

The Unmovable Kingdom of God – Hebrews 12:25-29

See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven. (v. 25)

Verse 25 is another of the many warnings in the book of Hebrews. Once again, the point is: if you refuse to obey the Word of God, you have no assurance of your salvation. The author says, actually, the stakes are higher for us because we have a heavenly warning. The Old Testament hope was primarily (though not exclusively) earthly. Ours is exclusively heavenly. Greater revelation includes greater responsibility.

And His 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.” This expression, “Yet once more,” denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. (v. 26-27)

Verses 26-27 refers to the destruction of this present earth. Heaven here seems to refer not to the heaven of verse 25 (same Greek word), which cannot be shaken, but to the atmosphere surrounding the earth and the solar system of the physical universe. [Here is another example where the immediate context determines the meaning of the word.] This is the heavens in our three-dimensional universe of which Peter tells us, *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up* (2 Peter 3:10). This is also the heaven about which the Apostle John says, *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away* (Revelation 21:1).

Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire. (v. 28-29)

Verse 28 is poorly translated by the NASV. The point is not to show gratitude but to respond to the grace we have received. The Greek text literally translated reads: *Therefore having received an unmovable kingdom, let us have grace through which we worship (or serve) God acceptably with reverence (piety or caution) and fear (or awe).*

The words *let us have grace*, obviously do not mean we should show unmerited favor toward God, which is why the NASV translates it *show gratitude*. But the intent here seems to be more like, *let us live with a focus on the grace we have*. The result of that is to worship God (this same word is used for worship in Acts 7:7 and Hebrews 9:1). [*Service* is not an acceptable translation here.]

The worship of God is to be done in fear. The two words *reverence* and *awe* clearly mean fear, especially in view of verse 29.

Verse 29 describes God as a *consuming fire*. The idea of fire is usually one of purification through judgment. This is certainly the context of verses 25-27. As Walt Henrichsen has illustrated: **God is like a fire on a cold night. You want to get close, but the closer you get, the more dangerous it is.**