

A CRITICAL INVESTIGATION  
OF HEBREWS 12:25-29

by  
Samuel J. Hadley

Submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Master of Divinity in  
Grace Theological Seminary  
May 1982



Title: A CRITICAL INVESTIGATION OF HEBREWS 12:25-29  
Author: Samuel J. Hadley  
Degree: Master of Divinity  
Date: May, 1982  
Adviser: Lee L. Kantenwein

Hebrews 12:25-29 contains information about the kingdom of God, dispensations, eternal security, perseverance of the saints, and the end of earth and heaven. It warns of a great shaking of created things and of those who refuse to heed God's word. The problem is that the recipients of the Epistle are Christians. Are they in danger of becoming apostate? The shaking is to come at any time, so they had better be ready. Another problem exists in the way Haggai 2:6 is used in the passage. It is not quoted verbatim and the author of Hebrews explains what will be shaken.

The first chapter lays the foundation for the thesis by detailing the background of Hebrews. Authorship, destination, purpose, date, readership, and circumstances of the occasion are explained. The second chapter is the heart of the thesis because it deals with the heart of the passage verse by verse. Minor questions concerning each verse are answered. Greek words that are crucial to the passage are defined and analyzed grammatically. The third and final chapter deals with the major problems. A considerable amount of space is given to the study of the Old Testament's use by the author of Hebrews compared with its general use by the apostolic writers. The issue of apostasy is closely examined in this chapter. Lastly, a definition and time period are given for "shaking."

It is concluded that both Haggai and the author of Hebrews have the divine authority to use the illustration of the shaking of Mount Sinai and a future shaking of the earth and heaven to illustrate their points, even though their contexts are different. The warning is describing characteristics and actions of apostates (unregenerate people) even though the author is writing to Hebrew Christians. Only God knows who the real apostates are. Their association with Christians, even their repentance alone as in the case of Esau, is not equal to salvation. For the shaking will come. It will include both the shaking of the world's corrupt system and of the created things as well. It should be expected to happen at any time. It will happen at the second coming of Christ and in the events connected with the second coming. It will be God's process of purifying the world by beginning the shaking during the seven years of tribulation and continuing the shaking when Christ sets foot on earth to reign for a thousand years. The shaking ends with the formation of a new heaven and a new earth.

Accepted by the Faculty of Grace Theological Seminary  
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree  
Master of Divinity

Lee L. Kantenwein  
Adviser



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
Interest in the Study . . . . .	1
The Purpose . . . . .	2
The Procedure of Organization . . . . .	3
Chapter	
I. BACKGROUND OF THE PASSAGE . . . . .	4
Authorship . . . . .	4
Destination . . . . .	5
Recipients . . . . .	6
Date . . . . .	8
Circumstances . . . . .	8
Purpose . . . . .	10
Theme . . . . .	11
Argument . . . . .	11
Summary . . . . .	12
II. EXEGETICAL TREATMENT OF THE PASSAGE . . . . .	14
Verse 25 . . . . .	14
Translation . . . . .	15
Grammatical considerations . . . . .	15
Questions about the verse . . . . .	17
Verse 26 . . . . .	18
Translation . . . . .	19
Grammatical considerations . . . . .	19
Questions about the verse . . . . .	21
Verse 27 . . . . .	22
Translation . . . . .	22
Grammatical considerations . . . . .	22
Questions about the verse . . . . .	23
Verse 28 . . . . .	24
Translation . . . . .	25
Grammatical considerations . . . . .	25
Questions about the verse . . . . .	27
Verse 29 . . . . .	29
Translation . . . . .	30
Grammatical considerations . . . . .	30
Questions about the verse . . . . .	31
Summary . . . . .	32

III. PROBLEMS IN THE PASSAGE . . . . .	34
What Dispensations Are Involved? . . . . .	34
The dispensation of law . . . . .	34
The dispensation of grace . . . . .	35
The dispensation of the kingdom . . . . .	35
What Old Testament Meaning Is Involved . . . . .	36
The hermeneutical approach . . . . .	36
The use of illustration . . . . .	37
The use of a prophetic quote . . . . .	38
Hermeneutical problems . . . . .	38
Explanations for the lack of a	
verbatim quotation . . . . .	38
The difference in context . . . . .	40
Is The Author Warning Of Apostasy . . . . .	42
Definition . . . . .	43
Reasons . . . . .	44
Conclusion . . . . .	45
The Meaning Of "Shaking" . . . . .	45
Definition . . . . .	45
Time Period . . . . .	46
Summary . . . . .	48
CONCLUSION . . . . .	50
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	53

## INTRODUCTION

Hebrews 12:25-29 is the fifth of the warning passages found in the book.<sup>1</sup> It is an admonition against departing from God. Those people to whom the passage is addressed are exhorted to continually serve God with reverence and awe. God will certainly carry out His judgment by the removal of temporal things. Only eternal things will remain. Those who do not depart from God belong to what is eternal, His kingdom. To better understand the importance of this message an analytical approach will be given to the passage.

### Interest In The Study

An evangelist by the name of Morris Cerullo has written a book entitled, The Shaking Has Started. He claims the "shaking" mentioned in Hebrews 12:26-27 has begun and is continuing today.<sup>2</sup> Is this a true interpretation of the passage? A critical investigation of Hebrews 12:25-29 will determine if a "shaking" is truly existing today.

Also, the passage aids the understanding of the doctrines of the kingdom, eternal security, perseverance of the saints, and eschatology. The use of the Old Testament in the

---

<sup>1</sup>For the other four warning passages see pp. 10, 42-43 below.

<sup>2</sup>Morris Cerullo, The Shaking Has Started (San Diego: World Evangelism, Inc., 1980), p. iv.

New is also here. There is further interest in the study of the character of God and the possibility of apostasy among the recipients of the letter.

### The Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to find the answers to the questions and problems concerning Hebrews 12:25-29. There are minor problems that will be dealt with in a verse by verse analysis of the passage. These include whether the same speaker is the one who spoke from earth as the one who spoke from heaven. And is this the same heaven that is going to be shaken? Is the kingdom received in the present or in the future?

The major problem of the interpretation of the Old Testament in the New exists in this passage. The words and the context of the Old Testament have been slightly changed by the author of Hebrews. Does this bare on the inerrancy of Scripture?

There is also the problem of who is being warned here. Is this a genuine warning to Christians that God might disinherit them or only to those who are associated with Christians but are refusing to obey God's word? The "shaking" that is going to come is either political turmoil or destruction of the world or both. The answers lie in the passage and related passages. Related to the purpose is the hope that one will see the need for heeding God's word as the original author also hoped for the passage.

### The Procedure Of Organization

The first chapter will lay the foundation for the thesis by detailing the background of Hebrews. Authorship, destination, purpose, date, readership, and circumstances of the occasion will be explained. The second chapter will be the heart of the thesis because it will deal with the exegesis of the passage verse by verse. Minor problems mentioned in this introduction will also receive consideration. Greek words that are crucial to the passage will be defined and analyzed grammatically. The third and final chapter will deal with the major problems of Hebrews 12:25-29. A considerable amount of space will be given to the study of the Old Testament's use by the author of Hebrews compared with its general use by the apostolic writers. The issue of apostasy will be more closely examined in this chapter. Lastly, a definition and time period will be given for "shaking."

## CHAPTER I

### BACKGROUND OF THE PASSAGE

The book of Hebrews contains more than a few uncertainties concerning its background and one must know its background to properly understand the passage dealt with in this thesis. For this reason the problems connected with authorship and destination will be discussed. Also, other points concerning purpose, date, readership and circumstances of the occasion will be presented.

#### Authorship

Though some of the early King James Version translations name Paul in the heading, that heading did not appear until the third or fourth century A.D., and these headings are not part of the inspired text. The ancient Christian writers were not certain who wrote the book. Although the writer is known to the original readers, the person's name is not indicated. Therefore, naming a particular person as the author is simply speculation. The people suggested as possible authors are Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, Priscilla and Aquilla, and Luke and Silas.<sup>1</sup> Each has pro and con evidence

---

<sup>1</sup>Everett F. Harrison, Introduction to the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), pp. 374-80.

or little evidence at all. It is best to leave the authorship problem the way F. F. Bruce does: "In spite of traditional ascriptions and brilliant guesses, its authorship is unknown."<sup>1</sup>

Although God only knows the name of the author, there are other points about the author that are known and are significant to this study. His style of writing is Alexandria Greek using rhythmical cadences. His grammar is polished and clear. It is presented in a deliberate fashion. The author of Hebrews quotes exclusively from the Septuagint. There are 29 direct quotations from this Greek translation of the Old Testament plus 53 clear allusions to various other passages. This demonstrates that the author was a scholar of the Old Testament. Also, he was probably a second-generation Christian according to the words, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him" (Heb 2:3). Finally, the author of Hebrews is a courageous writer who fervently and powerfully confronts his readers, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ and warning them to be obedient to Him.

