in verses 18-24. Exhortation peak #3 (verse 25a): See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. That's what Esau did. Don't do it. Trust God. Don't spurn his grace. Then comes the third valley of motivation in verses 25b-27. Finally, exhortation peak #4 (verse 28): Be thankful for God's promise of an unshakable kingdom and in that grateful hope worship God - serve God - with reverence and awe. Because - and this is the last small but explosive valley of motivation, verse 29 - because our God is a consuming fire.

So everything written in this chapter is aimed at changing your life. The whole book is built this way - weighty, lengthy sections of doctrine (right-knowing), all aimed at motivating the peaks of exhortation: strip off weights and sins and run the straight way; pursue peace and holiness; don't fail to obtain the grace of God as Esau did, who traded it for a single meal; don't refuse the voice of the one who speaks from heaven; but be thankful for the stunning promises of God for an unshakable kingdom, and worship in reverence and awe.<sup>5</sup>

**10. The writer of Hebrews uses both love and fear as motivation to stay with Christ. Which one works better for you in motivating you for your life? Which one is more powerful for you and why? Give an example. (e.g., fear - "I really started eating healthy after my doctor told me I would be dead in a year if I did not change." or love - "I started playing catch with my son every day because he said when he plays with me he feels loved and affirmed.")**

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/you-have-come-to-mount-zion>

**11. “Terror” and “distance” described Israel’s experience with God at Mount Sinai. Does God ever feel distant to you? Do you ever find yourself afraid to pray to him?**

**12. “Joy”, “nearness”, and “acceptance” are words that describe the Christian’s relationship to God. Would you use these words to describe your relationship to him? Why or why not?**

1986, Texas gem dealer Roy Whetstine was pawing through a Tupperware bowl of cheaply priced rocks at a mineral show in Arizona when he came across a lavender-gray, potato-size stone that looked a bit special. “You want \$15 for this?” Whetstine asked the amateur collector. “Tell you what,” replied the collector. “I’ll let you have it for \$10. It’s not as pretty as the others.”

Whetstine walked away with the world’s largest star sapphire, later valued at as high as \$2.28 million! He planned to sell his 1,905-carat bargain in its uncut form for \$1.5 million and put the profits in trust for his two sons, each of whom had given Dad \$5 to bring back a little something from the gem show (Newsweek [11/24/1986], p. 75).

If you don’t know what you possess, you may disregard it or let it go for something worth far less. Esau did that—he didn’t appreciate the value of his birthright, which entitled him to the blessings of God’s promises to Abraham, and so he traded it for a bowl of stew. He gave away eternal blessings for instant gratification. Bad trade!

But that’s what the original readers of Hebrews were in danger of doing! Under the threat of persecution, they were tempted to abandon Christ to return to their Jewish faith. So the author here contrasts the terrors of Mount Sinai, representing Jewish life under the law, with the glories of Mount Zion, picturing the joy of life under the new covenant. He wants us to know that right living flows out of right knowing. If you know the riches that you possess in Christ, you won’t want to go back to the empty, fleeting pleasures of the world.<sup>6</sup>

**13. There is a great homecoming in store for all believers where we will be united with each other and with our Savior! Are you looking forward to this great gathering and day of feasting? Who are some loved ones that you are looking forward to being with again?**

**14. Everything will be shaken, meaning, God will abruptly change the normal order of things when His Kingdom comes. Jesus has delivered you into this Kingdom already and will make it complete when He sets up the new heavens and the new earth. How does this promise motivate you to live your life? How do you show your gratitude to Christ for these great promises right now in your life?**

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<sup>6</sup> <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-49-are-you-living-sinai-or-zion-hebrews-1218-24-exodus-1910-25>

15. Christians should be the most thankful people around (v 28; 1 Thessalonians 5:18). How can you grow in your thankfulness to God this week? In other words, how can you help yourself be thankful for something that is yet to come?

*Because of His work of atonement, our Lord has become the mediator of the New Covenant. The remaining verses of chapter 9 focus on the “better sacrifice,” the shedding of our Lord’s precious blood at Calvary. It is by this better sacrifice that our sins are dealt with once for all. These verses show us that our Lord’s death was necessary and that it offers salvation to sinners who are destined for judgment and eternal torment after death. These verses spell out the gospel and God’s only means for forgiveness and eternal life. There are no more wonderful words for the sinner who wishes (by God’s doing) to draw near to God.<sup>7</sup>*

16. As you consider the days of your life, what are some of the pivotal moments when God has reminded you of the great riches you have in Him? Share with your group one of these times when God reminded you of the great salvation He has given you.

17. Our lives are full of motivations and actions, and this includes our spiritual lives. Honestly evaluate your life as a follower of Jesus Christ and ask this question - Do the words fear and legalism define my relationship with God or do the words love and freedom? Please explain why with some examples of your patterns of thinking.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://bible.org/seriespage/21-dealing-death-or-worlds-greatest-bailout-hebrews-915-28>

So the question is, “Where are you living?” Are you living on Mount Sinai, trying to earn acceptance with a holy God by keeping His law? If so, you should be in terror, because it is impossible to meet the demands of His holiness. If you have trusted Christ, you are living on Mount Zion. Two applications:

First, stay focused on what Christ has done for you. In a similar context where Paul is warning about the dangers of legalism, he wrote, “Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God” (Col. 3:1). That’s where all of our treasures lie! Don’t forget it! “Keep seeking” implies a lifelong quest. If you lose sight of the benefits of Zion, you may be tempted, like Esau, to trade your treasures in Christ for the world’s empty pleasures.

Second, maintain the biblical balance between familiar fellowship with the Father and reverential awe of His holiness. We are to draw near to His throne to receive grace for our every need (Heb. 4:16), but we also need to remember that “our God is a consuming fire” (12:29).

Several years ago, Marla and I, along with our son Daniel and one of his friends, attempted to climb Mount Windom, one of Colorado’s 14ers. We were within sight of the top when a thunderstorm moved in on us. The only place we could go was to lie between some of the boulders and pray that we wouldn’t be struck by lightning. We knew that many people have died that way, so it was a scary experience.

A couple of years ago, Marla and I were in another thunderstorm on top of Bill Williams Mountain, west of Flagstaff. But this time, we weren’t afraid. Instead, we were reveling in the awesome display of God’s power. The difference was, we were inside the lookout tower, which is grounded with lightning rods. Although the lightning was crackling around us and the thunder was booming, we thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

If you are at Mount Sinai, you are in grave danger before the holy God, because you’re exposed to His judgment. But if you are on Mount Zion, you are secure because the blood of Jesus has covered your sins. You can revel in God’s holy presence without fear of His judgment! Live on Mount Zion!<sup>8</sup>

**18. How can you encourage someone this week to rejoice and be thankful for all that God has promised for those who have faith in Christ? *Take time right now, to pray for and then call or send a text to someone God puts on your heart to encourage.***

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<sup>8</sup> <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-49-are-you-living-sinai-or-zion-hebrews-1218-24-exodus-1910-25>

This study was compiled and questions were written by Steve Lombardo (Plano Campus)—[www.villagebible.church/smallgroup](http://www.villagebible.church/smallgroup)