

CHAPTER 18
The Epistle to the Hebrews
THE FINAL WARNING (Hebrews 12:25-29)
by G. H. Lang

Chapter 12:25-29

25. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not, when they refused him that warned *them* on earth, much more *shall not we escape*, who turn away from him that *warneth* from heaven;
26. whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more will I make to tremble not the earth only, but also the heaven.
27. And this *word*, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain.
28. Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace, whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe:
29. for our God is a consuming fire.

With this noble display of the heavenly prospects the mighty argument has reached its climax and it now moves to its conclusion.

1. *Emphatic Recapitulation (25)*. "See to it that you do not reject the One speaking: for if those rejecting the one who passed on divine instruction on earth did not escape [penalty], much more [shall not] we, [that is] those turning away from the One from the heavens.

This summarizes the appeal of 10:26-31. To defy Moses was to incur severe penalties; yet he was only an earthly messenger of God, who offered blessings connected with the earth and denounced penalties to be inflicted on earth. But the Messenger now speaking is the Son of God, the Lord from heaven (1:1, 2), as much nobler than Moses as the son is greater than the servant (3:1-4), Whose message opens to faith the sublime privileges laid up in the heavens and warns of penalties more severe than those under the law of Moses.

Now these privileges are based upon that atoning blood which speaks to God in the heavenly sanctuary (ver. 24 above). To turn from *that* blood and *this* Speaker (see 10:29), by reverting to the law, with *its* mediator, Moses, and *its* but typical blood, is to reject the bright reality and return to the shadow. He who thus rejects the heavenly shall pay a severer penalty than he who rejected the earthly.

From this there is no possible escape. In every place in the New Testament this word "escape" has its natural force—*ek-pheugo*, to flee *out of* a place or trouble and be quite clear thereof. It comes only at Luke 21:36; Acts 16:27; 19:16; Rom. 2:3; 2 Cor.

11:33; 1 Thess. 5:3; Heb. 2:3, and here. In comparison with Rom. 2:3 see its use in the Septuagint in the interpolated passage after Esth. 8:13: “they suppose that they shall *escape* the sin-hating vengeance of the ever-seeing God”; also Judges 6:11; Job 15:30; Prov. 10:19. The sense is invariably as stated. One is either completely free from the penalty or completely involved in it, which latter shall certainly be the experience of the one who turns away from the heavenly Speaker.

But the Writer’s words (ver. 25) require strict understanding. It is again shown that not sin by ignorance or inadvertence is in view. He emphasizes his words found at 10:26 that it is if we sin “willfully,” deliberately, knowing what we are doing and adhering to that decision, that the warning operates. They who rejected Moses did so on definite occasions and maintained the disobedience (*paraitesamenoī*, aorist participle); and the Christians here are warned not to do the like (*paraitesesthe*, aorist conjunctive passive); and this “turning away” is not a thoughtless act soon mourned, but is continuous (*apostrophomenoī*, present participle middle).

While this limits the sin in view, yet the form of his sentence emphasizes again that it is Christians who are being warned. He does not use a general or indefinite expression, as, “such as turn away” shall suffer, but he employs again the specific and emphatic “we, that is, those of us who are turning away” (*hemeis hoi apostrophomenoī*), for this was precisely what some of the Christian circle were doing or about to do; and which some have done all the centuries since.

2. *The Past* (ver. 26). The heinousness of such apostasy, such turning away, arises from the majesty of Him from whom one turns. At court it were an unpardonable insult to turn one’s back upon the king, especially should he be speaking. And the One from whom the apostate turns is of incomparable majesty. When of old Sinai’s mighty mass heard the voice of Jehovah “the whole mount quaked greatly” (Exod. 19:18), as it is said in our passage (ver. 26), “Whose voice then shook the earth.”

3. *The Future* (vers. 26, 27). Yet that awesome display of His power is but a trifle as compared with what He will do hereafter; for “now hath He promised, saying, Yet once more will I make to tremble not the earth only, but also the heaven. And this, ‘Yet once more,’ signifieth the removing of those things which are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain.”

i. The Speaker from heaven is the same Person as He Whose voice shook Sinai. Christ is the Jehovah of the Old Testament. The Legislator is the Redeemer, the Redeemer remains the Legislator.

ii. Warnings are promises: “He hath *promised*” to shake earth and heaven, and He will keep His promise, whether of mercy or of wrath. Comp. 2 Tim. 2:11-13.

iii. The future disturbances of nature will test the heavenly regions as well as the earth.

iv. The period for this is significant, and is easily learned from Hag. 2:6-9 whence the promise is quoted. The whole prophecy reads:

For thus saith the Lord of hosts: Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desirable things of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.

