

Study Notes For Hebrews **(Chapter Twelve)**

Hebrews 12:1-3 - *“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds”* (Hebrews 12:1-3).

The great cloud [“...a large dense multitude...”; Strong’s # 3509] of witnesses ties to the people of faith we studied about in the previous chapter (Hebrews 11:1-40). If you spend some time looking at the Greek word translated “witnesses” [μάρτυς], part of the definition of that word is this: “an historical sense, one who is a spectator of anything, e.g. of a contest” (Strong’s # 3144). Think about that. Paul illustrated his efforts in preaching and faithfully living the Gospel of Christ by likening such to running a race, striving for the mastery, and fighting a fight (I Corinthians 9:16-27). The first verse in this chapter says we are running a race. Therefore, it is as though we are competing in a sporting event and the audience is the champions who have lived before us.

Running this race as though those who served in the past with unwavering faith are observing us, we need to step up our game. One way in which we can compete better is to cast off anything that might weigh us down. As we should have done before conversion, we need to make sure nothing has a grip on us to cause us to look backwards (Luke 9:57-62). We need to make sure that the cares [anxieties] of this life are not weighing us down (Matthew 13:22, Mark 4:19, Luke 10:38-42, Luke 21:34, Philippians 4:6-8, and II Timothy 2:1-4). We need to make sure that fleshly desires are not weighing us down (Romans 13:12-14, I Corinthians 3:1-3, II Corinthians 7:1, Galatians 5:16-24, I Peter 2:11, and I Peter 4:1-2). Individually, we are all running our own race. Therefore, examine your life (II Corinthians 13:5). If there is something that is weighing you down, deal with it in a manner pleasing to our Lord.

Think about how sin will “beset” a person. The term translated “beset” [εὐπερίστατος] is defined as: “well standing around, i.e. (a competitor) thwarting (a racer) in every direction (figuratively, of sin in genitive case): — which doth so easily beset. Skillfully surrounding i.e. besetting” (Strong’s # 2139). Obviously, we know that sin will cause us to lose our reward in Heaven (John 5:28-29, Romans 6:23, I

Corinthians 6:9-10, Hebrews 10:26-39, and James 1:13-16). Sin will only earn us a place in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone (Revelation 21:8). This text however addresses sin [transgression of the law; I John 3:4] in another manner. That is, that sin will surround you. Sin will get in your way (Galatians 5:17). The fact is, you either serve sin or obedience (Romans 6:16).

The first verse in the text we are examining also deals with the subject matter of patience [endurance]. We have to have a patient continuance in well doing wherein we seek eternal life (Romans 2:7). Earlier in this letter the text said “*ye have need of patience*” (Hebrews 10:36). So, as Paul taught Timothy, flee the things that hold you back and follow after that which saves. That includes patience (I Timothy 6:3-12).

When you’re running distance it is wise to have your face set towards a finish. In this text, that is looking unto Jesus (Titus 2:11-14 and Hebrews 9:27-28). Forget all that which is behind you, the goal is ahead. That’s how the faithful get through this life (Philippians 3:1-21).

The eleventh chapter of this letter gave us great examples of faith. Yet, there is no example that is greater than our Lord Jesus Christ. He chose to come to this world and chose to go through all that He did for our salvation (John 10:1-18). He is the author [source] of our salvation (Hebrews 5:5-9). His example is before us to follow (I Peter 2:21-24). He is the firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:12-18). What that means is, He is the first one to fully experience death, being buried, raised from the dead, and ascending into Heaven. He is where we seek to be for all eternity (Hebrews 1:1-3 and Hebrews 8:1). He won the fight, the race, etc. He then gives unto us the pattern of victory (I Corinthians 15:20-23; 15:54-57).

Before Jesus came into this world He knew that He would be despised and rejected (Isaiah 53:3). Shame did not weigh down our Lord. He faced contradiction [dispute; disobedience; strife] from sinners (Matthew 12:22-30, Mark 12:13-17, Mark 14:65, Luke 4:16-30, Luke 9:22, John 6:60-71, etc.). The horrible things our Lord faced did not cause Him to quit. He could have chosen not to go through with more suffering. He could have called legions of angels to protect Himself. He chose not to (Matthew 26:47-56).

