

Receiving *an* Unshakable Kingdom



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Heb. 12:18–29; Exod. 32:32; Dan. 7:9, 10, 13–22; Hag. 2:6–9, 20–22; Ps. 15:5; Ps. 16:8; Heb. 13:15, 16.*

Memory Text: “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (*Hebrews 12:28, NKJV*).

Hebrews 12:18–29, the passage for this week, is the climax of the letter, and it sums up its main concern by repeating the idea with which it started: God has spoken to us in the person of His Son, and we need to pay careful attention (*Heb. 1:1, 2; Heb. 12:25*) to Him. The description of Jesus in Hebrews 12:22–24 epitomizes the letter's assertions about Him: Jesus is the Mediator of the new covenant, and His blood provides salvation for believers. His priestly and royal ministry in our behalf is a cause for celebration for the heavenly hosts. And finally, Hebrews 12:25–29 contains the last and climactic exhortation: God's judgment is coming. It will bring destruction to His enemies—but vindication and a kingdom to His people (*Heb. 12:28, 29*).

The ending reaffirms the importance of Jesus' achievements at the cross and directs believers to the consummation of Jesus' victory at the Second Coming. Paul used imagery from Daniel 7 to remind the readers that Jesus has received a kingdom from God, the Judge (*Dan. 7:9–14*), and is going to share His kingdom with believers, “the saints of the Most High,” who will possess it forever and ever (*Dan. 7:18*).

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 19.

“You Have Come to Mount Zion”

Read Hebrews 12:22–24. What does Paul describe here?

Hebrews affirms that we have come to Mount Zion and participate in a great celebration. “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” (*Heb 12:22, ESV*). We have come through faith in the person of our Representative, Jesus. In this celebration we find an innumerable host of angels, God Himself, and Jesus, who is the center of the celebration. We come as part of the “assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven” (*Heb. 12:23, ESV*). Our names are enrolled in the books of heaven, where God’s professed people are listed (*Exod. 32:32, Ps. 56:8, Dan. 12:1, Mal. 3:16, Luke 10:20, Rev. 13:8, Rev. 17:8*).

We are the “firstborn” because we share the inheritance of the Firstborn par excellence, Jesus (*Heb. 1:6*). Thus, we have come not as guests but as citizens (*compare with Phil. 3:20*). We also are described as “the spirits of the righteous made perfect” (*Heb. 12:23, ESV*). This expression is a figure of speech in which a dimension of our human nature stands for the whole. It is analogous to the expression “the Father of spirits” in Hebrews 12:9, which refers to God as the Father of us all, human beings who are spiritual in nature.

The festal gathering celebrates the inauguration of Jesus’ kingly rule, priestly ministry, and the inauguration of the new covenant. In Hebrews, Mount Zion is the place where all these events take place. Three of the psalms in Hebrews 1:5–14 describe the enthronement of the Son and have Mount Zion as the place where it occurred (*Ps. 2:6, 7; Ps. 110:1, 2; Ps. 102:21–27*).

Mount Zion also is the place where the Son was appointed “priest forever” (*Heb. 5:6*), a quotation of Psalm 110:4. According to Psalm 110, the appointment of the Son as High Priest occurs at Mount Zion, as well (*Ps. 110:2*). Finally, Hebrews argues that the inauguration of Jesus’ priesthood also marks the inauguration of the new covenant (*Heb. 7:11–22*). Thus, Mount Zion also is the place where the new covenant was ratified. Hebrews 12:22–24 describes, then, the festal gathering that occurred in heaven when Jesus ascended.

In what practical ways can we celebrate the reality of Jesus, His priestly ministry, and the new covenant in our lives and in our worship? Why is rejoicing in this great truth faith-affirming?

You Have Come to God, the Judge of All

Read Hebrews 12:23. If this is a celebration, why is God described as a judge? How can a judge be part of or a reason for a celebration? Read also Daniel 7:9, 10, 13–22.