#### Destination

Where did these people live? The answer remains another uncertainty. However, most likely it was Rome. The

---

<sup>1</sup>Tenny, Merrill C., gen. ed., The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corp., 1975), 3:87.

following reasons are given for this conclusion.

First, Rome, as far as extant literature indicates, is the first place Hebrews appears to have been known.

Clement of Rome refers to Hebrews in his letter to the Corinthian Church on behalf of the Roman Church in 96 A.D.<sup>1</sup>

Second, Timothy, who is mentioned in Hebrews 13:23, would be well-known to Roman Christians. Philippians 2:19, 20 (if written from Rome) suggests that Timothy was sharing Paul's first Roman imprisonment.

Third, a large group of Hellenistic Christians lived in Rome and remained there for many years.

Fourth, the natural meaning of the phrase "they of Italy" (Heb 13:24) is "Christians from Italy who, living outside Italy, send greetings to their friends in Italy." It may mean, however, "Christians in Italy," but this would seem strange that someone located in Italy would use this phrase to send greetings to others in Italy because it includes all who lived in Italy.

Fifth, the reference to "foods" (Heb 13:9) suggests a tendency to put false values on eating ceremonial foods much like the tendency found in Romans 14:13-23.

### Recipients

Closely associated with the destination of the Epistle is its recipients, the readers. The evidence

---

<sup>1</sup>F. F. Bruce, The Epistle To The Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), p. xxxiv.



strongly supports the view that the readers were Jewish Christians.

First, even though the title "to the Hebrews" may not be original, it must belong to a very early tradition for it is found in the manuscripts Vaticanus and Sinaiticus and in the Chester Beatty papyrus.<sup>1</sup> The person who added the title in the last quarter of the second century certainly believed that the Epistle was addressed to Jewish Christians.

Second, the author constantly appeals to the Old Testament scripture. This implies that his readers would be willing to listen to the authority of the Old Testament even if they were drifting away from the gospel. They would do this if they were Jewish Christians. In fact, the whole argument of the book is developed against a background of Old Testament allusions (angels, Moses, Aaron, priesthood, sacrifice, etc.).

Third, when the author of Hebrews warns his readers against "falling away from the living God" he uses the example of Israel in the wilderness. Under Moses Israel disobeyed God and were rejected by God. Therefore, what was possible for Jews in the wilderness is also possible for the readers of Hebrews.

Fourth, the author insists that the readers no longer go back to the Old Covenant. The New Covenant of Jesus Christ is the better way. This tendency would most likely

---

<sup>1</sup>Thomas Hewitt, The Epistle To The Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960), p. 32.

belong to Jews.

### Date

A date before 70 A.D. is likely because it was in that year the Roman general Titus conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. This event could have been used in the author's argument, but it is not mentioned. Also, a first century date is required because Clement of Rome refers to the Epistle in 96 A.D.<sup>1</sup> The date is generally accepted as 64 A.D. because the persecution of Nero in 64 A.D. had not yet occurred. The words of Hebrews 12:24, "You have not yet resisted unto blood," would indicate this. Chapter 10:32 ff. was probably a mild persecution under Claudius in 49 A.D.<sup>2</sup> Finally, the author and the readers came to know the gospel from people who themselves had listened to the teachings of Jesus.

### Circumstances

To understand the message of Hebrews 12:25-29 fully, it is important to appreciate the circumstances in which the passage was written. The Jewish nation began to see Christianity as a force to be fought. It was no longer possible for Christians to worship in the temple precincts. This seems to have caused discouragement among the readers. It is also possible, according to Hewitt, "that the Jewish

---

<sup>1</sup>Bruce, Hebrews, p. xlii.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. xliii.

nation was facing a serious crisis and was making a strong appeal to all Jews for their help and loyalty."<sup>1</sup>

Judaism, also, enjoyed freedom as a religion under Rome. Christian Jews were tempted to take advantage of this situation. When persecution came the Jewish Christians might revert back to Judaism if their faith were not strong. The writer argued that to go back to the customs and practices of Judaism would be equal to apostasy. Repeatedly, the writer pleads with his readers not to revert to their old life, but rather to obey the Word of God.

Another important circumstance to consider is the lack of maturity among the readers. The impression that they had been Christians for some time is given in Hebrews 13:7. They should have been teachers by now, but they were still babies in the faith needing teaching themselves. Instead of having the strong meat of Christian doctrine to eat, they were only fit to eat baby food. They were grieving so much about their sufferings that they failed to fully recognize the power and greatness of Jesus Christ.

Hebrew Christians would have to clearly distinguish between Judaism and Christianity. Christianity has its roots in Judaism, but the two are by no means the same. The Hebrew Christians needed to realize that the Old Covenant was simply a shadow of the New. To return to the law of Moses after becoming free from the law through Christ would

---

<sup>1</sup>Hewitt, Hebrews, p. 40.

be like Israel going back to Egypt and slavery. Thus, the stage is set for the purpose of the book.

### Purpose

In the Epistle there are three main purposes. First, there is the purpose of confirming these Hebrew Christians in their Christian faith. The author's main method of dealing with this purpose is to stress the finality of Christianity, and its superiority over all other religions and especially Judaism.

The second purpose is to comfort these Christians in their trials and difficulties. The author tells them of the need to endure and reminds them of the promises of God and of a great reward (Heb 10:35, 36).

The third purpose is to caution these Hebrew Christians concerning the danger of apostasy, the rejection of light. This purpose is developed through five warning passages:

1. Heed the Word of God (Heb 2:1-4)
2. Do not be hardened in Unbelief (Heb 3:12-14)
3. Maturity affects assurance (Heb 5:11-6:12)
4. Do not reject Christ (Heb 10:26-31)
5. Heed the Word of God (Heb 12:25-29)

Hebrews 12:25-29 is the final warning. It emphasizes the importance of listening to the Word of God and obeying it. The first and last warnings deal with this subject. It is very important to the author that the Hebrews understand this. He began with the fact that God spoke (Heb 1:1). Because it is God who spoke, the readers had better listen.

Hebrews 12:25-29 is also an admonition against departing from God. The readers are exhorted to continually serve God with reverence and awe. God will certainly carry out His judgment by the removal of temporal things. Only eternal things will remain. Those who do not depart from God belong to what is eternal, His kingdom. Refusal to have faith in Jesus Christ leads to judgment and loss of the kingdom of God. As heirs of the unshakable kingdom the readers should cut the bonds that tied them to their past and go forth to Christ.

#### Theme

The theme of Hebrews is the superiority of Christ and thus of Christianity. God's final and ultimate revelation has been given in His Son. God will not speak beyond Jesus Christ. The key word of this Epistle is "better." Christ is better than the Old Testament system in every way. The readers were having second thoughts about having left Judaism. The author is showing that what they have in Christ is far superior to what they had in Judaism. He uses this theme as well as the warning passages to convince the Hebrew Christians to continue their growth and spiritual health as Christians.

#### Argument

The first ten chapters of the Epistle make the greatest of all Christologies. In sequence Jesus Christ is explained as superior to the Old Testament prophets (Heb 1:

1-3), superior to the angels (Heb 1:4-14), superior to Moses (Heb 3:1-4:13), and to Aaron and the Aaronic Priesthood (Heb 4:14-10:18). The practical consequence of these chapters is that faith in Jesus Christ is the superior way. This is the argument of Hebrews 10:19-12:25. The argument of Chapter 12 applies the past experiences of Israel to the present trials of the Hebrew Christians.

