

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

First Quarter 2022: *In These Last Days: The Message of Hebrews*

Lesson 12 “Receiving an Unshakeable Kingdom”

Read for this week’s study

Hebrews 12:18–29; Exodus 32:32; Daniel 7:9, 10, 13–22; Haggai 2:6–9, 20–22; Psalm 15:5; Psalm 16:8; Hebrews 13:15, 16.

Memory Text

“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” (Hebrews 12:28, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. You Have Come to Mount Zion
- III. You Have Come to God, the Judge of All
- IV. Shake the Heavens and the Earth
- V. An Unshakeable Kingdom
- VI. Let Us Be Grateful
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. “The passage for this week, Hebrews 12:18–29, is the climax of the letter, and it sums up its main concern by repeating the idea with which it started: God has spoken to us in the person of His Son, and we need to pay careful attention to Him (Hebrews 1:1, 2; Heb. 12:25).” (Sabbath Afternoon)
2. What is the significance that, “you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering” (12:22, ESV)? What contrasts is the author drawing our attention to?
3. How does this passage not only pull together the themes previously mentioned in this letter, but also urges us to see the Old and New Testament as part of one story—a story which culminates with what Jesus is doing now? What are the common mistakes and pitfalls that are easy to make when comparing Mount Sinai with Mount Zion? How do we avoid them?

4. “The festal gathering celebrates the inauguration of Jesus’ kingly rule, priestly ministry, and the inauguration of the new covenant. [...] Hebrews 12:22–24 describes, then, the festal gathering that occurred in heaven when Jesus ascended.” (Sunday’s lesson) Why is this important? What does it tell us about how God is running his universe?
5. “You have come to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect.” (12:23) What are the meanings of the terms “firstborn,” “God the judge of all,” and “the spirits of the righteous made perfect”? (Monday’s lesson) How does the understanding of the antecedent context guard us from reading into the text ideas which are foreign to it?
6. What is the purpose of God’s shaking the heavens and the earth in Hebrews 12:26, 27? (Tuesday’s lesson) Because religion is a search for certainty, how do we make sure that everything that is transient, temporary and secondary does not occupy a primary position in our thinking and lives? How can God use “small” shaking to save us from the final shaking sifting us out?
7. Why is it significant that the idea of “shaking” is in the conclusion of the “letter” to the Hebrews? What will not be shaken? (Wednesday’s lesson) If in Hebrews, permanence and stability are associated with Jesus, are we more interested in being “in/with” Jesus, or in not being shaken? Can you give some personal examples of how a shaking experience brought you closer to God? Why are these experiences necessary to get a truer picture of God and ourselves in relation to him (12:28-29)?
8. How do we deal with “the good things of life” – especially food, drink, money, and possessions? Historically, people dealt with it either by hedonism or ascetism. What is the “biblical” way of dealing with all that comes our way (12:28)? (Thursday’s lesson)
9. Why does it mention in this context that “our God is a consuming fire” (12:29)? Why is the context of worship significant for our understanding of its meaning?
10. All pagans believe that their gods live in some kind of heavenly temple or sanctuary. But Christians believe that in Jesus Christ they have received an entry ticket to more than a building in the sky. Their God is inviting them, “Come in, my house is wide open to you. Enjoy being here with me. It is now your home too.”

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

I have heard servants sometimes charge that friends lack a keen sense of justice. They do not leave room in their understanding of God for just and essential punishment. Their God is simply too weak and kind. “You have a marshmallow God,” I heard one servant say.

The truth is precisely the opposite. Friend-believers have great concern about righteousness, which is the literal meaning of the Greek word often translated “justice.” The English word “justice” comes from the Latin translation of the Greek. (Latin, “justitia”)

Friends admire God’s righteousness and would love to be like him. And to do what is right is, of course, to do what is just. But servants tend to think of justice in terms of retribution and punishment.

