

Study 2 — Glory is revelation, so listen! — Hebrews 12:18-29

This second study, like the first, is somewhat introductory to the whole matter of knowing and living in the glory of God.

Our first study spoke of the appeal Moses made to God to show his glory, but this second study is an appeal to us: '*You have come to Mount Zion...*' '*...do not refuse him who is speaking*' (Heb. 12:22, 25). The presence of glory in this passage is implied rather than mentioned but it is clear that Christians are those who live in the revelation of God's glory, and they should not settle for a life or a worship that is constrained merely by what can be seen. This was the issue for the first readers, and it remains the issue for us who have come to the glory of God in Jesus Christ: we may revert to living in a way that is merely outward. Because we are always in danger of finding our confidence in the things of this world rather than in the things of God, this writer calls us to see the glory to which we *have come*.

While it is true to say that God's glory has been revealed, visibly, and as an actual history, God does not shout loud to compete with the siren voices, or glories, of this world; or, if he does, it is through the voice of pain, and because the Lord does not willingly afflict or grieve us (Lam. 3:33) that is not his preferred method! He calls us be alive and awake to the glory to which we have already come.

Hebrews 12 reminds us of the glory Israel sees in Egypt and at Mt. Sinai, and the fear that comes to those who are there. It will be helpful to see more of what this experience means for Israel. Paul tells us that the glory 'belongs' to Israel (Rom. 9:4) in the sense that it was shown to them and worked out in them so they would be a witness and blessing to all nations.

Because Moses insists on seeing God's glory, Israel knows the reality of his steadfast love and faithfulness. It was as if Moses asks God, 'I want to know what this glory is all about. I can see the glory present but I want to know what it means.' God proclaims his glory, that he is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness...forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty' (Ex. 34:6-7).

This is the glory that *remains* among the people of Israel. God remains present among them, in the tabernacle or temple. At times, this was evident (Ex. 40; 2 Ch. 5:11-14; 7:1-3); the manifestation of glory has its place, but the fact of glory among them is a constant. It remains a reality to those who fear the Lord (Ps. 26:8), especially to David who has witnessed God working among his people (1 Ch. 16:7-36).

Even when Israel is unfaithful to their covenant, God's glory remains among them, and this is occasionally revealed to the prophets, as with Isaiah (Is. 6:3). He is permitted to see the Lord on his throne. Interestingly, what he hears is that God is holy, and that his glory is evident *in the whole earth*, that is, not just in the temple. The rest of his book shows how this glory will be worked out in the history of Israel among the nations. The false glory of Israel, and other nations, will be shown for what it is, and then, the glory of the Lord will be revealed in a restoration of Israel to their land (Is. 40:5). The glory of the Lord is also important in Jeremiah, and it is mentioned some 15 times in Ezekiel. God shows this prophet that, while Israel was far from glorious, his glory was still being revealed and would again reside among his people.

So what of ourselves? God has revealed his glory to the world in Christ (John 1:14), and continues to do so through the preaching of the gospel of Christ (2 Cor. 4:4-6). The church has encountered the glory of God in the cross of Christ (John 12:28), in the resurrection (Phil. 3:21) and in the coming of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:7), matters to which we must return. So where do we stand? The writer of Hebrews wants us to be in awe even more than people at Sinai.

We have come '*to Mount Zion*', that is, the renewed Jerusalem of Israel's prophecies (e.g. Zeph. 3:9-20), a people who will not be shamed (v. 11), who are no longer haughty (v. 11), no longer unjust or afraid (vv. 12-13), because the Lord has taken away her judgements, cleared away her enemies and has come to live within her, quieting them with his love (vv. 14-17). As Paul says, 'the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother (Gal. 4:26). What was available to Israel has been far surpassed in our coming to a city that has foundations, and based on the promise of God to be present among his people.

We have come '*to the general assembly and church of the firstborn*', the Firstborn being Jesus, particularly, the firstborn from the dead (Col. 1:15, 18). We, assembled under him, share in the glory of Christ himself, in his reign and victory and future.

Already, we have come to our *Judge*, not to cringe before him, but to live, together with all who are alive in *spirit*, as *just* people, *made perfect* or ready for being in God's presence. We have come *to Jesus* who has mediated the *new covenant* by spilling his own *blood*, blood that *cries out to God* for the sparing of us rather than for vengeance against us.

We tend to think of an earthly revelation being more substantial than one from heaven. The Son has descended from heaven (John 3:13) to reveal heavenly things more clearly than ever could have been revealed by a prophet. And the kingdom to which we have now been transferred is eternal (Col. 1:13).

All these things reveal to us a God who is *a consuming fire*. He is jealous for what he has made, jealous to have a people who know him and receive his gifts. This is the nature of the fire, but a fire that will be burn nonetheless, if we refuse to stand in Jesus the Mediator. As Moses was told, his glory consists in steadfast love and faithfulness, but in no way acquitting the guilty—that is, those who remain in their sin. Then again, he will burn away the dross of carelessness if we revert to living for the things that are seen.

All this is an exhortation, in the midst of our own secular environment, to live in the glory of God revealed to us in Christ, and not to be content with what only lasts for the present.