



NG Study Guide: Hebrews 12:18-29 :: “Jesus Offers a Greater Kingdom” [1.21.24]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. *Leader note: Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

The Study

Thesis: The way citizens of a specific place live is influenced by their culture and community ideals. As we draw near to Jesus and spend time with Him, we should be known as citizens of His heavenly kingdom through the way we live.

Subject: The Greater Kingdom of Jesus

Object: Draw Near to God

Context: Hebrews 11 and the beginning of 12 focus on the faith of God’s people and the life that flows from it. Following the exhortation for believers to “strengthen [their] hands and feeble knees...and make straight paths for [their] feet,” the author gives the Church instruction on how this might be done by once again comparing the old covenant with the new covenant of Jesus.

A. The Fear of the Old Covenant [18-21]

The imagery in this section is drawn from Exodus 19 in a description of Israel arriving in Sinai after their escape from slavery in Egypt. This would come to be one of the key places Israel dwelt during their time in the wilderness (most of Exodus, all of Leviticus, Numbers 1-10). The time Israel spent around Mount Sinai gives us incredible insight into the nature of the old covenant and Israel’s response to it.

What associations does the author of Hebrews make with Israel’s time at Mount Sinai?

1. Disconnected from God [18, 20]

¹⁸ For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest.... ²⁰ (For they could not endure what was commanded: “And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.”

In Exodus 19, the people of Israel have been set free from their captivity in Egypt and are now wandering in the wilderness. They’ve journeyed to Sinai and God descends onto the top of the mountain as fire with the intention of speaking to the people of Israel. However, we see a physical distance created between God and His people that is meant to represent a much more critical spiritual disconnect from God. As God manifested on the mountain, if anyone touch it, they were to be put to death. The time at Mount Sinai is a reminder of the old covenant’s condition of perfect obedience, and the continual separation experienced between God and mankind throughout the Old Testament.

2. Wavered in Faith [19]

19 and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore....

We learn in Exodus 20 why the people were disconnected from God. Though God desired to speak with all of Israel, the people were afraid and asked Moses to speak to God and relay back to them (in essence, to act as their mediator). They explicitly did not want God to speak directly with them for fear of death (though this fear was not rooted in any real danger they faced). After Moses ascended the mountain, God reminded him of the covenant He established between Himself and Israel. It was following the people's fear and unwillingness to approach Him that God commanded Moses to warn the people not to ascend or touch the mountain, lest they die. Though God only desired to cleanse His people and raise them up as a nation of priests, their fear caused them to waiver in their faith.

How can we combat against this sort of wavering in our faith today and avoid being disconnected from God? It begins by developing a healthy fear of God.

3. Develop a Healthy Fear of God [21]

21 And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling."

Portrayed in Scripture is this seemingly paradoxical idea of God wanting us to fear Him (referenced over 140 times in Scripture) without being afraid of Him. Yet, there is a way to fear God without being afraid of Him. The key is knowing the difference between the two ideas.

a. Being Afraid of God: An unhealthy fear of God is rooted in being afraid of God, His power, punishment, and/or wrath. If we see His power as a force against us, we will naturally seek to remove ourselves from His presence and protection. Even Moses himself, who had spoken with God throughout the freeing of the Israelites from Egypt, was afraid of God's presence in this moment. Being afraid of God acts as an obstacle to genuine faith and obedience.

b. Fearing God: A healthy fear of God is found in knowing God can use His power *against* us to justly punish us but instead uses it *for* us to justify and save us. When we understand the power of God is working for us, it should compel us to draw near to His hand of protection and provision (c.f. Romans 8:28). This type of fear speaks to an awe, reverence, and respect for the Lord.

While the Israelites time around Mount Sinai was marked by fear and distance from God, the new covenant calls us to draw near to God in faith. This drawing near offers us great joy.

B. The Joy of the New Covenant [22-24]

The author of Hebrews gives this picture of Israel's relationship with God at Sinai to be able to juxtapose it with the reality of our experience under the new covenant. In the following verse, we see the beautiful joy afforded to us when we place our faith in Jesus. What can believers expect in the new covenant?

1. Dwell with God [22]

22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels...

The author of Hebrews contrasts Mount Sinai with another mountain: Mount Zion. This was a reference to the hill upon which Jerusalem sits. While Sinai held a close correlation to Egypt and the pain of the wilderness, Zion signified an established people who rejoiced in the glory of God. But more significantly, the author tells us we have come to Mount Zion and "*the city of the living God*". The picture of Mount Sinai is God manifesting Himself for a time among the Israelites. Here, we see this image of God's people being invited to live with God in His dwelling place (heaven), with an innumerable company of angels.

2. Received into Godly Community [23]

23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect...