It is wise to look to Jesus. To see His example (I John 2:3-6). To see that we too can be victorious lest we get tired and faint mentally. There is a reward before us if we do not get tired and give up (Galatians 6:9). Our labor is not and will not be in vain (I Corinthians 15:58 and Hebrews 6:10-12). Faithfully living in this world is not easy. There are times, like the faithful of the past had to endure, wherein we can be “*troubled*”

on every side” (II Corinthians 4:8). If you go back and read that context, you see that Paul was able to press through those difficult times he faced by keeping his focus on things eternal (II Corinthians 4:9-5:11). Staying goal minded is the key. Jesus stayed focused (John 4:31-34). Jesus steadfastly set His face on where He was supposed to go to do our Father’s will (i.e. Luke 9:51). Brethren, look unto Jesus!

Hebrews 12:4 - In this article we are going to study a very interesting passage of Scripture. The wording has made this passage a bit difficult for me to understand. I am also struggling to see it clearly in the context we have read, though it certainly applies in what was written following. The word “and” in Hebrews 12:5 ties this verse to the context going forward. Here is the verse we are going study: *“Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin”* (Hebrews 12:4).

We are going to start off breaking down the meaning of some of the words in this passage of Scripture. The word translated “resisted” [ἀντικαθίστημι] is defined as: “to set down (troops) against, i.e. withstand: — resist. To put in place of another; to place in opposition; to dispose troops, set an army in line of battle. To stand against, resist” (Strong’s # 478). A word study is very difficult on this term. This is the only verse in the New Testament wherein we find this Greek word being used.

The word translated “unto” [μέχρι] is defined as: “as far as, i.e. up to a certain point (as a preposition, of extent): — till, (un-)to, until. As far as, until” (Strong’s # 3360). We see this term translated in other passages as “until” (Matthew 11:23, Matthew 13:30, Matthew 28:15, Acts 10:30, Acts 20:7, I Timothy 6:14, and Hebrews 9:10), “till” (Mark 13:30 and Ephesians 4:13), “to” (Romans 5:14), and “unto” (Romans 15:19, Philippians 2:8, Philippians 2:30, II Timothy 2:9, Hebrews 3:6, and Hebrews 3:14).

The term translated “blood” [αἷμα] can mean a variety of things. Yet, it is not hard to understand. It is defined as: “blood, literally (of men or animals), figuratively (the juice of grapes) or specially (the atoning blood of Christ); by implication, bloodshed, also kindred: — blood...” (Strong’s # 129). That Greek term appears about ninety-nine times in the New Testament and is as broadly used as the definition. It can refer to the blood of man (Matthew 23:35), the fruit of the vine figuratively representing Jesus’ blood (Matthew 26:28), disease (Mark 5:25), animal blood (Hebrews 9:12), etc.

The term translated “striving” [ἀνταγωνίζομαι] only appears in this one New Testament verse. The definition of that term is: “To struggle against (figuratively) (“antagonize”): — strive against. To struggle, fight” (Strong’s # 464). We have just previously considered running the race of faith and enduring to the end. We also read

about laying aside sin that would easily beset a person. So, the word is pretty easy to understand.

The Greek term translated as “sin” [ἁμαρτία] is just as you would think. It is the common term used in the New Testament for sin that appears one hundred seventy-four times. The definition is: “a sin (properly abstract): — offense, sin(-ful)...” (Strong’s #266). We see that same Greek word used in a verse that clearly defines sin (I John 3:4).

Looking at other translations, that are not as accurate as the KJV, has not been too helpful for me. The ASV 1901 reads the same as the KJV. One translation reads: “You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin” (New King James Version). Other translations vary and some greatly from others. So apparently, this passage of Scripture is difficult for translators as well as so-called translations that act more as denominational commentaries.

Here is what I have to offer in thoughts on this passage. Their lives, like ours today, was a battle (I Timothy 6:12). That battle is a spiritual one (II Corinthians 10:1-5). Our armor and weaponry are spiritual (Ephesians 6:10-17 and I Thessalonians 5:8). Sin is a battle against our own carnal desires (James 1:13-16). Meaning, it is an internal battle (Galatians 5:16-17 and I Peter 2:11). If we surrender to sin we lose our souls (Romans 6:23 and Revelation 21:8). What they were or were not doing needed some correction. That is clear in the coming passages of Scripture.

They were not resisting; standing against something regarding the shedding of blood. That could mean various things. For example, when there was false doctrines being taught in Antioch the Holy Ghost, the Apostles, and the congregation in Jerusalem sent a letter to Antioch. Notice what was said: *“It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well”* (Acts 15:25-29). This is one possibility.

There is another possibility that could make sense too. The book of James was written to early first century Jewish Christians at the time they were scattered from Jerusalem (James 1:1; cf. Acts 8:1-4). In that letter plenty of transgressions among those saints was addressed. Among those errors was that some of the wealthy ones

were committing acts of violence against the just (James 5:1-6). Remember, some Jews converted to Christ but then were soon removed (Galatians 1:1-6:18). We even have Jesus warning the disciples that some of the Jews would kill the faithful thinking they were doing God service (John 16:1-3). It is possible there was some of that spillover into apostate saints. That seems less likely than the former (abstaining from animal blood), but is not entirely out of the question. Maybe there are other possibilities too. That's where I am going to leave it. I am just not sure one way or another.

Hebrews 12:5-13 - *“And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed”* (Hebrews 12:5-13).

The instruction begins with the fact that they had forgotten a Proverb of old (Proverbs 3:11-12). Interestingly, the same collection of Proverbs includes this instruction: *“My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments”* (Proverbs 3:1). It is beneficial to have a remembrance of what God has said (Proverbs 4:1-6). That is why teachers, such as those writing this Hebrew letter, remind people of what they once knew (I Timothy 4:6, II Peter 1:10-15, II Peter 3:1-2, and Jude 1:5; 1:17-19).

Correction should not be despised (Psalms 94:12). Correction from God comes about because of His love (Revelation 3:19). Correction keeps us from being condemned with the world (I Corinthians 11:27-32). One Proverb says: *“He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding”* (Proverbs 15:32). One of the reasons our Heavenly Father has given us His word and the instructions for His word to be taught is for correction (II Timothy 3:15-4:2).

One of the concerns that comes about with correction is fatigue. A parent may look at a child and say something like, “if you keep that up I am going to wear you out.” We know that being chastised often can wear one out. One of the Psalmists wrote: “*O LORD, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. Have mercy upon me, O LORD; for I am weak: O LORD, heal me; for my bones are vexed*” (Psalms 6:1-2). Unfortunately, sometimes correction has to keep coming about because the one or ones needing corrected are not changing. Sin cannot be ignored because the consequences are eternal (Romans 6:23 and Revelation 21:8). Yet, there is a real concern that being corrected often will cause some not only to get tired, but also to harden their necks (Proverbs 29:1). God’s way of dealing with that is shown in this text. He is reminding those being corrected of the love behind that correction and His desire for them not to get tired (Galatians 6:9).

Those among God’s people that are parents understand the need for instructing and correcting children (Deuteronomy 4:9, Deuteronomy 11:18-19, Proverbs 1:8, Proverbs 3:12, Proverbs 19:18, Proverbs 22:6, Proverbs 22:15, Proverbs 23:13-14, Proverbs 29:15, Proverbs 29:17, and Ephesians 6:4). So, God reminds the readers of this epistle that He is dealing with those He corrects as a Father to a son. Remember, we are the children of God (II Corinthians 6:14-18, Galatians 3:26-29, I John 3:1-3, and Revelation 21:7). As His children, there is something to keep in mind about correction that comes from our Lord’s word. Notice: “*He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes*” (Proverbs 13:24). So, the text asked a question concerning the relationship between God as a Father and His children. If reverence is paid to fathers in the flesh that correct, why not the same for Him? The reward for reverence towards God certainly supersedes the reward earthly parents can offer (Jude 1:21).

What does it mean that parents correct “after their own pleasure?” The word translated “pleasure” is most often translated “think” (Strong’s # 1380). Parents in this world correct children based upon what they “think” is best. God on the other hand corrects based on what is truly best for us. We know human logic can be flawed (Proverbs 16:25). God is just trying to illustrate that we ought to receive His correction better than anyone in this world. It’s best for us to do so. The goal behind God’s actions is our salvation (John 5:34).

Though we desire salvation, being corrected is not a time of joy. That being said, if our course is corrected the end result is worth the process (II Corinthians 7:10). That process includes a time wherein you learn you’re wrong and you hate yourself for it (Job 42:1-6). One cannot stay in that frame of mind though. If a person being corrected

stays in the stage of sorrow that person can be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow (II Corinthians 2:7-8).

After being corrected and repenting of sin, that person has to get up and move forward. There has to be a healing process. If we deal with our sins properly, God will be merciful to us (Proverbs 28:13 and I John 1:9). God is of great mercy (Psalms 145:8). It can be easy to forget about God's mercy when one is being corrected. One may feel that sin will always be in front of them. We have to remember that we live in a time wherein we can have sins forgiven and remembered no more (Hebrews 8:12). So, if you find yourself being corrected or even if you are correcting yourself using the Scriptures, that process is for our salvation not our damnation (Ezekiel 18:18-32 and II Timothy 2:24-26).

Hebrews 12:14 - The text in this letter goes from being corrected and moving forward (Hebrews 12:5-13) to another subject. The Lord's next instruction is: "*Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord*" (Hebrews 12:14).

Jesus taught about peace while He was on this earth. He taught: "*Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God*" (Matthew 5:9). Most division/discord is sinful (Proverbs 6:16-19, I Corinthians 1:10, and I Corinthians 12:25). Yet, Jesus also taught: "*Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me*" (Matthew 10:34-37). So, the subject matter of following peace with all men is not that simple.

Jesus took stands while He was on earth that did not bring about peace with all men (John 2:13-17, John 7:32-43, John 9:1-16, and John 10:1-21). There are situations wherein a faithful Christian has to stand for the truth and that will not bring about peace (i.e. Acts 17:1-15). We cannot sacrifice the truth upon some invented altar of peace (Proverbs 23:23, Proverbs 28:4, Romans 16:17-18, Philippians 1:17, Jude 1:3-4, and Revelation 2:14-16). So, the instruction to follow peace with all men has to be understood in light of the fact that peace is not always attainable when living and teaching the truth. Paul's inspired instructions to the saints in Rome is very helpful on this subject matter. Notice: "*Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is*

written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:17-21). Now, think about how following peace with all men includes holiness.

God did not call us to live unclean, but rather for us to be holy (I Thessalonians 4:7). For us to understand what it means to be holy, we have to look at God and imitate His character. Notice: *“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy”* (I Peter 1:13-16).

When we consider the instructions to follow peace with all men and to be holy together we get some clarity. For example, think about the following two Scriptures: *“This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth”* (I John 1:5-6). The God of peace (Romans 15:33, Romans 16:20, Philippians 4:9, I Thessalonians 5:23, and Hebrews 13:20) will not change His character for the sake of peace. He will not allow darkness to abide in Himself. If we therefore are holy as He is holy, we will never compromise our holiness to try to create peace. If any one of us ended up doing so, our relationship with our Lord would be over (II John 1:9). We have to walk in the light as He is in the light (I John 1:7).

In considering our relationship with the Lord, that brings us to the end of the verse we are studying. The end of Hebrews 12:14 says: *“without which no man shall see the Lord.”* This is not all that simple of a phrase. Is this talking about Jesus? Is this talking about God our Father? The word translated “Lord” appears in nearly seven hundred New Testament Scriptures (KJV). That study is both exhausting and inconclusive. Most of the verses clearly refer to Jesus. Some clearly refer to the Father (i.e. Acts 3:22 and Acts 7:37; cf. Deuteronomy 18:15-19). Other Scriptures are not so clear. For example, Matthew 21:42, Luke 13:35, or James 4:10 could refer to the Father or the Son. Then there are passages wherein that same Greek word is used and is not about the Father or the Son (i.e. Acts 16:30 [translated “Sirs”]).

The phrase is not clear. However, other Scriptures clarify that all will see Jesus. Therein we have our answer. Notice: *“And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us*

kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen” (Revelation 1:5-7). Furthermore, other Scriptures state: “For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living. But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God... For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (Romans 14:9-12 and II Corinthians 5:10). So, without following peace with holiness we will not see our Heavenly Father. Like all spiritual truths, take this information and apply it to your life (James 1:21-25).

Hebrews 12:15-17 - After the instruction to follow peace with all (Hebrews 12:14), we have the instructions we are going to examine in this article. Consider the following: *“Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears” (Hebrews 12:15-17).*

The phrase translated “looking diligently” [ἐπισκοπέω] means: “To beware: — look diligently, take the oversight. To look upon, inspect, oversee, look after, care for; of the care of the church which rested upon the elders. To look carefully, beware” (Strong’s # 1983). The only other time you see that Greek term is in I Peter 5:2. In that passage the term is translated “oversight” and is talking about elders. So, take some time to process that. The Lord’s instruction here is to take oversight of your faithfulness to Him. To inspect yourself as a shepherd would his flock. This is a consistent truth throughout the Scriptures (Psalms 119:59, Lamentations 3:40, Haggai 1:5, Haggai 1:7, I Corinthians 11:28-31, II Corinthians 13:5, and Galatians 6:4).

If in that examination of one’s self that person were to find his or herself bitter, changes need to be made. Paul wrote: *“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice” (Ephesians 4:31).* To bring about the point, the Holy Spirit had the writers of this letter bring Esau forth as an example. If you will recall, Jacob and Esau were brothers. Their father was Isaac. When it came time for Isaac to give the birthright to the eldest there was certainly some

problems. For one, Jacob and their mother Rebekah tricked Isaac into giving the blessing to Jacob (Genesis 27:1-33). As a result, there was bitterness on Esau's part. Notice: *"And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father"* (Genesis 27:34).

The problem behind Esau's bitterness didn't start with Jacob's deception. The text we are studying draws us back to an earlier account that ties the two situations together as one. For a greater understanding of the whole situation, I am going to give the record going back a little further than what is referenced. Notice: *"And Isaac intreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren: and the LORD was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived. And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to enquire of the LORD. And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger. And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. And the first came out red, all over like a hairy garment; and they called his name Esau. And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them. And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob. And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint: And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright"* (Genesis 25:21-34).

Esau gave up his birthright. Our (those whom have obeyed the will of the Lord) birthright is the kingdom of Heaven (John 3:1-5). By using self-examination, we need to weigh our spiritual condition. We have to consider whether or not we have failed when it comes to the grace of God. The warning is that a person can fall from grace (Galatians 5:4). It would do us all well if we never lose sight of the fact that we could fall away and lose our inheritance (Luke 8:13, I Corinthians 9:24-27, I Corinthians 10:1-12, Galatians 1:6-9, Galatians 3:1-3, Galatians 5:7-9, I Timothy 4:1, Hebrews 3:12-13, II Peter 2:20-22, Revelation 2:1-7, and Revelation 22:18-19).

There are some other words we ought to pay attention to in Hebrews 12:15-17. Such as something “springing up” that troubles a person. Like we read earlier in this chapter, anything in our way needs to be set aside (Hebrews 12:1-3). Consider also the word “defiled” in the text. Even the most corrupt Jews, such as those who delivered Jesus to be put to death, understood what it meant to be defiled (John 18:28). Bitterness defiles a person. The text also talks about fornicators. We know fornicators will not be saved (Ephesians 5:5).

Finally, consider why the Lord brought up that Esau sought a place for repentance, but there was no place found. Twice in this letter it was established that someone can walk too far away from God (Hebrews 5:12-6:6 and Hebrews 10:26-31). Sure, confession and repentance from sin can save an erring Christian (II Timothy 2:24-26 and I John 1:9). However, we should not take that as a given (Acts 8:13-24). So, we should take that message and be sure we are always ready to be judged by the Lord (Matthew 24:35-25:46).

Hebrews 12:18-24 - *“For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:) But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel”* (Hebrews 12:18-24).

As this epistle has already established, there is a new law in place (Hebrews 8:7-10:18). Jewish Christians needed to understand that what they had through Moses was not comparable to what they have in Christ (Hebrews 7:14-8:6). With that goal, this context starts explaining the difference between the literal mount Sinai and the now figurative mount Sion. The Law of Moses was delivered from mount Sinai (Exodus 34:1-35). This was the mount that burned with fire, darkness, etc. (Exodus 19:18, Exodus 24:17, Deuteronomy 5:4-5, Deuteronomy 5:22, and Deuteronomy 9:10).

That mountain from which the Law of Moses began was a mountain that could not be touched until the long sound of the trumpet (Exodus 19:1-25). Consider the result: *“And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the*

trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die” (Exodus 20:18-19).

The people were not the only ones to fear. Moses did too. He especially feared when the people erred and he witnessed the reaction of the Lord (Deuteronomy 9:13-29). Why is that significant? Isn't fearing God a good thing (Philippians 2:12)? The answer is both yes and no. Fear can lead to initial obedience. However, fear can also be debilitating. Consider two Scriptures on this matter: *“For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father... There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love” (Romans 8:15 and I John 4:18).*

Thus, the lesson turns to *“But ye are come unto...”* The children of Israel should have been somewhat familiar with the prophecies concerning mount Zion (Isaiah 2:2-3, Joel 2:28-32, and Micah 4:1-2). Those who had converted to Christ should then have also understood that those prophecies were fulfilled when the Gospel was preached in Jerusalem on the first pentecost after the death of Jesus (Acts 2:1-41). They should have also understood that this is when the saved were added to the church of our Lord (Acts 2:47). For those who converted from being obedient to the Law of Moses to the Law of Christ, they would understand these figures to represent the freedom they had which did not exist under the Old Law (Galatians 4:1-31).

This epistle will not allow the honest reader to think of the city of the living God to be a place on earth (Hebrews 13:14). Christians then and now should know that our conversation [citizenship] is in Heaven (Philippians 3:20). When John saw visions of things above he saw a great number of angels (Revelation 5:11-12). When you put these things together we have the fact that the kingdom of Heaven is comprised not only of the saints alive on earth now, but even the angels that are in Heaven. Let that sink in. So often Christians have limited their thinking of the church to the local assembly. The church is far greater than the local assembly. Thus, we are reading about the “general assembly” in this context.

The language of “the church of the firstborn” should not be confusing to Christians. We know the firstborn is in reference to Christ (Colossians 1:12-18). The reference to those whose names are written in Heaven is about those who are in the book of life (Exodus 32:32-33, Psalms 69:28, Philippians 4:3, Revelation 3:5, Revelation 21:27, and Revelation 22:18-19). The continuation of the description of those who are part of the city of the living God includes the spirits of just men made perfect. Being

made perfect is language already used in this letter (Hebrews 5:8-9). Here, like the previous usage, it is in reference to those who have completed life in this world. The subject matter of the just has been covered too (Hebrews 10:38-39). So, both they and us should understand this language.

Finally, regarding the text of our study in this article, Jesus is put forth as the new mediator. Moses was the mediator [go between] of old. He was the one who interceded for the children of Israel with God (Exodus 32:1-14). Now there is one mediator. That one mediator is Jesus (I Timothy 2:5-6). He offered His body as a sacrifice (Ephesians 5:2 and Hebrews 10:19-22). While Abel offered an acceptable sacrifice (Genesis 4:1-10 and Hebrews 11:4), Jesus' sacrifice declares better things. Jesus gave His life to be a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). Not only did He die for sins to be forgiven (I Peter 3:18), but also so that redemption from the Law of Moses could occur (Galatians 3:13). The fact is, everything is better because of what Jesus did for all of mankind. Be thankful for that!

Hebrews 12:25-27 - *“See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain”* (Hebrews 12:25-27).

In this same epistle we read that if the word spoken by angels was disobeyed there was a just recompense of reward (Hebrews 2:1-2). We also read that those who despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses (Hebrews 10:28). In the context we are now studying Moses is the earthly messenger being spoken of (Hebrews 12:21).

Under the Law of Moses, if someone rejected the commandments given there was a swift punishment. Notice: *“But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Because he hath despised the word of the LORD, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him. And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day. And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation. And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him. And the LORD said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone*

him with stones without the camp. And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the LORD commanded Moses” (Numbers 15:30-36).

The point being made by drawing this point out is to think about how much sorer punishment one could expect if they turn from He who speaks from Heaven. This point has already been made in this epistle (Hebrews 10:29-31). Those who reject the word of God can expect a fiery vengeance to be rendered unto them (II Thessalonians 1:7-9 and Revelation 21:8). When Paul spoke on Mars Hill in Athens to those ignorantly worshipping the “UNKNOWN GOD” he said this: *“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead”* (Acts 17:30-31). When you read through punishments rendered under the Law of Moses, they were really severe at times (Exodus 32:1-28, Numbers 16:1-50, and Numbers 25:1-9). Now, the standard is higher. Therefore, so is the punishment for breaking that standard. The punishment for disobedience to Christ is eternal (Matthew 25:31-46 and John 5:28-29).

To draw the point clearly, it is brought up that the earth shook at the voice of God (Exodus 19:18). In a song by David this was said: *“In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried to my God: and he did hear my voice out of his temple, and my cry did enter into his ears. Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of heaven moved and shook, because he was wroth”* (II Samuel 22:7-8). In regard to the burden of Ninevah, Nahum the prophet wrote: *“God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies. The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers: Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth. The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him”* (Nahum 1:2-6).

God could shake the earth with His voice. Yet, that is not all. They should have known God’s capability of shaking the heavens as well (Joel 3:16). They appear to have forgotten the might of God. Jews in the first century still highly revered Moses (John 9:28-29). This was even true among some believers (Acts 15:1-5). They were highly offended when something contradicted what they perceived was taught by Moses

(Acts 6:10-14). So, this section of Scripture we are studying is yet another attempt to get those clinging to Moses to let go. They needed to realize that holding on to Moses and fearing the consequences of disobeying the old law was nothing in comparison to rejecting what the Father has delivered through His only begotten Son. There is no escape from God if they/we reject the New Covenant. Remember, God said: "...*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him*" (Matthew 17:5).

The promise is that the earth that was shaken will be removed. Then, there will only be that which cannot be shaken. The earth and sky are temporary (Matthew 24:35). Yet, there is a kingdom that remains. We will study about the eternal kingdom in the next article when we look at Hebrews 12:28. There is a habitation that is not of this world. It will outlast this world. That is the promise of God (II Peter 3:9-14). Regarding such, Paul and Timothy wrote saying: "*For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*" (II Corinthians 5:1). They were not clinging to the temporary (Hebrews 7:16). Like them then, we too need to think about that. Nothing earthly is worth hanging on to if it will cost you your soul (Mark 8:34-38).

Hebrews 12:28-29 - We left off our previous study considering that which cannot be shaken (Hebrews 12:25-27). In this study we pick up with this: "*Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire*" (Hebrews 12:28-29).

The language concerning the kingdom was not foreign to the children of Israel (Exodus 19:6, Psalms 22:28, Psalms 103:19, and Psalms 145:9-13). They knew that the kingdom given to David (I Chronicles 10:13-14) was prophesied to be established forever (Isaiah 9:1-7). They knew to expect a kingdom to come (Daniel 2:31-45 and Daniel 7:13-14). They knew to look forward to the coming of the last days because of the words of the prophets (Isaiah 2:1-5 and Micah 4:1-5). The angel Gabriel told Mary that Jesus was going to sit on David's throne and that of His kingdom there would be no end (Luke 1:26-33). John and Jesus both preached that the kingdom of heaven was "at hand" (Matthew 3:2 and Matthew 4:17). Jesus prayed for the kingdom to come (Matthew 6:10). We know when the last days began (Acts 2:1-41). The Hebrew letter began with the fact that they were living in the last days (Hebrews 1:1-2). So, the phrase "wherefore we receiving a kingdom" proves that the promises of God concerning the kingdom were fulfilled.

Things were not always clear for disciples of Christ in the first century. You might recall that they thought the kingdom was earthly (John 6:15 and Acts 1:6). The fact is,

there are still people today that don't understand the kingdom has come. They can even read the verses we are discussing and still not see it. No matter how confused someone might be for whatever reason, the establishment of the kingdom in the first century is not mistakable. Those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ were then and now citizens of the kingdom. Notice: *"Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins"* (Colossians 1:12-14). If you read the contexts of our current study as well as the previously quoted Scriptures, you see the church and the kingdom refer to the same body of God's people (Colossians 1:12-18 and Hebrews 12:22-29).

The Jews that had converted to Christ were seeing a lot of changes. They had seen what was known as the kingdom of Israel (cf. I Samuel 15:28) go through changes throughout their history. Now, they've seen the physical kingdom of Israel come to an end in Christ. In this message they see something that will not end. The kingdom, unlike the earth and other things that have changed, cannot be moved. This should be comforting. The kingdom of Christ is everlasting (II Peter 1:11). Even when the end comes, the kingdom will reside eternally under the oversight of our Heavenly Father (I Corinthians 15:24-28).

The phrase "let us have grace" is very interesting. The phrase indicates that they needed to accept the gift of being in the kingdom of God. Does that imply they were struggling? Yes, that is evident throughout the New Testament. Think about the churches of Galatia being carried away because of wanting to go back to some things contained in the Law of Moses (Galatians 1:1-6:18). As not to fall like the churches of Galatia, they needed to avoid receiving the grace of God in vain (II Corinthians 6:1).

Being in the kingdom and recipients of the grace of God carries the responsibility to serve God (Romans 12:1-2) with reverence (Hebrews 12:9) and godly fear (I Peter 1:17). This was not intended to draw them back to the fear they had under the Law of Moses. Earlier in this letter they were taught about how Jesus delivered them from the fear of death they had under the Law (Hebrews 2:14-18). Nor was this message intended to get their knees shaking at the thought of God (I John 4:18). In light of the context, the message was to get them to consider the consequences of not pleasing God (I Corinthians 10:1-12). Remember, the contextual message is to not refuse Him that speaketh from Heaven (Hebrews 12:25).

Receiving grace and citizenship in the kingdom of our Lord should not have been taken for granted. God is a consuming fire. The Law of Moses stated such: *"For the*

LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God” (Deuteronomy 4:24). As we addressed in our last study, this was seen of the children of Israel in the days of Moses on the mount (Exodus 19:18, Exodus 24:17, Deuteronomy 5:4, etc.). When the Lord led the children of Israel, He was as a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 9:3).

Since it should be supposed that those addressed in this letter had some knowledge of what was written aforetime, they should have known what God’s anger was like. Think about this: *“And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp”* (Numbers 11:1). It is wise to understand the danger of the wrath of a king (Proverbs 16:14). Seeing that the Lord is our King and His ability to punish is greater than any earthly king, He is to be feared by those who would disobey Him.

When one considers our Lord as a consuming fire from the Old Law, that has a little different message than now. When we think about consuming fire as it relates to our Lord we need to consider the eternal measure of such (Matthew 25:31-46 and II Thessalonians 1:3-9). Serving God as to not spend eternity in Hell is certainly a motivator.