

# Hebrews 12:18-21 Commentary

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CONSIDER JESUS OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST  
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Swindoll's Chart, Interesting Pictorial Chart of Hebrews, Another Chart

The Epistle to the Hebrews				
INSTRUCTION Hebrews 1-10:18			EXHORTATION Hebrews 10:19-13:25	
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BETTER THAN PERSON Hebrews 1:1-4:13	BETTER PRIESTHOOD Heb 4:14-7:28	BETTER COVENANT Heb 8:1-13	BETTER SACRIFICE Heb 9:1-10:18	BETTER LIFE

MAJESTY OF CHRIST	MINISTRY OF CHRIST	MINISTERS FOR CHRIST
DOCTRINE		DUTY
DATE WRITTEN: ca. 64-68AD		

See [ESV Study Bible "Introduction to Hebrews"](#)  
(See also [MacArthur's Introduction to Hebrews](#))

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**Hebrews 12:18** For you have not [come](#) to a mountain that can be [touched](#) and to a [blazing fire](#), and to [darkness](#) and [gloom](#) and [whirlwind](#), ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [Ou gar proseleluthate](#) (2SRAI) [pselaphomeno](#) (PPNSD) [kai kekaumeno](#) (RPPNSD) [puri kai gnopho kai zopho kai thuelle](#)

**GNT** Ο γ ρ προσεληλ θατε ψηλαφωμ ν κα κεκαυμ ν πυρ κα γν φ κα ζ φ κα θυ λλ

**Amplified:** For you have not come [as did the Israelites in the wilderness] to a [material] mountain that can be touched, [a mountain] that is ablaze with fire, and to gloom and darkness and a raging storm, ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**NLT:** You have not come to a physical mountain, to a place of flaming fire, darkness, gloom, and whirlwind, as the Israelites did at Mount Sinai when God gave them his laws. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**NLT** (revised) You have not come to a physical mountain, to a place of flaming fire, darkness, gloom, and whirlwind, as the Israelites did at Mount Sinai.

**NET** For you have not come to something that can be touched, to a burning fire and darkness and gloom and a whirlwind

**KJV** For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest,

**ESV** For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest

**ASV** For ye are not come unto a mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, and unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest,

**CSB** For you have not come to what could be touched, to a blazing fire, to darkness, gloom, and storm,

**NIV** You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm;

**NKJ** For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest,

**NRS** You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest,

**NAB** You have not approached that which could be touched and a blazing fire and gloomy darkness and storm

**NJB** What you have come to is nothing known to the senses: not a blazing fire, or gloom or total darkness, or a storm;

**GWN** You have not come to something that you can feel, to a blazing fire, to darkness, to gloom, to a storm,

**BBE** You have not come to a mountain which may be touched, and is burning with fire, and to a black cloud, and a dark smoke, and a violent wind,

**Young's Literal:** For ye came not near to the mount touched and scorched with fire, and to blackness, and darkness, and tempest,

**FOR YOU HAVE NOT COME TO A MOUNTAIN THAT MAY BE TOUCHED: Ou gar proseleluthate (2SRAI: proserchomai = drawn near) pselaphomeno (PPPNSD):**

- Ex 19:12-19 Ex 20:18 Ex 24:17 De 4:11 Dt 5:22-26 Ro 6:14 Ro 8:15 2Ti 1:7
- [Hebrews 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Mt Sinai - Fire and Smoke

**NOTE:** [See below for the Old Testament context](#)

**J Ramsey Michaels** entitles Hebrews 12:18-29 "**True Worship**." (Cornerstone Commentary) The contrast is between the earthly Sinai and the Heavenly Zion. Barclay entitles this section "The terror of the old and the glory of the new."

**Lenski** says: In one grand sentence (v. 18-24) in which the writer draws a comparison with Judaism he presents to his readers to what they have come as Christians

**DeHaan** says: These Hebrew Christians were tempted to go back to the beggarly elements of the law, and place themselves under bondage to escape a little present discomfort, reproach and persecution. In order to urge them on, a contrast between the law and grace, Mount Sinai and Calvary, is now presented.

**Brian Bell** - The Lord seems to believe a picture is worth a 1000 words. Here the writer downloads 2 pictures for us, comparing: 2 different mountains. 2 different covenants. 2 historic people. 2 important principles. Note all the words that are contrasted when we read: Sinai/Zion; heaven/earth; new/old cov.; terror/joy; shake/unshaken; not come/come; distance/closeness; law at Sinai/grace & glory at Zion ([Sermon](#))

**Steven Cole** - In 1986, Texas gem dealer Roy Whetstine was pawing through a Tupperware bowl of cheaply priced rocks at a mineral show in Arizona when he came across a lavender-gray, potato-size stone that looked a bit special. "You want \$15 for this?" Whetstine asked the amateur collector. "Tell you what," replied the collector. "I'll let you have it for \$10. It's not as pretty as the others." Whetstine walked away with the world's largest star sapphire, later valued at as high as \$2.28 million! He planned to sell his 1,905-carat bargain in its uncut form for \$1.5 million and put the profits in trust for his two sons, each of whom had given Dad \$5 to bring back a little something from the gem show (*Newsweek* [11/24/1986], p. 75). If you don't know what you possess, you may disregard it or let it go for something worth far less. Esau did that—he didn't appreciate the value of his birthright, which entitled him to the blessings of God's promises to Abraham, and so he traded it for a bowl of stew. He gave away eternal blessings for instant gratification. Bad trade! But that's what the original readers of Hebrews were in danger of doing! Under the threat of persecution, they were tempted to abandon Christ to return to their Jewish faith. So the author here contrasts the terrors of Mount Sinai, representing Jewish life under the law, with the glories of Mount Zion, picturing the joy of life under the new covenant. He wants us to know that right living flows out of right knowing. If you know the riches that you possess in Christ, you won't want to go back to the empty, fleeting pleasures of the world. John Newton put it this way ("[Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken](#)," verse 4):

Savior, if of Zion's city, I through grace a member am,  
Let the world deride or pity, I will glory in Thy name;  
Fading is the world's best pleasure, All its boasted pomp and show;  
Solid joys and lasting treasure None but Zion's children know.

So the author does not want us to make Esau's spiritually fatal mistake. He draws a sharp contrast between life under the old covenant and life under the new covenant. The feeling of the old covenant was terror and judgment. The feeling of the new covenant is joyous celebration with the saints and angels in the presence of God. There is still reverence, but the blood of Jesus has taken away the dread of judgment. The old covenant was physical and earthly; the new covenant is spiritual and heavenly. The old covenant put distance between the holy God and the sinful people. The new covenant invites us to dwell in the city of the living God through the blood of Jesus. So his message is: If you have trusted in Jesus' blood, you have not come to the terrors of the law, but to the joys of the new covenant. ([Sermon](#))

**For (gar)** - pause and ponder this **term of explanation**.

**Michaels** explains the writer's **term of explanation (for)** this way - Because the introduction of Esau as a cautionary tale (Heb 12:16-17) was somewhat parenthetical, the author seems to have in mind the warning just before that—namely, "Look after each

other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God... [so that] no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you" (Heb 12:15). He now gives the reason for such warnings: because "the grace of God" is, in its own way, an even more severe taskmaster than the ancient law of Moses. Because God is speaking to us not as he spoke long ago on earth (Heb 12:18-21) but now from heaven (Heb 12:25), the consequences of not paying attention and failing to receive the grace of God are that much greater (Heb 12:25-29). (Cornerstone Biblical Commentary – Volume 17: 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews)

In this next section Hebrews 12:18-24, the author again draws a contrast between the Old Covenant given by God to Moses at Mt Sinai and the New Covenant of grace through the shed blood of the Messiah.

