

FAITH IS ENDURANCE

BIBLE BASIS: Hebrews 12:1–11

BIBLE TRUTH: We have many great examples of how to endure.

MEMORY VERSES: “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” (Hebrews 12:1–2, KJV).

LESSON AIM: By the end of the lesson, we will: **DESCRIBE** how to have enduring faith; **BECOME CONVINCED** that we can endure in faith; and **DEVELOP** a plan to utilize our faith to determine and reach spiritual goals.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Hebrews 12:1–11 — Read and incorporate the insights gained from the Background Scriptures into your study of the lesson.

TEACHER PREPARATION

MATERIALS NEEDED: Bibles, (several different versions), Quarterly Commentary/Teacher Manual, Adult Quarterly, teaching resources such as charts, worksheets/handouts, paper, pens, and pencils.

OTHER MATERIALS NEEDED / TEACHER’S NOTES:

LESSON OVERVIEW

LIFE NEED FOR TODAY’S LESSON

To develop the endurance to persevere in our walk of faith.

BIBLE LEARNING

To learn how Hebrews 12 describes enduring faith.

BIBLE APPLICATION

To know that God is teaching us through the experiences of our lives.

STUDENTS’ RESPONSES

Students will be encouraged to develop a plan to utilize their faith for endurance.

LESSON SCRIPTURE

Hebrews 12:1–11, KJV

12:1. 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

Hebrews 12:1–11, AMP

12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of [a]witnesses [who by faith have testified to the truth of God’s absolute

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so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

2. 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.

3. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

4. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

5. 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:

6. For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

7. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

8. But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

9. 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?

10. 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.

11. 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.

faithfulness], stripping off every unnecessary weight and the sin which so easily and cleverly entangles us, let us run with endurance and active persistence the race that is set before us,

2 [looking away from all that will distract us and] focusing our eyes on Jesus, who is the Author and Perfecter of faith [the first incentive for our belief and the One who brings our faith to maturity], who for the joy [of accomplishing the goal] set before Him endured the cross, [b]disregarding the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God [revealing His deity, His authority, and the completion of His work].

3 Just consider and meditate on Him who endured from sinners such bitter hostility against Himself [consider it all in comparison with your trials], so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

4 You have not yet struggled to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;

5 and you have [c]forgotten the divine word of encouragement which is addressed to you as sons,

6. "My son, do not make light of the discipline of the Lord, And do not lose heart and give up when you are corrected by Him; For the Lord disciplines and corrects those whom He loves, And He punishes every son whom He receives and welcomes [to His heart]."

7 You must submit to [correction for the purpose of] discipline; God is dealing with you as with sons; for [d]what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

8 Now if you are exempt from correction and without discipline, in which all [of God's children] share, then you are illegitimate children and not sons [at all].

9 Moreover, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us, and we submitted and respected them [for training us]; shall we not much more willingly submit to the Father of [e]spirits, and live [by learning from His discipline]?

10 For our earthly fathers disciplined us for only a short time as seemed best to them; but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.

11 For the time being no discipline brings joy, but seems sad and painful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness [right standing with God and a lifestyle and attitude that seeks conformity to God's will and purpose]



BIBLICAL DEFINITIONS

A. Witnesses (Hebrews 12:1) *martus* (Gk.)—Those who can verify a particular truth based on what they know, have seen, or heard.

B. Chastening (vv. 5, 7, 11) *paideia* (Gk.)—Education or training; by implication, it also means disciplinary correction.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

As the capital city of Italy, Rome was the center of commerce, culture, and religion. A myriad of religions dotted the social landscape at the time this letter to the Hebrews was circulated. This epistle to the Hebrews was probably written to a group of Jewish Christians who met in a “house-church” in Rome (Barclay, 6-7). They were a subgroup of the main Christian congregation that had been formed there years earlier. Living in a climate filled with other religions and cults, their faith was tested constantly. When times were hard—politically, culturally, socially, and

economically—the chance was greater that they would return to Judaism.

TEACHING THE BIBLE LESSON

LIFE NEED FOR TODAY'S LESSON

AIM: That your students will learn that the Christian life demands our full exertion.

