Fulfilled Prophecies

From Mount Sinai To Mount Zion: The Bible's Two Mountains



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† The Bible presents two mountains that represent two very different covenant realities. Mount Sinai represents the covenant given through Moses, while Mount Zion represents the heavenly Jerusalem and the New Covenant established through Jesus Christ.

† Sinai was surrounded by fear, trembling, darkness, fire, and separation. Zion is described as the heavenly Jerusalem, the

city of the living God, where God's people have been brought near through Christ.
† Paul used the same contrast when he compared Hagar with Mount Sinai and slavery, while identifying the Jerusalem above as free. The writer of Hebrews then declared to first-century believers that they had not come to Sinai, but had come to Mount Zion.
† This isn't a story about believers waiting thousands of years to reach another physical mountain. It's the biblical story of covenant transition, from the old covenant represented by Sinai to the New Covenant reality represented by Zion.

Exodus 19:10-12
The Lord also said to Moses, Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and have them wash their garments; and have them ready for the third day, for on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. But you shall set boundaries for the people all around, saying, Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall certainly be put to death.
† Sinai established a boundary between the people and the presence of God. They couldn't simply approach the mountain because the holiness of God exposed the problem of sin and separation.
† The boundary around Sinai pictured the limitations of the old covenant. Access to God's presence was restricted, and the people needed priests, sacrifices, and repeated cleansing to approach Him (Hebrews 9:6-10).
† This prepares us for the contrast in Hebrews. Under the New Covenant, God's people aren't commanded to remain at a distance. Through Christ, they have been brought near (Ephesians 2:13, 18).

Exodus 19:16-18
So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud over

the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the entire mountain quaked violently.
† Sinai was deliberately presented with terrifying imagery. Thunder, lightning, thick clouds, trumpet blasts, smoke, fire, and an earthquake surrounded the giving of the covenant.
† Hebrews later returned directly to this scene to contrast Sinai with Zion. The writer wasn't introducing two unrelated mountains. He was contrasting two covenant orders.
† The physical signs at Sinai demonstrated God's holiness and the seriousness of the covenant being established with Israel. The people trembled because they were standing before the God who had entered into covenant with their nation.

Galatians 4:22-24
For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and one by the free woman. But the son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. This is speaking allegorically, for these women are two covenants: one coming from Mount Sinai giving birth to children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar.
† Paul tells us exactly how he wanted this contrast understood. The two women represented two covenants. Hagar corresponded to Mount Sinai and represented slavery.
† This means Sinai wasn't merely a geographical location in Paul's argument. It represented the Mosaic covenant and the condition of those who remained under it.
† Paul wasn't attacking God's law as though it had been evil. The Law served the purpose God intended for it until the promised Seed came (Galatians 3:19). The problem was attempting to remain under that covenant after Christ had brought its purpose to fulfillment.

Galatians 4:25-26
Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is enslaved with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.
† Paul's words are especially important because he identified the Jerusalem of his own day with Sinai. He said the Jerusalem that existed then was in slavery with her children.
† He then contrasted that earthly Jerusalem with the Jerusalem above. One represented slavery under the old covenant, while the other represented freedom in Christ.
† Paul wasn't waiting for the earthly Jerusalem to become the Jerusalem above. He distinguished them. The Jerusalem above belonged to the New Covenant reality already being revealed through Christ (Hebrews 12:22-24).
† This is why the New Jerusalem shouldn't be reduced to a future physical city descending onto a reconstructed earth. The apostles identified God's covenant city with the people who belonged to Christ (Revelation 21:2-3, 9-10).

Galatians 4:28-31
And you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time the son who was born according to the flesh persecuted the one who was born according to the Spirit, so it is even now. But what does the Scripture say? "Drive out the slave woman and her son, For the son of the slave woman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman." So then, brothers and sisters, we are not children of a slave woman, but of the free woman.
† Notice Paul's repeated first-century language. He said, so also it is now. The conflict between the two covenant communities was occurring in Paul's own generation.
† The command to cast out the slave woman and her son pointed to the removal of the covenant represented by Hagar and Sinai. The inheritance belonged to the children of promise in Christ.
† This covenant transition explains why the New Testament repeatedly speaks about something old passing away while

something better was being established (Hebrews 8:13).
† The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70 visibly ended the old covenant system that could no longer continue after Christ had accomplished redemption.

Hebrews 12:18-21
For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words, which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. For they could not cope with the command, "If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I am terrified and trembling."
† The writer takes his readers directly back to Exodus 19. The fire, darkness, storm, trumpet, fear, and trembling identify Mount Sinai unmistakably.
† But his message begins with what they had not come to. They weren't being called back to Sinai. They weren't being called back into the covenant represented by that mountain.
† The old covenant couldn't provide the final access to God that Christ provided. It contained shadows pointing forward to the reality found in Christ (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1).

Hebrews 12:22-24
But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.
† These are some of the clearest words in the entire New Testament concerning Zion. The writer didn't tell these believers that someday they would come to Mount Zion. He told them, you have come to Mount Zion.
† Zion is identified as the city of the living God and the heavenly

Jerusalem. This is covenant language describing the reality believers entered through Jesus, the mediator of the New Covenant.
† Notice everything connected with Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the assembly, the church of the firstborn, God the Judge of all, the righteous made perfect, Jesus the mediator, and His blood.
† This is why the movement from Sinai to Zion is central to understanding biblical prophecy. God's purpose wasn't to restore people permanently to Sinai. His purpose was to bring His people into the better covenant established through Christ (Hebrews 8:6).
† Sinai said that boundaries surrounded the mountain. Zion declares that God's people have come near. Sinai was associated with slavery in Paul's argument. Zion is associated with the heavenly Jerusalem and New Covenant access to God.

Hebrews 12:25-28
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 us from heaven. 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. Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let's show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe;
† The transition from Sinai to Zion involved a shaking. The writer said things that could be shaken were going to be removed so that what couldn't be shaken would remain.
† His first-century readers were receiving an unshakable kingdom. The old covenant world centered on the earthly sanctuary was approaching its removal, while the kingdom established through Christ would remain (Hebrews 8:13).
† This shaking wasn't the destruction of planet Earth. It was

covenant judgment and transformation. What belonged to the temporary order was removed, while the kingdom of Christ remained.
† The earthly temple could be destroyed, Jerusalem could fall, and the old covenant system could disappear, but the heavenly Jerusalem couldn't be destroyed. Mount Zion couldn't be shaken because its foundation is Christ Himself.

Historical References
† Josephus described the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70 in great detail. His account records the devastation of the city, the burning of the temple, and the collapse of the Jewish sacrificial center that had dominated the old covenant world.
† Josephus also described extraordinary disturbances surrounding Jerusalem during the period leading to its destruction, including signs associated with the temple and the city. His account provides important historical background for the generation that experienced the end of the temple system.
† Eusebius later recorded the early Christian tradition that believers in Jerusalem left the city before the war and went to Pella. This corresponds with Jesus' warning that His disciples should flee when they saw Jerusalem surrounded by armies (Luke 21:20-22).
† These historical witnesses don't establish doctrine, Scripture does. But they help us understand the historical setting in which the New Testament's warnings of approaching judgment were fulfilled.

How It Applies To Us Today
† We aren't standing at Mount Sinai waiting for permission to approach God. In Christ, we've come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.
† We don't approach God through an earthly temple, an earthly priesthood, animal sacrifices, or the Mosaic covenant. We approach the Father through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:18).
† Our citizenship isn't defined by an earthly Jerusalem. Paul

said the Jerusalem above is free, and Hebrews identifies Mount Zion as the heavenly Jerusalem.
† We live in the unshakable kingdom. Governments rise and fall, nations change, buildings disappear, and earthly institutions pass away, but Christ's kingdom remains.
† The Bible's movement from Sinai to Zion is the movement from shadow to substance, slavery to freedom, distance to access, and the old covenant to the New Covenant.
† We don't need to travel back to Sinai, rebuild the old covenant system, or wait for another earthly Jerusalem to become the center of God's redemptive plan. In Christ, God's people have already been brought to the heavenly Jerusalem.
† The question isn't when we'll someday come to Zion. Hebrews declared to believers nearly two thousand years ago that they had already come to Zion. We now live in the completed New Covenant reality secured through Jesus Christ.

Q & A Appendix
Q: What do Mount Sinai and Mount Zion represent?
A: Mount Sinai represents the old covenant associated with Moses, while Mount Zion represents the heavenly Jerusalem and the New Covenant established through Jesus Christ (Galatians 4:24-26; Hebrews 12:18-24).

Q: Did the first-century believers have to wait until the end of the physical universe to come to Mount Zion?
A: No. Hebrews told them that they had come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22). The language describes a covenant reality, not a future journey to a physical mountain.

Q: Why did Paul connect the Jerusalem of his day with Mount Sinai?
A: Because the earthly Jerusalem of Paul's day remained connected with the Mosaic covenant. Paul said that Jerusalem was in slavery with her children, while the Jerusalem above was

free (Galatians 4:25-26).

Q: Does this mean God's promises failed?
A: No. God's promises reached their fulfillment in Christ. The Law pointed forward to Christ, and the inheritance belongs to those who are in Him (Galatians 3:16, 24-29).

Q: What was being shaken and removed in Hebrews 12?
A: The context contrasts Sinai and Zion, the old covenant order and the unshakable kingdom. The temporary covenant order was being removed, while the kingdom received through Christ remained (Hebrews 12:18-28).

Q: Are Christians still waiting for the kingdom?
A: No. The first-century believers were already receiving the kingdom that couldn't be shaken (Hebrews 12:28). Christ's kingdom isn't dependent upon an earthly temple, earthly Jerusalem, or restoration of the Mosaic covenant.

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †
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Source Index
† Exodus 19:10-12; Exodus 19:16-18; Galatians 4:22-24; Galatians 4:25-26; Galatians 4:28-31; Hebrews 12:18-21; Hebrews 12:22-24; Hebrews 12:25-28
† Josephus, The Wars of the Jews; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History

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