

Hebrews 12:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, This begins contrasting Old and New Covenant experiences. 'The mount that might be touched' (psēlaphōmenō orei, ψηλαφωμένω ὄρει) refers to Mount Sinai where God gave the Law (Exodus 19-20). Though physical and touchable, it was forbidden to touch on pain of death (Exodus 19:12-13). The 'fire, blackness, darkness, and tempest' describe the terrifying theophany when God descended on Sinai with thunder, lightning, thick cloud, trumpet blast, fire, and smoke—emphasizing God's holiness and Law's terror.

This Sinai experience produced fear, distance, and dread. Israel begged Moses to mediate because they couldn't endure God's direct presence (Exodus 20:18-19). The Old Covenant, though glorious, was characterized by terror, exclusion, and consciousness of sin and judgment. Physical proximity to God's presence brought death to the unholy. The mountain's tangibility symbolizes the Old Covenant's external, physical, temporary nature.

This teaches that Christianity isn't merely improved Judaism but fundamentally different approach to God. Under the Old Covenant, God's holiness terrified; under the New, it attracts. The Law revealed sin and condemned; the gospel reveals grace and saves. Reformed theology emphasizes this discontinuity—we don't

merely have better regulations but a better covenant established on better promises (Hebrews 8:6).

Historical Context

Exodus 19-20 records Israel's terrifying encounter with God at Mount Sinai. The mountain smoked, quaked, thunder rolled, lightning flashed, and trumpet sounded increasingly loud. God warned that any person or animal touching the mountain would die. The people trembled with fear, standing at distance. This physical, awesome display of divine holiness established the Mosaic Covenant with its demanding Law. For first-century Jewish Christians, Sinai represented their ancestral faith's foundation. The author shows that Christ brings something far superior to Sinai's terror—access to God's presence with confidence rather than cowering fear. Mount Sinai's temporary terror has been superseded by Mount Zion's permanent grace.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does understanding the Old Covenant's terror at Sinai increase your gratitude for New Covenant access to God through Christ?
2. What aspects of your relationship with God still reflect Sinai-like fear rather than gospel confidence?
3. In what ways should recognition of God's holiness produce both reverence and confident access through Christ?

Interlinear Text

Οὐ	γὰρ	προσεληλύθατε	ψηλαφωμένῳ	ὄρει,	καὶ		
not	For	come	that might be touched	unto the mount	and		
G3756	G1063	G4334	G5584	G3735	G2532		
κεκαυμένῳ	πυρὶ	καὶ	γνόφῳ	καὶ	σκότῳ,	καὶ	θυέλλῃ
that burned	with fire	and	unto blackness	and	darkness	and	tempest
G2545	G4442	G2532	G1105	G2532	G4655	G2532	G2366

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 4:11 (Darkness): And ye came near and stood under the mountain; and the mountain burned with fire unto the midst of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness.

Exodus 24:17 (Parallel theme): And the sight of the glory of the LORD was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel.

Exodus 20:18 (Parallel theme): And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off.

Romans 6:14 (Parallel theme): For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

Romans 8:15 (Parallel theme): For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

2 Corinthians 3:9 (Parallel theme): For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.

2 Timothy 1:7 (Parallel theme): For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.