



## **LESSON EIGHT**

### **The Old Covenant versus the New Covenant and an Unshakable Kingdom**

Scripture Reading:

#### **HEBREWS 12:18 - 29**

- 18 For you have not come forward to a mountain which could be touched and which was set on fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind,
- 19 And to the sound of a trumpet and to the voice of words, because of which those who heard entreated that no further word be spoken to them;
- 20 For they could not bear that which was being commanded: "If even a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned."
- 21 And so fearful was the sight, Moses said, "I am full of fear and trembling."
- 22 But you have come forward to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; and to myriads of angels, to the universal gathering;
- 23 And to the church of the firstborn, who have been enrolled in the heavens; and to God, the Judge of all; and to the spirits of righteous men who have been made perfect;
- 24 And to Jesus, the Mediator of a new covenant; and to the blood of sprinkling, which speaks something better than that of Abel.
- 25 See that you do not refuse Him who speaks, for if those did not escape who refused Him who warned them upon the earth, much more we shall not escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven,
- 26 Whose voice at that time shook the earth but now has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also heaven."
- 27 And this word, "Yet once more," shows clearly the removal of the things being shaken as being of things having been made, that the things which are not shaken may remain.
- 28 Therefore receiving an unshakable kingdom, let us have grace, through which we may serve God well-pleasingly with piety and fear;
- 29 For our God is also a consuming fire.

## **QUESTIONS:**

### **Section 1:**

1. What are the six items in the old covenant?
2. How do these items relate to our experience?

### **Section 2:**

1. What are the eight items in the new covenant?
2. What is the significance of Paul using the word 'universal gathering' in Hebrews 12:22?
3. What is the difference between the six items in the old covenant with the eight items in the new covenant? Please compare these items to show us the contrast between the old and the new.

### **Section 3:**

1. What is the kingdom? How can we see it from the Bible?
2. What are the two aspects of the kingdom? Please share some experiences of under the rule of the reality of the kingdom?

### **Section 4:**

1. What is the reward in the coming kingdom in its manifestation?
2. What is the focal point of the book of Hebrews? How can we see it from this book?

-----[SECTION 1] -----

**A CONTRAST BETWEEN THE SIGHT  
OF THE OLD COVENANT  
AND THE SCENE OF THE NEW  
COVENANT**

In this message we come to a very exciting subject—the contrast between the sight of the old covenant and the scene of the new covenant (12:18-24). Paul was undoubtedly marvelous both in the spirit and in the mind. He was a very brilliant man. Like one of today's writers who includes photographs in his books, Paul gave us some pictures in 12:18-24. The two scenes portrayed in these verses not only give us a comparison but also a clear view of the situation of both the old and new covenants.

If we read these seven verses carefully, we can see that there are six items belonging to the old covenant and eight belonging to the new covenant. Six is the number of the old creation, which was made in six days (Gen. 1). Eight is the number of resurrection. The Lord Jesus was resurrected on the first day of the week (John 20:1), which is the eighth day. The six items of the old covenant indicate that the old covenant was on the side of the old creation. The eight items of the new covenant indicate that the new covenant is on the side of resurrection. The number eight signifies a new beginning after the passing of a period of time. A week is the first period of time, and the first day of the second week, the eighth day, is a new beginning. Hence, the number eight signifies resurrection, a new beginning. The new covenant is a new start after the period of the old covenant has passed.

The old covenant was of the law, whose position is that of a concubine. The new covenant is of grace, whose position is that of the proper wife. Sarah, Abraham's wife, symbolizes grace in resurrection, and Hagar, the concubine, symbolizes the law related to the flesh. Paul makes this quite clear in Galatians 4, where he tells us that these two women, Hagar and Sarah, are two covenants, Hagar being the old covenant and Sarah the new. In other words, Hagar stands for the law and Sarah for grace. We Christians today are not the children of Hagar but of Sarah. We are children of grace. These two women also symbolize two mountains. Hagar signifies Mount Sinai, and Sarah signifies Mount Zion, which is the heavenly Jerusalem, our mother.

**I. THE SIGHT OF THE OLD COVENANT  
ON THE SIDE OF THE LAW**

**A. Comprising Six Items**

Let us now look into the six items of the old covenant presented in verses 18 through 21. This side is the side of the law.

***1. The Mountain Being Touchable and Set on Fire***

Verse 18 says, "You have not come to the mountain which might be touched and which was set on fire." The first item in the sight of the old covenant was the mountain which was set on fire (Exo. 19:11-12, 18). Do you like such a mountain? I prefer a mountain covered with trees and flowing streams, but I do not like a mountain that is set on fire. That would terrify me. Paul seemed to be saying, "Hebrew brothers, do you still want to go back to the old covenant? Don't you know that that belongs to the mountain which was set on fire?" After saying so many things in the foregoing chapters, he showed them such a picture.

***2. Darkness***

The second item in the sight of the old covenant is darkness (v. 18; Deut. 5:23). Ordinarily, when there is a great fire, there is also some shining and enlightening. But the Bible says that while the fire was burning on Mount Sinai, there was darkness. This darkness came from two sources: from the thick cloud in the air and from the heavy smoke on the earth. The mingling of the cloud and the smoke produced a thick darkness. This picture depicts the negative situation of the old covenant.

***3. Gloom***

The third item in the sight of the old covenant is gloom (v. 18; Exo. 20:21; Deut. 5:22, Heb.). What is the difference between darkness and gloom? According to my understanding and experience, darkness is objective and gloom is subjective. When darkness is afar off, it remains darkness, but once we enter into it, it becomes gloom. Gloom is an atmosphere in which we dwell. When we enter into darkness and dwell in it, that darkness becomes gloom. Darkness was not only an objective condition for those in the old covenant; it had become the gloom in which they dwelt.

The same is true in our spiritual experience. When we were not seeking the Lord, we were in

darkness. But when we began to pursue spiritual things, we immediately had the deep sense that we were in gloom. Before we were revived, we were in darkness. After we were revived, we were in a gloomy situation. If the Hebrew brothers had returned to the old covenant where the darkness was, that darkness would have brought them into gloom.

#### **4. Whirlwind**

The next item is the whirlwind (v. 18). A whirlwind is a type of wind that has no direction or peace. In my background in Christianity, there was no direction or peace. Neither was there any direction or peace with the Judaizers. With them there was just the whirlwind.

#### **5. The Sound of a Trumpet**

In the sight of the old covenant there is also the sound of a trumpet (v. 19; Exo. 19:13, 16, 19; 20:18). The sound of a trumpet indicates a warning. Religion is filled with warnings, such as, “Don’t do this or you will go to hell,” or, “Be careful or you will lose your salvation.” In religion, they sound the warning trumpet much more often than they deliver a positive message. Religion always says, “Be careful—don’t do that,” for in religion there are always many more “don’ts” than “do’s.” The sound of the trumpet is a sign of the poverty of religion. Religion has nothing positive to afford us; it can only warn us negatively. Every religion, including Buddhism, Catholicism, and Protestantism, is the same in principle, sounding warnings and telling us what we should not do.

#### **6. The Terrifying Voice of Words**

The sixth item in the sight of the old covenant is the terrifying voice of words (v. 19; Deut. 4:12; Exo. 19:19). What people finally have in religion is the terrifying voice of words, not the jubilant praise to the Lord. However, in the church we always hear the praises to the Lord.

#### **B. All Items Being Temporal**

Because all the items in the sight of the old covenant were of the old dispensation they were temporal, not permanent. Just as the old creation will one day pass away, so all the items of the old covenant, belonging to the old creation, have been terminated.

### **-----[SECTION 2] -----**

## **II. THE SCENE OF THE NEW COVENANT ON THE SIDE OF GRACE**

### **A. Comprising Eight Items in Four Pairs**

Now we come to the scene of the new covenant on the side of grace (vv. 22-24). This scene comprises eight items in four pairs. That these items are arranged in pairs is very meaningful. The six items of the old covenant are presented singly, while the six items of the word of foundation in Hebrews 6 are arranged in three pairs. Here, in chapter twelve, we have the eight items of the new covenant arranged in four pairs.

#### **1. The First Pair**

The first pair consists of Mount Zion (v. 22; Psa. 2:6; Rev. 14:1) and the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem (v. 22; 11:10, 16; Rev. 22:2). Here there is no fire but a beautiful mountain with a glorious city, the heavenly Jerusalem, which is God’s habitation and the center of His universal administration.

#### **2. The Second Pair**

The second pair is composed of the myriads of angels, that is, the universal gathering (v. 22; Rev. 5:11), and the church of the firstborn ones who have been enrolled in the heavens (v. 23; 2:12; Luke 10:20). The Greek word rendered “universal gathering” may also be translated as “festal gathering.” This Greek word, *paneguris*, means universal gathering, whole or full assembly, and is used for a gathering of the people to celebrate a public festival, such as the Olympic games. The entire new covenant age is a festival, and the myriads of angels, who are the ministering spirits rendering service to the heirs of salvation (1:14) under the new covenant, are a universal festal gathering celebrating the marvelous festival of “so great a salvation” (2:3), the greatest and most exciting “game” in the universe. The word of the Lord in Luke 15:7 and 10 may indicate this.

As we have seen, the Greek word used by the Apostle Paul for “universal gathering” was used to describe the Olympic games, the greatest and most important public games in ancient Greece. At the time of the Olympic games, the people held a large public gathering. In like manner, huge crowds attend football games in the United States today. The Apostle Paul used the background of the Olympic games to show us

that in this universe a game is in progress. The spectators at this game are the myriads of angels who have gathered together to watch it. The game is the race mentioned earlier in this chapter (v. 1). We are qualified to participate in this game, but the angels are not. They are only qualified to be the cheering spectators. In Luke 15:7 and 10, the Lord Jesus said, "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Whenever a sinner is saved, the angels are excited. I wholly believe that the angels in heaven are also very excited about what is happening in the Lord's recovery today. We are playing the greatest game, and the angels are our spectators.

It is very significant that Paul put the myriads of angels together with the church of the firstborn ones who are enrolled in the heavens. We are the firstborn, and they are the spectators; we are the runners, and they are the observers. In a football game, the spectators are always more excited than the players. Although we may not always be excited, the angels are very excited as they observe us. First Peter 1:12, speaking of things which "the angels desire to look into," indicates that the angels are eager to know this gospel game. I do not believe that the cheering angels are very interested in poor Christianity. There is hardly a game there because there is no race there. But there is a real game in the church life today. Whenever we are excited about what is happening in the church life, the angels must be even more excited. The church life has been keeping the angels very excited.

The focus of God's intention in the whole universe is to gain a group of people like us. The angels have been waiting for this for a long time. If there were no games in the United States, many Americans would be waiting, wondering when there would be a game. Likewise, for centuries, the angels, who saw those in Catholicism worshipping idols and burning candles, have been waiting and watching to see a group of real seekers of Jesus. Whenever they see this, they rejoice in a praising way.

### **3. The Third Pair**

As the third pair in the scene of the new covenant, we have God, the Judge of all (v. 23; Gen. 18:25; Psa. 94:2), and the spirits of just men who have been made perfect (v. 23). In this pair, we have the just God as the Judge and the spirits of the just men, who are the Old

Testament saints, made perfect through their faith in the types of Christ.

### **4. The Fourth Pair**

The fourth pair is Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant (v. 24; 8:6; 9:15) and the blood of sprinkling which speaks better than that of Abel (v. 24; 9:12, 14; Gen. 4:10). As we have seen, Jesus is the Mediator of the new covenant. The Greek word, *neos*, here means new, fresh with respect to quality. In this pair, we have not only the Mediator, the Redeemer, of the new covenant, but also the blood of the new covenant.

In this book, the blood of Christ is particularly prominent and crucial. It is the blood of the eternal covenant (13:20), with which the new and better covenant was enacted (10:29). Through this blood, Christ entered once for all into the Holy of Holies and found eternal redemption for us (9:12). By this blood Christ also cleansed the heavens and all things in the heavens (9:22-24). This blood sanctifies us (13:12; 10:29), purifies our conscience to serve the living God (9:14), and speaks better for us than that of Abel (12:24). It is by this blood that we have boldness for entering into the Holy of Holies (10:19). We should not regard this blood common as animal blood. If we do, we shall suffer God's punishment (10:29).

The blood of Christ not only redeems, sanctifies, and purifies; it also speaks. It is the speaking blood, speaking better than the blood of Abel. Abel's blood speaks to God for accusation and vengeance (Gen. 4:10, 15), whereas Christ's blood speaks to God for forgiveness, justification, reconciliation, and redemption. Moreover, this precious blood speaks to God for us saying that by it (as unveiled in this book) the new covenant, which is eternal, has been enacted, and that in this new covenant God must give Himself and all His blessings to the believers in Christ who receive this covenant by faith.