**MacArthur** - The Old Covenant was associated with Mount Sinai because that is where God spoke to Moses when that covenant was instituted. It was a covenant of law, and it was also a covenant of judgment and of fear. It said, "Do this, or do not do that, or you will be judged." In some cases it said, "Do not do this, or you will die." That is not the place to which the New Covenant brings us. (MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Hebrews)

**For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched**- Ultimately Mt Sinai was an unforgettable picture of God's holiness, His "set apartness" if you will, His separation from all that is unholy. And the Jews could not touch Mt Sinai or they would die, which is also a picture of the power of the Law which puts men under a "curse," but "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law." (Gal 3:13+) To say it another way, Sinai provided no power to overcome the power of sin.

The New Covenant is not like the Old Covenant which was initially identified with a literal visible, tangible mountaintop (one that could be touched but dare not be touched lest one die - Ex 19:12+). That is NOT the mountain they have approached now as believers.

**Have come** (proserchomai) is in the [perfect tense](#) indicating past completed act (when they first believed in Messiah) and ongoing effect. Proserchomai is used again in this section on the two mountains (Sinai, Zion) in Hebrews 12:22+ and again is in the [perfect tense](#) indicating our permanent continuing state. Although not a major point, even these uses of the perfect tense emphasize how secure our salvation is in Christ. Our "continuing state" will endure throughout time and eternity! Hallelujah! Amen!

**S Lewis Johnson** on **you have not come** (Heb 12:18) and **you have come** (Heb 12:22+) - Notice the two words; they are exactly alike in the original text, "**You have not come.**" That, of course, with the negative. And then, verse 22+, "**You have come.**" without the negative. So "You have come," "You have not come." So he's talking about what they have **not** come to; what they have **now** come to. The **former**, the Sinaitic revelation is the revelation of the sheer majesty of God, the absolute inapproachability of God, the sheer terror of the presence of the Lord God apart from the blood of sprinkling of the Cross of Calvary. That's so important for us to remember because it's a marvelous picture of how our sin and our judgment, and the fact that apart from Jesus Christ we should experience the lost-ness of eternal life, of eternal judgment. ([Sermon](#)) (For more of Dr Johnson's discussion on **have come** and the [perfect tense](#) see his [note](#) on Hebrews 12:22.)

**Barclay** - The sense of the passage is, that every circumstance that occurred there was suited to fill the soul with terror. Everything accompanying the giving of the Law, the setting of bounds around the mountain which they might not pass, and the darkness and tempest on the mountain itself, was adopted to overawe the soul. . ([Hebrews Commentary](#))

- See images of [Mt Sinai](#)

**Have come** (4334) (proserchomai from prós = facing + érchomai = come) means literally to come facing toward and so to approach or come near. To come to visit or associate with. It describes the approach to or entry into a deity's presence. In the **Septuagint (LXX)** proserchomai was the verb used to describe the approach of the priests to Jehovah for worship and to perform of their priestly (Levitical) functions. But here in Hebrews, under the New covenant, all seven uses of **proserchomai** refer to believers possessing the privilege of access to God the Father through Christ the Great High Priest.

Here are the seven uses of this **proserchomai** in Hebrews...

Hebrews 4:16 (note) Let us therefore **draw near** with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.

**Comment:** "Let us... " emphasizes that this privilege is always available to those under the New Covenant. Do we really comprehend and avail ourselves of the profundity of this privilege?

Hebrews 7:25 (note) Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who **draw near** (present tense = emphasizes continual activity) to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

Hebrews 10:1 (note) For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who **draw near**.

Hebrews 10:22 (note) let us **draw near** with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Hebrews 11:6 (note) And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he **whocomes** (drawn near) **to** God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

Hebrews 12:18 (note) For you have not **come** (drawn near) **to** a mountain that may be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind,

Hebrews 12:22 (note) But you have **come** (drawn near) **to** Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels

The thrust of this section is to stir up some frightful images in the minds of his Hebrew readers. Those Jewish hearers (as well as any modern day hearer who says for example he wants to go to a Messianic Jewish congregation where they seek to keep the Law - not true of all Messianic congregations) who were tempted to return to the Old (conditional) Covenant of the Law needed to remember the terrifying circumstances attending the giving of the Law. In so doing they might be able to draw clear spiritual lessons that Sinai was not the way to life but the way to death. Indeed, by trying to keep the Law no man can be justified and no justified man can be sanctified by trying to keep the Law (cf Gal 3:2-3+). The writer knows the axiomatic truth that if the Law brings a person to the end of his or her self efforts to attain righteousness, it becomes like a teacher to lead them to seek the true righteousness (the Christ bestowed kind of righteousness, the only kind God accepts) and true life (even eternal life) found in the New Covenant in His blood. In this sense the Law is good, for it can lead the humble soul to grace.

Read the following passages related to the **Law** given at Mount Sinai...

Gal 3:24-25+ Therefore the **Law** has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

Gal 2:19+ "For through the **Law** I died to the Law, so that I might live to God.

Acts 13:38-39+ "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, 39 and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the **Law** of Moses.

Ro 3:20-22+ because by the works of the **Law** no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. 21 But now apart from the **Law** the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the **Law** and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction;

Ro 7:7-9+, What shall we say then? Is the **Law** sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the **Law**; for I would not have known about coveting if the **Law** had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET." 8 But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the **Law** sin is dead. 9 I was once alive apart from the **Law**; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died;

Heb 7:18-19+ For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former **commandment** because of its weakness and uselessness 19 (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

The scene was **Mount Sinai**, a literal, tangible mountain where the fire reached to heaven, the wind swirled as an angry tempest and thick clouds of darkness billowed up forming a backdrop for lightning and peals of thunder. This entire mountain was enveloped in a pall or veil that made everything seem indistinct, obscure, and nebulous. The writer of Hebrews is telling his readers that in contrast to this appropriately terrifying picture at Mt. Sinai, they who have become genuine possessors of life indeed by grace through faith in the New Covenant, have drawn near to the Heavenly City, Mt. Zion and to the throne of the living God and no longer needed to fear death's sting which the Law brings. Paul echoes this thought writing

"O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1Cor 15:55-57)

Although the writer describes Mt Sinai as one **"that can be touched"** he was not saying that the Israelites had permission to approach the mountain and touch it. The writer is using this as a figure of speech merely acknowledging that Mt Sinai was a material, earthly mountain that could be touched as opposed to the "heavenly" nature of the second mountain (Heb 11:22+).

**Spurgeon** - We are joyfully reminded that we are not come to Mount Sinai and its overwhelming manifestations. After Israel had

kept the feast of the Passover, God was pleased to give His people a sort of Pentecost, and more fully to manifest Himself and His law to them at Sinai. They were in the wilderness, with the solemn peaks of a desolate mountain as their center; and from the top thereof, in the midst of fire, and blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and with the sound of a trumpet, God spoke with them. Upon the believer's spirit there rests not the slavish fear, the abject terror, the fainting alarm, which swayed the tribes of Israel; for the manifestation of God that he beholds, though not less majestic, is far more full of hope and joy. Over us there does not rest the impenetrable cloud of apprehension; we are not buried in a present darkness of despair; we are not tossed about with a tempest of horror; and, therefore, we do not exceedingly fear and quake. How thankful we should be for this!

**William Barclay** has a fairly good summation of the intent of the writer in this section Hebrews 12:18-24- To enforce the considerations already urged, the apostle introduces this sublime comparison between the old and new dispensations; Hebrews 12:18-24. The object, in accordance with the principal scope of the Epistle, is, to guard them against apostasy. To do this, he shows that under the new dispensation there was much more to hind them to fidelity, and to make apostasy dangerous, than there was under the old. The main point of the comparison is, that under the Jewish dispensation, everything was adapted to awe the mind, and to restrain by the exhibition of grandeur and of power; but that under the Christian dispensation, while there was as much that was sublime, there was much more that was adapted to win and hold the affections. There were revelations of higher truths. There were more affecting motives to lead to obedience. There was that of which the former was but the type and emblem. There was the clear revelation of the glories of heaven, and of the blessed society there, all adapted to prompt to the earnest desire that they might be our own. The considerations presented in this passage constitute the climax of the argument so beautifully pursued through this Epistle, showing that the Christian system was far superior in every respect to the Jewish. In presenting this closing argument, the apostle first refers to some of the circumstances attending the former dispensation which were designed to keep the people of God from apostasy, and then the considerations of superior weight existing under the Christian economy. ([Hebrews Commentary](#))

**Touched** (5584) ([pselaphao](#) from **psáo** = to rub or touch lightly, cp psallo = to play a stringed instrument) means to handle, to touch or to feel for or after an object, groping. **Pselaphao** is used by the Greek writers to mean the "blind feeling around."

