

THE STAND

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE HEBREWS CHAPTER 12



Chapter 12 Commentary

When the Bible was originally written, it was not broken down into chapters and verses. Man added these markers later on to help us study the text and find sections quickly. We must not assume that a new chapter begins a new line of conversation. Instead we should realize Hebrews 12 carries on with a topic mentioned a few chapters earlier. Therefore, to understand this chapter, we will have to look back a few chapters to the beginning of this conversation.

In Chapter 10, we see the writer address sin. It was a common belief, in the Jewish culture, that illness, persecution and other tragedies in life were caused by a man's sin. They believed God was punishing them for a sin they had committed when bad things happened. If Christ's sacrifice covered sin for all men for all time, then why were the people still struggling with sin? Why were bad things still happening in the world? This is the discussion that begins in Chapter 10 and one we will finish here in Chapter 12.

To review, in Chapter 10, the writer begins by reminding the people, once again, that Christ's sacrifice is sufficient to atone for all sin. He has discussed this point over and over already but, once again, reminds the people that Christ's sacrifice set them free from sin and its bondage. This new freedom should result in a new way of life. Their response to the great gift of Christ should be to sacrifice for others, encourage one another and spread the message of Jesus Christ to the world. They must do all these things in the midst of a fallen world while living under the oppression of the Roman Empire. They must have faith that this honest and humble way of life was the best way to life. When the Roman Empire would come and seize their property or throw them in prison, they should no longer assume that this persecution was simply the result of sin in their life. This was the product of living as Christ, in a fallen world. This lifestyle takes faith.

So, in Chapter 11, the writer takes time to remind them of many of their forefathers' stories of faith. Each of these stories includes trials or persecution where faith in God had to triumph over the situation. This is the type of faith that the writer is calling his audience to. It will take big faith for these 1st Century Jews to believe the message of Jesus Christ, just as it took great faith for Abraham to stand over Isaac ready to sacrifice his only son.

As we enter Chapter 12, the writer explains that this cloud of witnesses should serve as an encouragement and a reminder of what true faith looks like. These are people who have consciously laid aside sinful and worldly things in exchange for God's promises. The writer compares the lives of the people to running a race. Those who are in Christ have a race set before them, one that requires endurance. But sin, and the things of this fallen world, can act as an obstacle in their path. Because sin and things of the world look enticing, they can easily cause the runner to go off course. They must focus on the goal, Jesus Christ, who has run the race, endured the cross in our place and perfected faith for mankind. Christ willingly fell into the hands of sinful man, the very people He desired to save, and suffered even to the point of death. This audience had obviously not suffered to the point of death. The writer draws attention to the level of suffering Christ endured on their behalf.

After two chapters of introduction, the writer is now ready to explain to his audience why they still endure the persecution and suffering. Quoting a Proverb, the writer reminds them that God has disciplined His people throughout the ages. By specifically referring to His people as sons, this also serves as a reminder that those God disciplines are part of His family. What is discipline? As 21st Century readers in America, we might have to remind ourselves of the true definition and the purpose of discipline. We often think of discipline as punishment because of a wrong doing. While this is correct, we must look further to understand its purpose. If discipline is given in a loving way, the punishment or rebuke is given so one might become a better person. The reality is, loving discipline is given to train. A parent wants their child to obey so they will grow up to be a better person, succeed in society and gain respect for God. When you received a time-out or were grounded as a child, you were being trained so that you would become a better person.

This is the same idea when we are disciplined by God. The writer goes as far to say that if we are not disciplined by God, we are not His children. The writer wants His audience to recognize that God will still discipline them because He wants them to become better, to be more holy. Now, there's no reason to assume that discipline is enjoyable. Few

people enjoy discipline, even if it's self imposed. However, the result of God's discipline is peace and righteousness, not condemnation. The writer compares God's discipline to a lame leg. If your leg is hurt, causing you to steer off the path, you wouldn't put it out of joint. You would take steps to allow it to heal. Discipline from God is not meant to destroy, but to heal.

Discipline also leads to peace with others. Look at the story of Jacob and Esau. Esau was foolish and sold his birthright for a single meal. Because Esau refused discipline from God, he was never restored in his relationship with his family. He never experienced the peace with men and God that true discipline can provide.

As the chapter comes to a close, the writer paints a contrasting picture of the days of old and the future that is to come. He reminds his audience of the days at Mt. Sinai where God seemed so fearful that even Moses approached cautiously. He reminds them of how the people were separated from God, but this is changing. Because of Christ and his own self-discipline to complete the work on the cross, they now approach a different mountain, Mt. Zion. The writer paints a picture of the new Heaven, new Earth and new Jerusalem. These two contrasts serve as a reminder that they are still somewhere in the middle. Christ has done His work of securing their future, but they are still living in a fallen world. The new Heaven and new Earth have yet to come about. He encourages the audience by reminding them that the current Heavens and Earth will be shaken or renewed, but Christ is preparing a place that cannot be shaken. This will be a place where we serve Him for all eternity. All evil and wicked things will have been consumed in the fire of God, and all things good will be refined by the same fire.

So, how should we look at these trials and bad things in the world today? Does God still discipline us? If we are legitimate sons of God, we will be disciplined. As we are disciplined, we must remember that God is not taking out His vengeance or wrath on us, but training us. He is doing it in love and because He wants us to share in His holiness and draw closer to Him. We must also not assume that everything bad in our lives is direct discipline from God. There are many times when we will be presented with situations that are simply part of living in a fallen world. However, our endurance and perseverance in these situations can still bring us closer to God. This happens through self-discipline.

When you think about it, self-discipline has the same purpose. It makes something better or brings about perfection. If you self-discipline yourself to workout daily, you're doing so with the goal that this discipline will bring about a better change. It doesn't mean that the discipline is fun or enjoyable; you endure it willingly because you have a desire to be better. We discipline ourselves in our relationship with God as well. Sometimes it's hard to commit to spending time daily with God. Those who have had to discipline themselves in this way would say this training has led to greater depth in their relationship with God that has become a welcome routine, not a discipline. So, when you are presented with a struggle that is simply a product of the fallen world, through self-discipline, you may use that opportunity to come closer to God. Through Christ's example, discipline yourself to endure and persevere, as He did on the cross.

THE STAND



Personal Study Questions

The purpose of these study questions is to help you get into God's Word. We hope that through a personal encounter with God's Word, He will reveal His Truth and allow you to understand His story first hand.

1. Do you think Christ had to discipline Himself to endure the suffering and shame on the cross? Why?

2. Who does the Lord discipline? Why does He discipline these people?

3. Write down a time in your life you believe you were disciplined by God. How has this discipline made you more holy?

4. What can happen if we reject the discipline of God?

5. What situations in your life have you had to impose self-discipline. How has your self-discipline trained you?

THE STAND

