

Hebrews 12 - Preparing for Persecution

1. Who are the witnesses of Hebrews 12:1? _____

[The rendering “surrounded” comes from two Greek words. The first, echo (S# 2192) has among its many usages the concept of “to accompany,” “keep” or “hold.” The second is a compound (S# 4029) meaning “to lie all around,” “encircle,” or “be bound (compassed) with.”

Those included in the “witnesses” of verse 1 should not be understood in the sense of observing our goings on here on earth (9:5-6). “Witness” can carry two different connotations. One may be witness OF something seen (a crime, sporting event) or a witness TO something experienced (e.g., a diet or personal improvement program). In this case, it is the latter.

Together, these two words compose a beautiful thought! All the faithful of all the ages are our partners in faith. And not only partners, but our bulwark and fortification, upholding our faith through their own experience and exercise of an incredible and unshakeable faith!]

2. “Let us lay aside every _____ and the _____ which so _____ ensnares us, and let us run with _____ the _____ that is set _____ us.”

[This verse contains words and concepts that should be of particular interest to the Christian. The word rendered “weight” is here used to describe a burden, and was used by the Jewish philosopher Philo (himself a contemporary of Paul) to describe some hindrance of a physical or figurative/spiritual burden. The phrase “so easily ensnares” comes from a compound describing sin as standing ever present, surrounding us at every turn ready to entangle us. It is accompanied by the thought of sin as an ever present distraction. Concerning the utmost need to focus on the prize, John Chrysostom wrote:

“He that runs looks not at the spectators, but at the prize. Whether they be rich or poor, if one mock them, applaud them, insult them, throw stones at them-if one plunder their house, if they see children or wife or anything whatsoever-the runner is not turned aside, but is concerned only with his running and winning the prize. He who runs stops nowhere; since, if he be a little remiss, all is lost. He who runs relaxes in no respect before the end, but then, most of all, stretches over the course.”

Three more points of note: 1) The need to run with patience, necessarily implying the Christian race is more akin to a marathon as opposed to a sprint; and 2) Our race is set before us, not behind us. The past is past. Let us forget those things which are behind (including past sins), and reach forth to what is before us, and press toward the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus (Phil 3:14-15); and 3) As with any race, the course is already mapped and laid out. In this case, there is a definitive starting point (obedience to the gospel/baptism - 1 Peter 1:22-25, Mark 16:15-16) and finish line (death in the Lord - Rev 14:12-13). The crowning and reward come after the race is completed (2 Tim 4:6-8; 1 Cor 9:24-27) according to the rules (2 Tim 2:5).

As an avid runner and marathoner, one thing I appreciate about runners and racing is the fact that each runner essentially runs against himself. Runners often speak of their “PR,” their personal record. If I finish dead last in my age group and/or gender, or even in the entire race field itself, I still can leave with a feeling of accomplishment if I improve on a previous time. Moreover, I can congratulate others who have run and be congratulated by the same.

So it is with the Christian race. We run against no one but ourselves. If another is a better preacher or teacher, a better song leader, has public skills than I, it is of no consequence. I do not nor should I ever consider myself in competition with another. I am focused on making myself more fit for service in the Lord’s kingdom, striving for greater personal holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor 7:1).]

Discussion: What are some burdens that Christians need to lay aside as they run their race?

3. “Looking to Jesus, the _____ and _____ of our _____, who for the _____ set before Him endured the _____, despising the _____, and has sat down at the right hand of God.”

[“Author and finisher” should be understood in the sense of beginning and end. The ESV renders this phrase as “the founder and perfecter.” Other renderings include “source and perfecter” (Holman Christian Standard) and “author and perfecter” (NASB). “Author” is from the Greek “archegos,” which often means “originator.” However, in this context, it means one who takes the lead or sets an example (Lightfoot, 229). As He is also the perfecter of our faith, it should be noted that His perfection did not come apart from suffering and persecution, about which subject our author is about to elaborate.

“The joy set before” Jesus refers to the future joy that would be received after the intense and imminent sufferings. This was noted at the very beginning of this epistle- “For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, to being many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering” (Heb 2:10). It was the glorious prospect of salvation that compelled our Lord to endure His time on earth.]

4. “For _____ Him who endured such _____ of _____ against Himself, lest you become _____ and _____ in your souls.”

