

## Hebrews Bible Study Week 13: Chapter 12

We have reached the penultimate chapter! (I love using that word. ☺ ) I feel like we have just started, yet we are now so near the end. After 10 chapters of fairly hefty doctrine (containing more meat than milk!) and a whole chapter of examples of faith, we have now come to the last two chapters containing heavy application. These applications would lose much of their power, I think, without the doctrine to back it up. For example, how can we truly consider Jesus as the model for our own endurance if we haven't actually considered him throughout the entire book? What should motivate us to do the right thing, to endure, and to have faith is not simply checking off a to-do list. It should be love for and following the example of a Savior who has done the same. It should be a reverent fear of the God who loves us and holds us accountable.

Here are the questions for the week.

1. What are we surrounded by? Who/what is that (note the "therefore")?
2. Since the above is true, what all should we do?
  - a. What should we lay aside?
  - b. How should we run the race set before us?
  - c. What should be our focus as we run/who should we be looking at?
3. Describe Jesus in relationship to our faith.
4. What did Jesus endure? Why?
5. How did Jesus view the shame of the cross?
6. What was the joy set before Jesus? Where is he now?
7. The author of Hebrews has used the word consider frequently. He urged us to consider Jesus who was a faithful high priest (3:1-2). He urged believers to consider how to stir up each other to love and good works (10:24). In chapter 11, he gave three examples of how OT saints considered: Sarah considered God faithful (v11), Abraham considered that God would be faithful to his promise so he might raise Isaac from the death (v19), and Moses considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt (v26). If you didn't define the word consider earlier, do so now. In 12:3, who are we to consider?
8. What did Jesus endure?
9. Why should we consider the enduring Jesus?
10. What was not the nature of the Hebrews' struggle against sin (compared to Christ's)?
11. What exhortation did the author remind them of?
12. In this context, what do you think is the nature of the "discipline" the Lord gives?

13. Why do they have to endure? In so doing, how is God treating them?
14. An undisciplined son is compared to what?
15. If we respect earthly fathers for their discipline of us, what is the comparison to our relationship to God who disciplines us?
16. Why do earthly fathers discipline their children?
17. Why does God discipline his children?
18. How does all discipline seem in the moment?
19. What does discipline later yield? For whom?
20. Because all of the above is true about the discipline the Lord sends that we must endure, what should be our response (vv 12-13)?
21. How else should we respond (vv 14-17)?
  - a. What should we strive for?
  - b. What three things should we see to?
22. Who is given as a negative example of these things? What did he do? What happened in response to his actions, his being a “root of bitterness”?
23. What is the “for” in v18 connecting to?
24. What have we not come to? What do you think this is referring to?
25. What order was given then (at Mount Sinai)?
26. How did Israel as a whole and Moses in particular respond to what they saw and heard?
27. In contrast, where have believers now come, described in several different ways? To whom have believers now come? To what have believers now come?
28. How is the God whom believers come to described?
29. Who do you think are the “spirits of the righteous made perfect”?
30. How is Jesus described to whom believers have come?
31. How is the blood described to which believers come? What does this description mean?
32. What warning is given in v25? Who is speaking (cf. 1:2)?

33. What was the result of those who refused he who warned them on earth? Who was this one warning on earth, do you think?
34. What is the danger if we reject he who warns from heaven? Who is the one warning from heaven?
35. What was the voice of he who warned from earth like?
36. What has he now promised about his warning?
37. What does the phrase “yet once more” indicate? What does this mean?
38. Therefore, what should our response be?
39. Our response should be thus, because God is described how?

My notes:

### **12:1-13: A Call to Endurance**

**12:1.** Because we are surrounded by all these witnesses (from Greek word *martyrs*, meaning witness, testifier, martyr; similar to the Greek work *martyreō*, from which comes “commend” in 11:2, 4, 5, 39)—those who were commended by their testimony of faith—we should also persevere in our faith.

“We are not to picture the great cloud of witnesses in ch. 11 as spectators in an amphitheatre, cheering us on in the race of faith. It is ‘what we see in them, not what they see in us, that is the writer’s main point’ (J. Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Clark, 1924], p. 193). They are witnesses (Gk. *martyres*) of true faith for us because God ‘witnessed’ (Gk. *emartyrēthēsan*, 11:2, 4–5, 39) to their faith in the pages of the Bible. They demonstrate the nature and possibilities of faith for believers in every generation. As contestants in the race, we are to look to their example for encouragement.”[1]

{My husband preached an excellent message on vv 1-3, with a basic outline that I will share that really helps think through these things: 1. Look around (at the surrounding witnesses who have finished the race—v1a); 2. Look within (at the sin which clings so closely—v1b); 3. Look ahead (at the race set before us—v1c); 4. Look up (at Jesus who endured and finished the race—vv2-3a); 5. Don’t look down (at your tired, weary feet and become faint—v3b)}

We should lay aside every weight—sin which clings so closely. Sin weighs us down and does not help us in our running the marathon of faith and obedience.

We should run with endurance the race set before us.

**12:2-4.** While we run, we look to Jesus as an example of endurance. He is described as the founder and perfecter of faith. “The word ‘our’ does not occur in the original. Faith in an absolute or general sense is meant (he is ‘the author and perfecter of faith’). Jesus is the perfect example of the faith we are to express. The word translated author (Gk. *archēgon*, as in 2:10) literally means that he is pioneer or

leader in the race of faith. However, the context also suggests that he is the author or initiator of true faith since he opens the way to God and enables us to follow in his footsteps.”[2]

He perfected the faith by enduring the cross and despising the shame (considered the shame of the cross as not important enough to be a concern when compared to something else). Jesus’ suffering was considered nothing compared to the joy of his exaltation in which he sat at God’s right hand.

We should consider Jesus’ enduring hostility from sinners, so we can endure, so we don’t grow weary and faint-hearted. In the Hebrews’ struggle for sin they (and many of us too!) haven’t had to shed blood over it (perhaps indicating that whatever persecution they were then enduring was not “bloody” at the time).

**12:5-8.** The author reminds them of another exhortation addressed to sons from Prov 3:11-12. All discipline, reproof, and chastisement is evidence of God’s love for his children, thus his children should not be wearied by it nor regard it lightly.

It seems like “discipline” includes the ideas of being chastised/reproved when sin is involved. But it also seems like it involves being trained to endure something difficult—like training to run the race. Every earthly father does this with his children, whether disciplining concerning sin or training a child to learn something difficult to help them grow up into responsible adults. When God does this with us, he is treating us as his children.

Instead of seeing the trials and hardships of life as wearying, pointless, and a sign of God’s lack of concern or love for us, we should recognize them as marks of his claiming us as his children.

**12:9-11.** When earthly fathers disciplined us as they saw best when we were young, we recognize their love for us and respond with respect. How much more should we correctly respond to our heavenly Father with submission (resulting in life in the end), even when at the moment the discipline is painful. Discipline trains us in righteousness, with the end result being our good—sharing in God’s holiness.

**12:12-13.** Here is the positive command mirroring the negative in v3 (Don’t be weary or fainthearted). Here, the picture seems to be someone hunched over in exhaustion, walking off-track because they are looking down. The encouragement is to straighten up and look ahead straight toward the goal. “It is a challenge to abandon fear and despair and not become exhausted in the race of faith (cf. Is. 35:3–4). The quotation from Pr. 4:26 (‘Make level paths for your feet’) is a warning about following the way that God has provided, not swerving to the right or left.”[3] Those really struggling need to be especially strengthened so that there can be healing instead of permanent “injury.”

#### **12:14-13:25: Appeals for a God-Honoring Lifestyle**

If we are being disciplined for the purpose of sharing in God’s holiness, then we actually need to strive for holiness. Following are practical ways, mixed with more exhortation and encouragement in which to pursue holiness.

### **12:14-17: A Final Warning Against Failure**

**12:14.** Believers are encouraged to strive for peace and holiness. This striving for a holiness (that God also works in us (v10) is a requirement for seeing God. Those who don't strive for holiness prove that God has not done a work in our hearts allowing us to share in his holiness.

**12:15.** Here is another warning that none fail to obtain God's grace. How could that happen? A "root of bitterness" could spring up among them, cause trouble, and defile many. "Such imagery recalls Dt. 29:18, where Moses warns about the bitterness that can be spread throughout the community of God's people by one rebellious member." [4] This would hinder others from enduring the race, the exact opposite of strengthening the lame (vv 12-13).

