**Reflections 24 – 30 August -Awesome!**

**Bible study on Hebrews 12:18-29**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

Lord, we long to worship and praise you
in all your majesty, mystery and power.
You are greater than we can understand or imagine.
You are awesome!
Yet we thank you that, through Jesus,
we can approach you with confidence and joy.
**Amen.**

**Read the passage**

*Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.*

**Hebrews 12:18-29**

### The Mountain of Fear and the Mountain of Joy

**18**You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; **19**to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, **20**because they could not bear what was commanded: “If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death.”[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%2012&version=NIV#fen-NIV-30233c)] **21**The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, “I am trembling with fear.”[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%2012&version=NIV#fen-NIV-30234d)]

**22**But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, **23**to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, **24**to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

**25**See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? **26**At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.”[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%2012&version=NIV#fen-NIV-30239e)] **27**The words “once more” indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

**28**Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, **29**for our “God is a consuming fire.”[[f](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%2012&version=NIV#fen-NIV-30242f)]

**Explore and respond to the text**

*Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.*

**Bible notes**

This passage is part of a section (12:14-29) praising the grace of God, the free gift of God’s love, which sets us on the path to holiness and enables us to keep going. It draws on a complex set of contrasts between Old and New Testament imagery. The writer first describes the terrifying sight of Mount Sinai, where God gave the Israelites the Law (Exodus 19:9-25; Deuteronomy 9:19). He contrasts this with the destination of Christians. Mount Zion was another name for Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:6-9), chosen by David to be the home of the Ark of the Covenant. It was a place of rejoicing (2 Samuel 6:12–15). The second, heavenly Jerusalem, where God makes a home with humankind (Revelation 21:1-4), is equally a place of celebration – even the angels are partying (v.22; the phrase ‘festal gathering’ describes a happy, joyful festival). This is the home of the new Israel, where believers join with the people of faith who lived before Christ in a celebration of God, who offers them a renewed covenant relationship, mediated through Jesus, whose blood sets us free from sin (10:19-22).

The writer moves on to encourage his hearers again to accept God’s invitation. Just as the divine voice shook the earth at Sinai (Exodus 19:18), so the voice from heaven will shake the whole universe. This one-off shaking (cf Haggai 2:6) will sieve out the stuff of creation, leaving only the eternal reality of God’s kingdom. This image, along with the reference to ‘consuming fire’ (v.29; cf Deuteronomy 4:24) describes God’s judgement in ways that are unusual in New Testament thinking. Rather than expecting creation to come to a complete end, we hear mainly of a recreated heaven and earth, where everything is made new (Revelation 21:5). Both understandings of renewal lead to praise and thanksgiving to an awesome God.

**Reflection**

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

Some people are good at noticing the world around them. Archaeologists have a keen eye for the one stone that is a shaped flint. Shepherds can recognise their sheep. Jesus spotted a woman who was forced into insignificance and isolation by disability. A God’s eye view attends to people whose needs push them to the margins, restricting their life choices. God’s awesome orientation to life in all its fullness means that God longs to see people flourish.

This readiness to notice and make a difference characterises Jesus. Where, and in what ways, is the same awe-inspiring focus present in local communities? Where should we be taking care to notice the ones with heads bowed low, so that we can support them in finding ways to look up?

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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| A watercolor of people in a circle  AI-generated content may be incorrect. |  |

**Questions**

* What fills you with awe?
* What does the heavenly city look like to you?
* What’s your favourite way to celebrate?

**A prayer to end the Bible study**

Lord of awe and wonder,
Lord of gentleness and strength,
Lord of joy and celebration,
we go out into the world with you.
**Amen.**