The author of Hebrews develops six important points concerning Chapter 12. First, there is an exhortation to run the race without any sin because of the great many witnesses from the past who are watching (Heb 12:1-2). Second, Jesus who is the pioneer and perfecter of faith is the example to keep on running because of His great suffering (Heb 12:2-3). The third point is that God disciplines His people as His sons for their good and as a way to share God's holiness (Heb 12:4-13). Fourth, there is an exhortation to peace and purity using the example of not being like Esau (Heb 12:14-17). Fifth, the advantages of the heavenly Zion and of Jesus Christ are shown over the earthly Sinai (Heb 12:18-24). Sixth is the fifth warning of not departing from God, but instead heeding His word (Heb 12:25-29).

Chapter 13 concludes the Epistle by giving personal instructions. This includes social and religious duties and closes with a salutation and benediction.

### Summary

In this chapter important information has been assembled about the background of the passage. The author

who is unknown has taken a strong and courageous stand for the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. His reason for such a strong argument was to bring these Hebrew Christians to maturity. He knew that matters were going to worsen for Christians in Rome and that strong faith in Jesus Christ was needed for survival. His reasoning develops through the Epistle with one point after another extolling the virtues of the New Covenant over the Old. Interlaced with this reasoning are the five warnings of which the passage under consideration is the last. With the foundation of this chapter laid, the building blocks will be the exegesis of each verse of the passage in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER II

### EXEGETICAL TREATMENT OF THE PASSAGE

This chapter will include a verse by verse analysis of Hebrews 12:25-29. Focus will be given to the individual Greek words and their meaning according to grammatical considerations.

#### Verse 25

The thought of this verse is linked to the immediately preceding verse. Because Jesus Christ's sprinkled blood speaks better than the blood of Abel (Heb 12:24), there is every reason to obey Him. This is the same as saying that God speaks to His people by virtue of the redemption He has freely provided in Christ's blood sacrifice.

Also, verse 25 continues what was said at the very beginning of the Epistle, namely, that "in these last days God has spoken to us by a Son" (Heb 1:2). To refuse to listen and obey the one who is speaking is like trampling on the blood of the Son of God (Heb 10:29). The recipients of this Epistle are Christians.<sup>1</sup> They have fellowshiped together in a believing community. To not heed God's word is to treat with contempt the goodness of God's grace (Heb

---

<sup>1</sup>For a detailed discussion of this matter see pp. 6-8 above.



6:5, 6). It would be the same as rebelling against the living God (Heb 3:12). Instead of turning back to Judaism, the author is telling them to obey God by listening to His Son and growing to maturity.

#### Translation

"See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused Him who warned them on earth, much less shall we escape if we reject Him who warns from heaven."

#### Grammatical Considerations

Verse 25 begins with βλέπετε and is used here with the idea of "see to it." This verb translated "see" is a present imperative which speaks of continuous action. Wuest states that the word conveys the meaning "ever keep a watchful eye open."<sup>1</sup> The negative particle μή suggests that one should deny even the thought of παραιτήσθε: "to prevent the consequences of an act by protesting against it and disavowing it, to decline, refuse or avoid." The word, λαλοῦντα, is a present active participle showing durative action. Thus, the idea of the first sentence is, "always see to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking."

The thought of not refusing Him who is speaking is also found in verse 19 of Hebrews 12. The author compares the readers with Israel at Mount Sinai. At Sinai, Israel

---

<sup>1</sup>Kenneth S. Wuest, Hebrews in the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1947), p. 229.

was so afraid that they begged God to stop speaking. They closed their ears to God. The readers were also in danger of closing their ears to God because of rebelliousness, not fear. In fact, the same verb, *παραιτέομαι*, is used in both verse 19 and verse 25. Hughes states the following:

The Hebrew Christians whom he is addressing were in danger, like their forebears under Moses, of stopping their ears against the voice of God Himself. While it is true that in the Old Testament accounts (Ex. 20:19 and Dt. 5:25-27) the motivation is fear rather than rebelliousness, the writer of Hebrews doubtless has in mind the unhappy history of the people of Israel in the wilderness which was repeatedly marred by refusal and disobedience, and so sees in their request at Sinai that God should no longer speak to them a parable of the hardness of their hearts.<sup>1</sup>

The second phrase of verse 25 beginning with *εἰ γὰρ* is an example that one cannot escape God's wrath if one keeps refusing to obey God. Escape, flight to safety (*ἐξέφυγον*) is absolutely denied (*οὐκ*). The translation of *χορηματίζοντα* is "to admonish, to warn." Here it is a timeless, descriptive, present participle with the article. In this passage it refers to the act of God in admonishing and warning the people. It happened at Mt. Sinai and was also happening as the Epistle was being written. The readers, if they continue in their unfaithfulness, will not escape the punishment of God. Here, the author includes himself. He uses the personal pronoun "we" and it is emphatic. The point is emphasized that there is no escape for those who reject the Word of God. And

---

<sup>1</sup>Philip E. Hughes, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), p. 556.

this refusal to heed God's voice was a current problem as indicated by ἀποστρέφόμενοι which is a present participle, speaking of action then happening, meaning: "we who are turning away or rejecting." Additional words holding significance in verse 25 are the adverbs πολὺ and μᾶλλον, translated here "much less." The idea here is that God's present communication is far, far superior to the one He made to the Israelites at Sinai, so there is even less possibility for the recipients to escape God's judgment.

#### Questions About The Verse

Who is the one who warned on earth? Is this a different person from the one who warned from heaven? Hughes says that there is a difference of opinion: "Many scholars understand two different speakers to be intended, maintaining that the former refers to Moses, the earthly and merely human mediator of the law, and the latter to Christ, the Mediator from heaven of the new covenant."<sup>1</sup> Others, such as F. F. Bruce, contend that God is the sole speaker intended.<sup>2</sup> This seems to be the correct view because of the following reasons: Verse 26 confirms that God is the only speaker by stating: "His voice then shook the earth; but now he has promised. . . ." The reason for it being God speaking is that it was definitely God's voice, not that of Moses or an angel, that shook the earth at Sinai. The fact that verse

---

<sup>1</sup>Hughes, Hebrews, p. 556.

<sup>2</sup>Bruce, Hebrews, p. 381.

25 is linked with 19 and 24 confirms the speaker as God for it was God's speaking, not Moses' mediatorship that Israel refused (Exod 20:19).

If God is the speaker both times, how is "on earth" explained in the case of the Old Testament incident? Kent answers this by stating "that the author regards God as descending upon Sinai (see Exod 19:11, 18, 20), and His speaking of the law was from a geographic locale."<sup>1</sup>

#### Verse 26

To understand the background for this verse one must realize that the earthquake of Mt. Sinai was deeply rooted in the memory of Israel. Psalm 68 gives this account:

O God, when you did go forth before your people,  
When you did march through the wilderness,  
The earth quaked, the heavens also dropped rain at the  
presence of God;  
Sinai itself quaked at the presence of God,  
The God of Israel (Ps 68:7-8).

An earthquake in the Old Testament was predicted many times as happening in the future day of the Lord. Isaiah 13:13 states, "I will make the heavens to tremble, and the earth shall be shaken out of its place, in the wrath of Jehovah of hosts, and in the day of His fierce anger." Isaiah 2:19, 21 explains that the coming day of the Lord will be "when He arises to shake mightily the earth." Isaiah 24:19, 20 predicts that the earth will be shaken violently and "will fall, never to rise again."

---

<sup>1</sup>Homer A. Kent, Jr., The Epistle to the Hebrews (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1972), p. 275.

### Translation

Whose voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven."

### Grammatical Considerations

The words of verse 26 go back to τὸν λαλοῦντα "Him, who is speaking" (Heb 12:25). The Greek word, τότε, refers to the time of Moses, and τὴν γῆν ἐσάλευσεν should be understood as describing the physical events that occurred when the law was given. "And Mount Sinai was altogether smoking, because the Lord came down on it in fire: and the smoke of it went up like the smoke in a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly" (Exod 19:18). This was not a figurative shaking. The mountain actually shook. The smoke and fire were physical realities and so was the quake. Judges 5:4, 5 confirms this: "The earth quaked, the heavens also dripped, even the clouds dripped water. The mountains quaked at the presence of the Lord; this Sinai, at the presence of the Lord, the God of Israel."

The Greek word used here for "shook" is ἐσάλευσεν. It is an aorist active verb showing that the action has taken place. The word is used of violent elemental convulsions as in Matthew 24:29: "The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken."

The next phrase, νῦν δὲ ἐπ' ἡγγελται, points to the

times of Jesus Christ, the age in which the author was writing. The verb, ἐπὶγγελλται, is used in a middle or active sense, as it is used in Romans 4:21, and means "He has promised."

