

Turning away, turning toward

A. Divine encounters of two kinds [12:18-24]

12:18,19 Identify the irony of Israel's first encounter with the God to whom they had cried out (Ex.2:23-25; 20:18-21)

[1] [12:18] In this respect Christians were differently circumstanced from those who heard the Law at Sinai. The Jews were forbidden to draw near: Christians shrank back when they were invited to approach. **Brooke Foss Westcott**, *Hebrews* p. 412
 [2] [12:18,19] The description of the terrors of Sinai is based on the account in Ex. 19:16-19; 20:18-21, with Moses' recollection of the scene forty years later in Deut. 4:11f. The mountain was so charged with the holiness of the God who manifested Himself there that for man or beast to touch it meant certain death. **F.F. Bruce** *Hebrews* p. 371

12:20,21 Not a 'comfy' place for either beast or man! (11:13-15)

[3] [12:20] If even a beast accidentally touched or trespassed on the hill of God, it contracted so much holiness from it that it became highly dangerous to touch itself; it must be killed from a safe distance – stoned ... **F.F. Bruce** *Hebrews* p. 371

12:22-24 Itemize the 7 characteristics of the 'heavenly city' (2:17,18; 8:1,2)

[4] [v.22-24] It is implied that he is no easy-going God. The contrast is not between the mere terrors of Sinai and the gracious relationship of Zion, but between the outward, sensuous terror of the former and the inward intimacy of the latter – an intimacy which still involves awe. **James Moffatt**, *Hebrews* (ICC) p. 218
 [5] But the spiritual birth, with the forgiveness of all past sins, was offered by the apostles to all mankind; and their epistles imply that, as the result of it, Christians had passed into new regions of life, – had received, so to speak, new senses, – so that they saw and heard what other men could not see or hear, – had discovered that they were surrounded on every side by the institutions and powers of an eternal kingdom, or which they were the subjects, and Christ the king. ... That many of us have failed to enter the high and lofty life which such declarations as these represent, must not induce us to impoverish and degrade the plain language of inspired men. In striving



to recover the habits of thought characteristic of apostolic times, we may, perhaps, be assisted to recover the fervour of their devotion and the energy of their labours. **R.W. Dale** *The Jewish Temple and the Christian Church* pp.271,272

12:23,24 Though more remote, why is this 'mountain' more approachable? (11:16)

[6] [12:22-24] Again the word "Jesus" is used expressive of the human nature and earthly life of our Lord, and is particularly appropriate to the context. It is also very

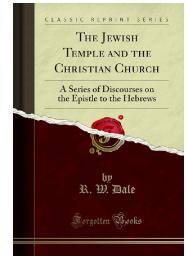
striking to read "ye are come," especially when it is remembered that up to the present there have been only exhortations: "Let us come boldly" (4:16), "let us draw near" (10:19-22). Thus those who are appealed to in this way are regarded as having already the spiritual position in Christ which they are to make their own. The word "better" is found here for the last time, twelve occurrences altogether being found in the Epistle. By contrast with verse 18, "ye are not come," it is seen that the key-thought is that of access, "ye have come right up" (v.22). **W.H. Griffith Thomas** *Let Us Go On* p.166

**"The key-thought
is that of access"**

B. Two types of terror [12:25-29]

12:25,26 Note our author assumes that the God who 'speaks' is now just as inescapable (and audible) as the God of Sinai!

[7] [12:25-27] A comparison is again instituted (as in 2:2,3) between the old and new dispensations, showing the greater responsibility of being associated with the latter. Responsibility is not only not lessened; it is really increased by the Gospel. Grace though free and full is nevertheless inextricably bound up with seriousness and faithfulness of life. The word "refuse" is the same as "entreated" in verse 19 and as "excused" in Luke 14:18. "See that you do not beg off from Him who is continually speaking." And it is to be observed that if we begin by "excusing," we may easily end by definite "turning away." We commence by "deprecating," and we finish by "departing." **W.H. Griffith Thomas** *Let Us Go On* p.167



[8] The difficulties of a religious life are felt the most, by those who shrink from complete and unreserved devotion to God; "the straight paths" of perfect loyalty to Christ are, for many reasons, easier to walk in, than the crooked paths of compromise; and this is especially true for those who are deficient in moral and religious strength. **R.W. Dale** *The Jewish Temple and the Christian Church* p.265

