

Mounts Sinai and Zion

I would like to start by reading a section of Scripture in the book of Hebrews. In the latter part of the chapter, there are a number of verses that speak very much to the Day of Pentecost. Paul says:

***Hebrews 12:18 For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest,
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.
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."
21 And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.")***

He said, "We haven't come to an event such as Israel experienced at Mount Sinai."

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

These 12 verses are laden with imagery and instruction relating to Pentecost. They start at Mount Sinai, the giving of God's Law, which we understand was on the Feast of Pentecost - the first time Israel kept Pentecost, assembled before God.

Paul talks about firstfruits, the firstfruits who are recorded in heaven. He talks about a covenant, and Jesus Christ being the Mediator of the covenant: also associated with Pentecost as well. And he carries on and talks about the benefit of having God's Holy Spirit.

I would like to look at at least one of these aspects today in the light of what Paul is saying here in Hebrews 12. I would like to start at the beginning, with Mount Sinai and Mount Zion because he says:

22 But you have come ...

There is a sense of opposition set up here between what happened at Mount Sinai on the Day of Pentecost. He said, "That's not the experience you are having here. On the other hand, you have come ..."

***22 ... to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,
23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn (the firstfruits) who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,***

People love to set these situations in the New Testament up as oppositions to one another.

"Sinai is the Old Covenant, therefore it's bad. Zion, the New Jerusalem coming down from God as described in the book of Revelation, is what it's all about. That's all we need to focus upon."

In reality, Paul is not setting these up in opposition whatsoever. There's no sense of juxtaposing these one against the other. Rather, Paul is pointing out the role that they played in God's dealings with Israel.

In God's Word there are many parables. One parable is never able to encompass the greatness of God's purpose. One Holy Day is not sufficient for God's Plan. And one mountain was not adequate for God's revelation to His people.

Let's start with Mount Sinai. It was very clearly the place of God's revelation to His people. They were to come out of Egypt to this mountain to worship God. Those were the marching orders given to Moses when he came upon the burning bush, recorded in Exodus chapter three. He had to bring them to this point so that they could worship God.

They came to this place of revelation and the Eternal revealed Himself to them. They received a covenant. They agreed to a covenant in which they would be the people of God.

But although it was a place of revelation and of such great importance, if we go through the Old Testament we never find Sinai being the FOCUS of people's relationship with God. In other words, it doesn't become "the sacred mountain" to which all good Israelites make pilgrimages. It never enters into the law.

In fact, people don't start making pilgrimages to Mount Sinai until about the third or fourth century of this era - and then, for some strange reason they were people who considered themselves Christians. It was not a matter of the people of Israel making pilgrimages to Mount Sinai at any point in time.

Yes, one individual fled there. We will touch upon that in due course. But it wasn't the FOCUS of God's dealings with His people on an ongoing, continuing basis.

Deuteronomy 12:11 "then there will be the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide. There you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, and all your choice offerings which you vow to the LORD."

The book of Deuteronomy is filled with references to "the place where God places His name." Sinai was a place of revelation, but it wasn't the place where God put His name for His people.

So why did God bring them to Sinai? There are a number of reasons. The use of Mount Sinai by the Eternal speaks to two aspects: one on the human level and one on the divine. And it speaks very much to the TYPE of people we have to be. It speaks to one of the most foundational principles upon which the Church of God is based.

Where was Mount Sinai? It was in a desert. It seemed to be totally beyond the control of any of the political powers of those days. Israel was brought into the wilderness, no longer able to be affected by Egypt, or to take it a little further, by Babylon, or by the Canaanites to the north. The only people who could have influenced them (the Amalekites) had been chased away by the time they got there.

So it was almost as though the Eternal brought them into an environment in which they were cut off from the influences of this world. He wanted their UNDIVIDED attention for what He was doing with them. Mount Sinai, for Israel, was above all else, a symbol of FREEDOM. Nobody claimed it. No government claimed it - except the Eternal. God brought them to a place which symbolised freedom from the civilisations of this world.