The author next quotes the prophecy of Haggai 2:6. The context of the prophecy in Haggai is to assure the governor and Joshua the high priest at the dedication of the second temple in 516 B.C. that God would someday in the future restore the glory to the temple.

For thus says the Lord of hosts, "Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land. And I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations; and I will fill this house with glory," says the Lord of hosts (Hag 2:6, 7).

Two subjects are dealt with in the prophecy of Haggai. The first is the great glory that will some day fill the temple in spite of its present state of poverty. The second is the continuation and sovereignty of the Davidic kingdom in spite of the bleak times. Westcott well states the thoughts of the prophet:

The prophet looks forward from the feeble beginnings of the new spiritual and national life to that final manifestation of the majesty and kingdom of God in which the discipline begun on Sinai is to have an end. He naturally recalls in thought the phenomena which accompanied the giving of the Law; and foreshadows a correspondence between the circumstances of the first and the last scenes in the divine revelation. That which was local and preparatory at Sinai is seen in the consummation to be universal.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>B. F. Westcott, The Epistle to the Hebrews (London: Macmillan, 1889; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), p. 420.

### Questions About The Verse

Verse 26 contains the phrase, "but now he has promised." The Greek word *vũv* is translated "now." Does *vũv* refer to a later time or to the times of the New Testament? If *vũv* does refer to the times of Jesus Christ and his church, where is the record in the New Testament of God saying this verse? Was it first spoken by Christ? Lindsay states, "Some take this view, and conceive that the reference is either to the famous prediction in the 24th chapter of Matthew, or to some other discourse of Christ not recorded in the Gospels."<sup>1</sup> But the clearest answer is that the *vũv* of the author points to the period to which the prediction refers more than to the date of the prediction. God's promise to shake the earth and heaven to be an effective warning would be expected to happen at any moment. Therefore, the promise referred to is the imminent fulfillment of Haggai 2:6. The prophet's words spoken by the author develop his argument to prove the superiority of the gospel to the law and to show the strong claims which the gospel of Jesus Christ has to the reader's respect and obedience.

There is emphasis in this verse that the last shaking will be the worst for not only earth will be shaken, but also heaven. What does *οὐρανόν*, heaven, refer to in this verse? Is it the atmospheric heavens, the celestial heavens, or the abode of God? The Greek meaning originally was describing

---

<sup>1</sup>William Lindsay, Lectures on the Epistle to the Hebrews (Philadelphia: Smith, English, and Co., 1867), p. 307.

all that was above the earth. The context of heaven in this verse seems to indicate that it is temporary and can be destroyed. It can be destroyed because of man's sin and God's subsequent curse. Therefore, heaven must here refer to the created material universe, the planets and stars. This correlates with those verses that present a renewed or re-created universe such as Isaiah 51:16; Matthew 19:28; 24:29-31, 35; Romans 8:19-23; and 2 Corinthians 5:17.

### Verse 27

In verse 27 the divine interpretation is given. The author uses the phrase "yet once more" from his quotation of Haggai 2:6 to stress the fact that the new shaking mentioned by the prophet will be the final one. In this future judgment there will be a removing of all that does not survive this experience of being divinely shaken. The author wants his readers to clearly understand that there will be no second chances after this event occurs. So, now is the time to heed God's voice before it is too late.

### Translation

And this "yet once more" indicates the removal of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, in order that the things which are not shaken may remain.

### Grammatical Considerations

The Greek ἔτι ἄπαξ is understood by the author as emphatic: "Yet once, and no more." The word "removal" is



the translation of μετάθεσιν which means "to transfer to a new basis, to transpose, to change." Wuest explains its meaning in this verse as follows:

It refers to the act of God transferring to a new basis, this present universe which is under the curse of Adam's sin, that new basis being a new and perfect universe. John speaks of this in the words "I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away" (Rev 21:1). The universe was created by God, but will be made to pass away, and to be substituted by a new universe which will exist forever. Thus, transitory, perishable things must pass away, in order that the eternal things may appear in their abiding value.<sup>1</sup>

The phrase ὡς πεποιημένων is used here as a perfect passive participle and means "as things that are made or created." Lindsay gives the following analysis of its meaning in the context of verse 27:

It seems to point to some inferiority of constitution in the things spoken of, and is analogous to χειροποίητα in chap. 9:11, 24. The things were to be shaken ὡς πεποιημένων, as things made, that is, because of their character, or nature, or constitution. The idea of their being perishable or mutable is conceived to be embodied in the way of their having been made or appointed.<sup>2</sup>

Also, ἵνα μείνῃ is connected with τὰ μὴ σαλευόμενα, "the things that cannot be shaken." "Ἰνα is the conjunction showing purpose. The purpose of ἔτι ἅπαξ is to point to one great change: that the things not to be shaken might remain.

#### Questions About The Verse

The words "Yet once more" are taken from the Septuagint. Do they actually portray the sense of the

---

<sup>1</sup>Wuest, Hebrews, pp. 230, 231.

<sup>2</sup>Lindsay, Lectures on Hebrews, p. 311.

original? Lindsay answers this question with the following information: "The Hebrew, it is said, should be read as one phrase: not, 'Yet once, it is a little while;' but 'Yet one little while.' But according to either view, the phrase seems equally suitable to the apostle's purpose."<sup>1</sup>

Is the author referring to the one phrase "Yet once more" or is the entire sentence from Haggai in mind? Again Lindsay answers the question:

With the object of evading the difficulty connected with the alleged inaccuracy of the Septuagint, Hengstenberg conceives that the apostle's conclusion is not grounded upon the words ἐτι ἄπαξ, but that these words are mentioned merely as the beginning: τὸ δέ, this, ἐτι ἄπαξ, κ.τ.λ., proves. But Tholuck's objection to this is quite decisive, that the whole sentence is quoted in the previous verse; and that, if the apostle had here referred to the whole, he would have simply said, τοῦτο δέ.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, it may be concluded that "Yet once more" is singled out by the author for a specific reason and that was to warn that the next shaking would be the final one.

#### Verse 28

What will survive this shaking? This verse answers that question. The unshakable kingdom will survive. Since the Hebrew Christians are receivers of this kingdom, they should be grateful. Their gratitude should be demonstrated in service; a service that is full of reverence and awe. The author has the same recurring theme here of exhorting his readers to keep active in the faith.

---

<sup>1</sup>Lindsay, Lectures on Hebrews, p. 311.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

### Translation

Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us be grateful, by which we may offer service well pleasing to God with reverence and awe.

### Grammatical Considerations

The use of  $\delta\iota\omicron$ , a conjunction proclaiming a logical conclusion, demonstrates the author's persistent one-sided argument that there is every reason to obey God. The appeal to obey God is based on the reward of living in this unshakable kingdom. In verses 25-27 it was based on escaping the shaking, but the same appeal to obey God remains throughout the passage.

A "kingdom" from βασιλείαν refers to the kingdom of God. This kingdom is described in verse 22 as "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." It is where God eternally dwells with his people and reigns in righteousness (Rev 21:1ff.). The light of this kingdom is the glory of God and the Lamb (Rev 21:23). It is a group committed to the Sovereign Lord of all who governs this kingdom (Rev 19:16). Hughes gives the following convincing statement for why this kingdom cannot be shaken: "It is an unshakable kingdom because it is a purified kingdom from which every shakable thing, or, in other words, everything stained by defilement and corruption, has been excluded, and in which there is a perfect and unfailing unison of goodness and justice and joy."<sup>1</sup> And the reason the author can include

---

<sup>1</sup>Hughes, Hebrews, p. 559.

himself and his readers as among the members of this kingdom is because they have been made pure through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The present tense of the participle παραλαμβάνοντες suggests that Christians now are receiving the unshakable kingdom. However, the full reception of the kingdom is not yet complete. The Hebrew Christians are presently heirs and citizens, but the final experiencing of the full inheritance is still awaiting.