The celebration described in Hebrews 12:22–24 alludes to a future judgment. God, the Judge, presides, and books are used, and the result of this future judgment from the books is that God’s people receive the kingdom (*Heb. 12:28*).

This scene evokes the great pre-Advent judgment described in Daniel 7, which portrays a judgment scene in which God, the “Ancient of Days” (*Dan. 7:9*), sits on a throne made of fire and is surrounded with “ten thousand times ten thousand” (*Dan. 7:10*) angels. Books are opened (*Dan. 7:10*), and the judgment is decided in favor of “the saints of the most High,” who then “possessed the kingdom” (*Dan. 7:22*).

Similarly, Hebrews 12:22–29 describes a judgment scene at Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, where God, “the Judge of all,” is surrounded with “thousands upon thousands” of angels (*NIV*). The scene also is a fiery one (*Heb. 12:29*). It includes books because the saints are “enrolled” in them (*Heb. 12:23, ESV*), which implies a favorable judgment for the saints.

Jesus is at the center of the scene (*Heb. 12:24*). He was described as the Son of man in Hebrews 2, who was “crowned with glory and honor” after having tasted “death” in our behalf (*Heb. 2:9, ESV*). According to Hebrews 2:10, the “son of man” (*see Heb. 2:6, ESV*) suffered in order that He could bring “many sons to glory” (*ESV*); that is, in order that believers would be able to be “crowned with glory and honor,” as well. The “Son” has now brought believers into Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, through the benefits of the new covenant (*Heb. 12:22–24*), where they are promised to receive a kingdom (*Heb. 12:28*).

This judgment is, then, really good news for believers because it is a judgment that rules in their favor. It vindicates them. It is a judgment that defeats their adversary, the dragon, who is behind the terrible beasts that have persecuted believers in the past (*Daniel 7*) and will do so in the future (*Revelation 13*).

How does what we studied today help us understand that God’s judgment in the three angels’ messages is “good news” for this time (*Rev. 14:6, 7; compare with Deut. 32:36; 1 Chron. 16:33–35*)?

Shake the Heavens and the Earth

After describing the festal gathering occurring in heaven, Paul warns the readers that they need to pay attention to God's voice because God will shake " 'yet once more . . . not only the earth but also the heavens' " (*Heb. 12:26, ESV*). Paul is saying that although Jesus has been enthroned in heaven, our salvation has not been consummated. We need to pay attention because an important event is still to happen.

Compare Haggai 2:6–9, 20–22; Psalm 96:9, 10; Psalm 99:1; and Hebrews 12:26, 27. What is the purpose of God's shaking the heavens and the earth? What does this mean?

In the Old Testament, the shaking of the earth was a common figure for the presence of God, who shows up to deliver His people. When Deborah and Barak fought against Sisera, God fought from heaven on their behalf (*Judg. 5:20*). This is described as a powerful earthquake, a shaking of the earth and mountains because of the presence of God (*Judg. 5:4, 5*). We find this same image appearing throughout the Old Testament when God arises to deliver the oppressed (*Ps. 68:7, 8; Ps. 60:2; Ps. 77:17, 18*). Thus, a shaking signaled God's judgment as He asserts His authority over the peoples of the earth. The prophets predicted this would happen in the day of the Lord (*Isa. 13:13, Isa. 24:18–23*).

For Hebrews, the "shaking" of heaven and earth refers to the destruction of the enemies of God. This is what God promised at the enthronement of Jesus. God said to Him: " 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet' " (*Heb. 1:13, ESV*). Thus, Jesus has defeated the enemy (*Heb. 2:14–16*) and been enthroned (*Heb. 1:5–14*), but the enemies have not yet been destroyed (*Heb. 10:11–14, 1 Cor. 15:23–25*).

But God will destroy these enemies in the future, when He will shake the heavens and the earth. The shaking of the heavens and the earth means, then, the destruction of the earthly powers that persecute God's people and, more important, the destruction of the evil powers (Satan and his angels) who stand behind the earthly powers and control them.