Sinai also speaks to the Eternal. Let me read a quotation from a writer who probably summed it up better than I could write it. He said:

"The desert serves as a cradle for this primitive universalism of social elements which are outside the control of governments, in that it is a space free of any political authority whatsoever, and of any organised, governmental, cultic establishment."

The Eternal brought them to a place which was free of any religious trappings whatsoever, so that the people wouldn't say: "Let's bring this Egyptian thing in here." He literally brought them into a religious void, and said, "Now I am going to set up for you a totally new way of life. And it is based upon your relationship with Me."

Another writer once said:

"Sinai acts as an eternal rebuke to man's arrogant belief that he can govern himself."

What was God doing? God was setting up a relationship with His people, a very unique relationship. Let's rehearse what happened:

Exodus 19:1 In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai.

2 For they had departed from Rephidim, had come to the Wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness. So Israel camped there before the mountain.

3 And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel:

4 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself.

5 'Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.

6 'And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

7 So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the LORD commanded him.

8 Then all the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." So Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD.

... thus entering into an agreement, creating a covenant relationship.

People recognise that here we have what was probably the very first concept of universalism anywhere in the written world. Because this God was saying, "I am the God of the entire world - and I have chosen you."

He wasn't just the God of Egypt, or the God of Canaan or Babylon, He was the God of the entire world! That concept was totally unknown to the people of Israel at that point in time. They didn't comprehend it in its fullness. To a certain extent, they don't comprehend it to this very day.

So, as I mentioned earlier, the desert serves as a cradle for this primitive universalism, this idea that there is a God who is above everything else, that can choose a nation to worship Himself for a greater purpose. Thus universalism was established.

The Eternal desired to have a relationship with them collectively as a people, and even more so, He desired to have a relationship with them individually. Yes, they had priests, judges and various rulers. But in reality, they all had the opportunity of a relationship with God. The role of the priests and the judges was to help in that relationship with God, to help them understand what sort of people they should be, having that relationship with God.

In terms of Mount Sinai, let's turn to the one account in the Bible of a pilgrimage to Mount Sinai. It wasn't so much of a "pilgrimage," because it was done at a much greater rate than a pilgrim would normally do, and under very different circumstances.

1st Kings 18 records that Elijah had called the people of the northern kingdom of Israel together to Mount

Carmel - overlooking the Mediterranean Sea at the mouth of the Valley of Megiddo. Having brought them to the point of declaring their allegiance to the Eternal instead of Baal, God answers by fire. The sacrifice is consumed. The priests and prophets of Baal are all slain - and then God sends rain as a result of the prayer of Elijah.

But in the next chapter, the whole scene changes - because a woman called Jezebel appears! Ahab got home that night and told Jezebel all that had happened that day. The fact that it was now raining torrentially, breaking the drought, apparently meant absolutely nothing to Jezebel. The only thing that concerned her was that her beloved prophets of Baal had been killed, so she sent a messenger to Elijah.

1 Kings 19:2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time."

This man has just had God answer prayers in a miraculous manner. Fire comes down from heaven. It rains. We don't necessarily appreciate some of these things because we are not farmers. We haven't lived through three and a half years of drought, and seen our livelihood disappearing before our face. But that would have been an incredible event to have lived through.

Jezebel sends a not-veiled threat to him, saying, "You are going to be like the prophets of Baal tomorrow."

And what does Elijah do? He scarpers! He runs for his life.

And where does he run to? Eventually, he ends up at Mount Sinai - or Horeb, the mountain of God. (Horeb is another name for Sinai.)

8 So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God.

9 And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

"What are you here for?"

I guess he didn't feel he could go anywhere else. He obviously didn't consider Beersheba in Judah, on the edge of the Negev safe (verse 3). He didn't want Jezebel's threat to come to pass, and the Eternal had to say, "What are you doing here? Is this what I want you to do, to come down here to hide in a cave on a mountain? What are you looking for?"

People tend to look for the physical accoutrements of what God has done in terms of theophany from time to time. People look for the physical manifestations that occurred in terms of the Day of Pentecost. And they miss the whole picture of what God is doing.

So Elijah replied:

10 So he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."

11 Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake;

All of these things are associated with what happened at Sinai in Exodus chapter 19, but on this occasion, this wasn't a manifestation of God.

