

Lesson Twenty-four

(12:18-28)

THE UNSHAKEABLE KINGDOM

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

25See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less shall we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. ²⁶His voice then shook the earth; but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven." ²⁷This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of what is shaken,

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as of what has been made, in order that what cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe;

Down deep inside, everyone desires to build life and hope upon something solid. No one in their best moment wants a life without adequate reason for being, a firm basis for thought and action. There is no person who in earnestness desires a life at loose ends rather than one having a sure center and circumference.

God has provided just such as is needed in the kingdom of Jesus Christ, the church. It is founded upon Jesus himself, which makes a foundation that even the gates of death cannot move. It is of this kingdom that our text speaks. God has spared nothing in respect to security for the Christian. No plausible reason can be advanced by anyone against God, in regard to the adequacy of the church, built with Christians in mind.

It is true that God has always been a sufficient reason for faith, beginning with Adam. He is not of such nature that he would demand faith without reason. Hence, all who have lived as if there were no God have been held guilty, Romans 1:18-32. He even gave more evidences for faith in the time of the Mosaic law, with the great miracles performed in Egypt and related places. But the greatest God reserved until his son came. He kept back nothing that would be profitable to Christians, giving all adequate reason for hope. To this point our author addresses himself, putting the finishing touches on a long section of exhortation directed to his readers. Beginning in 10:19, he has worked about every possible angle to help those early Christians to remain steadfast, not giving up before the prize is gained. He continues with a picture of the life to come, freely given to all who build their life upon an unshakable kingdom.

12:18 Contrasting the real to the temporary, the author shows that the institution in which the Jews gloried was but a shadow while the substance was Christ, Colossians 2:16ff.

V. 19 — **no further messages** — God was doing the Israelites an incalculable favor, but at the same time attempting to teach enduring lessons. He did not have to give Israel his law, or even care about them, but he did. What they were to realize, however, was that the law and all involved in it was but a teacher to lead them to Christ. As Jesus pointed out in John 5:38-39, they searched the scriptures because they rightly thought that eternal life was to be found there. It was to be found there for the scriptures pointed to Christ. The problem with too many of the

Jews was that they failed to see Jesus, and lived as if law-keeping per se was what God desired. Tragically, they were mistaken.

V. 20 — **they could not endure** — As Paul wrote in II Corinthians 3, the law came with glory, even if it was weak and temporary. The point our author is making is that even with the greatness present in it, the law did not evoke happiness but fear.

V. 21 — Moses, of whom few were even peers, was like those whom he was leading: afraid. He evidently saw what others did not, however, the fact that the law was doomed to be replaced. See II Corinthians 3:13.

V. 22 — **But you** — Christians have been ushered into the heavenly places, Ephesians 2:6, and enjoy in some senses the actual indwelling of God, John 14:23. Paul used a similar comparison in Galatians 4:21-31, pointing out there that Christians are sons of promise, free, whereas those who clung to the Mosaic institution were like Ishmael, slaves and in bondage.

angels in festal gathering — Consider the contrastive picture drawn: Judaism was gloom and fear, Christianity is happiness and festivity, etc.

V. 23 — **assembly of the first-born** — Reference is to Christians whose names are written down in the book of life, Philippians 4:3; Revelation 20:15. It is somewhat debatable if the reference is to all Christians in a future time, or to those who have died and gone to be with the Lord, Philippians 1:21-23; Revelation 14:13. In either case, the picture is one of good things happening, which ought to provide incentive for us.

judge . . . God — It is God with whom all have to do, 4:13, who is to judge those who pass through this life. As John says in Revelation 22:14, how happy will be the state of those who wash their robes in the blood of the lamb, for they alone will have access to the tree of life, and be allowed to enter the gates to the city, New Jerusalem, where God is waiting for them, Revelation 21:1-4.

spirits of just men made perfect — Descriptive of Christians (and all the faithful) who led obedient lives through discipline, and reaped the reward of sowing to the spirit rather than the flesh, Galatians 6:7-8, who endured and received the promise, 6:17; 11:33.

V. 24 — Most importantly, Christians are those who have placed their faith in Jesus and the covenant he represents, which is "new," one characterized by grace and peace and truth, John 1:17, and that replaced the "old" which came through Moses.

Abel — While Abel's faith in God spoke of God's willingness to reveal himself to man, and make it possible for men to trust in him, such hardly compares with all God has done for Christians, so much of which has been done in time and space. Christians in some ways live less by faith and more by sight than any who sojourned before Jesus came.

V. 25. — **See** — Another imperative among many in this chapter. The

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argument here is like that in 10:26-31 — if the Israelites were held responsible for the revelation they had, however poor it might be compared to the new revelation, how much more will it be so for Christians!

the one speaking — Harkening back to 1:1-2, God is speaking through Jesus, his son. If life is to be had, Christians must listen to Jesus, Matthew 17:5, not Moses or Elijah (who represented the Old Covenant).

V. 26 — God has made some promises to mankind that are conditional in nature, while others he has made are not so. This is one of those not conditional. The present world and all that is in it will pass away; I John 2:17, and be replaced by a new world, eternal in nature, righteous in character, II Peter 3:1-13. Since these things be so, it ill behooves any Christian to do aught but hold fast to that which Jesus has built.

V. 28 — **Therefore** — The church Jesus has built is the unshakeable kingdom, designed to last beyond this world and all its glory (including Judaism and that associated with it). Knowing these things, as Peter says, will cause Christians in all ages to live lives of holiness and godliness. Paul made comment in II Corinthians 4:16ff. that any slight momentary affliction, such as was then being endured by the readers of Hebrews, would simply be something to work for them an eternal reward, a home by God himself, II Cor. 5:1ff.

Always the scriptures are like this: first the cross (the life we are to lead and the demands of it), then the crown (the reward God has for those who obey faithfully). It is so in our total context — first the life to be lived, in the fear of a living God yet lived with confidence, always looking unto Jesus who represents the last and best that this world has to offer (all of these are “acceptable worship”), then the eternal home where God is, sharing in that which he has prepared for his own.

acceptable worship — Simply means a faithful life, such as those mentioned in ch. 11, or Jesus in 12:1-2. The scriptures use the word “worship” in a much broader sense than is generally true today, since the word is normally used to mean what is done in some building on Sunday. It rather means what is done throughout life, and intends a totally dedicated person who continually serves God. Let us so learn and so live!

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 24:

231. How does this lesson fit in with the previous lessons?
232. Have you listed in columns the phrases describing the Mosaic dispensation?
233. Why were the Israelites scared when the law was given?

234. Does Paul indicate that Moses could see the true nature of the law he was receiving?
235. In the text of II Corinthians 3, how does Paul describe the effect of the law upon the Jew — it is as a what?
236. Where is liberty, according to II Corinthians 3?
237. What were the comparisons Paul made in Galatians 4:21-31?
238. Who escaped God under the law?
239. What is to be removed, according to v. 27?
240. Who is the "us" in v. 28?
241. What should the privilege of receiving an unshakeable kingdom cause "us" to do, according to v. 28?
242. What added motivation to give acceptable worship is mentioned in v. 29?