A good translation of ἔχωμεν χάριν is "Let us be grateful." The King James Version says "let us have grace." The New American Standard Version translates it as "let us show gratitude." The present tense again indicates that this should be a current state of mind. There are six occurrences of this phrase in the New Testament. Four of these clearly have the sense of being grateful (Luke 17:9; 1 Tim 1:12; 2 Tim 1:3; 3 John 4). Two have the meaning of receiving grace, favor, or benefaction (Acts 2:47; 2 Cor 1:15). Either meaning would fit into the context of this passage in Hebrews. Hebrews 4:16 urges the readers to come to the throne where grace is given, and thus be enabled to serve God acceptably. Hebrews 13:15, on the other hand, speaks of serving God by offering him praise and thanksgiving through one's lips. In Hebrews 12:28 showing gratitude is a way of acceptably serving God. The Greek verb λατρεύωμεν is attracted to ἔχωμεν conveying the meaning "let us thank God, and by that gratitude let us serve Him."

The Greek word for "reverence" used here is *εὐλαβεῖ-  
ας* which means "caution, circumspection, discretion." The translation of *δέους* is "awe." This is a godly fear. The fundamental idea is "timid apprehension of danger." This is not the same as *φόβος* which has a meaning of the terror a person feels when he is in danger. Wuest offers this observation about the meaning in this verse: "Here *δέος* speaks, not of a slavish, cringing apprehension, but of a wholesome regard for a holy God and His standards and requirements, which if a person violates, he must suffer the consequences."<sup>1</sup>

#### Questions About The Verse

There is a question as to whether the verse is saying the readers already have the kingdom or are to receive the kingdom. Lindsay answers this question the following way:

Calvin, Limborch, Bengel, and others, view *παραλαμβάνοντες* as part of the admonition. Let us, receiving, cherish gratitude; i.e. let us be grateful for it. But without a doubt, the first clause belongs to the subject; for you may say, receiving a kingdom; but throw it into the shape of an admonition, and the clause must be definite: let us receive the kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, since the clause is not definite, it should be translated "since we receive a kingdom." It is a matter of fact, not an admonition.

Another question could be asked. How is the word

---

<sup>1</sup>Wuest, Hebrews, p. 231.

<sup>2</sup>Lindsay, Hebrews, p. 313.

fear used differently in verse 28 than it was used in verse 21? The answer is that a different word for fear is used in verse 21. Verse 21 has *ἐκφοβος* which has a different meaning than *δέους* of verse 28. Henrichsen offers this helpful explanation of the fear in verse 21:

The law of Sinai produced a fear relationship (see Heb 12:18-21). The terror of the law was such that the people urged Moses to ask God not to speak to them in this way again (see Deut 5:24-27). Even Moses regarded it as a fearful experience.

Fear enters our relationship with God when we view it as being the result of what we do. If our acceptance by God is dependent on our performance, as was the case with the Mosaic covenant, we have cause to fear.<sup>1</sup>

What then is the cure for this problem of fear?

This was not the relationship the Hebrew Christians were to have with God. When a relationship is based on performance rather than on love and acceptance, the result is fear. Henrichsen states the following answer as to what the cure is:

The cure is easy to see. It is spelled out for us in the admonition to look to Mount Zion, not Sinai, to Jesus and Abraham, not Moses. The Mosaic covenant of law did not replace the Abrahamic covenant of grace. The law was given to teach us our need for Christ. It was never intended to be the basis of our relationship with God.<sup>2</sup>

Since this is true, what should our relationship with God be? The answer lies in verse 28. Our relationship should be one of gratitude. It should be one of service with reverence and a godly fear; one of awe. Henrichsen

---

<sup>1</sup>Walter A. Henrichsen, After The Sacrifice (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corp., 1979), p. 172.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

describes it like this:

The fear mentioned here (v. 28) is not the fear of not being accepted by God, but rather the fear of the awful consequences of sin. It is a "godly fear," "reverence and awe." It means we are willing to appropriate the grace of God, "and so worship God acceptably."<sup>1</sup>

This is another advantage of the New Covenant over the Old. It is another reason why the readers of Hebrews should choose to follow God completely in a relationship of grateful awe.

#### Verse 29

This verse is derived from Deuteronomy 4:24 which says, "For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God." The context in Deuteronomy is a warning to remember God's covenant with Moses and, thus, to not worship any idols. The fire symbolizes God's holiness and purity. He will not accept less than worship to Himself alone.

Deuteronomy 4:24 is from the same passage that was referred to earlier in Hebrews 12:18, 19. The fire and smoke that showed God's presence at Mount Sinai were real reminders that God's consuming holiness destroys all evil that continues in this world. The readers of Hebrews were going to have to deal with more than physical smoke and fire. They would have to deal with the fire of the living God if they did not soon heed His Word.

Wuest gives the following statement as the setting of this verse:

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 174.

The historical background of this last statement here is that of the apostate Jew who having left the temple sacrifices, and having made a profession of faith in Messiah as High Priest, now renounces that professed faith and returns to the Levitical system. To that person, God is a consuming fire.<sup>1</sup>

God's fiery holiness is seen by Israel at Mount Sinai and is also repeated in New Testament times. Christians must never forget this aspect of God's character.

#### Translation

For indeed our God is a consuming fire.

#### Grammatical Considerations

The adverbial use of καὶ is used here adding emphasis to the statement translated as "indeed." This shows the certainty and truth of the statement.

The Greek word γὰρ is used as a coordinating conjunction tying this verse with the preceding one. The word serves to join this statement, as another reason for serving God with reverence and awe, with the reason given in the last verse.

The Greek word πῦρ is translated "fire" and used as a predicate nominative showing that God in this context is compared to a fire. But this is not any type of fire. It is a fire that consumes καταναλίσκων. This word is a present participle in the active sense. While it is true that at the final judgment God will be a consuming fire, this verse shows that right now God is a consuming fire. In the

---

<sup>1</sup>Wuest, Hebrews, p. 231.



Old Testament God put distance between the sacred Ark of the Covenant and the rank and file of the people even when the camp was on the march. In the New Covenant the distance has been removed, but the burning holiness remains.

Marcus Dodds explains that verse 29 is an additional reason to obey God. "The fire and smoke which manifested His presence at Sinai (ver. 18) were but symbols of that consuming holiness that destroys all persistent inexcusable evil. It is God Himself who is the fire with which you have to do, not a mere physical, material, quenchable fire."<sup>1</sup>

F. B. Meyer sees a comfort and a blessing in the thought of God as a consuming fire. "When we yield to God's love, and open our hearts to Him, He enters into us, and becomes within us a consuming fire; not to ourselves, but to the evil within us."<sup>2</sup>

#### Questions About The Verse

It is possible to translate the verse to say, "for our God too is a consuming fire." Does this mean that the God of the Christians is like the God of the Old Testament, suggesting two different Gods? The answer is no. Constant expression is given throughout the Epistle to the writer's belief that the God of the Old Covenant is also the God of

---

<sup>1</sup>Marcus Dodds, "The Epistle to the Hebrews," in vol. 4 of Expositor's Greek Testament, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (New York: George H. Doran Company, n.d.), p. 374.

<sup>2</sup>F. B. Meyer, The Way into the Holiest (Westchester, IL: Good News Publishers, 1960), p. 53.

the New. This is evidenced by the opening verses of Hebrews (1:1, 2). The very same God who spoke through the prophets in the Old Testament now speaks through His Son.

What is the reason that this aspect of God's character so often found in the Old Testament (Exod 24:17; Deut 5:4; Isa 33:14) is so stressed in this verse? It is to warn the readers against a false acceptance of the Christian faith. At the time of Christ's second coming, just as the material and transitory will disappear and the eternal and permanent will remain, so what is false and evil will be revealed in the fire of God's holiness. Those who have not obeyed God by following Christ will be consumed in God's holy fire. Therefore, those who refuse God's final revelation in Christ should soberly weigh the consequences in the light of this warning. And those who are believers need not be filled with terror at God's coming judgment, but the prospect of it should instill in them a healthy respect for God's absolute holiness.

#### Summary

The crucial Greek words of Hebrews 12:25-29 have been examined in this chapter. To make his point the author of Hebrews refers to what he wrote earlier. God's voice had been heard from Mount Sinai (Heb 12:18-21). It was a terrifying experience. He said that God's voice "shook the earth." God is not through shaking the earth and next time it will not be just the earth, "but also the heavens" (Heb 12:26). Therefore, obey and fear the Lord.

There are still some problems left to be solved. What dispensations are involved in this passage? How is the Old Testament used? Is the author warning of apostasy? When will the events of this passage occur? Will the earth be completely destroyed? What does this passage say about the kingdom? These problems form the subjects of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER III

### PROBLEMS IN THE PASSAGE

The purpose of this chapter is to deal more completely with specific questions and problems. It is hoped that this chapter will show how Hebrews 12:25-29 aids in understanding doctrines of the kingdom, dispensations, eternal security and eschatology.