INTRODUCTION

Eyes on Jesus

The author of Hebrews wrote this epistle in response to the threat that believers might renounce Christianity and revert to Judaism. The writer wanted to inform his readers that Jesus Christ, the object of God's final revelation, is superior to the greatest of Judaism's heroes. The writer wanted to highlight Jesus' power of salvation. He reminded the readers that whereas the Jewish legal sacrificial system was powerless to remit sins, Jesus, the eternal High Priest, “is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to

make intercession for them” (**Hebrews 7:25**). Furthermore, the writer explained the need for patient endurance amid the persecution and sufferings to which the heirs of eternal salvation are inevitably exposed.

BIBLE LEARNING

AIM: That your students will learn that difficulties are often permitted by God to develop character within us.

I. BELIEVERS MUST RUN THE RACE

(**Hebrews 12:1–2**)

The writer paints a picture of an athletic contest with terms such as “run with perseverance the race” and “a great cloud of witnesses [spectators]” (**Hebrews 12:1, NIV**). These Christians were to think of themselves as athletes who must develop endurance in order to ensure victory over the forces of evil. The spectators or examples were the heroes of faith from the previous chapter, plus the greatest example of all—Jesus. The great cloud of witnesses is our inspiration to pursue a life of complete holiness. Our heroes of faith encourage us to participate in kingdom work that can change our present world and witness to the world to come.

As the Crowds Cheer Us On
(**Hebrews 12:1–2**)

1. 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, 2. 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.

The writer encourages the Christian readers to continue to undertake or “run their race” of discipleship no matter what hindrances they may

encounter. He tells them not to get tripped up by burdens or sins that are present in their lives.

Disciples of Jesus Christ must always look to Jesus as the ultimate model of perseverance. In His ministry, He suffered insults and attempts on His life.

His hometown and relatives rejected Him. He overcame the obstinacy of His followers and betrayal by one of His own. He never faltered during the unjust criminal trial that accused Him of sedition and heresy—or the beating by the Roman police force. Finally, He did not waver on the Cross at Calvary. He did all of that not only so future generations of believers would have access to a spiritual power potent enough to change the world, but also to set an example of the perfect leader who was tempted but did not give in. But most importantly, He endured the Cross to take away our sins and provide the way of salvation for us.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

QUESTION 1

What should inspire Christians to hold on to their faith?

The cloud of witnesses that surrounds us provides an example of endurance under difficult circumstances.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Our Secret Weapon

When life becomes unbearable and we get discouraged by temporal circumstances, we ought to look to Jesus as our source of strength. If we think of all that Jesus endured, giving His life so we might have life, we have to thank God for the character and integrity of His Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Hebrews** makes it clear that the Christians’ secret weapon, needed for victory in spite of trials and tribulations, is unwavering faith.

II. BELIEVERS MUST DEVELOP ENDURANCE (Hebrews 12:3–6)

The writer of Hebrews encouraged the vacillating Jewish Christians, so that when they began to complain about the adversity they had to face, they would consider Jesus' life. He supported his argument by testifying that they had not faced persecution to the degree that they had shed their own blood.

Don't Give Up (verses 3–6)

3. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. 4. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. 5. 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: 6. For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

It was not easy or politically correct to be a Christian during the time of these persecutions. Christians in Rome had to deal with the threat of persecution by the Roman authorities. At the time of this epistle, none of them had become martyrs like Stephen and others. (This happened later under Nero, the emperor.) The writer points out that because they were still alive, they must continue to run their race and not give up. He reminded them that Jesus never gave up and neither should they.

Trials suffered for righteousness' sake could be theologically viewed as the "chastening of the Lord," God's "disciplinary correction, instruction, and nurture." The Lord's chastening is not arbitrary or without direction—it always has a purpose. The writer of Hebrews explains that trials are part of God's overall plan to edify His children.

Corrective discipline is always a good thing and a symbol of love. When an earthly parent exercises discipline on a child, it is beneficial to the child so that the same wrong actions will not be repeated. Our Heavenly Father operates in the same way. Because God loves us, He disciplines us so we will not commit the same sins or something worse.

QUESTION 2

Why does God allow difficulties to come into our lives?