12 and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.

13 So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and

stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice came to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

"What are you looking for? This isn't the place to be finding Me."

14 And he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."

This still doesn't do anything to the Eternal. The Eternal doesn't pat him on the head and say, "Poor boy." Rather ...

15 Then the LORD said to him: "Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus ...

"This is not where you are supposed to be. You are supposed to be somewhere else."

15 ... and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria (the Arameans).

16 "Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place.

17 "It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill.

"... and by the by: you see yourself as a poor, lonesome creature ..."

18 "Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

"You're not alone in this battle. You don't need to be afraid."

I guess that reading that over the centuries, the Israelites and Jews in particular came to have the idea that going to Mount Sinai wasn't a particularly good idea. It was not what God required. Yes, it was a place where God revealed Himself to the people, but it was not then to become an idol or a place of worship in its own right.

Let's now a look at Mount Zion, and its place within God's Plan. 1st Kings chapter eight records the dedication of the Temple by Solomon. It was built on Zion, Mount Moriah. The place it was built was a very particular place:

2 Chronicles 3:1 Now Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the LORD had appeared to his father David, at the place that David had prepared on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

The place where the Temple was built was Mount Moriah. It was a place at which the Eternal had appeared to David. Was David the only one that God had appeared to at Mount Moriah? The answer to that is no, because in Genesis 22 we find that Abraham also came to Mount Moriah to sacrifice Isaac:

Genesis 22:1 Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."

2 Then He said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

I don't have to recount the rest of the story because you know what happened in terms of God intervening and providing a sacrifice instead of Isaac. The sacrifice took place but it was not Isaac who was sacrificed. It was a ram.

Rather interestingly, the noun "Moriah" (*môrîyâh*) is derived from the Hebrew verb which means, "to see" (*râ'âh*). In fact, the meaning of "Moriah" really means "sight," "spectacle," or "vision." We find that occurring a couple of times in the chapter which oftentimes the King James English hides by the way in which it is translated.

Genesis 22:14 And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide (Yahweh-Yireh), as it is said to this day, "In the Mount of The LORD it shall be provided."

If one were to translate that more directly from the Hebrew as the Tanakh does, it would read:

"Abraham named the site Yahweh-Yireh, hence the present saying, "On the mount of the Eternal there is vision."

... there is sight! We find it as well in a preceding verse where Abraham is asked by Isaac, his son, "Where is the lamb?"

Genesis 22:7 But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." Then he said, "Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"
8 And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide (*râ'âh*) for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering" ...

"He will SHOW us the lamb for the burnt offering. It will be revealed. It will be understood."

So when we come to 1st Kings 8, and we start talking about Mount Zion, and the Temple that is built on Mount Zion, we need to bear in mind what the background was. This was a place of vision! This was a place of seeing. We should appreciate that.

1 Kings 8:1 Now Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the chief fathers of the children of Israel, to King Solomon in Jerusalem, that they might bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD from the City of David, which is Zion.

They brought it up during the Feast of Tabernacles, and all the details are then given. Solomon prays a prayer that speaks to this whole aspect of what we are talking about.

14 Then the king turned around and blessed the whole assembly of Israel, while all the assembly of Israel was standing.

15 And he said: "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who spoke with His mouth to my father David, and with His hand has fulfilled it, saying,

16 'Since the day that I brought My people Israel out of Egypt, I have chosen no city from any tribe of Israel in which to build a house, that My name might be there; but I chose David to be over My people Israel.'

He said, "Up until this point, no place has been chosen." The tabernacle was in Gilgal for a period of time. It moved to Shiloh. The ark of the tabernacle was in various locations as well, before coming to Zion, to the city of David.

So Solomon recounts the story of David's desire to build a house for the Eternal, and the way in which the Eternal said, "No, David. You are not going to be the one who does that. Your son is going to do it."

22 Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands toward heaven;

23 and he said: "LORD God of Israel, there is no God in heaven above or on earth below like You, who keep Your covenant and mercy with Your servants who walk before You with all their hearts.

24 "You have kept what You promised Your servant David my father; You have both spoken with Your mouth and fulfilled it with Your hand, as it is this day.

26 "And now I pray, O God of Israel, let Your word come true, which You have spoken to Your servant David my father.

27 "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? ...

"Can we really make a dwelling place for you on earth? Is it possible for us to do that?"

27 ... Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You ...

... so different to the pagan world! Solomon's mind had an appreciation of God which was far out of the dimension of the pagan nations around about them, who thought that they could have a "god in box," so that they could control him.

Solomon realised that the Eternal was doing something for His people, and providing something for His people which was much greater than others understood.

27 "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!

28 "Yet regard the prayer of Your servant and his supplication, O LORD my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer which Your servant is praying before You today:

29 "that Your eyes may be open toward this temple ...

"... that You may SEE, that this may be a place of seeing!"

29 "that Your eyes may be open toward this temple night and day, toward the place of which You said, 'My name shall be there,' that You may hear the prayer which Your servant makes toward this place.

30 "And may You hear the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. Hear in heaven Your dwelling place; and when You hear, forgive.

Here was a point: Mount Zion. The Temple on Mount Zion was really a connection between God's people on earth and God's throne. It was like a conduit: a point of connection. God's name was to be placed there firstly, and with God's name, all of the authority that went with that. It wasn't just a simple collection of words. It had great meaning. When something was done "in God's name," it had all the authority and all of the power of God behind it.

And not only was His name placed upon it, but His GLORY filled it as well. In fact, if we look at the Chronicles account of this event, we will find that when Solomon finishes praying, fire comes down from heaven, consumes what is on the altar, and the glory of God FILLS the house in such a way that even the priests can't go about their work! God heard that prayer in a very remarkable way.

Once again, fire is sent down from heaven, as it was in Exodus 19, as the tongues of fire on the Day of Pentecost, and as it was sent down from heaven to consume the altar and offering of Elijah a few chapters later in this book.

God is establishing His Presence!

Let's pick up a few other points throughout this particular chapter.

31 "When anyone sins against his neighbor, and is forced to take an oath, and comes and takes an oath before Your altar in this temple,

32 "then hear in heaven, and act, and judge Your servants, condemning the wicked, bringing his way on his head, and justifying the righteous by giving him according to his righteousness.

He goes on to set out a number of scenarios, the way in which Israel could end up in problems, yet they could turn to this place.

Solomon understood God's plan for all humanity - at least at this point in time.

**41 "Moreover, concerning a foreigner, who is not of Your people Israel, but has come from a far country for Your name's sake
42 '(for they will hear of Your great name and Your strong hand and Your outstretched arm), when he comes and prays toward this temple,
43 "hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, that all peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear You, as do Your people Israel, and that they may know that this temple which I have built is called by Your name.**

The Temple was to be a means of contact for people with the Eternal. This was to be the mechanism by which people lived the life that God had revealed to them at Sinai. They had different roles. Sinai was that of revelation. This is of daily living: how we live according to that daily life. They are not in opposition to one another. They are not against one another. They are different functions of God's purpose for His people

46 "When they sin against You (for there is no one who does not sin) ...

... he understood the human condition very well. We all end up in that situation.

**46 ... and You become angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and they take them captive to the land of the enemy, far or near;
47 "yet when they come to themselves in the land where they were carried captive, and repent, and make supplication to You in the land of those who took them captive, saying, 'We have sinned and done wrong, we have committed wickedness';
48 "and when they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies who led them away captive, and pray to You toward their land which You gave to their fathers, the city which You have chosen and the temple which I have built for Your name:**

... so they could be anywhere on the face of the earth, and they could come to a point of repenting and all they need to do is to pray towards this place. He said, "Father ...

49 "then hear in heaven Your dwelling place their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause,

Did that ever happen? I believe it did - in terms of Daniel. Daniel went into his room that faced Jerusalem, three times a day and prayed to God.

**Daniel 6:9 Therefore King Darius signed the written decree.
10 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.**

And the remarkable thing about God was that God was able to hear him even in Babylon. We have a God who is so much GREATER than the pagan gods which the world was peopled with. This is a classic example of the way in which God did that. It didn't matter how remote they were from it. They just had to recognise what Mount Zion was all about.