## Background for Hebrews 12:18-29

Exodus 19:10-25 -- see commentary on this passage

The LORD also said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments; 11 and let them be ready for the third day, for on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. 12 "You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, '**Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death.** 13 'No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live.' When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain." 14 So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments. 15 He said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman." 16 So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. 17 And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. 18 Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. 19 When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder. 20 The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. 21 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, "Go down, warn the people, so that they do not break through to the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish. 22 "Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, or else the LORD will break out against them." 23 Moses said to the LORD, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for You warned us, saying, 'Set bounds about the mountain and consecrate it.'" 24 Then the LORD said to him, "Go down and come up again, you and Aaron with you; but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, or He will break forth upon them." 25 So Moses went down to the people and told them.

**Steven Cole** observes that "These verses (**Exodus 19:10-25**) summarize the story of God's giving the law at Mount Sinai. You may wonder, "Why would God reveal Himself in such a terrifying manner?" Even Moses, who had seen God in the burning bush, who had performed God's miracles before Pharaoh, was full of fear and trembling. (The quote in Hebrews 12:21 is not in the original story.



The author may have been relying on Jewish oral tradition, or he may have included Moses with the people in their fear.) This doesn't sound like the kind of warm, grandfatherly God that you'd want to cuddle up to!

The answer to that question depends on the answer to another question:

"Why did God give the law?" Paul answers that question in Galatians 3:19ff+. He says (Gal. 3:22+) that the law was given to "shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe." He goes on to explain (Gal. 3:24+), "Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith."

By nature, we're all blind to the extent of our sin before a holy God. We compare ourselves with terrorists and child molesters and think, "Sure, I've got my faults, but I'm not a terrible sinner!" And, we know that God is holy, but we don't grasp what that means. But then the law comes in and shows us God's absolute holiness. With Isaiah (6:5), we say, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Isaiah didn't know that he had a dirty mouth *before* he saw God in His holiness. But the instant he saw God's holiness, he was aware of his own sinfulness. The route to Zion goes through Sinai, where we encounter the terrors of God's law. ([Sermon](#))

**AND TO A BLAZING FIRE AND TO DARKNESS AND GLOOM AND WHIRLWIND: kai kekaumeno (RPPNSD) puri kai gnopho kai zopho kai thuelle:**

- [Hebrews 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**And to a blazing fire and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind** - The writer is alluding to pictures which his Jewish readers would have studied in the Old Testament.

Exodus 19:16+ So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.

Exodus 19:18+ Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently.

Deuteronomy 4:11 "You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain **burned with fire to the very heart of the heavens**: darkness, cloud and thick gloom.

Deuteronomy 33:2 He said, "The LORD came from Sinai, And dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, And He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones (ANGELS); At His right hand there was flashing lightning for them.

**Blazing fire** - see [Moses' description below](#), especially "there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled." Take a moment and just imagine the scene -- the ground unsteady due to tremors, the sky black in deep darkness except for the radiating forks of lightning and fire blazing from the top of Sinai, celestial shophars (Ex 19:16, 19+ = [Shofar](#)) blaring louder and louder and all of this in with the background of strong, swirling gusts of wind. Onto this "pulpit" Moses comes to speak and God answers him with a voice like thunder. What a awesome, fearful day this was! The people were visibly, physically assaulted with the holiness and majesty of God. The display of God's power on Sinai communicated far more than any sermon ever could and it was one all could comprehend! And why such a frightening scene? Clearly this was to teach the people that God is unapproachable by any sinful human being. God is holy, set apart and for the people to touch the symbol of His holiness meant certain death. And to emphasize His holiness, even an innocent animal accidentally contacted the [Mount Sinai](#) he would die! God's holiness is serious business!

**THOUGHT** - We forget that in our modern society. Sadly even true believers (I speak from personal experience) forget this truth! What effect might it have on our heart and mind if we were to frequently come back to meditate on Exodus 19? I think the Spirit would use the words of Moses to renew our sense of God's perfect holiness. May it be so Lord God. Amen.

**Darkness** (only here in NT)([1105](#)) (**gnophos** from **néphos** = a cloud) describes a thick dark cloud. It signifies half-darkness, gloom, nebulousness, as the darkness of evening or the gathering gloom of death. It is a darkness which does not entirely conceal color. **Gnophos** is half-darkness, gloom, nebulousness; as the darkness of evening or the gathering gloom of death. It is a darkness which does not entirely conceal colour. Thus **dnophos** the earlier and poetic form of **gnophos**, is used by Homer of water which appears dark against the underlying rock, or is tinged by mire.

**Gloom** (2217) (**zophos**) speaks of deep gloom. **Friberg** says **zophos** is used "as a designation for the underworld = thick darkness, gloomy hell." **Zophos** - Heb 12:18; 2 Pet 2:4, 17; Jude 1:6, 13

**Whirlwind** (only here in NT)(2366) (**thuella** form **thúo** = to rush on or along, speaking of wind or a storm or from **thuein** = to boil or foam) describes a storm characterized by strong and sudden winds, a tempest, a squall, or a whirlwind. There are sudden and violent gusts of winds, often from varied directions. It is a brief, violent, sudden, destructive blast, sometimes working upward and carrying objects into the upper air. Such is the description of Sinai which the writer to the Hebrews gives as a picture of the First Testament. He assures them that his readers, in drawing near to Messiah and His Cross, are not approaching such a place as Sinai.

**Spurgeon** - God's presence made the mountain melt and flow down. "And Yahweh thundered from the heavens, and the Most High uttered his voice with hail and coals of fire" (Ps 18:13). Sinai was "all wrapped in smoke" (Ex 19:18); innumerable lightnings flashed forth around the summit of the hill. The cloud on Sinai was so dark as to obscure the day, except that every now and then the lightning flash lit up the scene. What are we come to in contrast to that darkness? "To God the judge of all" (Heb 12:23). **Possibly it does not strike you with joy when I mention it, but this is perhaps the most joyous of all the clauses of the passage. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). What a contrast to the darkness of the law is a reconciled God!** "But," you say, "he is there as the Judge of all, and that makes us tremble." Why? Why? It makes me stop trembling when I think that I have come "to God the judge of all," that Christ has brought me near, even to the Judge, so that I have nothing to dread from Him. All over the top of Sinai there swept fierce winds and terrible tornadoes, for the Lord was there. All heaven seemed convulsed when God rent it and descended in majesty upon the sacred mount. But what do you and I see? The very reverse of tempest: "The spirits of righteous people made perfect" (Heb 12:23)—serenely resting. What more is there for them to do? They are perfect. They have fought the fight, they have run the race (2 Tim 4:7), they are crowned (2 Ti 4:8), and they are full of ecstatic bliss. The light of God is on their brows, and the glory of God is reflected from their faces. Everything like a tempest is far gone from them; they have reached the fair haven, and are tossed with tempest no more.

Essential to understanding the contrast, we must see that the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai was an awesome physical display (see below). The prelude to the divine fireworks at Sinai involved the people's consecration as directed by God. They washed their clothing and abstained from sexual relations, so as to be ceremonially clean. They also observed God's orders that no man or beast touch the mountain on pain of death by stoning or arrows.