(1) The subject is the house of God at Jerusalem. The Jews who had returned from Babylon were building the second temple. To the old among these the prophet addresses the question: "Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? and how do you see it now? is it not in your eyes as nothing?" (Hag. 2:3). Thus did God identify this second and smaller temple with that former and nobler temple, speaking of "*this* house in its former glory." It is then added: "the precious things of all nations shall come, and I will fill *this* house with glory, saith Jehovah of hosts," the precious things being the silver and the gold next mentioned. In consequence "the latter glory of *this* house shall be greater than the former, saith Jehovah of hosts."

Now it is clear that these promises have not yet been fulfilled. Herod the Great did indeed enlarge and adorn that second temple, but it never approached to the magnificence of Solomon's temple. There must therefore be built in Jerusalem in days to come a temple grander than even the first. This is the consistent prediction of all Scripture, as Zech. 6:12, 13; 14:20, 21 (Zechariah spoke at the same time as Haggai); Ps. 24, esp. ver. 3; Isa. 66:22-24; Ezek. 20:40-48; etc. The suggestion that all these and other passages, in the Old Testament and the New Testament, find fulfillment in the present spiritual house of God, the church, empties Scripture of any definite meaning or accomplishment, indeed, it sets aside the plain force of the Word of God.

The three-fold "*this* house" of Haggai definitely identifies the second temple with the first, and the third and future temple with the first and second: in God's view they are all one house. This *compels* the view that the third *must* be as literal as its predecessors with which it is identified and must stand upon the same site at Jerusalem.

(2) This future temple is to be built by Messiah, "the man Whose name is the Branch," Who "shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne, and he shall be a priest upon his throne" (Zech. 6:12, 13). The era is therefore that of the millennial reign of Christ.

(3) This is confirmed by the feature that “all nations” shall be disturbed: “I will shake all nations.” Comp. Jer. 25:26, 29-33, where judgment is denounced five times against “all the inhabitants of the earth.” See also Ezek. 39:21; Zech. 14:2; Matt. 25:32; Ps. 75:3, 8; all pointing to the time of Christ’s coming in judgment.

(4) Other scriptures speak of this shaking of all nature as to take place at that epoch.

Isa. 2:19, 21 speaks twice of Jehovah arising “to shake mightily the earth.” Isa. 13:13 says: “Therefore 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.” See also Isa. 24:1, 19, 20; Joel 2:10, 11; Nah. 1:3-6. Also the Lord foretold in detail the same disturbances as to occur in connection with His return in glory, saying that “the powers of the heavens shall be shaken” (Matt. 24:29) as well as there be “roaring of the sea and the billows” (Luke 21:25-26; see also Ps. 46:1-3), which dread panorama the *Revelation* expands in lurid fullness (ch. 6:12-16; chs. 8, 9, and 16) as ushering in the reign of Christ on earth.

(5) This shaking is not, however, the final cataclysm of the purifying wrath of God which will come at the close of the Millennium, for that will not be only a *shaking* of heaven and earth but a *dissolving* of their very elements, and the agency will be fervent fire, not merely agitation. This shaking is to be at the opening of the kingdom era, not at its close.

(6) The shaking here foretold is to be the final occasion when God will use this form of testing and judgment. Earth and heaven were agitated when God came to Sinai (Exod. 19:18; Judges 5:4, 5; Ps. 77:16-20; 114). These frequent mentions over many centuries indicate how terrific was that disturbance of nature and how deeply its lesson was impressed on pious men.

But the coming shaking shall far exceed that in extent and degree, for the heavens shall be involved, and the effect shall be “the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain” (ver. 27). Then shall be fulfilled Ps. 93:1: “Jehovah reigneth. . . . The world also is established, that it cannot be moved.”

4. Here is announced a *vital principle*, a fundamental necessity. If a building is to be permanent weak materials and constructions must be removed. Some years ago it was found that St. Paul’s Cathedral was in danger; whereupon old and decaying timbers were removed and replaced by sound beams, and other measures taken to assure stability. In the kingdom of God there arose of old sin and its inevitable weakness, and ever since there has developed more and more the need that this shall be eliminated. Hence the shakings and shatterings known in individual experience by the people of God; hence the perpetual attacks of Satan and the world upon the churches

of God; hence the ceaseless overthrowing of all human institutions; hence that coming overturning of the government of heaven and earth by angels—all things must be shaken terribly that the base and weak elements may collapse and make room for that which is divine, holy, stable.

This is the proper force of the word *metathesis* translated by “removed.” It signifies the substituting of one thing by another, as a name, an opinion, an institution. This is exhibited in ch. 7:12, which speaks of the substitution of the new priesthood and law in place of the Mosaic, using this word and its root.

And this shows the sense of the phrase “as of things that have been *made*.” For *poieo* does not here refer to the original creation of the substance of things, or the passage would require a new thought evidently foreign to it, even that *all* things would be “removed,” whether good or bad, strong as well as weak. But the statement as given is that some things are to be shaken and “removed” in order that other things, being unshakable, may remain. Yet these last have been “made” in the sense of being created.