#### What Dispensations Are Involved?

God has worked in varying ways with His people throughout history. These ways are identified with successive time periods in God's sovereign plan. Three of these time periods known as dispensations are involved in the passage. These are the dispensation of law when the first warning on Mount Sinai was given; the dispensation of grace when the Epistle was written; and the dispensation of the kingdom which begins with the final shaking.

#### The Dispensation Of Law

The dispensation of law began in Exodus 19:3 at the time when the Lord first shook Mount Sinai. It extended up to the day of Pentecost when the church had its beginning. The Mosaic law was directed toward Israel. The readers of Hebrews were considering turning back to this law. This

law, known as the Mosaic covenant, was temporary. It was only to be in force until Christ should come (Gal 3:24-25). It was also conditional with its blessings based on obedience. The author of Hebrews points out that the law could not sanctify or perfect (Heb 7:18-19). In this passage the author includes, among those things which are shaken, the old levitical system and the impermanent order of things instituted through Moses, which have been surpassed and superseded by the one perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

#### The Dispensation Of Grace

The dispensation of grace begins at Acts 2:1 and continues throughout the New Testament. This dispensation is different in that it concerns the church comprising Jewish and Gentile believers.<sup>1</sup> This was the dispensation to which the Hebrew Christians belonged. The Mosaic law was completely canceled as to its immediate application, but continues to testify to the holiness of God (Heb 12:29) and provides many spiritual lessons by application. The author uses Hebrews 12:25 to help his readers realize this. He also wants his readers to realize that this dispensation is superior over the dispensation of law.

#### The Dispensation Of The Kingdom

Christ reigns on earth during the dispensation of the kingdom and all people obey Him. It begins with the

---

<sup>1</sup>Lewis Sperry Chafer, Major Bible Themes, revised by John F. Walvoord (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), p. 135.

second coming of Christ (Matt 24:29-31; Rev 19:11-16).<sup>1</sup> It is the kingdom referred to in Hebrews 12:28. The author states that it is unshakable, showing its permanency. Verse 28 also mentions that the kingdom is being received. Alva J. McClain gives the following comment concerning this:

It is not unusual for Scripture, on behalf of believers, to assert ownership regarding certain blessings even before they are possessed in Christian experience. Compare 1 Corinthians 3:21-22 where "all things" are said to belong to the believer, yet among these things are some that are yet "to come." The ownership is legally certain, though the experience of possession may be future.<sup>2</sup>

The receiving of the kingdom is shown as a key reason by the author to show gratitude and service to God (Heb 12:28).

#### What Old Testament Meaning Is Involved?

The author of Hebrews quotes the prophecy of Haggai 2:6. The quotation is not verbatim, but the correct thought is there. The author gives the divine interpretation of the expression, "yet once more." He does so to stress that the new shaking mentioned by the prophet will be the final one. What hermeneutical approach is in use here by the author? Why is the quotation not verbatim? What is the Old Testament background?

#### The Hermeneutical Approach

To better understand how the author of Hebrews used the Old Testament in Hebrews 12:25-29 a look at the New

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>2</sup>Alva J. McClain, The Greatness Of The Kingdom (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1968), p. 436.

Testament's writers view of the Old Testament is helpful.

As the New Testament was written, the writers were conscious that they were guided by the Spirit of God and freely claimed that the New Testament was inspired equally with the Old. Just as David wrote by the Spirit (Matt 22:43) and as the psalmist was inspired (Heb 3:7-11; cf. Ps 95:7-11), so the New Testament likewise claims inspiration. In 1 Timothy 5:18, both Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7 are quoted as equally inspired Scripture. In 2 Peter 3:15-16, the epistles of Paul are classified as Scripture which should be received as the Word of God like all other Scripture. The New Testament obviously claims to have the same inspiration as the Old.<sup>1</sup>

The writers of the New Testament basically interpreted the Old Testament as a preparation for the gospel of Jesus Christ. "Generally it may be said Christ and the Christian dispensation are regarded as the one end to which the Old Testament points and in which it finds its complete accomplishment."<sup>2</sup>

The author of Hebrews uses the Old Testament in two ways in Hebrews 12:25-29. First, he draws upon an illustration of God's power from Jewish history. Second, he quotes a prophecy found in Haggai 2:6, 7. Following is an examination of these two uses.

### The use of illustration

In Hebrews 12:25-29 the author of Hebrews uses the incident of the shaking of Mount Sinai (Exod 19:18) as an illustration of God's great power. He uses this illustration to show that it is folly to think that one can escape

---

<sup>1</sup>Chafer, Themes, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup>Westcott, Hebrews, p. 480.

God. He bases this point on his belief that the shaking of Mount Sinai actually happened as the Old Testament states. He hopes his readers will be exhorted to heed God's word, first, by drawing attention to this Old Testament incident and, then, by explaining that the second shaking will be worse (as shown by the prophecy of Haggai 2:6, 7).

#### The use of a prophetic quote

F. F. Bruce states, "To our author the Old Testament is a divine oracle from first to last; not only passages which in their original setting are the direct utterance of God (such as Ps. 110:4, 'Thou art a priest forever . . .') but others are treated as spoken by God."<sup>1</sup> Haggai 2:6,7 is a direct utterance of God. The author of Hebrews believes that if God said that the heavens and earth will be shaken, then it will certainly happen. This fact is used to exhort the readers to obey God in the present age (Heb 12:26, 27).

#### Hermeneutical Problems

There are two problems concerning the hermeneutics of the author of Hebrews in Hebrews 12:25-29. First, he does not use a verbatim quotation from the Old Testament and second, he has some contextual differences.

#### Explanations for the lack of a verbatim quotation

The Septuagint version of the Old Testament is regularly quoted throughout the Epistle to the Hebrews.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Bruce, Hebrews, p. xlix.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



Since Greek was the most wide-spread language of the first century, the Greek Septuagint was probably the most read text of Scripture in use. The Septuagint had greater respectability than the manuscripts of targums of the Pentateuch and the prophets because the targums were interpretive translations and the Septuagint was a rather literal translation. The Dead Sea Scrolls have proven the Septuagint even more respectable.<sup>1</sup>

Concerning Hebrews 12:26 and Haggai 2:6, there are variants. J. C. McCullough comments:

In the first half of the quotation there are two variants which occur in some LXX witnesses but which are not found in Hebrews (the occurrence of  $\delta\tau\iota$  and  $\sigma\epsilon\acute{\iota}\omega$ ). In the second half the author adds  $\text{o}\acute{\upsilon}\ \mu\acute{o}\nu\omicron\nu$ , and transposes the phrases  $\tau\eta\nu\ \gamma\eta\nu$  and  $\tau\omicron\nu\ \omicron\upsilon\pi\alpha\nu\acute{o}\nu$ . These changes were made for stylistic reasons to fit the quotation into its context in the epistle and for the sake of emphasis.<sup>2</sup>

Why did the author of Hebrews feel free to make the changes?

To the New Testament writers the sense of a passage was more important than precise wording. They relied on their memories to duplicate much of the Old Testament Scripture. "Verbatim quotation was generally foreign to the first century A.D."<sup>3</sup> The practice used today of carefully forming exact, precise quotations was either unknown or unimportant to the New Testament writers. The writers used

---

<sup>1</sup>Donald A. Hagner, "The Old Testament in the New Testament," in Interpreting the Word of God, ed. Samuel J. Schultz and Morris A. Inch (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), p. 85.

<sup>2</sup>J. C. McCullough, "The Old Testament Quotations in Hebrews," New Testament Studies 26 (April 1980):377.