### MOSES' DESCRIPTION OF MOUNT SINAI

Exodus 19:9+ And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I shall come to you in a thick cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe in you forever." Then Moses told the words of the people to the LORD.

10 The LORD also said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments;

11 and let them be ready for the third day, for on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.

12 "And you shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death.

13 'No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live.' When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain."

14 So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments.

15 And he said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman."

16 So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.

17 And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.

18 Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently.

19 When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder.

20 And the LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.



21 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, "Go down, warn the people, lest they break through to the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish.

22 "And also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them."

The tension built for three days. Then early on the morning of the third day, the people saw a thick cloud cover the top of Sinai illumined by gold veins of lightning with accompanying thunder rolling down the slopes, plus a deafening trumpet blast that reduced everyone to trembling. The giving of the Law was attended by "10,000 holy ones" (Dt 33:2, cp Hebrews 2:2+). This suggests that hundreds of thousands of angels hovered invisibly around and over Sinai. Take a moment and try to imagine all of the sights, sounds and smells that were literally bombarding the people of Israel! It congers up an awesome image and one that should strike fear in any thinking person's heart!

The phenomena listed are all associated with the giving of the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai

Deut 4:11 "And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the very heart of the heavens: darkness, cloud and thick gloom.

Deut 5:22 "These words the LORD spoke to all your assembly at the mountain from the midst of the fire, of the cloud and of the thick gloom, with a great voice, and He added no more. And He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me. 23 "And it came about, when you heard the voice from the midst of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, that you came near to me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders. 24 "And you said, 'Behold, the LORD our God has shown us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice from the midst of the fire; we have seen today that God speaks with man, yet he lives. 25 'Now then why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer, then we shall die. 26 'For who is there of all flesh, who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?

Elsewhere the elements in this picture are clearly linked with the presence of God as seen in

### 1) Fire

For it came about when the flame went up from the altar toward heaven, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell on their faces to the ground. (Judges 13:20)

Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. (1Ki 18:38)

### 2) Darkness

Then Solomon said, "The LORD has said that He would dwell in the thick cloud (KJV = Darkness) (1Ki8:12)

### 3) Tempest

The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, And the LORD will by no means leave the guilty unpunished. In whirlwind and storm is His way, And clouds are the dust beneath His feet. (Nah 1:3)

### 4) The trumpet

Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder. (Ex 19:18-19)

The **trumpet** is also associated with the end time when God will manifest himself

And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. (Mt 24:31) (Comment: At the end of the Great Tribulation)

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. (1Cor 15:51-52)

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the

trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. (1 Th 4:16)

The picture the writer draws is one that strikes terror into the heart. The point of his description of Mt Sinai and the giving of the law is that the **Old Covenant aroused unbearable fear**. The sight of the burning mountain and the ever-increasing blare of a trumpet, the darkness, storm and fearful threats directed even toward dumb beasts, created such fear in the people that they begged Moses to plead with God for relief. Even Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."

**English** says: There is brought before us now an impressive contrast between the sternness of the Law and the benignity of God's grace. Here we see how far removed from God sinful man is in himself, and how very near man may be, through faith in Christ, in the majestic and gracious mercy of the Almighty.

**This is a picture of the invariable end of efforts made to obey the law** which requires perfect obedience (cf James 2:10+). Fear of God's just condemnation is overwhelming. Most people do not feel this fear because they do not take the law seriously, at least not until they reach the end of their lives and its fearful judgments lie immediately before them. All who seek earnestly to obey the law find themselves confronted with such personal failure that they soon despair of escaping God's fearful condemnation. **Mount Sinai stands as the symbol of this despair and fear, of self-effort, of failure to surrender to God**. Those who received Messiah as Savior are urged not to remain at the fearful **Mt Sinai** but to go on to **Mt. Zion** (Hebrews 12:22), not to linger fearfully under the Old Covenant of Law but to enter fully and by faith into the New Covenant of Grace.

**A W Pink** - The scope and design of the whole of our passage should now be obvious to the reader. The purpose was to show again how inferior Judaism was to Christianity. This he here does by taking us back to Sinai, where Judaism was formally instituted by the appearing of Jehovah at the giving of the law, and where the Mosaic economy was established by a covenant based thereon. All the circumstances connected with its institution were in most striking accord with the leading features and characteristics of that dispensation. At that time the nation of Israel was in a waste, howling wilderness, standing in speechless terror at the foot of the Mount. There Jehovah manifested Himself in His awful holiness and majesty, as Lawgiver and Judge; the people at a distance fenced off from Him. How profoundly thankful should Christians be that they belong to a much more mild and gracious order of things!

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**Kent Hughes** explains - To understand that God is holy and that one is a sinner is to stand at the threshold of grace. Moreover, the giving of the Ten Commandments in this awesome context and Israel's failure to keep them served to emphasize the people's impotence and doom, which is a further grace, however negative the experience may be. But this said, the great problem with the trip to Sinai was that while men and women could come to see God's holiness and their sinfulness, the Law provided no power to overcome sin.

To run and work the law commands,  
Yet gives me neither feet nor hands.

Understanding this, the writer's explanation that they have come to a better mountain than Sinai makes sense: "You have not come to a mountain that can be touched." Zion, to which they had come, is a spiritual mountain, whereas Sinai was a physical mountain that could be touched only at pain of death. In effect, the writer is admonishing his people as they attempt to run with perseverance the race that is marked out for them to not listen to the voices of their old friends who are still immersed in the futile pursuit of attempting to live up to Sinai, but rather to do everything in their power to maintain a straight path to Zion's grace. There is an early passage in **Pilgrim's Progress** in which **Christian**, amidst the difficulties of trying to walk the narrow path to Zion, is lured away by **Mr. Worldly Wiseman's** counsel and directed toward the futility of Sinai. John Bunyan writes:

So Christian turned out of his way to go to **Mr. Legality's house** for help; but, behold, when he was got now hard by the hill, it seemed so high, and also that side of it that was next the wayside did hang so much over, that Christian was afraid to venture farther, lest the hill should fall on his head; wherefore there he stood still, and wotted not what to do. Also his burden now seemed heavier to him than while he was in his way. There came also flashes of fire out of the hill that made Christian afraid that he should be burnt: here, therefore, he sweat and did quake for fear. And now he began to be sorry that he had taken Mr. Worldly Wiseman's counsel; and with that, he saw Evangelist coming to meet him, at the sight also of whom he began to blush for shame.  
([Read this account online](#))

And, of course, **Mr. Evangelist got him back on track**, and the race continued on to Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem. Today, few Christians, especially Gentiles, are in danger of turning back to Mt Sinai per se and embracing the Levitical laws of the Old Testament. Sinai, with its fiery mountain and its code, is simply too daunting. Instead, we fabricate our own "**mini-Sinai**s" with a series of mini-laws which reflect nothing of the fiery presence and which are, we think, well within the reach of our unaided powers. our legalisms—our mini-Sinai's are always reductionist, shrinking spirituality to a series of wooden laws which say, "If you will do those six or sixty or six hundred things, you will be godly." And, of course, legalism is always judgmental. How easily our hearts

imagine that our lists elevate us, while at the same time providing us with a convenient rack on which to stretch others in merciless judgment. ([Preaching the Word - Hebrews](#))

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## Walking in the Light

In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. John 1:4

Today's Scripture & Insight: Hebrews 12:18–24

Darkness descended on our forest village when the moon disappeared. Lightning slashed the skies, followed by a rainstorm and crackling thunder. Awake and afraid, as a child I imagined all kinds of grisly monsters about to pounce on me! By daybreak, however, the sounds vanished, the sun rose, and calm returned as birds jubilated in the sunshine. The contrast between the frightening darkness of the night and the joy of the daylight was remarkably sharp.

The author of Hebrews recalls the time when the Israelites had an experience at Mount Sinai so dark and stormy they hid in fear (Exodus 20:18–19). For them, God's presence, even in His loving gift of the law, felt dark and terrifying. This was because, as sinful people, the Israelites couldn't live up to God's standards. Their sin caused them to walk in darkness and fear (Hebrews 12:18–21).