**12:16-17.** They are called not to be sexually immoral in their pursuit of holiness. Then Esau is named as a specific example of one who evidence his unholiness by selling his birthright for one meal. He considered the comfort of the moment greater value than God's promises and future blessings. When he later realized the consequences of his actions and sought blessing, he found no repentance and was rejected.

### **12:18-29: Responding to the Call of God**

**12:18-21.** Following the author's exhortation, he includes—as he often has—an encouragement for believers to respond appropriately to the Jesus to whom they are looking. He begins this with a contrast. He describes what coming in to God's limited presence was like for Israel—but not for us. When they came to Sinai, God had descended to deliver the Covenant (cf. Ex 19ff) and came with darkness, fire, thunder, and lightning. No one, including animals, were to touch the mount on threat of death. Israel begged that they would not have to hear God's voice speak anymore, and even Moses said that he trembled with fear.

**12:22-24.** The Israelites' experience at Mount Sinai in which they begged not to hear God's spoken voice again is contrasted with believers' experience today ("But you. . ."). This is what we have come to:

1. Mount Zion/the city of the living God/the heavenly Jerusalem. I think this refers to heaven itself, the place where God dwells (cf. Rev 14:1). This is the city to which OT believers were looking to (cf. 11:10, 13-16), and one which we have already come to because it has been guaranteed through Jesus' work and our ability to draw near (cf. 4:16; 7:25; 10:22; 11:6).
2. Innumerable angels in festal gathering (cf. Jude 14)
3. The assembly of the firstborn (Jesus; cf. 1:6) who are enrolled in heaven (all believers who are the "brothers" of Christ; cf. 2:11-13; Eph 2:6-7; Rev 7)
4. God, the judge of all (cf. 9:27)
5. The spirits of righteous made perfect (probably saints who have died, like those listed in ch. 11)

6. Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant

7. The sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. Abel's shed blood spoke of his righteousness and faith (cf. 11:4) which brought commendation by God. Jesus' blood speaks of even better things, opening the way of entrance to God and cleansing hearts (cf. 10:19-22).

"The mention of Abel is unexpected since it does not belong to the developed comparison between Sinai and Zion. It may have been suggested by the reference to 'the spirits of righteous persons' in the heavenly city (v. 23). Abel was the first in Hebrews 11 to have been explicitly mentioned by God as 'righteous', and the author of Hebrews may have intended to draw attention to the whole sweep of redemptive history, from the righteous Abel to the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus." [5]

**12:25-27.** Here is another warning that we make sure not to refuse the one speaking (cf. 2:1-4; 4:12-13). Israelites and others who refused to listen to God's warning when he came to speak to them on earth did not escape (cf. 2:3). How much more will we not escape if we reject His warning coming from heaven. God's voice shook Sinai (cf. Ex 19:18), but he promised a future shaking of the earth and heavens (cf. Hag 2:6). The author explains that this phrase "yet once more" means that things that are made will be removed, and things not shaken will remain (cf. Psa 102:26). God's kingdom will remain forever (cf. Dan 2:44).

**12:28-29.** Those who receive this kingdom should respond with gratefulness and an offering of acceptable worship—defined as being worship with reverence and awe. Why such worship? Because we understand who God is—a consuming fire (cf. Deut 4:24).

"The Greek verb here (*latreuein*) may also be translated 'to serve', as it is in 9:14. Christian worship cannot be restricted to prayer and praise in a congregational context. As ch. 13 illustrates, we are to worship, or serve, God by faithfulness and obedience in every aspect of our lives (note particularly 13:15–16; cf. Rom. 12:1). However, the writer also insists that acceptable worship is characterized by reverence and awe, and supports his challenge with a description of God as a consuming fire. This alludes to Dt. 4:24 (cf. Dt. 9:3; Is. 33:14), where the Israelites were warned not to indulge in idolatry, but to remain faithful to the Lord and to serve him exclusively, lest they provoke him to anger. The certainty of God's grace must never blind us to the truth that a terrible judgment awaits the apostate." [6]

[1] Peterson, D. G. (1994). Hebrews. In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 1349). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*, 1350.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] O'Brien, P. T. (2010). *The Letter to the Hebrews* (pp. 490–491). Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

[6] Peterson, 1351.