<sup>3</sup>Hagner, "Old Testament," p. 79.

well practiced but not flawless memories because Old Testament Scriptures were either expensive or unavailable to them. The inspiration by the Holy Spirit guarded the New Testament writers from making mistakes concerning the meaning of the Old Testament Scriptures, but did not give them verbatim knowledge of what the original writers said. Jesus' words were not all exact quotations either, and were not meant to be. A. T. Robertson gives this description of the method Luke used in recording his gospel: "Others still had been eyewitnesses of the ministry of Jesus and gave Luke their oral testimony. Luke sifted it all with care and produced an orderly and reasonably full narrative of the earthly ministry of Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

Another reason for the lack of verbatim quotations was the oral tradition of the New Testament times. Not having an exact quotation was not a major concern. Donald Hagner states, "The early apostolic Fathers cited oral tradition rather than the written gospels when they quoted the sayings of Jesus."<sup>2</sup>

#### The difference in context

The prophecy of Haggai 2:6, 7 occurs almost 600 years before Hebrews was written. Haggai was the first prophetic voice to be heard after the Babylonian Exile of the Jews. The Jewish remnant that returned from Babylon was

---

<sup>1</sup>A. T. Robertson, A Harmony of the Gospels (New York: Harper and Row Pub., n.d.), p. 1

<sup>2</sup>Hagner, "Old Testament," p. 80.

small in number. The more well-to-do Jews stayed in Babylon. Those who returned to Jerusalem were interested in the rebuilding of the temple which was central to their worship. They laid the foundations of the temple, but because they became more interested in their own prosperity, their work on the temple ceased for fifteen years. Haggai's prophecies were given in the year 520 B.C. to exhort the Jews to finish the temple. Haggai's sermon (Hag 1:12-15) had almost immediate impact for the people began renewed work on the temple. However, after a month a few septuagenarians and older ones, who could remember the larger and more beautiful Temple of Solomon, wept when they saw the smaller, plainer Temple of Zerubbabel being built. Coupled with a slim harvest, the people became discouraged. Haggai's prophetic word of encouragement at this vivid point reminded the people of God's covenant promises in the past (Hag 2:4-5), and His confident plans for the near future (Hag 2:6-9). "The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former" (Hag 2:9). This prophecy encouraged the Jews to quit grumbling and get back to work because they saw a great future for their temple in Haggai's prophecy. The temple was completed four years later.

The Jews who heard Haggai's words expected the shaking to come soon because Haggai 2:6 states that it would happen "in a little while." This physical phenomena of shaking would be evidence that God is about to act. He will cause all nations to bring their wealth to fill the house of

the Lord (Hag 2:7). The King James Version translation "the desire of all nations" makes this a reference to the Messiah and is in accord with Jewish tradition. However, a more literal translation is "the treasures" or "that which is choice" which would render the verse: "The treasures of the nations will pour into this Temple, and I will fill it with splendor."<sup>1</sup>

Haggai 2:6 is used by the author of Hebrews to warn his readers to obey God or else the shaking may happen to them. But Haggai uses the shaking as an encouragement to build the temple because God will bring about future events to restore glory to the temple. Both writers are guided by God to use the same illustration, but for two different purposes.

#### Is The Author Warning Of Apostasy?

Hebrews 12:25-29 is the fifth and last warning passage in the book. It is like the other warning passages in exhorting the readers to obey God and live for him. The first warning passage (2:1-4) tells the readers not to drift away, but instead give careful attention to God. The second warning tells the readers not to have an unbelieving heart and turn away from the living God (3:12-14). The third warning suggests that if a person is not maturing in the

---

<sup>1</sup>C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Minor Prophets, vol. 10, trans. James Martin in Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949), pp. 196-200.

faith, he may have no faith at all (5:11-6:12). The fourth warning says that if someone rejects Christ, then he can expect to be consumed in the fire of judgment (10:26-31). The last passage teaches that if a person refuses to heed God's word, then he can expect to be a part of the things that can be shaken and destroyed (12:25-29).

The theme of these passages is to continue in the faith. This is the evidence of a genuine faith. This is the other side of the doctrine of eternal security. Genuine saints do persevere. The evidence that a person is a Christian is both confession of his belief in Christ and living the Christian life (1 John 2:4).

#### Definition

Apostates are those who depart from the Christian faith and ultimately spend eternity in hell. They have all the characteristics of being Christians, but are not. They are not backsliders. They have never had a personal experience of salvation, even though they may classify themselves as Christians.

In the NT apostasy occurs when men turn aside from following Jesus (John 6:66f.). It manifests itself in falling away from faith under persecution (Matt 24:9-13), denying the deity of Jesus (1 John 2:22), or living a life of open sin that denies the faith (2 Pet 2:20).<sup>1</sup>

Using this definition of apostasy, it is true that Hebrews 12:25-29 is warning of the very real possibility of apostasy.

---

<sup>1</sup>Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, s.v. "Apostasy," by I. H. Marshall, 1:216.

### Reasons

First, the author gives his own illustration of the type of individual he is concerned with in the warning passages. Hebrews 12:15-17 tells the readers not to be like Esau who sold his birthright and then when he wanted it back, he was rejected. The implication is that the Hebrew readers might be like Esau if they did not start obeying God's final word in God's Son. There is no indication that Esau ever had a saving faith, yet he was raised among believers of God's promises. Similarly, there were those among the Hebrew Christian group who may not have been Christians at all because there was no evidence of perseverance in the faith.

Second, the author of Hebrews makes it plain that "refusing Him" is not simply "backsliding." Rather, it is a removal (12:27). The warning in Hebrews 10:39 calls it destruction: "But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but to those who have faith to the preserving of the soul."

Third, the Hebrew Christians were wavering in their faith. This was a very serious situation. It was so serious that five warnings were given. There was evidence that some had the desire to return to their former Jewish religion. Some had the tendencies of the type of person characterized in the five warning passages. There was the real danger of apostasy.

### Conclusion

One of God's ways of keeping the saints secure is by using warnings. The warnings here are describing characteristics and actions of apostates (unregenerate people) even though the author is writing to Hebrew Christians. Only God knows who the real apostates are. Their association with Christians, even their repentance alone as in the case of Esau, is not equal to salvation.

### The Meaning Of "Shaking"

Hebrews 12:26 refers to the giving of the law on Sinai (Exod 19:1-24:18) when the divine voice shook (σαλεύω) the earth. At the end of the present world-order God is going to shake (σειώ, as in Hag 2:6) not only the earth, but the heavens too. The divine kingdom is described as unshakable (ἀσαλεύτος) in Hebrews 12:28 and therefore eternal. The material creation, however solid it has appeared in the past, will be shaken. This "shaking" is important to understand if one is to know the future events of the world.

### Definition

The Greek word σειώ means to shake, cause to quake, agitate. It is translated in the Old Testament as שָׁעַר meaning to shake, to move to and fro.<sup>1</sup> The Greek word σαλεύω means to shake, cause to waver or totter, unsettle,

---

<sup>1</sup>Colin Brown, editor, The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 3:556.

drive away.<sup>1</sup> "It is apparent that the author reads the σείω of Hag 2:6 with certain metaphysical assumptions. For him, that which is shakable belongs to the world of sense perception; and that which is perceptible to the senses is by nature transitory."<sup>2</sup>

In the New Testament σαλεύω is used to describe something that is disturbed violently. It is used in the parable of the two men whose houses, built on sand and rock respectively, faced the violence of a storm with dramatically different consequences.<sup>3</sup>

#### Time Period

When will the shaking occur? According to Haggai 2:7 it will occur just before all nations bring their wealth to the house of the Lord. The nations will bring this wealth when God sets up His earthly kingdom--a kingdom beyond what men have ever dreamed. This particular kingdom, the thousand year earthly reign of Christ, comes under various titles. It is called . . .

1. "the regeneration" (Matt 19:28)
2. "the times of refreshing" (Acts 3:19)
3. "the times of restitution" (Acts 3:21)
4. "the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6)
5. "the fullness of times" (Eph 1:10)

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 3:558.

<sup>2</sup>James W. Thompson, "That Which Cannot Be Shaken," Journal of Biblical Literature 94 (December 1975):585.

<sup>3</sup>Brown, New International Dictionary, 3:559.



Christ is going to reign over the whole earth from the hill of Zion. He will receive all the nations for His inheritance (Ps 2:6-8). The nations will bring their wealth to Him. Psalm 72:9-11 says, "They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before Him, and His enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him" (cf. Isa 11:4).

Haggai 2:7 records that all the nations will be shaken. This will occur during the seven years of the great tribulation because the tribulation involves God's judgment on all the nations (Rev 8:1-9:21). John MacArthur, Jr. says:

Before the Gentiles are gathered for judgment into the Valley of Decision, they will have already experienced the judgments of the seals, trumpets, and bowls. Revelation 18 records another type of judgment--the dissolution of the world's economic system. Little by little, during the Tribulation, everything disintegrates.<sup>1</sup>

The heavens will also be shaken at the end of the tribulation before the return of Christ: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give its light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken" (Matt 24:29-30).