But God is light; in Him there's no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). In Hebrews 12, Mount Sinai represents God's holiness and our old life of disobedience, while the beauty of Mount Zion represents God's grace and believers' new life in Jesus, "the mediator of a new covenant" (vv. 22–24).

Whoever follows Jesus will "never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). Through Him, we can let go of the darkness of our old life and celebrate the joy of walking in the light and beauty of His kingdom. By: Lawrence Darmani ([Our Daily Bread](#). Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

Reflect & Pray

If you're a believer in Jesus, how has your life changed since He came into it? What are some ways you'd like to grow in your faith?

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for bringing me out of darkness into Your marvelous light. Help me to avoid the darkness to continue walking in the light toward eternity.

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**D A Carson (from "For the Love of God")** - NOVEMBER 17 1 Chronicles 9–10; Hebrews 12; Amos 6; Luke 1:39–80

THE EFFORTS OF THE AUTHOR of the epistle to the Hebrews to help his readers grasp the transcendent importance of Jesus and the new covenant, over against the old covenant given by God at Sinai, precipitate a new and interesting contrast in Hebrews 12:18–24.

On the one hand, Christians "have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire" (12:18)—the reference is clearly to Mount Sinai when God came down upon it and met with Moses. The terror of that theophany is spelled out in graphic terms. God himself declared, "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned" (12:20). Even Moses experienced deep fear (Deut. 9:19; Heb. 12:21). Christians have not drawn near to that particular mountain.

On the other hand, Christians have come to another mountain. But here the author throws us a curve. At first it sounds as if he is saying that the mountain we approach is not Sinai, connected with the desert and the giving of the law, but Mount Zion, the place where the temple was built in Jerusalem, the seat of the Davidic dynasty. And then suddenly it becomes clear that the text is not focusing on the geographical and historical Zion, but on its antitype: "the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God" (12:22).

There is a great deal that could be said about this typology, but I shall restrict myself to two observations.

First, it extends to other biblical books. The typology itself is grounded in the return from exile. The hope of the exiles was that they return to Jerusalem. Jerusalem became the symbol of all that was restorative. Already in the literature of second-temple Judaism, Jews sometimes speak of "the new Jerusalem" or the like, which is heavenly, perfect. Similarly in the New Testament. Paul can speak of "the Jerusalem that is above" (Gal. 4:26). The last book of the Bible envisages the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven (Rev. 21).

Second, if Christians have "come" to this "heavenly Jerusalem," what does this in fact mean? It means that by becoming Christians we have joined the assembly of those "gathered" before the presence of the living God. Our citizenship is in heaven; our names are inscribed in heaven. We join the joyful assembly of countless thousands of angels around the throne. In short, we have "come to God, the judge of all men"; we have joined "the spirits of righteous men made perfect" (Heb. 12:23). Above all, we have come "to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant" (12:24). Here is the ultimate vision of what it means to be the gathered "church of the firstborn" (Heb. 12:23).

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## Worship Service

Read: Hebrews 12:18-25

You have come to . . . an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn. —Hebrews 12:22-23

The sign outside the church states, “Worship Service—Sunday at 11:00 a.m.” That ought to stop traffic. Passersby should take out their pens and jot the time down in their datebooks. When a church gathers to worship, astonishing things take place.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews opens our understanding of the privilege and glory of worship. He declared that we have come to “the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn” (12:22-23).

The writer did not say, “You shall come,” as though he were describing some future experience on the other side of death. We are part of a universal fellowship right now. When we worship, we gather with believers of all nations—with all who sing the same praises, read the same Bible, and bow before the same Lord. We also join with thousands upon thousands of angels who sing, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!” (Rev. 5:12).

Whether we meet with a handful or with hundreds, let’s join with the great company of angels and our fellow believers around the world in lifting our hearts in praise. By Haddon W. Robinson ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Come, we that love the Lord,  
And let our joys be known;  
Join in a song with sweet accord  
And thus surround the throne.  
—Watts

When we worship God, we're part of a fellowship  
as wide as the world and as high as heaven.

Hebrews 12:19 and to the **blast** of a **trumpet** and the **sound** of **words which** sound was such that **those** who **heard begged** that **no further word** be **spoken** to them. ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [kai salpiggos echo kai phone rhematon, es oi akousantes](#) ([AAPMPN](#)) [paretesanto](#) ([3PAMI](#)) [me prostethenai](#) ([APN](#)) [autois logon](#)

**Amplified:** And to the blast of a trumpet and a voice whose words make the listeners beg that nothing more be said to them. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**NLT:** For they heard an awesome trumpet blast and a voice with a message so terrible that they begged God to stop speaking. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**NLT (revised)** For they heard an awesome trumpet blast and a voice so terrible that they begged God to stop speaking.

**BGT** κα σ λπιγγος χ κα φων ημ των, ς ο κο σαντες παρ τ σαντο μ προστεθ ναι α το ς λ γον,

**NET** and the blast of a trumpet and a voice uttering words such that those who heard begged to hear no more.

**GNT** κα σ λπιγγος χ κα φων ημ των, ς ο κο σαντες παρ τ σαντο μ προστεθ ναι α το ς λ γον,

**KJV** And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more:

**ESV** and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them.

**ASV** and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that no word more should be spoken unto them;

**CSB** to the blast of a trumpet, and the sound of words. (Those who heard it begged that not another word be

spoken to them,

**NIV** to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them,

**NKJ** 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.

**NRS** and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them.

**YLT** and a sound of a trumpet, and a voice of sayings, which those having heard did entreat that a word might not be added to them,

**NAB** and a trumpet blast and a voice speaking words such that those who heard begged that no message be further addressed to them,

**NJB** or trumpet-blast or the sound of a voice speaking which made everyone that heard it beg that no more should be said to them.

**GWN** to a trumpet's blast, and to a voice. When your ancestors heard that voice, they begged not to hear it say another word.

**BBE** And to the sound of a horn, and the voice of words, the hearers of which made request that not a word more might be said to them:

**Young's Literal:** and a sound of a trumpet, and a voice of sayings, which those having heard did entreat that a word might not be added to them,

**AND TO THE BLAST OF A TRUMPET AND THE SOUND OF WORDS WHICH [SOUND WAS SUCH THAT] THOSE WHO HEARD BEGGED THAT NO FURTHER WORD SHOULD BE SPOKEN TO THEM: kai salpiggos echo kai phone rhematon, es oi akousantes (AAPMPN) paretasanto (3PAMI) me prostethenai (APN) autois logon kai salpiggos echo:**

- **the blast:** Ex 19:16-19 1Co 15:52 1Th 4:16
- **and the sound of words:** Ex 20:1-17,22 De 4:12,33 5:3-22
- **those who heard begged:** Ex 20:18,19 De 5:24-27 18:16
- [Hebrews 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**And to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them** - The scene was so frightening that Israel wanted the experience to stop, not to continue.

Exodus 19:19 When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder.

Deuteronomy 4:12 "Then the LORD spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form—only a voice.

Deuteronomy 5:23-27 "And when you heard the voice from the midst of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, you came near to me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders. 24 "You said, 'Behold, the LORD our God has shown us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice from the midst of the fire; we have seen today that God speaks with man, yet he lives. 25 'Now then why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer, then we will die. 26 'For who is there of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived? 27 'Go near and hear all that the LORD our God says; then speak to us all that the LORD our God speaks to you, and we will hear and do it.'

**Spurgeon** on the **blast of a trumpet** - Clarion notes most clear and shrill rang out again and again the high commands of the thrice-holy God. You are not come to that. Instead of a trumpet, which signifies war and the stern summons of a king, you are come to "**Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant**" (Heb 12:24), to the silver tones of "**Come to me, all of you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest**" (Matt 11:28).