The word *poieo* has therefore here its sense of existing things being arranged and instituted in certain relations to each other. It is not the annihilation of substance that is in view, but the annulling of relationships and the substituting of different relationships and institutions, suitable to the kingdom of God and capable of being everlasting.

Of these new institutions the principal will be that overthrowing of the existing angelic government, and the installing of the Son of man and His heavenly people in place of them, which has been before considered.

And this is the force of the statement before us that believers are in process of “receiving a kingdom” (ver. 28). What this means may be learned from Dan. 5:31: Darius the Mede received the kingdom,” where the Septuagint uses the same terms as in our passage (*parelabe ten basileian*). Or one may consider Mordecai’s question to the *queen*: “Who knoweth whether thou art not *come to the kingdom* for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14).

5. *Summary of the Five Warnings.* Thus the period of this shaking, as well as its accompaniment and results, show that the millennial epoch and kingdom are in view. This final warning is therefore in harmony with the earlier warnings. In ch. 2 the “great salvation” is the heavenly prospects of the disciples of Christ who attain to the first resurrection. In chs. 3 and 4 Canaan is used as a foreshadowing of the millennial rest, which will be entered by only the diligent. In ch. 6 the forfeiting of Canaan warns of the peril that apostasy from Christ may forfeit that heavenly portion. This is yet more heavily enforced in ch. 10, and positive penalties are added to the negative loss of glory. And here in ch. 12 the prospect of receiving a kingdom is the ground for being stable as

believers, seeing that only such shall abide the testings and meet the requirements of that great day, and that the penalty of instability, of not heeding and obeying the One speaking from heaven, is inescapable (ver. 25).

6. *Exhortation* (vers. 28, 29). “Let us have grace.” Upon what, therefore, shall the Christian concentrate so as to avoid the perils and secure his privileges? The Writer answers —upon GRACE. The danger underlying all dangers, against which pre-eminently he warns, is that of turning back from grace to law, ceremonies, self-effort as the basic principle of life. The urgent call is to trust in God as “the God of all grace,” for it is in this character that He has called us unto His eternal glory in Christ, and it is on this principle of grace that He undertakes to see us through the sufferings of the journey and perfect, stablish, and strengthen us (1 Pet. 5:10). This wholly unmerited and entirely adequate favor of God is made available in Christ His Son and only in Him. It is by reliance upon Him in His various offices and service that the believer acquires in daily experience “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3).

Therefore let faith adhere to this as the principle of all dealings with God, for so, and only so, shall we be able to “offer service well-pleasing to God” (ver. 28). To be well-pleasing to Him is the indispensable matter as regards attaining to what grace makes possible in Christ (ch. 11:5, 6); and for this faith and its fruits are the secret, and “dead works” are to be wholly renounced (9:14).

But living by the grace of our holy God is a serious matter. A just appreciation of His marvelous grace to us godless and guilty sinners produces “reverence and awe” (ver. 28). Let the Christian look steadily and long at these words “*reverence and awe.*” They are a New Testament form of this Old Testament promise: “to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that *trembleth at My word*” (Isa. 66:2). It is with such that God dwells and whose spirit He revives, so that they do not collapse under the strain of life (Isa. 57:15).

John Woolman says of a gathering of Quakers that “there was an awesome sense of the presence of God.” Is this what they seek who arrange “bright hours” and other devices for pleasing the carnal mind? Too truly has it been said that the present age, in religion as in things secular, is marked by specific levity instead of specific gravity. Therefore does our Writer remind us that grace produces reverence and awe, not frivolity and flippancy; and therefore does he close this exhortation with the reminder that “our God is a consuming fire,” which must and will burn up all that is not suitable to His holiness and glory.

The intense word “consume” *katanalisko* the Writer borrowed from the Greek Old Testament he so much used. It means to devour completely, to dissolve. He quotes from Deut. 4:24, where, warning Israel against forgetfulness of their God, and the resulting substitution of something else as the object of their hearts, Moses said, “For Jehovah thy God is a devouring fire, a jealous God.” Now jealousy is an outcome of

love. A man does not feel jealous that a woman he does not love should give herself to some other man. It is God's love of holiness that makes Him to bum against sin. It is His love for His people that compels Him to consume out of them all that is contrary to Himself and to their true welfare. If we respond to His grace, tremble at His word, serve Him with reverence and awe, then will He rejoice in us and we in Him; but if we provoke Him to jealousy with our vanities then must we learn by painful yet, at the last, salutary experience, that "our God is a consuming fire," even as was before shown at ch. 10:27.

The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Practical Treatise for Plain and Serious Readers
The Final Warning (Chapter 18) by G. H. Lang.

First Printing, The Paternoster Press, 1951
Second Printing, Schoettle Publishing Company, Inc., 1985

Schoettle Publishing Company, Inc.
P.O. Box 1246
Hayesville, NC 28904
(706) 892-3333

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