When Daniel prayed, the Temple had been demolished by Nebuchadnezzar! It didn't stand, yet because the Eternal placed His name there, it was very important. Sadly what happens is that people put their focus on the buildings rather than the PURPOSE for the buildings. The fact that it had God's name placed upon it, that it was a resting place for God's *Shekinah* glory, meant nothing to people. The buildings became the end for them.

Jeremiah had to address that, and he did so very well:

Jeremiah 7:1 *The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying,*
2 *"Stand in the gate of the LORD'S house, and proclaim there this word, and say, 'Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah who enter in at these gates to worship the LORD!'"*
3 *Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place."*

The reason for contact with God was to change: to change your ways, to bring your life into harmony with the covenant relationship that had been entered into at Mount Sinai. The whole purpose of the people worshipping in the Temple was to CHANGE, to become God-like rather than Semitic, or whatever else they might liked to have called themselves in those days. "Forget all the national identities, and become like the Eternal. Develop the character of the Eternal."

4 *"Do not trust in these lying words, saying, 'The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these.'"*

People were saying, "We've got the box. God is locked up inside it. Nobody can ever touch us."

God might say, "That's an illusion. It is foolishness because I can take My Presence out. I can remove My name from this pile of stones any time I wish. It is only of value if you are going to use it for the right purpose - and that is to build the very character of God."

5 *"For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor,*

6 *"if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt,*

7 *"then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever."*

As Mr Andrews said yesterday, the real miracle of Pentecost was that the people started doing what the Eternal said here. Their relationships with one another was not based on oppression. It was based on seeing the needs of others, and caring for them. Israel, and Judah in particular, never learned the lesson.

What was the function of the Temple? It was to provide for people a means of contact with God so that they could become like Him: they could live in accordance with the covenant that God had given in terms of Mount Sinai.

There's an interesting point that is mentioned towards the end of Acts 2:

Acts 2:46 *So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house ...*

What did I just read? "Continuing DAILY with one another in the Temple." The Church realised they had a relationship with God and they really wanted to cement that relationship with God. People had come together for Pentecost, but when they received God's Holy Spirit, they realised the relationship that they were able to have with God, and the physical Temple became the initial focus of the Church.

In fact, if we go through the entire New Testament, there is no point at which the Temple doesn't become the focus of the Church. That is really strange in terms of the way in which "Christianity" has developed itself over the ensuing millennia. The New Testament is a strange book! It is very Jewish! People want to reinterpret it in other ways.

Now the Eternal allowed the Temple to be destroyed. It's not there today.

Isaiah speaks about the Temple, setting up a situation that the New Testament came to understand.

Isaiah 66:1 *Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest?"*

"What's it all about? Is it just blocks and precious stones, gold, wealth? Is that what it's all about?"

God said, "You can't do anything, you can't create anything that suitably represents Me in terms of the physical commodities of the earth." Because when all is said and done, God made them! And He made us - so we are lesser mortals.

God says, "You can try doing physical things all you like, but ultimately speaking, that's not what impresses Me." What impresses God?

2 For all those things My hand has made, And all those things exist," Says the LORD. "But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word.

"... the person who comes to Me realising what it is all about, of learning to develop the character of God. Do they really see what it is all about? It's all about seeing!"

In the New Testament, when Jesus was in the synagogue on a day we understand to be the Day of Pentecost, He read from the book of Isaiah:

Luke 4:16 So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read.

17 And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:

***18 "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind ...***

That speaks to each and everyone of us. Jesus Christ came so that we could, in fact, see! So we come back to Mount Moriah again, and the idea of seeing, of having sight, and being able to understand what it is that God is doing.

***18 ... To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
19 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."***

Christ took from two sections of Isaiah, and did what eventually became a Rabbinic device, whereby you would be reading something, and then you would insert something from another section of Scripture that addressed the same issue. So here, in the second Scripture that He refers to, He brings in these aspects of liberty and release.

This is rather interesting. What does it say about the knowledge of the people about God's Word? They didn't have television, movie cinemas or MP3 players. They didn't have all of the paraphernalia that we have today. They didn't have "McGuffey Readers" or whatever it was that education was based upon.

The entire education was based on the Word of God! That's quite a unique experience! You can learn geography from the Word of God. You can learn history from the Word of God. You can learn government from the Word of God. You learn mathematics from the Word of God. You learn everything from it!

People KNEW what was in the Word of God. They were able to make those connections in quite a remarkable way. Jesus said that one of the whole purposes of His coming was the recovery of sight, so that people could see!

In Mark's gospel, we read that before He was crucified, Jesus came into the Temple and purged the Temple:

Mark 11:15 *So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves.*

16 *And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple.*

17 *Then He taught, saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"*

The whole purpose of the Temple had been lost! They didn't understand it. It was an opportunity to make a quick buck, rather than to understand the greatness of God. Jesus Christ was quoting from Isaiah 56 on that occasion.

Isaiah 56:6 *"Also the sons of the foreigner
Who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him,
And to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants -
Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath ...*

Ah! Foreigners had to keep the Sabbath, just like good Jews! There wasn't one law for one, and one law for another.

6 ... *And holds fast My covenant -
7 Even them I will bring to My holy mountain,
And make them joyful in My house of prayer.
Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
Will be accepted on My altar;
For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations."*

Every nation is going to come to appreciate this.

8 *The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says,
"Yet I will gather to him
Others besides those who are gathered to him."*

Eventually, all nations will have that opportunity of coming. Jesus Christ was talking about how the Temple was to be a house of prayer. The Temple no longer stands, but a Temple still exists.

A Scripture in Ephesians speaks very much to the heart of what God is doing. Having been talking about the "middle wall of partition" that had been broken down, so that people can become one, Paul said:

Ephesians 2:18 *For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.
19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,
20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,
21 in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,
22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.*

The Church is becoming a Temple! Yes, a physical Temple will be built in Jerusalem after the return of Jesus Christ, but at this point in time there is a spiritual Temple being created - out of you and me - for exactly the same purposes that a Temple was built on Mount Zion, so that we could worship God in the way He wishes, and that we can learn to be the type of people we need to be, based upon HIS revelation.

Remember the comment about Sinai:

"Sinai acts as an eternal rebuke to man's arrogant belief that he can govern himself."

We can take that on a community level, yet we don't know how to do it. But it's also an individual level. We don't know how to rule ourselves. Right from the Garden of Eden, we could look at Adam and Eve, or

Cain's relationship with Abel. Did Cain know how to govern himself? No. We have to learn that - and there's only one place we can learn it from, and that is from the Eternal.

So Mount Zion was the means whereby people could have that contact, and they could learn to change, to become God-like. We exist, being built up as a Temple at this point in time, so that we can see God - not in terms of His shape and form, but we can see His character. We can understand what His character is all about, and we can develop that character within ourselves through the aid of God's Holy Spirit.

We are not going back and seeking to demolish something that existed before, and rebuild some new thing altogether. It's not a going back and demolishing the Sinai experience, and saying, "That revelation was totally fallacious. This is the way we have to do it now."

Where did they get their revelation from? Unfortunately, it was from other men, mostly called Greek philosophers. And they got it all wrong.

Hebrews 12 is not talking about going back and demolishing the Sinai experience. It is rather speaking of a development of the Zion experience, so that we can see and hear in a way that ancient Israel never did, so that we can REALLY worship God in spirit and in truth, as Jesus Christ said (John 4:24). It is a DEVELOPMENT of the Zion experience.

Let's pick up a few other points from Hebrews 12. Yes, Sinai was a frightful experience. It was so frightful that the people didn't even want to listen to what the Eternal was saying! We can contrast the way in which the same imagery that is used in Exodus 19, is used in terms of the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. It's a replay - except that on this occasion, the people WERE prepared to listen! And as a result of that, change took place. It was a frightful event.