The Lord uses difficulties to teach us and strengthen us because He loves us as His children.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Purpose for the Trials

Even when seemingly unprovoked trials and tribulations come into our lives, we can benefit from them. **Romans 8:28** reads, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Truly, when we try to compare what we have to go through to what Jesus went through, we see there is no comparison. He endured much for us. The question is: What will we endure for Him? It is hard for us to suffer the loss of a job, the loss of a loved one, the pain of a broken relationship, or indebtedness. Trials will come in this life. Pain will be a part of our pilgrimage. But the good news is that enduring the suffering brings us into new levels of God's consciousness.

III. BELIEVERS MUST LEARN TO ACCEPT DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD (Hebrews 12:7–11)

The Bible is clear that those who suffer for righteousness' sake glorify God: The biblical writers insist that we must look on all the hardships of life as the discipline of God—sent

to work, not for our harm, but for our ultimate and highest good.

God's Loving Discipline (verses 7–11)

7. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? 8. But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. 9. 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? 10. 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. 11. 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.

The writer of Hebrews presents yet another reason that believers should cheerfully bear affliction when it comes. Christians are encouraged to endure the discipline of the Lord because it marks us as the sons and daughters of Christ, and contributes to helping us live more holy and righteous lives.

The failure to discipline a child who is disobedient is not a mark of trustworthiness or love, but of apathy and unconcern. Likewise, God's willingness to discipline us is a mark of our sonship. It is never pleasant to be corrected and disciplined by God, but His discipline is a sign of His deep love for us. When God corrects us, we must see it as proof of His love and His ability to lead us in the right direction, and ask Him what He is working to teach us.

In **verse 9**, God is called “the Father of spirits” (an expression that occurs only here in the New Testament). This term stands in contrast to the human “fathers of our flesh.” The writer makes a comparison between an earthly father and the

Heavenly Father. The argument is that if earthly parents discipline us and we respect them for it over the long run, then we should respect our Heavenly Father even more.

Our earthly parents discipline us “for a few days,” whereas God's discipline gives us an eternal benefit. Human discipline is often inconsistent and usually provides a temporary benefit. However, the long-range goal in God's discipline is that we might be “partakers” of His holiness. Nothing pleases God more than children who grow to emulate Him.

Present discipline seems painful because it is! The purpose of our pain is to produce Christ-like behavior. Sometimes we have to endure painful discipline. The word for “exercised” implies exercise of the mind in order to endure persecution. God desires for His children to have fruitful lives, and often, that requires pain and sacrifice.

QUESTION 3

What is the end result of God's chastening?

The end result is holiness and righteousness.

BIBLE APPLICATION

AIM: That your students will know that their troubles should cause them to become stronger in their faith.

Training Camp

If we Christians are going to be victorious, we have to go through training camp. God, our coach (leader), wants to turn us into a well-coached, well-trained, and well-disciplined body of believers. To do that, God allows some adversity into our lives. In a rather trite but fitting example, someone said that “Christians are like teabags.” In order for our rich and robust flavor to come out, we have to be placed in hot water. The Christians in our text were being placed in hot water so that their “flavor” would come out.

STUDENTS' RESPONSES

AIM: That your students will be determined to stay strong in the Lord.

The focus of this week's lesson is enduring troubles in our walk of faith. In all we go through in life, we are Christ's ambassadors. As we continue to live as ambassadors of Christ, let us persevere on our jobs, in our homes, and in our communities. God demands our best in this life. No matter what hardships we may go through, our history is peppered with credible, spiritually-strong leaders who have overcome greater hardships than we have ever had to imagine. We can learn from them. If they made it, surely we can make it. With God on our side and a "great . . . cloud of witnesses" cheering us on, we can get through any adverse situation we face. This week, you will probably face a situation that is, at least, undesirable. Whether its dealing with road rage and anger, or facing a life crisis, pray for awareness and God's wisdom to endure victoriously. Know what a Christ-centered response in that situation should be. Ask God for help to achieve that stance.

Remember this is training camp and you can respond to the Lord's discipline in several ways. First, we can accept it with resignation. Second, we can accept it with self-pity, thinking we really don't deserve it. Third, we can be angry and resentful toward God. Or, fourth, we can accept it gratefully, which is the appropriate response we owe a loving Father who cares enough about us to point us in the right direction.

PRAYER

Dear Father, we thank You for Jesus who endured the Cross for us. Help us to be strong in whatever things we have to suffer in our daily walk. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

DIG A LITTLE DEEPER

The Neronian Persecution

The most extensive text on the persecution of Christians by Emperor Nero at the time

Hebrews (c. mid-60s AD) was written is a text from Publius Cornelius Tacitus. He was a first-century Roman senator and historian of the early second century who recorded the following:

"But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, **Nero** fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called **Christians** by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed" (Tacitus, Annals 15.44).

