

**Hebrews 12****Lesson 12  
Exhortation To Have  
The Same Faith And Endurance****Outline**

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**Key Verse that Summarizes the Chapter****Hebrews 12:1**

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

This chapter consist of the fifth and final warning section of the book.<sup>1</sup> Here the admonition is to have the same faith as those heroes of faith in the previous chapter lest one fall short of the grace of God (cf. v. 15). The reader is encouraged to stay the course (vv. 1-3), endure the persecution patiently (vv. 4-11), have greater zeal (vv. 12-17), and consider the nature of the new economy (vv. 18-29).

### **Exhortation to Continue in the Course (vv. 1-3)**

*From the example of many who have gone before* (v. 1). The writer pictures the Christian life as running a race. To encourage the runners, they are reminded of the great cloud of witnesses (those people of faith mentioned in the previous chapter) that surround them. "The metaphor refers to the great amphitheatre with the arena for the runners and the tiers upon tiers of seats rising up like a cloud. The μαρτυρες [*martures*] (word of witnesses, DVR) here are not mere spectators (θεαται [*theatai*]), but testifiers (witnesses) who testify from their own experience (11:2, 4, 5, 33, 39) to God's fulfilling his promises as shown in chapter 11.<sup>2</sup> As we run, we look to the stands and see those who have already run, endured and won. This tells us we can do the same and encourages us to keep running. As we run, we must lay aside any weight hindering the run. Every sin and hindrance to our service must be laid aside. Then the race must be run with endurance—not giving up under the pressure of persecution (cf. 10:36).

*From the example of the Lord* (vv. 2-3). The runner is encouraged to focus attention on Jesus who is the author<sup>3</sup> and finisher<sup>4</sup> of our faith. "He is the founder of faith not in the sense that he was the first person to have faith in God, but that he was the first one to finish the course of faith all the way to heaven itself and to receive his heavenly reward... He has blazed the full length of the trail before us, showing us the way to reach that same goal ourselves (cf. 2:10)."<sup>5</sup>

Jesus is the perfect example of running the race with endurance. He endured the shame of the cross (v. 2) and hostility<sup>6</sup> from sinners (v. 3) and then sat down at the right hand of God. His focus on the joy of the future enabled him to endure all the opposition. If we do not look to Jesus and follow his example, we can become weary and discouraged. This picture "appears to be that of the runner letting himself get tired of the effort and thus quitting."<sup>7</sup>

### **Exhortation to Endure Afflictions Patiently (vv. 4-11)**

The recipients of this book were facing persecution. They needed words of encouragement to help them press on to the end. Here the writer says they could endure in view of two things:

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1 Go back to the Introduction to see the five sections.

2 A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Heb 12:1). Nashville, TN: Broadman Press.

3 NKJV footnote: "originator." ESV: "founder." Same word for "captain" (2:10).

4 NKJV footnote and ESV: "perfecter."

5 David McClister, *A Commentary on Hebrew*, 444.

6 ASV: "gainsaying."

7 R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and of the Epistle of James*, 431. Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern.

*In view of their comparative lightness* (v. 4). Whatever they have endured thus far, they had not yet paid the ultimate sacrifice of blood. Jesus did, as well as Stephen (Acts 7) and James (Acts 12).

*In view of the fact that the chastening of the Lord is intended for our good* (vv. 5-11). Here the writer quotes Proverbs 3:11-12 and makes application about the chastening<sup>8</sup> of the Lord. This refers to persecution for it is suffering that is peculiar to the sons of God (v. 6). It is "of the Lord" in the sense that God allows it for our good (in the same way he sends a strong delusion, 2 Thess. 2:10-12).

The reader is urged not be discouraged by the afflictions they face (vv. 5-6), for God, because he loves his children (v. 6), allows it. Just as our earthly fathers corrected us, so God chastens his children through the persecution (vv. 6-8). God's design in allowing it is the good that comes from it (vv. 9-11). When our earthly fathers disciplined us, we paid them respect (v. 9). Likewise we should willingly submit to our father who disciplines us (v. 9). The suffering in persecution should not drive one from God, but rather toward God. One who has been "trained" (v. 11) by this chastening is a partaker of God's holiness and is righteous (vv. 10-11). The suffering makes one stronger. Thus, one can endure persecution when he realizes good will come from it.