Though we are saved individually, we are not saved into individuality. God's desire is to grow His people. In Genesis 1-2, God gave Adam and Eve the blessing of multiplying and filling the earth. To Abraham, He

gave the promise that he would be the father of a great nation. Through the new covenant, God expands the scope and provides the means for anyone to be received into the godly community of faith. Those who are welcomed can find comfort knowing that they are:

a. Registered in heaven: Our salvation is secured through Christ Jesus. Our names are written in the book of life (c.f. Revelation 20:15) and cannot be removed.

b. Justified and made perfect: While the nation of Israel was plagued with the sin of disobedience and could not meet the requirements of the old covenant, the new covenant provides the forgiveness of sins by grace through faith, with the promise that we are positionally perfect through justification (i.e. God sees us through the lens of Jesus and His righteousness because He died for our sins on the cross) and are being made perfect (i.e. We are going through the process of sanctification, being made more like Jesus).

3. Draw Near to Jesus, the Mediator

²⁴ to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

Lastly, the joy of the new covenant is that we get to look to Jesus, the better Mediator of a better covenant. At Sinai, the people appointed Moses as their mediator out of fear of approaching God directly. The covenant he mediated was based upon earning God's favor through works. Under the new covenant, Jesus willingly steps in as our Mediator so that we can personally approach God with boldness and live in relationship with Him. This is made possible through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus that accomplished what the blood of prior animal sacrifices (like those made first by Abel) could not.

C. The Kingdom of Christ [25-29]

The conclusion of Hebrews 12 develops on the idea of what we can expect when we put our faith in Jesus. As we receive Christ's righteousness, we are delivered from darkness and are now called citizens of His kingdom (c.f. Colossians 1:13-14). Let's learn about the kingdom of Christ.

1. Received through Accepting Jesus [25]

²⁵ See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven....

We do not earn our right to live in Christ's kingdom as His citizens. He has given us an invitation, and it's up to us to decide whether we'll accept it. Israel was given a chance to approach Yahweh in the wilderness at Mount Sinai. They rejected the offer and could not escape the consequences that followed. We must not refuse the call of Jesus, who welcomes us into His heavenly kingdom. The consequences of refusing Him are much greater now than they were for Israel.

2. Everlasting [26-28a]

²⁶ whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." ²⁷ Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.... We are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken

At Mount Sinai, God shook the earth when He spoke. Here again, God has promises to shake the earth once more; but additionally, He also promises to shake heaven. The reason for this is to test that which will remain. The material, temporary, and inferior things of the world will not pass this test and will eventually fall away and fade. But that which is of God and His heavenly kingdom will remain forever. Christ's kingdom is an everlasting kingdom that cannot be shaken and we can have confidence that we and it will stand forever.

3. Leads to Kingdom Living [28-29]

²⁸ 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. ²⁹ For our God is a consuming fire.

Receiving the kingdom of God is a present reality that should be perceptible in some form. Though we may not see the kingdom manifest now, we see evidence of its existence through the way in which its citizens live. We should be asking God for the grace to serve Him in a way that is acceptable to Him, with the proper attitudes (namely here, reverence and godly fear). We can only do this when we place our faith in Jesus, receive His grace, and embrace kingdom living as citizens of Jesus' greater kingdom.

Contemplation & Prayer

- 1. Contemplate the power of God's grace and ask Him to lead you to serve Him as kingdom citizens.**
- 2. Embrace the community we have received in the new covenant and pray for someone around you.**

Study Guide Qs

Q1. What are some notable distinctions between the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God?

Q2. How might an unhealthy fear of God prevent us from living with a genuine and active faith?

Q3. What encouragement would you share with someone feeling disconnected from God, His people, and His eternal promises?

Q4. How does knowing that Christ will return to make a new heaven and earth affect the way you live today (both the positives and unintended consequences)?

“Disciples Who Dig Deeper” (optional or alternative study)

1. As we near the end of Hebrews, watch this video from the Bible Project that gives an detailed overview of the book: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/hebrews/>

2. Here's David Guzik's commentary from Enduring Word on Hebrews 12: <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/hebrews-12/>

Love your neighbors (inside + outside the group) better:

- 1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors inside or outside the group?**
- 2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbors inside or outside the group?**

Disciples who make disciples:

- 1. Who would like to share how they recently sought to make disciples?**
- 2. Here is a disciple making idea to consider for the weeks ahead: [Consider what margin you can invest into making disciples where you live, work, study, play, and worship \(family devotions, praying for co-workers, starting a bible study at school, sharing a meaningful conversation about your faith with a friend, serving in the local church, etc.\) and invest in the unshakable kingdom of God.](#)**

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

- 1. Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.
- 2. Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on** in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.
- 3. The "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities.** As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.
- 4. Every time you meet consider asking:**
 - a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?** If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.