(See also Lesson 10 Dig a Little Deeper: Convinced to Be a Christian)

HOW TO SAY IT:

Beset.	bih-SET.
Chasten.	CHEY-suhn.
Exhortation.	Eg-zawr-TEY-shuhn.

DAILY HOME BIBLE READINGS

MONDAY

The Discipline of the Lord
(Job 5:8–18)

TUESDAY

The Death of Sin
(Romans 6:1–11)

WEDNESDAY

The Race for the Prize
(1 Corinthians 9:24–27)

THURSDAY

The Training for Godliness
(1 Timothy 4:6–10)

FRIDAY

The Endurance of the Faithful
(James 5:7–11)

SATURDAY

The Example of Faithfulness
(1 Peter 2:18–25)

SUNDAY

The Pioneer of Faith
(Hebrews 12:1–11)

PREPARE FOR NEXT SUNDAY

Read **Hebrews 12:18–29**, and study “Faith Inspires Gratitude.”

Sources:

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The NIV Study Bible. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2002. 1916.

COMMENTS / NOTES:

FAITH INSPIRES GRATITUDE

BIBLE BASIS: Hebrews 12:18–29

BIBLE TRUTH: We have God’s kingdom within our hearts.

MEMORY VERSE: “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Hebrews 12:28, KJV).

LESSON AIM: By the end of the lesson, we will **KNOW** the meaning of God’s forgiveness and promise of eternal life; **EXPLORE** our fears about death and assurances of God’s grace; and **REPENT** for sometimes rejecting God’s grace.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Hebrews 12:14-29 — Read and incorporate the insights gained from the Background Scriptures into your study of the lesson.

TEACHER PREPARATION

MATERIALS NEEDED: Bibles, (several different versions), Quarterly Commentary/Teacher Manual, Adult Quarterly, teaching resources such as charts, worksheets/handouts, paper, pens, and pencils.

OTHER MATERIALS NEEDED / TEACHER’S NOTES:

LESSON OVERVIEW

LIFE NEED FOR TODAY’S LESSON

To have assurance concerning our spiritual futures.

BIBLE LEARNING

To learn that we can come to God through the blood of Jesus.

BIBLE APPLICATION

To know the meaning of God’s forgiveness and promise of eternal life.

STUDENTS’ RESPONSES

Students repent for sometimes rejecting God’s grace.

LESSON SCRIPTURE

HEBREWS 12:18–29, KJV

12:18. For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest,

HEBREWS 12:18–29, AMP

18 For you have not come [as did the Israelites in the wilderness] to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to gloom and darkness and a raging windstorm,

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19 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:

20. (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:

21. And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:)

22. 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,

23. 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,

24. And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

25. 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:

26. Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.

27. 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.

28. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:

29. For our God is a consuming fire.

19 and to the blast of a trumpet and a sound of words [such that] those who heard it begged that nothing more be said to them.

20 For they could not bear the command, "If even a wild animal touches the mountain, it will be stoned [to death]."

21 In fact, so terrifying was the sight, that Moses said, "I am filled with fear and trembling."

22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels [in festive gathering],

23 and to the general assembly and assembly of the firstborn who are registered [as citizens] in heaven, and to God, who is Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous (the redeemed in heaven) who have been made perfect [bringing them to their final glory],

24 and to Jesus, the Mediator of a new covenant [uniting God and man], and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks [of mercy], a better and nobler and more gracious message than the blood of Abel [which cried out for vengeance].

25 See to it that you do not refuse [to listen to] Him who is speaking [to you now]. For if those [sons of Israel] did not escape when they refused [to listen to] him who warned them on earth [revealing God's will], how much less will we escape if we turn our backs on Him who warns from heaven?

26 His voice shook the earth [at Mount Sinai] then, but now He has given a promise, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the [starry] heaven."

27 Now this [expression], "Yet once more," indicates the removal and final transformation of all those things which can be shaken—that

is, of that which has been created—so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

28 Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, and offer to God pleasing service and acceptable worship with reverence and awe;

29 for our God is [indeed] a consuming fire.



