

Hebrews 12:12-24 – Pursue Peace and Holiness

The beginning of chapter 12 encouraged the hearers/ readers of the letter to “run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus”. In their race, they were being disciplined by God out of his love for them. God’s discipline shows that he is treating us as his children. That is not discouraging but encouraging. Some may have gotten tired while running the race and were ready to give up. The author was cheering them on to victory.

Read Hebrews 12:12-17.

As a reminder, verses 7-11 talked about God’s discipline. Verse 12 may be a loose quote from Isaiah 35:3. It may also be a proverbial saying. Isaiah 35:3 says “Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees.” Isaiah 35:5 is a verse which Jesus referenced, “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened”. What does this verse mean in the context of Hebrews? (12:12)

In verse 13, I believe that it is safe to assume that this verse is not about a literal highway construction project. How can we make straight paths for our feet? In the second part of the verse, ESV has “put out of joint”. NKJV and NASB have “dislocated”. NIV has “disabled”. BDAG suggests that in this context it might mean something like our expressions ‘twist’ or ‘sprain one’s ankle’. How can we foster figurative healing of what is lame? (12:13)

In verse 14, what is the exhortation? Why is holiness important for us? (12:14)

Verse 15 is similar to 2:1-4 (don’t drift away), 3:12-15 (avoid an unbelieving heart that leads to falling away), 5:11-6:12 (grow up and don’t fall away) and 10:26-31 (don’t continue to deliberately sin and fall into the hands of the living God). What should we be on the lookout for? How can someone fail to obtain the grace of God? What is a “root of bitterness”? What damage can it do? (12:15)

In verses 16-17, the author chose Esau as a negative example. How was Esau described? What did Esau do which he later regretted? Why was Esau’s attempt at repentance rejected? See Genesis 25:27-34; 27:1-41. (12:16-17)

Read Hebrews 12:18-24.

Verses 18-21 are in contrast with verses 22-24. “You **have not** come to... but you **have** come to...”. What event did verses 18-21 describe? See Exodus 19:9-20:1; Deuteronomy 4:11-12, 5:22-26. What did God communicate about himself at this event? (12:18-21)

In verse 18, ESV has “**what** may be touched”. NKJV, NASB and NIV have “a/the mountain”. The reference here is clearly Mount Sinai. Why weren’t people or animals allowed to touch the mountain? (12:18)

Sometimes people have wished they could hear the voice of God. What did the people at Mt. Sinai do when they heard God’s voice? What happened if a person or an animal touched the mountain? (12:19-20)

How did Moses, their fearless leader, respond to the scene? This verse may have been based on oral tradition. This is not a direct quote from an Old Testament passage. (12:21)

Instead of Mt. Sinai, what mountain and city do we now approach? Who is found in the heavenly Jerusalem? Verses 22-23 are a rare example of verses being divided differently. ESV and NIV end verse 22 with “angels in festal gathering / joyful assembly”. NKJV and NASB end verse 22 with “angels” and begin verse 23 with “to the general assembly”. They take the “general assembly” as going with “church” and not “angels”. The word used at the end of 22 / beginning of 23 only occurs once in the New Testament. BDAG says it is “an assemblage of many persons for a special occasion, festal gathering”. TDNT supports BDAG with the meaning “festal gathering” as well as the verse structure of the ESV and NIV. NKJV, NASB and NIV all have “church”. ESV has “assembly” with a note “or church”. This word “church” occurs 119 times in the NT. It can mean “church” or in a more general sense, “assembly” or “congregation” as in 2:12. Are those in heaven fearful? Why or why not? What is the significance of “the firstborn”? (12:22-24)

In verse 24, Jesus was identified as the mediator of the New Covenant. What is the importance of the sprinkled blood found in heaven? Compare and contrast Abel’s blood shed at the hand of Cain with Jesus’ blood shed at the hand of sinners. See Genesis 4:10-12. (12:24)