### **B. All Items Being Eternal**

Because the eight items of the new covenant are on the side of resurrection, all of them are eternal, existing forever. Just as the new heaven and new earth will still remain after the old creation has passed away, so these eight items will remain through eternity.

The things mentioned in verses 18 and 19 are earthly or physical, signifying the side of the law, on which side everyone including Moses was terrified (vv. 19-21). The things mentioned in verses 22 through 24 are heavenly or spiritual, in contrast with the earthly and physical things listed in verses 18 and 19, signifying the side of grace. On this side, both the firstborn ones and the spirits of just men are saved by grace. The people under the old covenant came to the side of the law, whereas we Christians under the new covenant come to the side of grace. Hence, we are “not under law but under grace” (Rom. 6:14). This portion of the word, like Galatians 4:21-31, shows us that we are not under the bondage of law but under the freedom of grace to be heirs of inheritance. This is our birthright. We should not give it up by falling away from grace (v. 15), but rather have grace (v. 28). The things on the side of grace are heavenly, but not all are yet in heaven. A great number of the firstborn ones of the church are still on earth, while the spirits of just men, who are the Old Testament saints, are in paradise where Abraham is (Luke 16:22, 23, 24, 26) and where the Lord Jesus and the saved thief went after they died on the cross (Luke 23:43).

As we have seen, none of the six items listed on the side of the law is pleasant. Firstly, there is a mountain set on fire! Who would approach such a place! Then, the darkness, the gloom, and the stormy whirlwind. Lastly, the terrifying sound of the trumpet and the solemn warning voice of words. All these together present a fearful sight. On the side of grace, however, everything is pleasant. The eight items here may be considered as four pairs. The elevated Mount Zion and the beautiful heavenly Jerusalem are the first pair, denoting God’s habitation and the center of His universal administration. What a lovely place! Then the celebrating jubilant angels, so much related to the heirs of salvation to whom they minister, and the blessed firstborn ones of the church form the second pair in the scene. What a joyful demonstration of an angelic gathering! They celebrate the human heirs of salvation participating in the blessings of the new covenant as the church of the firstborn ones. God, the Judge of all, who is just, and the spirits (their bodies, not resurrected, are not worthy of listing here) of just men, the Old Testament saints, are related together as the third pair, showing how God, being just, justifies the just saints of old because of their faith. Lastly, the dear Lord Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, which is “a better covenant,” and His

precious sprinkled blood, which speaks better things, compose the last pair, indicating that a better covenant has been enacted with His better blood, that He died and has bequeathed this new covenant as a new testament to His believers, and that He is now the Mediator, the Executor, of this new testament to enforce the full realization of all the blessed facts which are contained within it. What a pleasant scene! What a contrast to the sight on the side of the law, where no God, no Savior, and even no angels are mentioned! No wonder not one saved person is seen there! In the scene of grace, there is the justifying God, the Savior who is the Mediator of His new covenant with His speaking blood, the ministering angels with the assembly (the church) of the saved ones, and the spirits of the justified saints. On the side of the law, the sight ends with a terrifying trumpet and the warning words. On the side of grace, the scene ends with a sympathizing Mediator and a vindicating speaking. After looking at such a contrast, who would be so foolish to leave the side of grace and turn to the side of the law? All eight things on the side of grace are not only heavenly or spiritual but also eternal. Hence, even when the heaven will be shaken (v. 26), these eight things, which are eternal, will still remain (v. 27).

### ----- [SECTION 3] -----

#### **AN UNSHAKABLE KINGDOM**

In this message we come to a very sober matter—the unshakable kingdom (12:25-29). The kingdom which we are receiving is unshakable (v. 28). Since this kingdom is unshakable, it is neither of the earth nor of the heavens. This is a strong word. Because we have such a doctrinal mind, we may argue with this statement, saying, “What about the kingdom of heaven? Doesn’t the Bible speak of this?” Yes, the New Testament does speak of the kingdom of the heavens, but it also says that heaven will be shaken (v. 26; Hag. 2:6). That heaven will be shaken proves that the kingdom which we are receiving is not of heaven. Although there seems to be a contradiction between the terms unshakable kingdom and the kingdom of the heavens, later on we shall see that there is actually no contradiction here.