“I find comfort in the thought that some day God will bring retribution on those who have hurt me so much,” I heard a believer say. “Now, I’m not asking for vengeance, you understand. I’m just asking for justice.” {Maxwell, Graham. *Servants or Friends? Another Look at God*, 109-110. Redlands, California: Pine Knoll Publications, 1992.}

<http://www.pineknoll.org/graham/sof/chapter8.html>

The point is that we are being considered by our future neighbors and friends; and they’re worried. Wouldn’t you be, if you were an angel? They’re going to let some of us in. And Satan capitalizes on this. Ellen White says he has an exact knowledge of every sin he’s ever tempted us to commit. We sometimes think our sins are rather private, and when they’re forgiven nobody knows them anymore. No, they know them. They’re headlines throughout the universe. They’re not forgotten. It wouldn’t be fair to forget our sins and then put David’s in the Bible. We preach about David’s sins. Nobody’s sins are hidden; they’re all well known up there.

And the devil arises and says, “Let me show you that God once more has made a mistake. He says Jones is safe to save.” And he lists all the things he’s tempted us to do. And Ellen White has a tremendous speech in his mouth. “Look at all the sins that have marked their disloyalty to God. Look at their selfishness”, et cetera, et cetera. How he dares make such a speech is almost unbelievable! And then he points to all the records and says, “Look at all the sins they have committed.” If you had just heard your life described, and it was put to the vote, would you vote for yourself? I mean would you hang your head and wonder what’s going to happen? But then Christ arises, as she describes it, and he does not excuse our sins.

He says, “The devil has told the truth. Jones did everything he’s mentioned. In fact, due to the shortness of time, he left out a lot he could have mentioned.” And there comes a murmur in the crowd and it’s Jones’ guardian angel, and he says, “Look, I was there, do you want me to fill in?” And the Lord says, “No, we’ve heard quite enough. Jones, on the record looks simply frightful. But let me tell you; that record is irrelevant, and it’s out of date. It describes the kind of person Jones used to be. But Jones has a new heart and a right spirit within him. He was born as I told Nicodemus, of the spirit. This doesn’t describe Jones.”

You see, God is not concerned about our sinful past, he's only concerned about the kind of people we are now. And if I were an angel, I wouldn't be concerned with whether or not God had forgiven Idi Amin; I'd want to know if it was safe to live next door to Idi Amin. When the prophet Isaiah meets King Manasseh in the hereafter, and he's innocently carrying a pruning hook or something to prune his vines; the last time he held one in his hands he was sawing poor Isaiah in half in a hollow log. And will God say, "Well, don't worry about him carrying that saw, I forgave him." That wouldn't reassure me at all; I'd want to know if he could be trusted with a sharp saw.

And that's why Jesus said to Nicodemus "Not unless ye be forgiven." No, he said, "Not unless you be born again." It's a healing ministry; new hearts, right spirits. David finally got the message and said, "Sacrifices won't do it, I need a new heart, I need a right spirit, I need truth in the inner man." Now he didn't say, "I'll stop offering sacrifices" because Christ hadn't yet come. But he says, "I'm going to start offering them for a different reason now." As Hebrews says, all the sacrifices were a constant reminder of sin, and that sin leads to death. He says, "I'll go on doing that." But no more were they sacrifices "to propitiate the wrath of God", and things like that.

Well I see this discussion going on in heaven. What chance do we have? Has God proved his ability to judge the human heart? Job showed that. And many other places. The last generation may show that. No angel can read our hearts; no angel can read our thoughts. If they could, they could have read Lucifer's thoughts and known, they would have known he was a deceiver. They couldn't read what his plan was. Only God can read our innermost thoughts. And so they have to look to God to say, "Is Jones really changed; is he safe to save?" And when Jesus says "Yes he is", then they say, "Then we'll welcome him at the gates." And so, I think they have very legitimate questions. I mean, they should be afraid that we're coming in. They have to hear Jesus say, "Don't judge the man by the record. Let me tell you, he's not that kind of person anymore; he's been changed." {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Atonement and Your Picture of God, recorded May 1993, San Diego, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/1MMAANDP> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/2MMAANDP> (Part 2)

But you see, all that matters is if we die God's trusting children; we will arise his trusting children, and all will be well. And you might say, "Well then, all I want to be is a little child with the faith of a little child." Yes, that's enough to get you into the Kingdom. But it's not enough to survive the time of trouble. All hell is going to break loose, and that, I believe, is the message of the Adventist Church.

