

Sermon

God's Two Mountains

Hebrews 12:18-24

August 14, 2016

The verses at the end of Hebrews 12 compare and contrast two realities of God. Some may think that there is a difference in the approach God has to *save/justify/make righteous* people based upon perceptions of events managed by God in the Old Testament as compared to the New Testament. The vengeful war-mongering God of the Old Testament is in contrast to the loving, forgiving God of the New Testament. If a person actually reads and studies the text, they will find there is a great consistency in comparing the Testaments. Focusing on Hebrews 12:18-24, and the time of the Exodus in which this passage points back to; we consider the answers to these questions.

Who were these people God treated in this way?

The Hebrews of the Exodus

What was their history?

Covenant descendents of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph

Where were they, at the time or when God displayed himself to them in this way?

At the base of Mount Sinai in the wilderness

Why did this happen?

God does not want His people to sin

When did this happen in relation to the New Testament?

About 500 years after Abraham lived. Abraham lived (175 Years/Gen 25:7) from somewhere between 1950 – 1775 BC. The Exodus began in about the year 1445 BC. The book of

Hebrews was written before 70 AD, yet after the life of Christ. It is safe to say that the events at Mt. Sinai, during the Exodus, took place about 1500 years before the book of Hebrews was written.

In Hebrews 12:18- 21, we find a reference to Moses calling the people to the base of Mt. Sinai. Reading the account in Exodus 19 & 20, we see God has a purpose for presenting himself at arm's length through thunders and a fiery display of nature. He does not want the people to sin, so, he puts fear, awe and reverence into them.

Exodus 20:20 Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, **so that you may not sin.**"

²¹ So the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was.

What events took place before God called the people to the base of Mt. Sinai?

In the Exodus chapters leading up to the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai, the Bible chronicles the events of the Hebrews coming out of Egypt as they start their forty years in the wilderness.

In Exodus 16, the people grumble that they are hungry. The Lord then provides "manna." In the Lord's provisions, He provides two days of bread on the sixth day; so, they will not have to work or gather manna on the seventh day, as it is dedicated, by the Lord; as a holy day of no work and a day of rest. However, when the seventh day came, some people went out to gather manna (Ex. 16:31). This brought the Lord's chastisement; "How long do you refuse to keep My commandments, and My instructions?"

In **Exodus 17**, the people tested God and complained to Moses about God's water provision; again, a quarrelsome people to the Lord.

In **Exodus 18**, we see Moses settling disputes among the people from morning until evening. Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, advises Moses to appoint judges over the people and to have the most serious cases sent to him. So Moses does this. We can see that the Hebrew people, like all people groups, quarrel and grumble. They do not follow God's commands and instructions. Therefore, in Exodus 19 we see God call Moses and the Hebrew people to the base of the Mount Sinai. Moses is called to the top of the mountain. This reference in the New Testament book of Hebrews 12 is referring to these events.

Continuing of Hebrews 12

¹⁸ For you have **not** come to a *mountain* that may be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, **Exodus 19:12**

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 should be spoken to them.** **Exodus 20:19**

²⁰ For they could not bear the command, **Exodus 19:12,13**
"If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned."

²¹ And so terrible was the sight,
that **Moses said,**
"I am full of fear and trembling." (**Duet. 9:19**)

Verse 21, is a quote from **Duet. 9:19**. This is when Moses referred back to the forty years in the wilderness and the Mt. Sinai events, to the Hebrew people before they went into the Promised Land.

Deut. 9:19 "For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the LORD was wrathful against you in order to destroy you, but the LORD listened to me that time also. (Exodus 32:9 & following)

This is a most telling verse. It is the proclamation by God that He treats the Hebrew people in a restrictive way, because they are a rebellious people. According to the verse, God might have destroyed the people, due to their sin, if Moses would not have intervened. God desired to protect them from their own sin. So, God placed judgment and fear over them for their own protection. Where do we see this in the New Testament? Jesus speaks concerning judgment and fear to the religious leaders in:

Jesus Christ in Matthew 23:1-33

^{NAS} **Matthew 23:1** Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, ² saying,

"The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; [**Judgment chair**]

³ therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say *things*, and do not do *them*.