**Blast** ([2279](#)) (**echos**) is a sound and can also mean a loud or confused noise ("echo") or a roar.

**Barry Horner on trumpet** - The music here was not entertaining; it was a summons, not a symphony; the message did not make its hearers happy! Here was the full force of God's holy proclamation that spoke of infinite demand and punishment at the slightest infraction. The more the people listened, the more hopeless their condition appeared. Their sin rose up to proportions never before envisaged, with the solution being thought to be the cessation of the message rather than a cry for mercy. The whole populace of Israel heard in such a paralyzing manner that the people seemed incapable of making a retreat. Thus Owen explains: "When God calls sinners to answer the law, there is no avoiding of an appearance; the terrible summons and citation will draw them out, whether they will or no." ([Commentary](#))

**Trumpet** ([4536](#)) (**salpigx**) is a musical instrument which today would be the equivalent of a brass musical instrument with a flared bell and a bright, penetrating tone. The Jewish people were familiar with trumpets, because trumpets were used to declare war, to announce special times and seasons, and to gather the people for a journey (Nu 10). In the Roman Empire, trumpets were used to announce the arrival of a great person. When God gave the Law to Israel, the event was preceded by a trumpet blast

**Exodus 19:13** No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live. When the ram's horn (Lxx = **salpigx**) sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain.

The **trumpet** is spoken of repeatedly in connection with Sinai (Ex 19:13, 16, 19; 20:18). And on that occasion the people heard the voice of God (Dt 5:24). But the effect of it all was to terrify them, and they asked that they should hear God's voice no more (Ex 20:19; Dt 5:25-27). They were overcome with awe and wanted no further part in the wonderful events. Ex 20:19 Dt 5:25, 18:16,

**Spurgeon** - Together with the trumpet there sounded out a voice that was so terrible that they asked that they might not hear it again. They cowered down under it, like poor, frightened children, terrified by the penetrating sound. They could not endure another word; they begged that the voice would be silent. We have come to another voice—the voice of "the sprinkled blood that speaks better than Abel's does" (Heb 12:24). There is a voice from Zion; there is a voice that rolls over the heads of the innumerable company of angels. A voice of the Lord that is full of majesty, and exceedingly comfortable to the "assembly of the firstborn" (Heb 12:23), who know the joyful sound. The blessed Word speaks life, pardon, reconciliation, acceptance, joy, eternal bliss!

**Words** ([4487](#)) (**rhema** from verb **rheo** = to speak - to say, speak or utter definite words) refers to the spoken word, especially a word as uttered by a living voice. **Laleo** is another word translated speak but it refers only to uttering a sound whereas **rheo** refers to uttering a definite intelligible word. **Rhema** refers to any sound produced by the voice which has a definite meaning. It focuses upon the content of the communication. For example in Luke we read "And they understood none of these things, and this **saying** (**rhema**) was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said. (Luke 18:34)

In the plural (as in Hebrews 12:19) **rhema** ("words"), means saying, speech or discourse.

**Begged** ([3868](#)) (**paraiteomai** from **pará** = aside and in this word gives a nuance of aversion or repudiation + **aitéo** = ask, beg) is literally to ask along side. then to beg away from oneself. As in Mark 15:6, this verb can mean to beg or request (a prisoner to be freed on the occasion of the Passover). In Luke 14:18+, it conveys the sense of **to beg off** or of wanting to be excused from a positive response, in this verse one excusing himself for not accepting a wedding invitation. Finally, in the pastoral epistles the meaning is to decline, refuse, to refuse to pay attention to, to shun, to avoid, to reject. In secular Greek a wrestler was declared the victor when his opponents **declined** to engage him upon seeing his unclothed physique.

**Hebrews 12:20** For they could not **bear** the **command**, "**IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED.**" (**NASB: Lockman**)

**Greek:** [ouk epheron](#) (3PIAI) [gar to diastellomenon](#). (PPPNSA) [Kan therion thige](#) (3SAAS) [tou orous](#). [lithobolthesetai](#): (3SFPI)

**Amplified:** For they could not bear the command that was given: If even a wild animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned to death. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**NLT:** They staggered back under God's command: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death." ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**BGT** Hebrews 12:20 ο κ φερων γ ρ τ διαστελλ μενον· κ ν θηρ ον θ γ το ρους, λιθοβοληθ σεται·

**NET** Hebrews 12:20 For they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned."



**GNT** Hebrews 12:20 ο κ φερων γ ρ τ διαστελλ μενον, Κ ν θηρ ον θ γ το ρους, λιθοβοληθ σεται·

**NLT** Hebrews 12:20 They staggered back under God's command: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death."

**KJV** Hebrews 12:20 (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart:

**ESV** Hebrews 12:20 For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned."

**ASV** Hebrews 12:20 for they could not endure that which was enjoined, If even a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned;

**CSB** Hebrews 12:20 for they could not bear what was commanded: And if even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned!

**NIV** Hebrews 12:20 because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned."

**NKJ** Hebrews 12:20 (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."

**NRS** Hebrews 12:20 (For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned to death."

**NAB** Hebrews 12:20 for they could not bear to hear the command: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned."

**NJB** Hebrews 12:20 They could not bear the order that was given: If even a beast touches the mountain, it must be stoned.

**GWN** Hebrews 12:20 They couldn't obey the command that was given, "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death."

**BBE** Hebrews 12:20 For the order which said, If the mountain is touched even by a beast, the beast is to be stoned, seemed hard to them;

**Wuest**: For they could not bear that which was commanded. And if a wild beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned.

**Young's Literal**: for they were not bearing that which is commanded, 'And if a beast may touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or with an arrow shot through,'

**FOR THEY COULD NOT BEAR THE COMMAND "IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN IT WILL BE STONED":** οὐκ  
εφερον (3PIAI) gar to diastellomenon, (PPPNSA) Kan therion thige (3SAAS) tou orous, lithobolethesetai; (3SFPI):

- **For they** - De 33:2 Ro 3:19,20 Ga 2:19 3:10
- **If even a beast** - Ex 19:13,16
- [Hebrews 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE AWESOMENESS OF HOLINESS

**For (gar)** - pause and ponder this term of explanation. Explaining why they begged no further word to be spoken to them.

**John MacArthur** explains that "God gave Israel the covenant of law in the middle of the wilderness, away from all distractions, all interference, and all hiding places. They had nothing to focus on but God, and in doing so became terribly aware of their own sinfulness. The first thing that leads a person to repentance and dependence on God for deliverance is the awareness of his sinfulness (**ED: THAT WAS PAUL'S PURPOSE IN EXPLAINING THE GOSPEL LEADING OFF WITH SIN IN Romans 1:18-3:20**). Apart from seeing his sinfulness, a person has no reason to seek salvation. **Only seeing our sin can make us see our need for salvation from sin and from the judgment it brings.** This was the purpose of Sinai, to bring the people face to face with their own sinfulness, with no place to hide. The law is God's great mirror. When we look into it, we see ourselves as we really are—

immeasurably short of God's standard of righteousness. There is not a single commandment that we have kept perfectly or can keep perfectly, in either act or attitude. The law makes no exceptions and no allowance for less than perfect obedience. The law overwhelms us, slays us. No sinner can endure Sinai. Every sinner who stands at the foot of Sinai is paralyzed with fear." (MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Hebrews) (Bold added)

**For they could not bear the command, "IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED " -** The **command** that nothing **touches the mountain** indicates the holiness and separateness of the mountain. Killing by stoning was prescribed so that those taking part in it would not need to touch the mountain themselves. They knew that if it meant death to a dumb, uncomprehending animal, how much more surely would it mean death to those who understood the warning.

