

Study # 12: Invisible Realities

Read Hebrews 12:1-13

In Hebrews 11, we summoned up Israelite history in the stories of men and women of faith. Suddenly, here, they are not examples from the past. They are living witnesses, all around us. We perform in their presence.

1. This passage begins with the metaphor of a long-distance race. What are the lessons you take from this image?
2. When we focus on Jesus, the first runner of this race, what kind of difficulties do we see that he endured?
3. Comparatively, what have the Hebrews gone through?
4. Beginning at verse 5, the author interprets those difficulties as parental discipline, with God as the parent. Does that mean God is behind everything that is hard on us? Why or why not?
5. Practically speaking, what do verses 12 and 13 mean we should do in the face of adversity?
6. *Read Hebrews 12:14-17*
7. Why do you think he singles out Esau as an example to be specially avoided? What makes hapless Esau's mistake so especially dreadful?
8. It's easy to apply Esau's undisciplined, appetite-driven approach to our sensual culture. Do you think it also applies to the ethos of the contemporary church? If so, how?
9. *Read Hebrews 12:18-29*
10. Regarding the destination described in verses 18-21, have you experienced religion like this? What made it so dark and fearsome?
11. What about the destination described in verses 22-24? Which of the descriptive terms speaks to you?
12. What does the blood of Abel say? (verse 24) What does Jesus' sprinkled blood say?
13. Who speaks that word, that we are not to refuse? (verse 25) What would refusal look like? What would acceptance look like?
14. Much of Hebrews is dedicated to explaining a great transition that has taken place with the coming of Jesus. What great transition is still to take place? (verses 26-29) What will happen? How will it affect us?
15. What are we supposed to do in response?

Hebrews 12:1-13 New International Version

12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

God Disciplines His Children

4 In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5 And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says,

“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”[a]

7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? 8 If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! 10 They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

12 Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. 13 “Make level paths for your feet,”[b] so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

Footnotes

Hebrews 12:6 Prov. 3:11,12 (see Septuagint)

Hebrews 12:13 Prov. 4:26

Hebrews 12:14-17 New International Version

Warning and Encouragement

14 Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to

cause trouble and defile many. 16 See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. 17 Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done.

Hebrews 12:18-29 New International Version

The Mountain of Fear and the Mountain of Joy

18 You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; 19 to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, 20 because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death."^[a] 21 The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."^[b]

22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

25 See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? 26 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens."^[c] 27 The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our "God is a consuming fire."^[d]