BIBLICAL DEFINITIONS

A. Voice (Hebrews 12:19, 26) *phone* (Gk.)—A sound; a tone; speech; the sound of uttered words.

B. Mediator (v. 24) *mesites* (Gk.)—One who intervenes between two others to restore peace and friendship.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

The first five books of Old Testament present the Mosaic Covenant, which was given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai for God's people, the Israelites. The Mosaic Covenant was conditional, based on Israel fulfilling its part of the covenant. The New Covenant is based on Jesus Christ, the Mediator, who died for the sins of all humanity. Believers will dwell with God in the heavenly city of God, Mount Zion (Sion). We receive the New Covenant by grace through faith.

TEACHING THE BIBLE LESSON

LIFE NEED FOR TODAY'S LESSON

AIM: That your students will learn that coming to God is a wonderful thing for those who follow Jesus.

INTRODUCTION

Hold On and Look Forward

The majority of the earliest believers in Christ were Jews. As the number of Jewish Christians grew, the church communities endured physical and social persecution from the Jews and Romans. Many people were arrested and ostracized because of their faith, and some suffered physically and experienced loss of their property because of their belief. The writer of Hebrews urged them not to be discouraged by struggles that perfect believers. Rather, they must keep their eyes on Jesus.

BIBLE LEARNING

AIM: That your students will learn that difficulties are often permitted by God in order to develop character within them.

I. MOUNTAIN SINAI (Hebrews 12:18–21)

The Israelites were very familiar with Mount Sinai. This was the place where God gave Moses the Law. Moses was the liaison between God and the Israelites. Moses communicated God's requirements for the covenant and pled Israel's case before God. After God revealed His power and rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, the Mosaic Covenant was conditional based on

Israel fulfilling its part of the covenant. All of this stems from the encounter in Mount Sinai.

The Former Fearful Situation (verses 18–21)

18. For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, 19. 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: 20. (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: 21. And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:)

The writer of Hebrews compares the Mosaic Covenant with the New Covenant by examining two mountains: Mount Sinai and Mount Zion. Mount Sinai is an actual, physical mountain—something that can be touched. God gave the Law to the Israelites at Mount Sinai with a majestic display of thunder and lightning. The Israelites were terrified by the experience. So they asked that they should hear God's voice no more (Exodus 20:19; Deuteronomy 5:25–27).

The fearfulness of the giving of the Law on Sinai is demonstrated with the command that no man or animal should even touch the mountain under penalty of death (Exodus 19:13). This command emphasizes the holiness and separateness of the mountain. Judgment for anyone who ignores the holiness of God is swift and terrible. At the time of the giving of the Law, Moses was the leader of the people; yet even he was terrified.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

QUESTION 1

How did the Israelites respond when they heard the voice of God at Mount Sinai?

They begged that God would not speak directly to them again.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Mount Sinai

The description in verses 18–21 leaves no doubt that the writer has Sinai in mind. The Israelites were terrified by the experience and overcome with fearfulness. Hebrews 12:21 is an indication of the awe and terror Moses and the people experienced that day. Even though Moses had an especially close relationship with God (Exodus 33:11), the experience was powerful for him, also. It was an awe-inspiring occasion that affected the people and Moses, the man of God.

II. THE HEAVENLY CITY (ZION OR SION) (Hebrews 12:22–23)

Beginning from verse 18, the author of Hebrews proceeds to contrast the Jewish and Christian ways. He compares the terrors associated with the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai with the joys and the glory associated with Mount Zion. The unifying concept in both is the need to take away sin so that sinful humans can stand before a just and mighty God.

Looking forward to a Wonderful Future (verses 22–23)

22. 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, 23. 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,

In contrast to the events on Mount Sinai, God instituted a New Covenant as represented metaphorically by Mount Zion. Christian believers joyfully approached God through the blood of Jesus on Mount Zion (Sion), which is

the Heavenly City of God. Instead of trembling before the awesome, thundering voice of God, the atmosphere at Mount Zion is joyful. There are many numbers of angels who are present as part of the welcoming celebration. The “firstborn” refers to all those “sons” whom God is leading into glory together with Jesus (**Hebrews 2:10**). In summation, the city of God is filled with angels and Saints.