**Barry Horner** adds "It was not that the holy glory of God was so delightful that the people could not endure such pleasure; rather it was that their unholiness could not tolerate the detail of His holiness, even the strictness of a common animal wandering into God's presence (Ex 19:12-13). If such a seeming minimal transgression could not escape the full weight of God's judgment, then what would be the consequence of a man or woman being sifted by His relentless examination? Here then, as **Owen** well points out, is indicated the utter **"inaccessibleness of God, in and by the law. . .** And it sheweth also at what distance we ought to keep ourselves from everything that falls under the curse of the law." ([Commentary](#))

**The command** (1291) ([diastellomai](#) from **diá** = denoting transition, + **stéllo** = send) means to state with force and/or authority what others must do. The **present tense** presents the command as ringing constantly in their ears.

**Touch** (2345) ([thiggano](#) from **thígo** = touch) means to come in contact with, to handle, touch with a view of ascertaining the quality of the object; to feel after, to grope. To touch so that one can exert a modifying influence on it. In Col 2:21 = ""Do not handle ([hapto](#)), do not taste, do not **touch!**"" In Hebrews 11:28 used somewhat figuratively "so that he who destroyed the firstborn would **nottouch** (= KILL) them."

**Thiggano** - 3x - Col. 2:21 ; Heb. 11:28; Heb. 12:20. Once in the Septuagint - Ex 19:12

**Wuest** - The word **"touch"** here is **thiggano** "to touch, handle." It implies a touching or a grasping which affects the object. In classical Greek it is often used of touching or handling some sacred object which may be desecrated by the one who lays hands on it. Here, to touch the mountain, was to profane it.

**Spurgeon** - In the sacred worship of the tabernacle and the temple, the thought of distance must always have been prominent to the devout mind. The mass of the people did not even enter the outer court. Into the inner court none but the priests could ever dare to come; while into the innermost place, or the holy of holies, but once a year one person only ever entered. The Lord seemed ever to be saying to the whole of His people, with but a few exceptions, "Do not come near here." It was the dispensation of distance, as if the Lord in those early ages would teach man that sin was so utterly loathsome to Him that He must treat men as lepers put without the camp. When He came nearest to them, He still made them feel the width of the separation between a holy God and the impure sinner. You cannot get nearer to God than that on the footing of works, for Mount Sinai is the symbol of works. Look to the flames that Moses saw, and shrink, and tremble, and despair. You cannot get to God that way. Calvary is the mountain.

Hebrews 12:21 And **so terrible** was the **sight**, that **Moses said**, "**I AM FULL OF FEAR** and **trembling**." (**NASB: Lockman**)

**Greek:** [kai](#), outo [phoberon en](#) (3SIAI) [to phantazomenon](#), (PPPNSN) [Mouses eipen](#), (3SAAI) [Ekphobos eimi](#) (1SPAI) [kai entromos](#).

**Amplified:** In fact, so awful and terrifying was the [phenomenal] sight that Moses said, I am terrified (aghast and trembling with fear). ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**NLT:** Moses himself was so frightened at the sight that he said, "I am terrified and trembling." ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**NET** In fact, the scene was so terrifying that Moses said, "I shudder with fear."

**GNT** κα , ο τω φοβερ ν ν τ φανταζ μενον, Μωϋς ς ε πεν, κφοβ ς ε μι κα ντρομος.

**KJV** And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:)

**ESV** Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear."

**ASV** and so fearful was the appearance, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:

**CSB** The appearance was so terrifying that Moses said, I am terrified and trembling.)

**NIV** The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."

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

**NRS** Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear.")

**NAB** Indeed, so fearful was the spectacle that Moses said, "I am terrified and trembling."

**NJB** The whole scene was so terrible that Moses said, 'I am afraid and trembling.'

**GWN** The sight was so terrifying that even Moses said he was trembling and afraid.

**BBE** And the vision was so overpowering that even Moses said, I am shaking and full of fear.

**Young's Literal:** and, (so terrible was the sight,) Moses said, 'I am fearful exceedingly, and trembling.'

**AND SO TERRIBLE WAS THE SIGHT, [THAT] MOSES SAID: kai outo phoberon en (3SISA) to phantazomenon (PPPNSN) Mouses eipen (3SAAI):**

- Ex 19:16,19 Ps 119:120 Isa 6:3-5 Da 10:8,17 Rev 1:17
- [Hebrews 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## GOD IS AN AWESOME GOD!

Beloved, God is not our "old pal," our "good buddy," "the big guy in the sky," etc, but HE IS OUR AWESOME HOLY GOD. Ponder the awesome nature of our great God as you play the chorus [Our God is an Awesome God!](#)

**And so terrible was the sight** - Mt Sinai was a place that was meant to cause fearfulness. Keep in mind that what the writer is speaking to Jewish readers who were being tempted to go back to the Law (ritual, sacrificial system, Levitical priesthood, etc). God under that Old Covenant system was in essence "untouchable" and one could only approach Him cautiously, but even then only from a distance (Ex 20:18-21, especially Ex 20:21 "So the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was.")

**Terrible** (5398) (**phoberos** from **phobos**= fear from **phébomai** = flee from) is an adjective which means causing or inspiring fear, frightful, formidable: fearful, dreadful, terrible, horrifying.

**Phoberos** is frequently used in the OT (Septuagint) to describe God as **awesome** (Dt 10:17, Neh 1:5, Neh 9:32, Ps 66:5, 89:7, 99:3, 111:9, Da 9:4) as well as His **awesome** deeds (Ps 66:3, 5, 106:22, 145:6)

**Vine** on **phoberos** - "fearful" (akin to A, No. 1 -**phobos**), is used only in the Active sense in the NT, i.e., causing "fear, terrible." ([Fear, Fearful, Fearfulness - Vine's Expository Dictionary of NT Words](#))

**Phoberos** was used also in Hebrews 10 - "but a certain **terrifying** expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries" (Heb 10:27-note) and "It is a **terrifying** thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Heb 10:31-note)

**Phoberos** - 39v in the **Septuagint** -

Gen 28:17; Dt 1:19; 2:7; 8:15; 10:17; Jdg 13:6; 1Chr 16:25; Neh 1:5; 4:14; 9:32; Esther 5:1; Ps 47:2; 66:3, 5; 76:7, 12; 89:7; 96:4; 99:3; 106:22; 111:9; 145:6; Pr 12:25; Isa 21:1; Dan 2:31; 4:1; 7:7, 19; 9:4; Hab 1:7;

Genesis 28:17 He was afraid and said, "How **awesome** (Heb - yare = to fear, be afraid, frightened; Lxx = phoberos) is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

Deuteronomy 1:19 (Dt 8:5 similar) "Then we set out from Horeb, and went through all that great and **terrible** (Heb - yare = to fear, be afraid, frightened; Lxx = phoberos) wilderness which you saw on the way to the hill country of the Amorites, just as the LORD our God had commanded us; and we came to Kadesh-barnea.

Deuteronomy 10:17 "For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the **awesome** (Heb - yare = to fear, be afraid, frightened; Lxx = phoberos) God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe.

Judges 13:6 Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, "A Man of God came to me and His appearance was like the appearance of the Angel of God (In context it was a pre-incarnate Christophany = **Angel of the LORD** - see Jdg 13:3), very **awesome** (Heb - yare = to fear, be afraid, frightened; Lxx = phoberos). And I did not ask Him where he came from, nor did He tell me His Name."

1 Chronicles 16:25 For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; He also is to be feared (Literally "fearful He is" - Heb - yare = to fear, be afraid, frightened; Lxx = phoberos) above all gods.

**Phoberos** gives a further indication of the awesomeness of God and the solemnity life under the Law. The words quoted are not found in the Sinai narrative but do occur at the time of the golden calf (Dt 9:11-18) -

For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the LORD was wrathful against you in order to destroy you, but the LORD listened to me that time also. (Dt 9:19).