⁴ "And they tie up heavy loads, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves are unwilling to move them with *so much* as a finger.

⁵ "But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries, and lengthen the tassels *of their garments*.

⁶ "And they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues,

⁷ and respectful greetings in the market places,

and being called by men, Rabbi.

⁸ "But do not be called Rabbi;
for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers.

⁹ "And do not call *anyone* on earth your father;
for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.

¹⁰ "And do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, *that is*, Christ.

¹¹ "But the greatest among you shall be your servant.

¹² "And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled;
and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

¹³ "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites,
because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from men;
for you do not enter in yourselves,
nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

¹⁴ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites,
*because you devour widows' houses,
even while for a pretense you make long prayers;
therefore you shall receive greater condemnation .*

¹⁵ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites,
because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte;
and when he becomes one,
you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

¹⁶ "Woe to you, blind guides, who say,
'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing;
but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obligated.'

¹⁷ "You fools and blind men; which is more important,
the gold, or the temple that sanctified the gold?

¹⁸ "And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, *that is* nothing,

but whoever swears by the offering upon it, he is obligated.'

¹⁹ "You blind men, which is more important, the offering or the altar that sanctifies the offering?"

²⁰ "Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears *both* by the altar and by everything on it.

²¹ "And he who swears by the temple, swears *both* by the temple and by Him who dwells within it.

²² "And he who swears by heaven, swears *both* by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.

²³ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.

²⁴ "You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!"

²⁵ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence.

²⁶ "You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.

²⁷ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

²⁸ "Even so you too outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

²⁹ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

For you build the tombs of the prophets
and adorn the monuments of the righteous,

³⁰ and say,

'If we had been *living* in the days of our fathers,
we would not have been partners with them
in *shedding* the blood of the prophets.'

³¹ "**Consequently** you bear witness against yourselves,
that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.

³² "Fill up then the measure *of the guilt* of your fathers.

³³ "You serpents, you brood of vipers,
how shall you escape the sentence of hell?

Stephen, in Acts 7:36-53

Points to the Exodus and the rebellion in the wilderness

³⁶ "This man led them out, [Moses]
performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt
and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years.

³⁷ "This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel,
'God shall raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren.'

³⁸ "This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness
together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai,
and *who was with our fathers*;
and he received living oracles to pass on to you.

³⁹ "And our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him,
but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt,

⁴⁰ saying to Aaron,
'Make for us gods who will go before us;
for this Moses who led us out of the land of Egypt—
we do not know what happened to him.'

⁴¹ "And at that time they made a calf
and brought a sacrifice to the idol,
and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.

⁴² "But God turned away
and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven;
as it is written in the book of the prophets,
'It was not to Me that you offered victims
and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness,
was it, Amos 5:25
O house of Israel?

⁴³ 'You also took along the tabernacle of Moloch
and the star of the god Rompha,
the images which you made to worship them.
I also will remove you beyond Babylon.'

⁴⁴ "Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness,
just as He who spoke to Moses directed *him* to make it according to
the pattern which he had seen.

⁴⁵ "And having received it in their turn,
our fathers brought it in with Joshua upon dispossessing the nations
whom God drove out before our fathers, until the time of David.

⁴⁶ "And *David* found favor in God's sight,
and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.

⁴⁷ "But it was Solomon who built a house for Him.

⁴⁸ "However, the Most High does not dwell in *houses* made by *human*
hands;
as the prophet says:

⁴⁹ 'Heaven is My throne,
And earth is the footstool of My feet;
What kind of house will you build for Me?'
says the Lord; 'Or what place is there for My repose?

⁵⁰ 'Was it not My hand which made all these things?'

⁵¹ "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart
and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit;
you are doing just as your fathers did.