While God seemed distant and threatening at Mount Sinai, at Mount Zion, Jesus has made the believer’s faith personal. Through Christ, we have the promise of eternal life through the forgiveness of our sins. We can accept God’s invitation through Christ receive forgiveness and experience the presence of God.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

QUESTION 2

Who will greet us when we come to Mount Zion?

We will come unto a crowd of angels too numerous to be counted, to the assembly of other believers, to Jesus, and to God, the Father.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

The Ultimate Mediator

A mediator is the one who goes between two warring parties. In this case it is our sinful hearts against the holiness of God. How can peace be made between two such opposites? The gap between our sins and God can only be bridged by the payment of blood—the blood of our holy God Himself—Jesus Christ, the Son. Jesus Christ is the Mediator or “go-between” between two parties: God and sinful humanity. He is the Mediator for the New Covenant that was established through His death on the Cross. The New Covenant brings forgiveness for the believer and new life. Jesus Christ is the only mediator who can help believers to remain in a covenant relationship with God. Therefore,

through Jesus, humanity receives the favor of God because Jesus pleads our cause before God.

III. THE HEAVENLY CITY AND JESUS, THE MEDIATOR (Hebrews 12:24)

Moses was the mediator of the Mosaic Covenant; he was the liaison between God and the Israelites. Moses gave the Israelites God’s Law, instruction, and the obligations for the covenant between God and the Israelites. But that was a shadow of what was to come.

The New Covenant (verse 24)

24. And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

Verse 24 speaks directly to the difference between the Jewish tradition and the Old Covenant. The Law was supported by sacrifices of animals as a way of demonstrating commitment to a Holy God. Those sacrifices—exemplified by the sacrifice of Abel that was accepted by God over his brother Cain’s sacrifice (**Genesis 4:3–5**)—was still insufficient to cleanse the sin of human kind. In the New Covenant, it is Jesus’ blood that speaks “a better word” than that of Abel (**12:24, NIV**). Jesus’ blood provides the only way to reconciliation.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

QUESTION 3

How did Jesus become the Mediator between God and us?

The blood of Jesus is sprinkled on us, opening a relationship with God, the Father.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Endurance

Because we have more knowledge of Christ and the promise of eternal life, if we turn away, we

will be judged for our unbelief (Hebrews 12:25). Instead, our faith in God should inspire our gratitude for all that He's done for us and help us to endure to the end.

IV. CRITERIA FOR ENTERING THE HEAVENLY CITY (Hebrews 12:25–26)

The entire universe will shake when the Son of God returns, but the kingdom of God will not be shaken. It will endure through eternity. The power of God will be evident, and everyone will recognize Him.

We Do Not Dare Turn away from God (verses 25–26)

25. 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: 26. Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.

We have a greater responsibility than Israel did to listen attentively to the voice of God. Those who deliberately ignore God's Son and who show contempt for the blessings of the New Covenant cannot possibly escape judgment. The reference to heaven and earth may hint at the concept of the new heaven and the new earth (Isaiah 66:22). At any rate, it points to the decisive intervention that God will make at the last time.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

QUESTION 4

What is the stern warning to us?

We should not refuse God because we will not be able to escape His punishment if we turn away from Him.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

The Great Shaking

The atmosphere at Mount Zion is festive. The frightening visual imagery of blazing fire, darkness, and gloom fades before the reality of the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem. The great sounds are silent as the praise of angels begins. In Mount Zion, the vision of frightened Israel gives way to image of the masses who can approach God with joy because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

V. PREPARING FOR THE HEAVENLY CITY (Hebrews 12:27–29)

Temporary things will be shaken and removed when Christ returns, while the eternal things will not be shaken. Only God's kingdom will last. Believers will endure the shaking through the grace of God. We will receive the kingdom of God, which will endure.

Shaking and Fire (verses 27–29)

27. 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. 28. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: 29. For our God is a consuming fire.

God will separate the things that last forever from those that do not. It is God's will for this final differentiation to be made so that only what cannot be shaken will remain. Believers have received the kingdom of God, which cannot be shaken. The Kingdom is something we "receive." It is not earned or created by believers; it is God's gift. The Kingdom is in stark contrast with earthly systems that can be shaken and in due course will be shaken.