The symbolism of Sinai

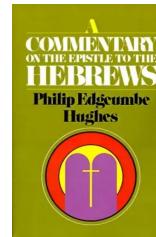
[9] The apostle speaks first of Sinai. He reminds us of seven things in connection with the giving of the law. ... Mount Sinai represents the law. It manifests the majesty of God above us as creatures, the wrath of God against us as sinners; it reveals to us God's judgment and our condemnation; it convinces us of our guilt and of our strengthlessness; it represents the state of fear and darkness, of distance and alienation from God. There is no true mediation; Moses and the angels minister, but cannot truly and fully bring God and man together. Here we are not children and heirs of salvation; here we are in bondage, and under condemnation. It is winter, without sunshine, without flower and fruit, without the song of birds, the melody of praise. **Adolph Saphir** *Hebrews* pp.845, 347

The Law convicts us OF sin, but cannot save us FROM sin

12:27,28 What is the foundation of the kingdom which cannot be shaken? (Acts 20:24; Eph.2:8,9)

[10] [12:27-29] Philo tries, rather awkwardly, to mediate between the biblical doctrine and the Platonic doctrine of the eternity of the world; but our author is quite forthright. Earlier he has emphasized the transitoriness of the world in order to set in contrast the eternity of the Son of God; now he emphasizes it again in order to set in contrast the eternity of that new order in which the Son of God has brought His people. **F.F. Bruce** *Hebrews* p. 384

[11] [v.28] As ingratitude lies at the very root of all sin and rebellion against God (Rom.1:21), so gratitude is the pulsating heartbeat of every positive response to the gospel, gratitude which spontaneously bursts forth in the apostle's exclamation: "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!" (2 Cor.9:15). Whatever his circumstances, whatever he does or suffers, "always and for everything" the Christian should be giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father" (Eph.5:20; Col.3:17; 1 Thess.5:18). **Philip Edgcumbe Hughes**, *Hebrews* p. 559



[12] [12:28,29] The thought in the Greek is that of priestly service, and is to be rendered with awe and reverence. We are all priests unto God (Rev. 1:6), and our attitude to Him must always be characterized by reverence. "Holy and reverend is his name." The freeness of grace is perfectly compatible with the fulness of awe. God is not only our Father; He is our God (1 Pet. 1:17). In these days, when so often "evil is wrought by want of thought as well as want of heart, we do well to remember how much and how often the Bible speaks of "the fear of God." **W.H. Griffith Thomas** *Let Us Go On* p.170

12:29 Note the juxtaposition of grace and fear! (2 Cor.5:11; 1 Pet.1:17; 2:17; cf. 1 Pet.3:14)

[13] [12:29] And, though at first sight there is something strange in the idea that thankfulness is the means whereby we may serve God, we are perhaps inclined to forget the weight which is attached in Scripture to gratitude and praise. It is the perception and acknowledgement of the divine glory which is the strength of man. The sense of love is the motive for proclaiming love. **B.F. Westcott**, *Hebrews* p. 424

[14] [12:27-29] To the grace of God the proper response is a grateful heart, and the words and actions that flow from a grateful heart are the sacrifices in which God takes delight. At the same time, such sacrificial worship must be offered with a due sense of the majesty and holiness of the God with whom we have to do: not only thankfulness, but reverence and awe must mark His people's approach to Him; "for our God is a consuming fire." He who descended on Mount Sinai in fire and spoke to His people from the midst of that fire still consumes in the white heat of His purity everything that is unworthy of Himself. **F.F. Bruce** *Hebrews* p. 384

The relation between doubt and disobedience

[15] The words, "See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh" reveal the ultimate purpose for which this letter was written. The Hebrew Christians to whom it was addressed were in danger of falling away from faith, and the danger which threatened them was the result of intellectual wavering as to the full and final authority of Christ. That intellectual wavering, moreover, resulted largely from the fact that they had not put Christ completely to the test. They were Christians. They were believers. They had turned from the Hebrew form of religion to its ultimate fulfilment in Jesus Christ, but they were unstable. They were remembering the majesty of the old economy with its angelic ministration, and its guidance through Moses and Joshua and Aaron. They were undoubtedly somewhat confused by the apparent simplicity that was in Christ. The temple was gone. The ritual had passed. All the splendour with which they had been familiar was no more. They were in danger of apostasy from the faith as they looked back, but did not sufficiently consider the fact of the Lord Himself. As we have already said, they had not put Him completely to the test, as the writer of the letter said: "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." They had been treating the whole matter largely on an intellectual level, and had been unable to grasp the full significance of Christ, because they had not yielded to Him a complete devotion. It is well to remind ourselves at this point that these two points always go together. All intellectual wavering in the presence of Jesus Christ on the part of those who have known Him, is the result of a failure somewhere to carry out logically the things professed. The great idea was expressed by our Lord Himself in the words: "If any man willetteth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God." The test of the Divine nature of the Christian message is that of "willing" to put it to the test. He whose life is yielded actively to the claims of Christ, even unto resisting unto blood if necessary, will discover that the teaching is of God. **G. Campbell Morgan** *God's Last Word to Man* pp.137,138