#### **I. FOR THE OLD COVENANT, THE EARTH BEING SHAKEN AS A WARNING UPON EARTH**

For the old covenant, the earth was shaken as a warning upon earth (vv. 25-26; Exo. 19:18). When the old covenant was given at Mount Sinai, the earth was shaken. That shaking was a warning to the people on earth.

**II. FOR THE NEW COVENANT,  
NOT ONLY THE EARTH  
BUT ALSO THE HEAVEN TO BE  
SHAKEN  
AS A WARNING FROM HEAVEN**

One day, for the new covenant, not only the earth but also the heaven will be shaken as a warning from heaven. This is according to the word in Haggai 2:6.

**III. ONLY THE LORD  
AND THE THINGS COMING OUT OF  
HIM  
REMAINING FOREVER**

The earth and the heavens are shakable. Only the Lord and the things that come out of Him will remain forever (v. 27; 1:11; 13:8). This means that the kingdom which we are receiving has come out of the Lord Himself. Hebrews 1:11, speaking of the heavens and the earth says, "They shall perish, but You remain; and they all shall become old as a garment."

The kingdom is actually the Lord Himself as the kingship within us. We have seen that faith is the Lord Himself as the believing element within us. Now, in the same principle, the kingdom is the Lord Himself as the kingship. As a help in realizing this matter, let us read Daniel 2:34 and 35. "Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth." The stone cut without hands is the heavenly Christ who was cut on the cross without human hands. Verse 44, referring to the toes of the image, says, "In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." Verse 45 also speaks of the stone, saying, "The stone was cut out of the mountain

without hands" and "it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold." These verses indicate that the stone, which is Christ, will eventually become a great mountain filling the whole earth. This great mountain is the coming kingdom. Hence, the unshakable kingdom which we are receiving is Christ with His enlargement.

**IV. THE KINGDOM,  
COMING OUT OF THE LORD,  
BEING UNSHAKABLE**

**A. We Having Repented for the Kingdom**

The gospel which the New Testament has preached to us is the gospel of the kingdom (Matt. 3:1-2; 4:17, 23; 10:7; 24:14). We repented for the kingdom (Matt. 3:2). Perhaps when we were saved, we did not hear such a clear gospel. At that time, we were afraid of going to hell and desired to go to heaven. Thus, we repented for heaven. This is the preaching of the wrong gospel, for repentance is not for heaven but for the kingdom.

**B. We Having Been Reborn into the Kingdom**

We have been reborn, regenerated, into the kingdom. In John 3:5 the Lord Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (Recovery Version). Many of us were wrongly told that regeneration is for going to heaven. Here we see clearly that regeneration is for entering into the kingdom of God.

**C. We Having Been Translated into the  
Kingdom**

Colossians 1:13 says, "Who hath delivered us from the authority of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of the son of his love" (Gk.). This verse reveals that we have been translated out of one kingdom, Satan's kingdom of darkness, into another kingdom, the kingdom of the Son of God's love.

**D. The Church Life  
Being the Kingdom of God Today**

In the church, we are living in the kingdom of God today. Romans 14:17 is a strong proof that today's church life is the kingdom: "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Recovery Version). Revelation 1:9 also proves that we are in the kingdom of God today:

"I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ." When John wrote the book of Revelation, he was already in the kingdom of God. These two verses are a strong proof that the church today is the kingdom. However, as we shall see, what we are in now in the church today is the kingdom in its reality, whereas the kingdom in its manifestation will come with Christ's return in the future.

## **V. THE REALITY AND MANIFESTATION OF THE KINGDOM**

If we would understand the New Testament truths regarding the kingdom, we must realize the two main aspects of the kingdom—the aspect of its reality and the aspect of its manifestation. In the church today, we do not have the kingdom in manifestation; we have the kingdom in reality. According to the outward appearance, men cannot see the kingdom in the church. Nevertheless, the kingdom is a reality among us.

### **A. The Reality of the Kingdom Being an Exercise and Discipline in the Church Today**

The reality of the kingdom, the kingdom in its reality, is an exercise and discipline for us in the church today (Matt. 5:3, 10, 20; 7:21). Suppose you purchase a hamburger at a stand and the cashier gives you too much change. If you are exercised and are ruled by the kingdom, you will return this extra change immediately. This is an experience of the rule of the reality of the kingdom, which is both an exercise and a discipline.

The situation of today's Christianity is very poor, for many Christians have been drugged, thinking that everything is of grace and that there is no need for training, exercise, or discipline. But we realize that we must uplift the standard of the church life through the discipline and exercise of the reality of the kingdom. Through the years, I have seen the Lord's grace working in so many of us. I thank the Lord that there has been a great improvement in His recovery. Nevertheless, we must uplift the standard even higher. If we do this, our cheering angels will be very happy, for they will see a group of believers who are quite serious regarding God's eternal purpose. How we need the discipline for the kingdom today!

### **B. The Manifestation of the Kingdom Being a Reward and an Enjoyment in the Millennial Kingdom in the Coming Age**

The manifestation of the kingdom, the kingdom in its manifestation, will be a reward and an enjoyment to us in the millennial kingdom in the coming age (Matt. 16:27; 25:21, 23). Today, in the reality of the kingdom, we have the exercise and the discipline. In the coming age, in the manifestation of the kingdom, we shall have a reward and an enjoyment. If we read Matthew 16:27 in its context, we shall see that the Lord's coming to reward every man according to his work is related to the manifestation of the kingdom. In Matthew 25:21 and 23, the Lord says to His faithful servants, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." To enter into the joy of the Lord is to be in the manifestation of the kingdom during the thousand years.

## **-----[SECTION 4] -----**

### **C. Taking the Spirit's Exercise and God's Discipline Today and Receiving the Lord's Reward and Entering into the Sabbath Rest in the Coming Age**

If we take the Spirit's exercise and God's discipline in the reality of the kingdom today, we shall receive the Lord's reward and enter into the enjoyment of the coming Sabbath rest (4:9) in the manifestation of the kingdom in the coming age. If we do not accept the Spirit's exercise and God's discipline today, we shall miss the coming kingdom in its manifestation as a reward. We shall not be rewarded with the manifestation of the kingdom at the Lord's coming back; we shall have no right to enter into the glory of the kingdom to participate in Christ's reign in the millennial kingdom; and we shall lose our birthright to inherit the earth in the coming age, to be the royal priests serving God and Christ in His manifested glory, and to be the co-kings with Christ ruling over all the nations with His divine authority (Rev. 20:4, 6).

### **D. Missing the Coming Kingdom and Losing Our Birthright in the Coming Age Meaning That We Shall Lose the Reward**

To miss the coming kingdom and to lose our birthright in the coming age does not mean that



we shall perish, but that we shall lose the reward. Although we may lose the reward, we shall never lose our salvation (1 Cor. 3:14-15). Our salvation is secured forever. But whether or not we receive the reward and the birthright in the manifestation of the kingdom depends upon our exercise today.

**E. The Warnings in Hebrews  
Referring to the Suffering  
of the Loss of the Kingdom Reward  
and to Being Punished by God**

As we have seen, the loss of the reward in the coming kingdom, the forfeiture of our birthright, does not mean that we shall perish. It means that we shall lose the reward and suffer loss, but still “be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Cor. 3:14-15, Gk.). This is the basic concept upon which all the five warnings of this book are given and with which they all are pervaded (2:3; 4:1-11; 6:8; 10:27, 29-31; 12:25). All the negative points of these warnings are related to suffering the loss of the reward in the coming kingdom and to being punished by God, whereas all the positive points are related to the reward and enjoyment of the kingdom. All the seven epistles in Revelation 2 and 3 are concluded with the same concept—the reward of the kingdom or the loss of it. Only with this concept can the word in Matthew 5:20; 7:21-23; 16:24-27; 19:23-30; 24:46-51; 25:11-13, 21, 23, 26-30; Luke 12:42-48; 19:17, 19, 22-27; Romans 14:10, 12; 1 Corinthians 3:8, 13-15; 4:5; 9:24-27; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:7-8; Hebrews 2:3; 4:1, 9, 11; 6:4-8; 10:26-31, 35-39; 12:16-17, 28-29; Revelation 2:7, 10-11, 17, 26-27; 3:4-5, 11-12, 20; and 22:12 be rightly understood and properly applied. Salvation is eternal: once we get it, we shall never lose it (John 10:28-29). But we may suffer the loss of the kingdom reward, even though we still shall be saved (1 Cor. 3:8, 14-15). All the warnings in Hebrews do not refer to the loss of eternal salvation, but to the loss of the kingdom reward. The Hebrew believers had received the kingdom, but they would have lost the reward in the manifestation of the kingdom if they shrank back from the grace of God, from God’s new covenant way. This was the main concern of the writer’s warning regarding the staggering Hebrew believers.

Some Christian teachers say that the slothful servant in Matthew 25 is a false servant. But this is altogether illogical. Although one of your children may be slothful, this does not mean that he is false. Since some Christian teachers do not

see the matter of the kingdom reward, they must say that the slothful servant is a false servant. On the contrary, some say that the slothful servant is a real servant who has fallen away and lost his salvation.

We have seen that God’s original intention was to have a corporate man to express Him with His image, to represent Him with His dominion, and to take possession of the earth. This is the proper human living. Because man fell from God’s original intention, God came in to redeem and save us. This is God’s salvation, in which there is the birthright having three aspects: being the priests to express God with His image, being the kings to represent God with His dominion, and taking full possession of the lost earth for God’s eternal purpose. If we live in this birthright, we shall spontaneously be in the reality of the kingdom of God, for the reality of the kingdom of God is the living out of the birthright, the realization of the full birthright. Since not all Christians are willing to cooperate with God in this matter, He, in His wisdom, has decided to make the birthright a reward. If we take grace, enter into the Holy of Holies, and cooperate with God, we shall certainly live out the birthright. Then whatever we live out will be the reality of the kingdom today. The reality which we are living out today will become our reward in the manifestation of the kingdom. This is the fulfillment of God’s original intention. It is also our perfection, glorification, and the gaining of our soul in the coming age. As a result, we shall have the proper human living with an uplifted and resurrected humanity. This is the crucial focus of the entire Bible, and the Bible is very consistent about it. How can all this be worked out? Only by our turning to the spirit, entering into the Holy of Holies, experiencing Christ in all His riches, and allowing the law of life to take us from one stage of glory to another as it permeates us, saturates us, and conforms us to His image.

Hebrews 12:29 says, “Our God is also a consuming fire.” God is holy. Holiness is His nature. Whatever does not correspond with His holy nature, He, as the consuming fire, will consume. If the Hebrew believers had turned aside to Judaism, which was common (unholy) in the sight of God, it would have made them unholy, and the holy God, as the consuming fire, would have consumed them. God is not only righteous but also holy. To satisfy God’s righteousness we need to be justified through the

redemption of Christ. To meet the demands of His holiness we need to be sanctified, to be made holy, by the heavenly, present, and living Christ. Romans stresses the matter of justification (Rom. 3:24) for God's righteousness (Rom. 3:25-26), whereas Hebrews emphasizes the matter of sanctification (2:11; 10:10, 14, 29; 13:12) for God's holiness (12:14). For this, the Hebrew believers had to separate themselves from unholy Judaism unto the holy God who has fully expressed Himself in the Son under the new covenant; otherwise, they would have defiled themselves with their old, profane religion and suffered the holy God as the consuming fire. That would have been "fearful" (10:31)! No wonder Paul was very much concerned about "the terror [fear] of the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:11).

The focal point of the book of Hebrews is to bring us into the holy nature of God. If we do not cooperate with God in this, we shall break His administration. To break God's administration is a governmental matter. Breaking God's law is not as serious as breaking His government. God has revealed that if we do not cooperate with Him in His administrative economy but rather break His government, He will punish us. This means that we shall lose the kingdom reward on the positive side and suffer punishment on the negative side. In Hebrews 10 and 12 we see the way, the race, and the pathway that we must take, run on, and pass through. In these chapters we also see the punishment, the reward, and the kingdom. These three things are crucial aspects of the basic concept in the composition of this book.

No other book in the New Testament reveals the focal point of God's economy as clearly as the book of Hebrews does, for no other book points us to the Holy of Holies and to the law of life in the ark. Although Romans 8:2 does mention the law of the Spirit of life, Hebrews covers the law of life much more thoroughly than Romans does. The writer of Hebrews warns us to take the revelation of God's economy as found in this book. If we take it, we shall receive a reward in the manifestation of the kingdom. If we do not take it, we shall suffer some punishment due to our breaking of God's administrative economy. Those who do not have the substantiating sense, or who fail to exercise it, cannot see this. While we are so serious and sober about this matter, many other Christians are not. Under the enlightening of the heavenly revelation we have

been seeing in these messages, we must be serious and sober about running the race on the straight paths. The way we run today will determine our future destiny.