God has saved babes in the truth all through the centuries, but he waits, in mercy he waits, for a group of people who are not just babes in the truth, but have their faculties trained by

practice to distinguish good from evil, for Satan soon comes as Christ, as an angel of light. He deceived angels; he could readily deceive mere humans.

This group of people will be settled into the truth more like some of these others—like Abraham, and Moses. Now maybe Samson goes into the Kingdom as a babe in the truth, to be sure. But we have a message, not just, “Be converted and reborn.” We have a message about growing up, and becoming mature, which you know any intelligent person really wants to be. To develop physically, mentally, spiritually, socially. Aren’t these the highest ideals of intelligent people everywhere, in all cultures? That’s to be really free, to recover the dignity of individuality. This is what God wishes for us, though it will be under very difficult circumstances, to be sure. And He says, “If you think only my Son could do that ... Well, Job wasn’t ‘perfect’, but he is an example, isn’t he?” And God says, “Maybe you don’t think he did well. I think he did magnificently. Job said of me what is right, and his faith could not be shaken.” And it wasn’t the devil who worked him over, only. It was also the theologians who worked him over. And that’s something to think about, by the way. Confusion can come from many sources. Nothing confused Job as to his convictions about God. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in all 66 – Hebrews, recorded July 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/73MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/74MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

“If only you knew the truth about God and his laws,” Jesus went on, “you would find that his yoke is easy, and his burden is light.” (As he glanced at all the books of rules and regulations they had accumulated.) Look at those famous words in Matthew 11:28:

Come to me, all of you who toil and are burdened and I will let you rest. Let my yoke be put upon you and learn from Me, for [though I am God] I am gentle and humble-minded [have you ever thought of the Infinite One being humble-minded?]. And your hearts will find rest, for the yoke I offer you is a kindly one, and the load I ask you to bear is light.
(Goodspeed)

You would think the people would be relieved to hear this right from headquarters. But instead, they accused the Son of God of blasphemously misrepresenting his Father. They even said he had a devil to be talking about God and his laws like this! And they condemned him as lawless and crucified him as a heretic.

Then the apostle Paul took up the cause of those who denounced Jesus as a heretic and who denounced his picture of God as false and even satanic. At first, as you know from the record, Saul also obeyed for the wrong reason. He worshiped a tyrannical God who would be pleased to see people persecuted, imprisoned, even stoned to death—to force them to obey. That was

the kind of God he worshiped. He had many texts (he thought) to support it. And he conducted his evangelism in the name of that God. That is why he felt free to use so much force.

Then on the Damascus road he saw the light, and the truth set him free. What a difference! He didn't change his Bible or even the name of his God. He didn't change the day he worshiped for Sabbath, or his diet, or his dress. What did he change that day? All Saul changed was his picture of God. And from then on, who has spoken more eloquently about freedom and faith and grace? And further, about Christ as the end of legalism as the way of being saved, and that we're not under law, but we're under grace because we worship a gracious God! {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #12, "God's Law is no Threat to Our Freedom" recorded April 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/12MMCAG>*

Further Study with Ellen White

All heaven is interested in our salvation. The angels of God, thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand, are commissioned to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation. They guard us against evil and press back the powers of darkness that are seeking our destruction. {6T 63.3}

By the life and the death of Christ, the thoughts of men also are brought to view. From the manger to the cross, the life of Jesus was a call to self-surrender, and to fellowship in suffering. It unveiled the purposes of men. Jesus came with the truth of heaven, and all who were listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit were drawn to Him. The worshipers of self belonged to Satan's kingdom. In their attitude toward Christ, all would show on which side they stood. And thus everyone passes judgment on himself. {DA 57.3}