### **Exhortation to Greater Zeal – Lest We Lose It All (vv. 12-17)**

Here the readers are warned that if they don't have greater zeal and endurance they will lose it all.

*Stir greater zeal and strength* (vv. 12-13). The hands hanging down and knees becoming feeble (taken from Isa. 35:3) is a picture of tired, weary, weak and discouraged people. They are almost ready to throw up their hands and quit. Instead, "They were to make every effort to bear up under their trials. The hope of victory will do much to strengthen one almost exhausted in battle; the desire to reach home invigorates the frame of the weary traveler."<sup>9</sup>

"Make the straight paths for your feet" (v. 13) means "keep on the right path" (NCV). "It has the sense of following the path that leads straight to the goal, without taking any deviation from it."<sup>10</sup> If this is not done, that which is lame<sup>11</sup> will be completely dislocated (disabled, NIV). Here is the idea of losing it all without greater zeal and strength.

*Follow peace and holiness* (v. 14).<sup>12</sup> The admonition is to pursue peace with all (which is part of making straight paths). This certainly includes the world and brethren. But, how does this fit the context which deals with persecution? "Rather than retaliate in kind, God's people are to react to mistreatment in a peaceful way...We react with peace because we believe that God's way is best for us."<sup>13</sup>

8 The word translated "chastening" is translated "training" (Eph. 6:4) and "instruction" (2 Tim. 3:16).

9 Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament: Hebrews*. (R. Frew, Ed.), 300. London: Blackie & Son.

10 McClister, *ibid.*, 458.

11 Same word is translated "cripple" (Acts 14:8).

12 The writer is possibly alluding to Psalm 34:14.

13 McClister, *ibid.*, 459.

The admonition also says pursue holiness.<sup>14</sup> Whether under persecution or not, God's people must always seek to be pure. Peace should not be sought at the expense of holiness. Without peace and holiness, one will not see the Lord. Here again is the idea of losing it all without greater zeal and strength.

*Look carefully* (vv. 15-17). While pursuing peace and holiness we must "look carefully"<sup>15</sup> or given close attention to others as well as ourselves.<sup>16</sup> This is to be done lest anyone of four things should happen:

**1. Lest anyone fall short of the grace of God (v. 15).** It is possible that under the pressure of persecution one would be discouraged and give up and thus fall short of the heavenly home provided by God's grace.

**2. Lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble (v. 15).** The writer is referencing Deuteronomy 29:18 where Moses warns about being overtaken in sin. "The allusion, in both cases, is to a bitter plant springing up among those that were cultivated for ornament or use, or to a tree bearing bitter and poisonous fruit, among those that produced good fruit. The reference of the apostle is to some person who should produce a similar effect in the church—to one who should inculcate false doctrines; or who should apostatize; or who should lead an unholy life, and thus be the means of corrupting and destroying others. They were to be at especial pains that no such person should start up from among themselves, or be tolerated by them."<sup>17</sup>

**3. Lest there be any fornicator (v. 16).** A fornicator is given to sensual pleasures. He is focused on physical and earthly over the spiritual and heavenly things.

**4. Lest there be any profane person (vv. 16-17).** Esau is given as an example of a profane ("unholy", ESV; "godless" fn. NKJV) person who did not regard God or his religion. He like the fornicator<sup>18</sup> followed his fleshly desires in selling his birthright (Gen. 25:27-34). He later found no place for repentance which means he could not change Isaac's mind. The NCV helps to paraphrase verse 17: "You remember that after Esau did this, he wanted to get his father's blessing, but his father refused. Esau could find no way to change what he had done, even though he wanted the blessing so much that he cried."

If we do not have greater zeal and strength (which involves watching out for our fellow Christians), we (them and us) could lose it all.

### **Exhortation Based on the Nature of the New Economy (vv. 18-29)**

*Superior honors and blessings of the new* (vv. 18-24). "For" (v. 18) points back to the responsibilities just mentioned. The fact that we are under a superior covenant gives us reason

14 Strong's defines this "*purification*, i.e. (the state) *purity*."

15 The word translated "looking carefully" is only used two times in the New Testament: Here and 1 Peter 5:2 where it is used of elders "serving as overseers."

16 ESV: "See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God..."

17 Albert Barnes, *ibid.*, 302.

18 Some interpret the text as saying Esau was a fornicator (using the term figuratively). The text is not saying Esau was a fornicator but that he (being profane) and the fornicator are alike. Both are worldly, focusing on fleshly desires.

to strive for greater zeal and endurance. "To enforce the considerations already urged, the apostle introduces this sublime comparison between the old and new dispensations; vers. 18–24. The object, in accordance with the principal scope of the epistle, is, to guard them against apostasy. To do this, he shows that under the new dispensation there was much more to bind them to fidelity, and to make apostasy dangerous, than there was under the old."<sup>19</sup>

**Description of the old (vv. 18-21).** The expressions here describes the awe and terror that filled the hearts of those who approached the mountain. "The purpose of the writer is to contrast the experience of coming before God in the new and old covenants."<sup>20</sup> Sinai was a mount that could not be touched (Exo. 19:10-13), was burned with fire (Exo. 19:18; Deut. 4:11), was covered with blackness and darkness (Exo. 19:16). There was the blast of the trumpet (Exo. 19:19) and the voice of God (Exo. 19:19). It was so fearful that those who heard the voice begged that the word not be spoken to them anymore (Exo. 20:18-19).

Verse 20 quotes Exodus 19:12-13. Verse 21 quotes Deuteronomy 9:19. The point of both is the terror that was experienced by the people and Moses.

**Description of the new (vv. 22-24).** The expressions used here describe both what is experienced now and what awaits the people of God in the future. In coming to God, instead of coming to Mount Sinai they have come to Mount Zion, also called the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (heaven, Rev. 21-22). Rather than coming to an earthly mount, they have come to a heavenly mount. There is an innumerable (myraids, YLT) company of angels gathered around the throne of God ready to welcome the faithful of God.

Those coming to God come to a general assembly ("festal gathering" NKJV fn) that is the church that is made up of those who hold the rank and privilege of the firstborn who have their names registered in heaven. Additionally they have come to God (judge of all), to the spirits of those who through the ages have been perfected by the blood of Christ (v 23), to Jesus the Mediator, and to the blood of Christ that is better than the blood Abel shed in his sacrifice.

*The authoritative voice of God (vv. 25-26).* Because of the superior nature of the new covenant, we should listen to the voice of God. If one who refused to listen to Moses was punished, how much more will we not escape if we refuse to listen to Christ (v. 25). The same voice of God that shook Mount Sinai (Exo. 19:18) has promised to shake the earth and heavens also (Hag. 2:6).<sup>21</sup>

*A remaining and stable kingdom (vv. 27-29).* The author makes application of the text he just quoted. The contrast here is between things that can be shaken (removed) and things that cannot be shaken (cannot be removed). The things being shaken would be the Old Covenant with its priesthood and sacrifices.<sup>22</sup> In contrast we have received a kingdom which cannot be shaken (cf. Dan. 2:44). Therefore, "let us be grateful for receiving" such a kingdom

19 Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament: Hebrews*. (R. Frew, Ed.), 305. London: Blackie & Son.

20 Daniel H. King, Sr., *The Book of Hebrews, Truth Commentaries*, 432.

21 This refers to the overthrow of nations or change in order.

22 Jerusalem itself will be destroyed within a short time of the writing of this book.

(ESV)<sup>23</sup> and thus serve God with reverence and godly fear because God is a consuming fire<sup>24</sup> (will punish the disobedient).

Use of the Old Testament in this Chapter	
Verse in Chapter 12	Old Testament Reference
vv. 5-6	Prov. 3:11-12
v. 12	Isa. 35:3
v. 20	Exo. 19:12-13
v. 21	Deut. 9:19
vv. 26-27	Hag. 2:6

<sup>23</sup> The NKJV says "let us have grace"; NASB: "let us show gratitude".

<sup>24</sup> Compare Exodus 24:17.

## Questions

1. How does this chapter relate to the previous chapter?
2. What is the "cloud of witness" (v.1)?
3. What does it mean that Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith?
4. In what way could the persecution be considered light (v. 4)?
5. What is the chastening of the Lord (vv. 5-11)?
6. What is the point being made about the chastening of the Lord?
7. What does following "peace" have to do with things in the context?
8. What is meant by looking carefully (v. 15)?
9. What is the contrast in verses 18-24?
10. What has been shaken and what will not be shaken?