Joel 3:13-17 explains the final shaking. This is the shaking that the author of Hebrews is referring to in

---

<sup>1</sup>John MacArthur, Jr., The Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1981), p. 173.

Hebrews 12:27. Joel 3:13 starts out depicting a time of judgment: "Put in the sickle; for the harvest is ripe; come, get down; for the press is full, the vats overflow; for their wickedness is great." The place of this judgment is seen in verses 14-17: "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision; for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. The Lord also shall roar out of Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shall shake."

When Christ sets foot on the Mount of Olives, the final shaking takes place. A valley is created by this shaking. It is in this valley that He judges the nations. So, the judge is Jesus Christ, the time is at the end of the tribulation, and the place is in the valley created east of Jerusalem. Then all those things that can be shaken will be removed. Christ ends the tribulation in the holocaust described in Revelation 19:17-21.

#### Summary

In Chapter III Hebrews 12:25-29 has been classified by dispensations, hermeneutics, and chronology. The dispensation of the law begins in Exodus 19:3. At the beginning of this dispensation God first shook the earth at Mount Sinai. The book was written during the dispensation of grace. The passage directly applies to people living in this age. The final shaking ends the dispensation of grace and begins the dispensation of the kingdom.

The author of Hebrews believes the Old Testament is inspired and profitable for use as illustration and exhortation. He uses the Old Testament event of the shaking of Mount Sinai and the prophecy of Haggai 2:6, 7 to warn his readers to obey God's voice.

The shaking mentioned in the passage refers both to a literal quaking and to a removal of all that is contaminated by evil. The final shaking will occur when Christ returns to the earth and begins with the judgments of the tribulation.

## CONCLUSION

The author of Hebrews has referred to the incident on Mount Sinai when God's voice had been heard from earth. It was a terrifying experience. He says that God's voice "shook the earth." God is not through shaking the earth. And the next time it will not be just the earth, "but also the heavens" (Heb 12:26). It is foolish to suppose that because one has entered into a gracious relationship with the Lord, it is no longer necessary to obey His word.

The author is warning his audience of the temptation of disobedience. One should never allow himself to forget that there is a profound difference between the forgiveness of God and the consequences of sin. The answer to the temptation of disobedience is the fear of sin's consequences. This is a godly fear, one of reverence and awe. It means the believer appropriates the grace of God in acceptable worship and service.

Spiritual reality is more important than physical reality. The temporal material things will pass away, but the kingdom is eternal. Since Christians are a part of this kingdom, they should have the attitude of gratitude. Because they are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, God will not be a "consuming fire" to them.

The shaking referred to in Hebrews 12:25-29 has not

begun and will not begin until the time of the tribulation just before Christ's return to earth. Three reasons are cited for this conclusion. First, Haggai 2:7 states that God will shake all nations. This will happen at the end of the tribulation (Matt 25:32). Second, the heavens will be shaken at the end of the tribulation (Matt 24:9; Mark 13:25; and Luke 21:26). Third, the shaking will occur when the Lord speaks at the end of the tribulation (Joel 3:13-17).

The author of Hebrews is addressing Hebrew Christians. However, some of his readers may not be genuine Christians. If they were genuine Christians, they would obey God's word. So, if they are not obeying God's word, they are in danger of being shaken in God's judgment (Heb 12:26, 27). On the other hand, if they are genuine Christians they can rejoice that they receive an unshakable kingdom (Heb 12:28).

The author of Hebrews uses the Old Testament to illustrate and emphasize his message of heeding God's word. He does not change the message of Haggai 2:6, 7 but emphasizes certain points. He emphasizes that both the heavens and the earth will be shaken, not just the earth as in the illustration of Mount Sinai. He also emphasizes that the shaking will happen just "once more." There will be no second chance for those who are not ready.

In Hebrews 12:25-29 both God's fiery judgment and His infinite grace are seen at work. His fiery judgment is seen in His promise to shake the heavens and the earth.

His infinite grace is seen in His gift of an unshakable kingdom to all who trust in Him. Therefore, "let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe" (Heb 12:28).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bauer, Walter; Arndt, William F.; and Gingrich, F. Wilbur. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957.
- Bauman, Edward W. An Introduction to the New Testament. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961.
- Beiderwolf, William E. The Second Coming Bible. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972.
- Brown, Colin, editor. The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, 3 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971.
- Bruce, F. F. The Epistle to the Hebrews. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964.
- Cerullo, Morris. The Shaking Has Started. San Diego: World Evangelism, Inc., 1980.
- Chafer, Lewis Sperry. Major Bible Themes. Revised by John F. Walvoord. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974.
- Clarke, Adam. "Hebrews." In vol. 6 of Clarke's Commentary. New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1883.
- Dodds, Marcus. "The Epistle to the Hebrews." In vol. 4 of Expositor's Greek Testament. Edited by W. Robertson Nicoll. New York: George H. Doran Company, n.d.
- Downer, Arthur Cleveland. The Principle of Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews. London: Butter and Tanner Ltd., n.d.
- Filson, Floyd V. Opening the New Testament. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1952.
- Freeman, Hobart E. An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets. Chicago: Moody Press, 1968.
- Greer, Rowan A. The Captain of Our Salvation. Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1973.

- Hagner, Donald A. "The Old Testament in the New Testament." In Interpreting the Word of God. Edited by Samuel J. Schultz and Morris A. Inch. Chicago: Moody Press, 1976.
- Hanson, Anthony Tyrrell. The New Testament Interpretation of Scripture. Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable Ltd., 1980.
- Harrison, Everett F. Introduction to the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964.
- Henrichsen, Walter A. After the Sacrifice. Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1979.
- Hewitt, Thomas. The Epistle to the Hebrews. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960.
- Hughes, Philip E. A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Interpreting Prophecy. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976.
- Hyde, Gordon M., editor. A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics. Washington, D.C.: The Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1974.
- Ironside, H. A. Studies in the Epistles to the Hebrews. New York: Loizeaux Brothers, Inc., 1932.
- Keil, C. F. and F. Delitzsch, Minor Prophets, vol. 10. Translated by James Martin. In Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949.
- Kelly, William: An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews. London: T. Weston, 1905.
- Kent, Homer A., Jr. The Epistle to the Hebrews. Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1972.
- Kligerman, Aaron J. Messianic Prophecy in the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1957.
- Lenski, R. C. H. The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966.
- Lindsay, William. Lectures on the Epistle to the Hebrews. Philadelphia: Smith, English, and Company, 1867.



- MacArthur, John, Jr. The Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1981.
- McClain, Alva J. The Greatness of the Kingdom. Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1968.
- McCullough, J. C. "The Old Testament Quotations in Hebrews." New Testament Studies 26 (April 1980): 363-79.
- Meyer, F. B. The Way into the Holiest. Westchester, IL: Good News Publishers, 1960.
- Mickelsen, A. Berkeley. Interpreting the Bible. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963.
- Milligan, George. The Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Minneapolis: The James Family Christian Publishers, 1978.
- Newell, William R. Hebrews Verse by Verse. Chicago: Moody Press, 1947.
- Owen, John. An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews. 4 vols. London: Thomas Tegg, 1840.
- Phillips, John. Exploring Hebrews. Chicago: Moody Press, 1977.
- Pink, Arthur W. An Exposition of Hebrews. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954.
- Ramm, Bernard. Protestant Biblical Interpretation. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978.
- Robertson, A. T. A Harmony of the Gospels. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, n.d.
- Shires, Henry M. Finding the Old Testament in the New. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974.
- Strong, A. H. Systematic Theology. Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1907.
- Tasker, R. V. G. The Old Testament in the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1946.
- Tenny, Merrill C., general editor. The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible. 5 vols. Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1975.

Terry, Milton S. Biblical Hermeneutics. New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1890.

Thompson, James W. "That Which Cannot Be Shaken." Journal of Biblical Literature 94 (December 1975):580-86.

Westcott, B. F. The Epistle to the Hebrews. London: Macmillan, 1889, reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973.

Wuest, Kenneth S. Hebrews in the Greek New Testament. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1947.

Young, Robert. Analytical Concordance to the Bible. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Reprinted 1978.

Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible. S.v. "Apostasy," by I. H. Marshall.