Not so of God's kingdom! The author does not simply say that it will not be shaken but that it

cannot be shaken. The appropriate response to the gift we have received is gratitude to God and acceptable worship through a manner of life that is pleasing to God. The qualification “with reverence and godly fear” constitutes a sober reminder of the holy character of God.

God is not to be trifled with. It is easy to be so taken up with the love and compassion of God that we overlook His implacable opposition to all evil. The wrath of God is not a popular subject today, but it looms large in biblical teaching. Because God is in fact a consuming fire, we must come to Him on His terms.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

QUESTION 5

What do believers receive that cannot be shaken?

We receive the kingdom of God within our hearts.

BIBLE APPLICATION

AIM: That your students will know that Jesus Christ has made a way to return to God.

A New Way

Ancient custom approved special treatment for the firstborn son. While the Old Testament tradition declared that the firstborn son should receive special blessings and a physical inheritance from his earthly father, the heirs in Heaven are believers, who are justified and made perfect because of Jesus Christ. Through Christ, believers will inherit the Kingdom: “Ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ” (**Colossians 3:24**). We have the promise of eternal life as our inheritance. By faith, believers’ names are recorded in Heaven; they are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. Believers can come to God by faith through Christ. By Him we have an eternal home with God in Heaven and the blessings of the firstborn.

STUDENTS’ RESPONSES

AIM: That your students will serve the Lord with reverence and holy living.

The news constantly reports details of natural disasters, of economic hardships, and of lives that rarely focus on steadfast thankfulness for God. The struggles and hardships of life are not the focus in today’s lesson. Instead, the focus of this week’s lesson is the holiness of God and the Grace of God that has opened the door to salvation through Jesus Christ.

PRAYER

Dear Father, we thank You that we have access to You through the blood of Jesus. Help us to live for You in great reverence. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

DIG A LITTLE DEEPER

The Use of the Old Testament in Hebrews

The Old Testament is quoted 35 times and there are 34 allusions to the Old Testament. There are 19 summaries of Old Testament material and 13 separate references to an Old Testament name or topic.

For example, similar to the series of citations of the Old Testament in Hebrews 1:5-14 (from Deut 32; Isa 61:1, 3; Psalm 2; 102:25-27; 110:1; 91:11), in order to support his claims about the superiority of Jesus to the angels (2:5-18), the author quotes Psalm 8:4-6. He supports this with additional citations from Psalm 22:22; Psalm 18:2 and Isaiah 8:17. In order to support his exhortation for believers to remain faithful to Jesus Christ (3:1-4:13), he quotes Psalm 95:7-11. This involves an extended exposition on what it means to enter God’s “rest,” and to respond “today.”

The most extensive use of the Old Testament is found in 4:14-7:28, where the author discusses

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the person and work of Christ as being after the priesthood of Melchizedek. He does this by quoting Psalm 110 in Hebrews 7:17, 21. His conclusion, once again, is that believers should be faithful:

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (4:14-16).

Hebrews 11 is dedicated to giving biblical examples of what it means to live by faith – a citation taken from Habakkuk 2:3-4 and cited in Hebrews 10:37-38). Why? The author supports his exhortation:

Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised (10:35-36).

Why does the author refer to the Old Testament so often? What does he hope to accomplish? As this brief review illustrates, the author strategically makes use of the Old Testament in order to support his exhortations that believers should remain faithful to Jesus even though they may be suffering. This suffering may take the form of physical, abuse, economic exploitation, or even martyrdom.

HOW TO SAY IT

Moses. MOH-ziz, -zis.

Zion. ZI-uhn.

PREPARE FOR NEXT SUNDAY

Read **Hebrews 13:1–3; 1 Corinthians 13**, and study “Faith Requires Mutual Love.”

DAILY HOME BIBLE READINGS

MONDAY

Listening to the Voice of Warning
(Ezekiel 33:1–9)

TUESDAY

Listening to the Spirit
(Revelation 3:1–13)

WEDNESDAY

Anticipating a Better Covenant
(Hebrews 8:1–7)

THURSDAY

Giving Thanks for the Faithful
(2 Thessalonians 1:1–7)

FRIDAY

Loving with God’s Kind of Love
(Matthew 5:43–48)

SATURDAY

Pursuing Peace and Holiness
(Hebrews 12:12–17)

SUNDAY

Offering Acceptable Worship
(Hebrews 12:18–29)

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COMMENTS / NOTES:
