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By Dan Maines

Hebrews 12

Hebrews 12:1

Therefore, since we also have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let's rid ourselves of every obstacle and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let's run with endurance the race that is set before us.

† The "great cloud of witnesses" refers back to the faithful in chapter 11. They are examples, not spectators. Their testimony urges believers to run faithfully.

† The image of a race was familiar in the Greco-Roman world. Philo (On the Special Laws 2.63) used athletic metaphors for virtue. Paul also uses it in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

† Clement of Rome, 1 Clement 7, reminded believers of this same race of faith and endurance.

Hebrews 12:2

Looking only at Jesus, the originator and perfecter of the faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

† Jesus is the starting point and goal of faith. He endured the cross because of the joy set before Him. The shame of crucifixion became the pathway to glory.

† Tacitus (Annals 15.44) called crucifixion the "extreme penalty" and the most shameful of deaths. Hebrews says Jesus despised that shame for the greater joy.

† Chrysostom (Homilies on Hebrews 28) wrote that Jesus turned the shame of the cross into honor by enduring it.

Hebrews 12:3

For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

† The hostility Christ endured is set before the church as encouragement. If He endured to the end, His people can endure as well.

† Josephus (Wars 6.300) describes how hostility and cruelty in Jerusalem reached a peak before its destruction. Hebrews urges endurance through similar trials.

Hebrews 12:4

You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin.

† The audience had faced persecution but not martyrdom. Hebrews warns them not to falter before the struggle reaches

its worst.

Hebrews 12:5-6

And you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are punished by Him, for whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He punishes every son whom He accepts."

† Quoting Proverbs 3:11-12, Hebrews reminds them that suffering is God's discipline, proof of His fatherly love.

† Philo (On the Cherubim 95) said that discipline is the truest form of God's care for His children.

Hebrews 12:7-8

It is for discipline that you endure, God deals with you as with sons, for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

† Suffering proved sonship. Without it, one would be illegitimate. Discipline is not rejection but proof of belonging.

Hebrews 12:9-10

Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them, shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.

† Earthly fathers discipline as they can, but God's discipline is always for holiness and life.

Hebrews 12:11

For the moment, all discipline seems not to be pleasant, but painful, yet to those who have been trained by it, afterward it

yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

† The fruit of discipline is righteousness. Trials refine faith like training strengthens an athlete.

† Seneca (On Providence 3.4) said hardship is the training ground of virtue. Hebrews shows God's discipline produces the fruit of righteousness.

Hebrews 12:12-13

Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is impaired may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

† Drawing from Isaiah 35:3-4, the writer urges renewal. Community encouragement helps heal weakness instead of allowing it to result in collapse.

Hebrews 12:14

Pursue peace with all people, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

† Holiness is essential. To live in peace and holiness is the visible proof of belonging to God.

Hebrews 12:15

See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God, that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.

† Quoting Deuteronomy 29:18, the warning is against apostasy that spreads corruption in the community.

† Josephus (Wars 4.6.3) said factions and bitterness destroyed Jerusalem from within. Hebrews warns against the same spiritual rot.

Hebrews 12:16-17

That there be no sexually immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. For you know that even afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.

† Esau is the model of despising God's promises for temporary relief. Once rejected, there was no reversal. Hebrews warns the church not to repeat his error.

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."

† Sinai represented fear, distance, and terror. The old covenant was marked by awe and separation.

† Philo (On the Decalogue 11) described Sinai as terrifying, even for Moses.

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.

† Zion represents joy, closeness, and access to God. The church has come to the heavenly Jerusalem, the true assembly.

† Revelation 21 shows the same city, the bride of Christ.

† Abel's blood cried for vengeance, but Christ's blood proclaims forgiveness.

† Augustine (City of God 17.4) said Abel's blood foreshadowed Christ's, but Christ's brought mercy where Abel's cried for justice.

Hebrews 12:25

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.

† If Israel at Sinai faced judgment for refusing Moses, how much more severe is it to refuse Christ from heaven.

Hebrews 12:26-27

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," indicates the removal of what can be shaken, that is, created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

† Quoting Haggai 2:6, Hebrews applies it to the removal of the old covenant order. The shaking in their day meant the destruction of the temple and the old system in AD 70.

† Josephus (Wars 6.289-300) described earthquakes, voices, and cosmic signs before Jerusalem's fall, showing the shaking of heaven and earth.

Hebrews 12:28-29

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let's show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

† The kingdom of Christ is unshakable. While Sinai trembled and Jerusalem fell, the kingdom remains. Gratitude and reverent worship are the only fitting response.

† Deuteronomy 4:24 declared God a consuming fire, reminding us of His holiness and judgment.

† Origen (Homilies on Jeremiah 18) taught that God consumes sin and purifies the faithful like fire refines gold.

Application for us today

† Discipline is not punishment but proof of sonship. Trials are training for holiness.

† The new covenant is Mount Zion, not Sinai. We have access to the heavenly city and to God through Christ's blood.

† Apostasy is dangerous. Esau's example warns us not to trade eternal inheritance for temporary relief.

† The shaking of heaven and earth was fulfilled in AD 70 with the end of the old covenant system. We now live in the unshakable kingdom.

† Our calling today is gratitude, endurance, holiness, and reverence, knowing that our God is still a consuming fire.

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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