To be in the presence of God is an AWESOME experience. Make no mistake about it! Anyone in Scripture, who has ever been in the presence of God, whether it is Isaiah, Elijah, or whoever it may have been, were ALTERED PEOPLE as a result of being in the presence of the Eternal! It was an AWESOME experience!

We've come to Mount Sinai. We've actually come to become part of God's eternal plan:

Hebrews 12:22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 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, 24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

He then gives us a warning as he so often does in the book of Hebrews. He says:

25 See that you do not refuse Him who speaks ...

He is not talking about a minister. Ministers are simply instruments. Israel refused to hear the Word of God. The people on the Day of Pentecost were prepared to hear the Word of God.

25 ... 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, 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."

If you are looking for excitement, if you are looking for signs, they are coming. Just wait your turn. But it's not going to do what you want it to do! It's not going to be for the end YOU want signs, just as the events surrounding Elijah at Mount Sinai, weren't inspired by God. They weren't efficacious to Elijah's wellbeing there. He wasn't supposed to be there.

God said, "Get out and do the Work Elijah."

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.

Physical things are going to be destroyed. Eventually, all of the physical earth is going to be burned up with fire.

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.

... have that relationship whereby we can BE part of the firstborn, where we can be part of the "general assembly, the Church of the Firstborn which is registered in heaven." It won't have the State of California stamp on it. It has a heavenly stamp on it!

He said we have got to listen to the words. What are the words? When the book of Hebrews was written, what was Scripture? It's an interesting point to consider. There was no New Testament. There was simply "The Holy Scriptures."

Notice a comment that Jesus Christ made to the disciples and to those who were listening to Him.

John 6:63 "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing ...

Ultimately speaking as Paul says in Hebrews, the flesh is going to be destroyed. The heavens and the earth are going to be shaken. The whole purpose is that of sorting out what is important and what is not important.

The physical can be destroyed. Jesus Christ is saying exactly the same thing here.

63 "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.

These are words that give life!

64 "But there are some of you who do not believe" ...

65 And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father."

66 From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.

67 Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?"

68 But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

"You have an understanding of God's Word that leads to eternal life." I believe it was one of those occasions where Peter didn't really understand the wisdom with which he spoke! God inspired him to provide an answer at that point in time. The "words" are very, very important.

John 14:24 "He who does not love Me does not keep My words ...

Another aspect of Mount Sinai, is that it was also a marriage. It was a love affair, and like all good affairs, it was totally irrational! It was irrational from God's point of view. Why choose Israel? They weren't the greatest. They weren't the smartest. They weren't the most beautiful people. But love does that sort of thing. And Jesus Christ is talking about the same thing again.

At Pentecost we can talk about love and marriage in terms of Mount Sinai, and the marriage relationship that Israel entered into it.

But Jesus Christ said:

24 "He who does not love Me does not keep My words

"You can show how faithful you are to this marriage relationship, by how you respond to My words."

24 ... and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me.

In Hebrews, the apostle Paul emphasises that aspect of words. He provides a warning for us:

Hebrews 2:1 Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.

2 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward,

3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him,

4 God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?

What is it that motivates us? Is it the miracles? They motivate many religious people. They want to see the miraculous.

Or is it the words? Do we see the words as being words of life - that will provide life, that will enable us to have eternal life with the Father and with Jesus Christ? It's a warning, because it's so very easy to slip into a torpor and become tempered, and lose sight of what it is that we have been called to be a part of.

How is our sight? Have we recovered our sight? Because it is a learning process, perhaps we should say, ARE we recovering our sight?

Paul, in Hebrews 12, leaves us with one clear conclusion. The power of God is not lessened. The power of God is not lost. He has the power to be able to change us - if we are willing to use His Holy Spirit. He has the power to give us eternal life, to make us part of His Family, and the power to change this entire world.

At the same time, on the other side of the coin, He has the same power that He had at Mount Sinai, where a person could be destroyed if they stepped out of line with what God required.

We don't find an opposition in Hebrews 12 regarding Mount Sinai and Mount Zion. They are both ESSENTIAL STEPS in God's plan of salvation that WE need to appreciate, to see and apply in our lives as a lesson of Pentecost.

... *Peter Nathan*
12 Jun 05

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