

Hebrews Lesson 17 Articles

The description in vv. 22–24 is of the New Covenant blessings in Christ. Mt. Zion is the heavenly city (13:14; Gal. 4:26), in contrast to earthly Jerusalem, which was about to be destroyed. There are three groups of people in the heavenly city: (1) the host of angels, who minister to the saints; (2) the church of the firstborn (see 1:6); and (3) the OT saints. “Made perfect” (v. 23) does not mean that believers in glory are now in their perfect resurrection bodies. It refers, rather, to the OT saints who have now a perfect standing before God because of the death and resurrection of Christ (10:14; 11:40). Anyone who believes God’s Word (as did the OT saints) goes to heaven; but the perfection of God’s work did not come until Christ’s death on the cross.¹

“Wherefore” (v. 28) introduces the practical application: “Let us have grace.” How do we receive grace? At the throne of grace, where our eternal High Priest intercedes for us. We must serve God, not old laws and customs. We are part of a kingdom that will never be shaken or removed. We are building our lives on the eternal, unchanging spiritual realities that we have in Christ. Therefore, let us serve God with reverence. Let us heed His Word and not refuse to listen, for in His Word is the grace and life that we need. The admonition of v. 25 does not regard our eternal destiny. As with the other exhortations of Hebrews, it deals with God’s chastening in this life, and not judgment in the next.²

Then comes the call to act responsibly towards the rest of the fellowship (vv. 14–17). Anything which militates against holiness of life must be nipped in the bud. To strengthen his case, the writer uses a well-known Old Testament character and his sad story. Esau was a popular kind of person, more obviously attractive than devious brother Jacob, but he was godless in his sensuality and materialism, and missed the blessing of God in the process. The message is clear enough, even if there is doubt over the true rendering of verse 17.

Does the verse mean that Esau could not find any way to change his attitude even though he was deeply disturbed? Or does it mean that he could not change his father’s decision, however much he wept? Where there is honest doubt we can hear the message from both interpretations. Either way, we must never trifle with God nor assume that we can turn on the right spiritual response at will. God is sovereign and he will not be mocked. Keeping a watchful eye on others is no excuse for prying or gossip, but we are our brother’s keeper.

What we believe about our future inevitably affects how we react here and now. Hebrew Christians no longer lived in the Old Testament dispensation, centered on Mount Sinai, but in the New Testament era, centered on Mount Zion. This is a kingdom of joy, not of fear, and yet God has not changed and needs to be approached with reverence and awe. So this chapter will end with the reminder that ‘our God is a consuming fire’ (v. 29).³

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). *Wiersbe’s expository outlines on the New Testament (711–712)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

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³ Hacking, P. H. (2006). *Opening up Hebrews*. Opening Up Commentary (85–87). Leominster: Day One Publications.