Why is the promise that one day justice will be done, and the evil that has been so prevalent in our world will one day be destroyed, such a hopeful promise for us all, especially those who have suffered directly at the hands of evil?

An Unshakable Kingdom

God has announced that He will “shake” the heavens and the earth, which means that He will destroy enemy nations. There are some things, however, that will not be shaken, that will not be destroyed.

Compare Psalm 15:5, Psalm 16:8, Psalm 21:7, Psalm 62:2, Psalm 112:6, and Hebrews 12:27. What are the things that will not be shaken?

Many modern translations of Hebrews 12:27 suggest that the shaking of the heavens and the earth means that they will be removed and forever gone.

The Bible is clear, however, that God will create new heavens and a new earth (*Isa. 65:17, Rev. 21:1–4*), and we will be resurrected and have new bodies (*1 Thess. 4:13–17, Phil. 3:20*) on this earth. Thus, the “shaking” implies the cleansing and renovation of creation, not its complete removal. What is here will be re-created, and it will be where the redeemed live.

There are some things, however, that will not and cannot be shaken. They include the righteous. They will not be shaken because they trust in God. The Creator sustains them and guarantees their survival.

Note that in Hebrews permanence and stability are associated with Jesus. Hebrews 1:10–12 says about Jesus:

“ ‘You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end’ ” (*ESV*). Hebrews also says that Jesus’ priesthood remains forever (*Heb. 7:3, 24*), as does the inheritance of the redeemed (*Heb. 10:34*). In the final judgment, those who hold fast “in Jesus” will not be shaken (*Ps. 46:5*).

Hebrews 12:28 also says that we will receive “a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (*ESV*). This is a reference to Daniel 7:18, which says that the saints will “possess the kingdom forever.” This is the kingdom that “shall never be destroyed” mentioned in Daniel 2:44. This kingdom belongs to the Son, but He will share it with us. Revelation 20:4 says that we will judge with Him the evil powers that persecuted us (*see also 1 Cor. 6:3*).

How well do you do now, in terms of being shaken? If not so well, what choices can you make in order to get help in this important area? (See Eph. 4:14.)

Let Us Be Grateful

Hebrews concludes this section by pointing out that the appropriate response to God for all the wonderful things He has done for us is to show gratitude by offering Him an appropriate type of worship.

Compare Hebrews 12:28 and Hebrews 13:15, 16. How do we offer God acceptable worship?

In the old covenant system, the sacrifice of animals was the way people showed repentance and gratitude, but these sacrifices were to be but a token of the gratitude and repentance in the heart of the worshiper. Thus, God made clear in Psalms and through the prophets that what really pleased Him was not the blood of animals but the gratitude, good deeds, and righteousness of the worshipers (*Ps. 50:7–23, Isa. 1:11–17*).

Thus, Paul invites us to worship God in the heavenly sanctuary by offering sacrifices of praise, confession, thanksgiving, and good works, which is the true worship that delights Him. We offer these sacrifices on earth, but they are accepted as pleasing to God in heaven. This exhortation embraces all the calls that Paul has made throughout the letter for the confession of Jesus' name (*Heb. 3:1, Heb. 4:14, Heb. 10:23*) and his exhortations that we continue to do good works (*Heb. 6:10–12; Heb. 13:1, 2, 16*).

The invitation of Paul to the audience to “offer to God acceptable worship” (*Heb. 12:28, ESV*) implies that believers are truly now a priestly nation that has been perfected and sanctified through the sacrifice of Jesus (*Heb. 10:10–14, 19–23*). This fulfills God's original purpose for Israel, that it would be a priestly nation through which He would be able to announce the good news of salvation to the world (*Exod. 19:4–6; 1 Pet. 2:9, 10; Rev. 1:6; Rev. 5:10*).

Hebrews 13:1–6 describes in practical terms what it means to do good and share what we have. It means to show brotherly love, just as Jesus showed brotherly love to us (*Heb. 2:11, 12*). It means to be hospitable, to visit those who are in prison or have been mistreated (*Heb. 13:3*), and to reject adultery and covetousness.

Why is it important to consider good works and sharing what we have as part of our worship to God? At the same time, what are the very real ways that our spiritual sacrifices to God may be corrupted (*Isa. 1:11–17*)?

Further Thought: “During the thousand years between the first and the second resurrection the judgment of the wicked takes place. The apostle Paul points to this judgment as an event that follows the second advent. ‘Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.’ 1 Corinthians 4:5. Daniel declares that when the Ancient of Days came, ‘judgment was given to the saints of the Most High.’ Daniel 7:22. At this time the righteous reign as kings and priests unto God. John in the Revelation says: ‘I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them.’ ‘They shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.’ Revelation 20:4, 6. It is at this time that, as foretold by Paul, ‘the saints shall judge the world.’ 1 Corinthians 6:2. In union with Christ they judge the wicked, comparing their acts with the statute book, the Bible, and deciding every case according to the deeds done in the body. Then the portion which the wicked must suffer is meted out, according to their works; and it is recorded against their names in the book of death.

“Satan also and evil angels are judged by Christ and His people. Says Paul: ‘Know ye not that we shall judge angels?’ Verse 3. And Jude declares that ‘the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, He hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.’ Jude 6.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 660, 661.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What does the participation of the saints in the judgment of the wicked (*1 Cor. 6:3, Jude 6*) say about God and how transparent He will be with us in showing us His goodness and fairness in how He has dealt with sin and evil?
- 2 Read Exodus 32:32, Psalm 56:8, Psalm 69:28, Psalm 139:16, Isaiah 4:3, Daniel 12:1, Malachi 3:16, Luke 10:20, Revelation 13:8, and Revelation 17:8. These are references to God’s books in heaven. What kinds of things are registered in these books? Why is it important that God maintains a record of our tears (*Ps. 56:8*), for example? If God knows everything, what is the purpose of such books or records?
- 3 Why do you think it is important that Hebrews ends the argument of the epistle with a link to the promises of Daniel 7? Why are these links important in the context of Jesus’ ministry in heaven? What does Daniel 7 teach us about the end of all earthly and fallen things?

Perfect Health

By ANDREW McCHESENEY

Noy was a wealthy woman who oversaw more than 100 workers at a family-owned coffee plantation in Laos. But then she fell ill with a mystery disease in her village.

Her physician couldn't identify the illness.

Noy went to many medical doctors across southern Laos, but no one could help.

Her health grew worse and worse until she could not even walk and was confined to her bed. More than that, she nearly lost her mind. Many times, she could not remember people in her own family.

All her workers left because she did not pay their salaries. Villagers told her and her husband that she would not survive.

At this low point in Noy's life, a visitor arrived from Laos's capital, Vientiane. The visitor, like Noy, was not a Christian, but her son and daughter-in-law were Seventh-day Adventists. She told Noy about Jesus.

"Maybe Jesus can save your life," she said.

With assistance from her husband, Noy found the telephone number of an Adventist pastor in the south and called him for help.

The pastor traveled to Noy's village and prayed with her.

Noy was encouraged by the prayer, and she decided to move temporarily to Vientiane. She wanted to meet Adventist church members and get to know them.

When she arrived, she could not get out of the bed, and she struggled to think clearly. Church members met and prayed with her regularly. Gradually, her health improved. She started to sit, stand, and walk.

Five months after falling ill, Noy returned to her home village in perfect health.

The villagers were surprised at what they saw. They had expected her to die, but she was alive and fully healed. Astonished, they asked her what had happened.

"Jesus saved me from death," Noy said.

Now many villagers are interested in knowing more about Jesus, the powerful Physician who can heal all who ask Him.

Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offering that will help spread the gospel to the people of Laos and other countries of the Southern Asia-Pacific Division. Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open an elementary school in Laos.

This mission story illustrates Mission Objective Number 2 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan: "To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach . . . among unreached and under-reached people groups, and to non-Christian religions." Learn more at IWillGo2020.org.