The picture is of an awful and overpowering occasion, one that affected all the people and terrified even Moses, the man of God the one with whom God would speak "face to face, as a man speaks with his friend". (Ex 33:11)

**Spurgeon** - The mount of God stood out in terrible sublimity against the sky, holding communion with the stars, but refusing to deal with men. It was sublime, but stern and tempest-beaten. God came upon Sinai with His law, and the dread mount became a type of what the law would be to us. It has given us a grand idea of holiness, but it has not offered us a pathway to it, nor furnished a weary heart with a resting place, nor supplied a hungry soul with spiritual food. It can never be the place where congregated multitudes erect a city for themselves and a temple for the living God. It is not the shrine of fellowship, but the throne of authority and justice.

### "I AM FULL OF FEAR AND TREMBLING": Ekphobos eimi (1SPA1) kai entromos

- [Hebrews 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE REVERENTIAL FEAR OF MOSES THE FRIEND OF GOD

**That Moses said, "I AM FULL OF FEAR and trembling** - Think about this declaration by Moses. Moses is the one called the friend of God (James 2:23+), the one who had been granted "access" to the mountain, the one who had seen the burning bush (and lived to tell) and the one who had received the tablets of the Law. Despite these incredible encounters with Yahweh, Moses still declares "I am continually ([present tense](#)) full of fear and trembling." Our God is an **awesome** (see **phoberos** above) God (keeping in mind that the noun "awe" is "an emotion variously combining dread, veneration, and wonder that is inspired by authority or by the sacred or sublime."

The words quoted by the author in Heb 12:21 **"I AM FULL OF FEAR** are not found in the Sinai narrative but many think this quote refers to words Moses recorded in the context of his description of the golden calf (Dt 9:19). The picture is of an awful and overpowering occasion, one that affected all the people and terrified even Moses, the man of God, the servant of God, the one with whom God would speak "face to face, as a man speaks with his friend". (Ex 33:11)

**Ironsides** - If even the lower creation (**IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED**), made subject to vanity because of man's sin, would not be permitted to so much as touch the mount, and if Moses who might be considered the very best in all Israel, trembled at the thought of drawing nigh to God under such circumstances, what possible hope could there be of any ordinary man standing before Jehovah on the ground of legal righteousness?

**Horner** - Moses had also earlier trembled at Mt. Horeb (Sinai) before God at His revelation in the burning bush (Ex 3:6; cf. Acts 7:32). The only other instance of Moses indicating such extreme anxiety upon his encounter with God's holy display was also at Mount Sinai. This was immediately following his smashing of the two tablets of the covenant on account of Israel's corruption under Aaron. Falling down before God, he declared to Israel that, "I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the LORD was wrathful against you in order to destroy you, but the LORD listened to me" (Deut. 9:19). 32). Here, the Sinaiic Covenant is characteristically fear inducing. It is significant that in Ernest Kevan's *The Grace Of Law, A Study Of Puritan Theology*, his sympathetic representation of the sanctifying effect of the Decalogue nevertheless makes no reference to the thrust of this whole depiction, in vs. 18-34, of the law's terror. Rather John Bunyan, in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, relates the meeting of Faithful with Adam the First and the pilgrim's inclination for his three daughters, Lust of the Flesh, Lust of the Eyes, and the Pride of Life. He then depicts his resultant encounter with Moses who constantly beats down the guilty pilgrim. When Faithful cries out for mercy, Moses responds: "I know not how to show mercy; and with that knocked [Faithful] . . . down again." Then another comes by who causes Moses to retreat. Faithful then explains, "I perceived the holes in his hands, and in his side" (John 1:17). 176 This then is not an encouraging and comforting camping place for the Christian. ([Commentary](#))

**Full of fear** (1630)(**ekphobos** from **ek** = out, used as an intensive + **phobeo** = to terrify, to frighten) is an adjective which means stricken with fear or terror, exceedingly frightened, terrified, intensely afraid. In both uses of this adjective we see that men who knew

God (Moses, disciples Peter and James and John) were still gripped by a healthy, holy fear of His awesome Being. Both of the NT uses of **ekphobos** are related to mountains (Mt Sinai, Mt of Transfiguration probably not Mt Tabor but [Mt Hermon](#), 40 mi NE of [Sea of Galilee](#)).

**Wuest** adds that "the word **fear**" is intensified as to its meaning by the prefixed preposition. It is *ekphobos*, literally, I am "frightened out or away." It makes me think of times when I was "frightened out of my mind!" at some horrendous experience on earth.

**Ekphobos** - 2x in NT

Mark 9:6 For he (Peter and James and John on the mountain at time of Jesus' transfiguration) did not know what to answer; for they became **terrified**.

**Ekphobos** - 1x in Septuagint

Deuteronomy 9:19 "For I (MOSES) was **afraid** ("*ekphobos eim*") of the anger and hot displeasure with which the LORD was wrathful against you in order to destroy you, but the LORD listened to me that time also.

**Trembling** (1790) (**entromos** from **en** = in + **tromos** = trembling, quaking, from *tremo* = to tremble, especially with fear) means trembling with fear. It is a picturesque adjective which refers to "being in a quivering condition because of exposure to an overwhelming or threatening circumstance."

**Entromos** - 3x in the NT -

Acts 7:32+ (quoting Exodus 3:6) 'I AM THE GOD OF YOUR FATHERS, THE GOD OF ABRAHAM AND ISAAC AND JACOB.' Moses **shook with fear** and would not venture to look.

Acts 16:29+ And he (Philippian jailer) called for lights and rushed in, and **trembling** with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas,

Hebrews 12:21 And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I AM FULL OF FEAR and **trembling**."

**Entromos** - 3x in the [Septuagint \(Lxx\)](#)

Psalms 18:7 Then the earth shook and quaked; And the foundations of the mountains were **trembling** And were shaken, because He was angry.

Psalms 77:18 The sound of Your thunder was in the whirlwind; The lightnings lit up the world; The earth **trembled** and shook.

Daniel 10:11 He said to me, "O Daniel, man of high esteem, understand the words that I am about to tell you and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you." And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up **trembling**.

All this speaks eloquently of the nature and ministry of the Law, for the Law is a firstly a revelation of God's righteous requirements and secondly is a revelation of His wrath against sin. The writer of Hebrews is trying to remind his readers that the purpose of the law was never to provide a way of salvation but even from the very inception was given that it might produce a knowledge of personal sin. The words "terrible... full of fear... trembling" all speak of the great gulf between the Holy God and sinful man. Indeed, the Law brought a ministry of condemnation, darkness, and gloom. Why would anyone in their right mind want to return to such a situation?

**Wuest** sums up Heb 12:20-21 - Their fear arose from God's initial command in Exodus 19:12-13 (summarized rather than directly quoted in the words "if even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned"), which isolated the mountain temporarily as a sacred area to which only Moses and Aaron were admitted. As a result, the Ten Commandments and the laws of the covenant were given to Moses to transmit to the people, who kept their distance so that they should not hear God's voice and die (Ex 20:18-21; cf. Dt 5:23-27). Even Moses, who was granted privileged access to the mountain, was not immune to the terror of the occasion, according to our author, though the words quoted, "I am trembling with fear," echo Deuteronomy 9:19. There Moses recalls not his initial approach to God at Sinai but his return to plead for the people after their idolatry with the golden calf, when the main cause of his fear was the Lord's anger at what the people had done rather than the frightening physical phenomena. **The story of Sinai and of the establishment of Israel's covenant with Yahweh thus symbolizes for our author a religion of fear and separation, which is the very opposite of the confident approach to God that Christ has won for his people** (Heb 10:19-23). The following verses speak of a religion where the worshiper is no longer kept at arm's length but welcomed and included. ([Hebrews - Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament](#))

**Spurgeon** - You who are under the law, you who are trying to win God's favor by your good works, you who fancy that human merit can bring you salvation, look to the flames that Moses saw, and sink, and tremble, and despair. You who think that you can live as

the law requires, and so attain to everlasting life, may well stand shivering and trembling before this almighty though invisible God. His lightnings blaze before your eyes, and His voice of thunder must alarm the stoutest heart. Terrible is the plight of the man who has to depend upon what Sinai can give him.