⁵² "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?
And they killed those
who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One,
whose betrayers and murderers you have now become;

⁵³ you who received the law as ordained by angels,
and yet did not keep it."

Paul in 1 Cor. 10:1-12, writes to the congregation in Corinth and reminds them about the Hebrews of the Exodus.

1 Corinthians 10:1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren,
that our fathers were all **under the cloud**, [Exodus reference]
and all passed through the sea;

² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea;

³ and all ate the same spiritual food; [Manna]

⁴ and all drank the same **spiritual drink**, [Water from rock, Moses' cane]
for they were drinking from a **spiritual rock**
which followed them; and the **rock was Christ**.

⁵ Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased;
for they were laid low in the wilderness.

⁶ Now these things happened as **examples for us**,

that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved.

⁷ And do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play."

⁸ Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. (Numbers 25:1-9)

⁹ Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. (Numbers 21:9; John 3:14)

¹⁰ Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.

¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

¹² Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

Through the New Testament testimonies of Christ, Stephen and Paul, we see that God, speaking through the Scripture, is judgmental to the Hebrew audience that He is directly speaking. In addition, words and phrases are used that are condemning.

Paul reminds the congregation in Corinth that God does destroy people (verses 10:9-10).

Stephen tells his Hebrew audience that they are just like those in the Wilderness, "stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:51-51). This is as condemning as it can get.

Christ, in Matthew 23: 33, when He tells the Scribes and the Pharisees, "How will you escape the sentence of Hell?"

Remember, just like the Assyrian destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (722 BC) and the deportation of the Southern Kingdom of Judah to Babylon (complete by 586 BC), Jerusalem, in the New Testament times, was destroyed by the Romans by 70 AD. The Temple was leveled and has not been rebuilt.

Therefore, God judged the Hebrew people in the New Testament just like He did in the Old Testament; same God, same people, who once again, did not keep God's commandments, thus the same results. I will be your God, and you will be my people, who walk in my commandments. If you do not, then you will be removed.

(Lev.26:12 and following; Jeremiah 7:23-34 ³³ "And the dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the sky, and for the beasts of the earth; and no one will frighten *them* away.

Here, in Hebrews 12, is the demarcation and transition from Mt. Sinai to Mt. Zion.

Hebrews 12:²² **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 **righteous men made perfect**,

Therefore, in Hebrews 12:22 there is a transition to Mount Zion and a new **understanding** for the Hebrew people.

In Exodus 19 and 20, Mt. Sinai was a place for fear and judgment, so the people would not sin. Bringing the events of Mt. Sinai forward to our day, it points to this life and the sinful world in which we

live. God still wants us to have a fear of sin. We need to have a healthy respect for sin and accept that there is judgment from God.

In contrast, Mt. Zion points to an eternal place, not of this world. Mt. Zion described in Hebrews 12:22 and 23 is a place where the righteous are, because they have passed through the test of **judgment of faith**, by God, for all people, not just the Jews. This test is centered in Jesus Christ, the mediator, and His blood being greater than the Law. Thus accomplishing what the Law could not and never intended to accomplish (Hebrews 10:11). In Hebrews 11, the first person that is considered righteous, because of their faith, is Able, whose blood was spilt by Cain. In Genesis 4:9, the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" ¹⁰ And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground."

Two points to make regarding Abel's spilt blood. Abel's blood speaks to God for vindication of Cain's sin. Abel's spilt blood did not make him righteous; his heart did, indicative through his offering to God.

The blood of Jesus Christ does not call for a vindication of martyrs, but for all people to turn, accept and surrender to His blood sacrifice for their sin. Abel's blood is not a sacrifice for sin.

The concept of blood sacrifice is not appealing to our modern world. It is crude and barbaric. Who is more barbaric? Here are three points in comparing the modern secular world, and how they spill blood, to the blood of Jesus, which is a world-defining contrast.

The secular world spills life-blood by the millions from the womb for population control of the unwanted. Jesus Christ is one man.