We dishonor God when we think of Him only as a judge ready to pass sentence upon us, and forget that He is a loving Father. The whole spiritual life is molded by our conceptions of God, and if we cherish erroneous views of His character, our souls will sustain injury. We should see in God one who yearns toward the children of men, longing to do them good. . . . All through the Scriptures, God is represented as one who calls, woos by His tender love, the hearts of His erring children. No earthly parent could be as patient with the faults and mistakes of their children as is God with those He seeks to save. No one could plead more tenderly with the transgressor. No human lips ever poured out more tender entreaty to the wanderer than does He. O shall we not love God, and show our love by humble obedience? Let us have a care for our thoughts, our experiences, our attitude toward God, for all His promises are but the breathings of unutterable love. {TMK 263.4}

Through the plan of salvation, a larger purpose is to be wrought out even than the salvation of man and the redemption of the earth. Through the revelation of the character of God in Christ,

the beneficence of the divine government would be manifested before the universe, the charge of Satan refuted, the nature and result of sin made plain, and the perpetuity of the law fully demonstrated. {ST, December 22, 1914 par. 4}

God's dealings with rebellion will result in fully unmasking the work that has so long been carried on under cover. The results of Satan's rule, the fruits of setting aside the divine statutes, will be laid open to the view of all created intelligences. The law of God will stand fully vindicated. It will be seen that all the dealings of God have been conducted with reference to the eternal good of His people, and the good of all the worlds that He has created. Satan himself, in the presence of the witnessing universe, will confess the justice of God's government and the righteousness of His law. {PP 338.4}

No one need look upon the sin against the Holy Ghost as something mysterious and indefinable. The sin against the Holy Ghost is the sin of persistent refusal to respond to the invitation to repent. {FLB 58.8}

God destroys no one. The sinner destroys himself by his own impenitence. When a person once neglects to heed the invitations, reproofs, and warnings of the Spirit of God, his conscience becomes seared, and the next time he is admonished, it will be more difficult to yield obedience than before. And thus with every repetition. Conscience is the voice of God, heard amid the conflict of human passions; when it is resisted, the Spirit of God is grieved. {5T 120.1}

The destiny of the wicked is fixed by their own choice. Their exclusion from heaven is voluntary with themselves, and just and merciful on the part of God. . . . {GC 542.2}

God, the One infinite and all-wise, sees the end from the beginning, and in dealing with evil His plans were far-reaching and comprehensive. It was His purpose, not merely to put down the rebellion, but to demonstrate to all the universe the nature of the rebellion. God's plan was unfolding, showing both His justice and His mercy, and fully vindicating His wisdom and righteousness in His dealings with evil. {PP 78.3}

We may utter words that reach the throne of the Monarch of the universe. We may speak with Jesus as we walk by the way, and He says, I am at thy right hand. [See Psalm 16:8.] {GW 258.1}

Divine wisdom will order the steps of those who put their trust in the Lord. Divine love will encircle them, and they will realize the presence of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. {OHC 324.6}

There the redeemed shall know, even as also they are known. The loves and sympathies which God Himself has planted in the soul shall there find truest and sweetest exercise. The pure communion with holy beings, the harmonious social life with the blessed angels and with the faithful ones of all ages who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, the sacred ties that bind together "the whole family in heaven and earth" (Ephesians 3:15)—these help to constitute the happiness of the redeemed. {GC 677.1}

There every power will be developed, every capability increased. The grandest enterprises will be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations will be reached, the highest ambitions realized. And still there will appear new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects of study to call forth the powers of body and mind and soul. {PK 731.1}

It is for our own benefit to keep every gift of God fresh in our memory. Thus faith is strengthened to claim and to receive more and more. There is greater encouragement for us in the least blessing we ourselves receive from God than in all the accounts we can read of the faith and experience of others. The soul that responds to the grace of God shall be like a watered garden. His health shall spring forth speedily; his light shall rise in obscurity, and the glory of the Lord shall be seen upon him. Let us then remember the loving-kindness of the Lord, and the multitude of His tender mercies. {DA 348.2}