The secular world spills blood in wars to gain control of their neighbor's territory. Jesus Christ's spilt blood gains a heavenly territory.

Some man-made religions/political systems kill their neighbor by the tens of thousands, because they pursue earthly wealth and control to the exclusion of all others not like them. Jesus never asked anyone to kill his neighbor for any reason.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16 NAS).

²⁴ and to **Jesus**,
the mediator of a **new covenant**,
and to the sprinkled blood,
which speaks **better than *the blood of Abel***.

To the Hebrews, understanding the message here in the book of Hebrews is a **New Covenant**. They misunderstood the covenant of Law prescribing animal sacrifice and the priest-temple system. What does Paul write in Galatians 3? Paul clearly states that the promise to Abraham was based on faith and came 430 years before the Law. The Law was a tutor that pointed the Hebrews to Christ, so that they can be justified by faith. So, why the Law? The Law having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made was added because of transgressions. Now a mediator is not for one *party only*; whereas God is *only* one. **Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be!**

This is proof; that the New Covenant spoken of here in Hebrews 12, and in Jeremiah 31:31 and following, does not create a new way for people to be saved. It is new for the Jews in their understanding and application of God's grace. **It is true that God used the Hebrew**

people as an example (1 Cor. 10:6) for the entire world to see; that the keeping of the Law is a futile exercise in life. Eventually, a person breaks the rules, and is, therefore, guilty of sin and in need of God's grace, demonstrated once and for all on the Cross of Christ: For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law (Galatians 3:21).

^{NAS} **Hebrews 10:1** For the Law, since it has *only* a shadow of the good things to come *and* not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near.

² Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?

³ But in those *sacrifices* there is a reminder of sins year by year.

⁴ For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

⁵ Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, "Sacrifice and offering Thou hast not desired, But a body Thou hast prepared for Me;

⁶ In whole burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin Thou hast taken no pleasure.

⁷ "Then I said, 'Behold, I have come (In the roll of the book it is written of Me) To do Thy will, O God.'"

⁸ After saying above, "Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin Thou hast not desired, nor hast Thou taken pleasure *in them*" (which are offered according to the Law),

⁹ then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Thy will."
He takes away the first in order to establish the second.

¹⁰ By this will we have been sanctified
through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

¹¹ And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after
time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins;
(Heb 10:1-11 NAS)

Some Scripture verses referenced

Deu 4:11 "And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain,
and the mountain burned with fire to the very heart of the heavens:
darkness, cloud and thick gloom.

Deu 5:22 "These words the LORD spoke to all your assembly
at the mountain from the midst of the fire,
of the cloud and of the thick gloom, with a great voice,
and He added no more.
And He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me.

Deu 9:19 "For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the LORD was wrathful against you in
order to destroy you, but the LORD listened to me that time also.

Exo 19:12 "And you shall set bounds for the people all around,
saying, Beware that you do not go up on the mountain
or touch the border of it;
whoever touches the mountain
shall surely be put to death.

¹³ 'No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through;
whether beast or man, he shall not live.'

When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain."

Exo 19:16 So it came about on the third day,
when it was morning,
that there were thunder and lightning flashes
and a thick cloud upon the mountain
and a very loud trumpet sound,
so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.

Exo 19:18 Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke
because the LORD descended upon it in fire;
and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace,
and the whole mountain quaked violently.

Exo 20:18 And all the people perceived the thunder

and the lightning flashes
and the **sound of the trumpet**
and the mountain smoking;
and when the people saw it,
they trembled and stood at a distance.

¹⁹ Then they said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen;
but let not God speak to us, or we will die."

²⁰ Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, **so that you may not sin.**"

²¹ So the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was.

Exo 24:17 And to the eyes of the sons of Israel
the appearance of the glory of the LORD
was like a **consuming fire on the mountain top.**

2 Cor 3:7 But if the ministry of death,
in letters engraved on stones,
came with glory,
so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses
because of the glory of his face, fading as it was,