[Herein we see how Jesus is our leader, our perfect example in living out our faith.]

5. “You have not yet _____ unto _____, striving against _____.”

[Though these Christians had suffered persecution and plundering for their faith (10:32-34), they had not yet suffered as Christ, who shed His blood for the same faith. However, the author is clear that such a time was coming. Lest their immaturity (5:12-14) would be their downfall, they are

exhorted to give their utmost attention and consideration to the Lord Jesus.]

6. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to _____: “My son, do not _____ the _____ of the Lord, nor be _____ when you are _____ by Him; for whom the Lord _____ He _____, and _____ whom He _____.”

[This is a direct quote from Proverbs 3:11-12, and the words from Solomon to his son. Solomon’s words were true under the Old Covenant, to which the Hebrews appear to be intent to return. Thus, being true then, it remained true for the recipients of this epistle. Moreover there is a consistency of this truth in both the physical and spiritual realm as our author will soon note.]

7. If we do not receive God’s chastening, then we are _____ and not _____.
8. What example is given to urge us to submit to God’s chastening? _____

[Note that a father’s discipline (chastening) of his children is understood, a given. However, we know such was not always the case, not even in the days of Solomon (cf Prov 13:24). Moreover, the results of a lack of discipline were well known even in those days (cf Prov 19:18, 22:15, 23:13-14; and 29:15-17).]

Read 1 Kings 1:1-2:25 and consider the case of Solomon’s own brother, Adonijah, in view of these texts concerning the need for discipline.]

- a. What did Adonijah presume to do (1:5)? _____
- b. What does the text say about Adonijah’s appearance (1:6)? _____
- c. What did David do to discipline or rebuke Adonijah (1:6)? _____
- d. Who did David chose to be king (1:28-30)? _____
- e. Who actually chose Solomon to be king (1 Chr 22:6-10)? _____
- f. What did Adonijah say about his claim to the kingdom (2:15)? _____
- g. What request did Adonijah make of Solomon (2:17-21)? _____
- h. What did Solomon do in response to this request? _____

[As David’s refusal to discipline Adonijah brought great distress upon the kingdom, so also does a lack of discipline make for problems at home and in the church.]

9. God chastens us for our _____ that we might be partakers of His _____.
10. No chastening is _____ at the present time, but _____.
11. What does God’s chastening yield? _____

[Discipline brings no joy to the administrator or recipient, yet is necessary for the good of both. In the case of parental discipline, both parent and child are injured but eventually blessed by the positive results of discipline. In the case of church discipline, the church and the sinner are hurt, but both the church and the sinner (by intention) are blessed – the church by maintaining purity and order, and the sinner through the salvation of his soul. In the case of Divine discipline, we are blessed by becoming partakers of God’s holiness. Make no mistake about it, as any loving father, God takes no joy in administering discipline to His children (cf Hosea 11:8). But it is His great love for us that compels Him to discipline us for our good always (cf Deut 6:24).

Consider also the author’s statement in the latter half of verse 11. Discipline alone is insufficient to produce righteousness in the one who receives it. Those who receive discipline must allow themselves to be trained by it. Read Deuteronomy 21:18-21. The rebellious son who was brought before the elders was one who refused to obey the voice of his parents and refused to heed them, even after chastening. Once determined to be stubborn and rebellious, such a son was to be stoned to death at the gate of the city. In this case, discipline was administered, but the son refused to be trained by it.]

12. “Therefore _____ the _____ which hang down, and the feeble _____, and make straight the paths for your feet, so that what is _____ may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.”

[This is a direct quote of Isaiah 35:3. When observing Old Testament texts quoted in the New, the context in which the Old is found must be considered, for that is likely the same context in which it will be quoted. In the case of Isaiah, the prophet has just finished multiple pronouncements against the nations in chapters 8-34, including: Samaria (i.e., Israel - 8), Assyria (God’s instrument against Samaria -10, 14:24ff), Babylon (God’s instrument against Judah - 13-14, 21), Philistia (14:28ff), Moab (15-16), Syria (17), Ethiopia (18, 20), Egypt (19, 20), Jerusalem (22), Tyre (23), and all the nations collectively (34).

Isaiah 35 is a message of hope and deliverance for those who are faithful to the Lord. The Hebrew recipients would have been most familiar with this text and its context. When hearing or reading this quote in the immediate context of suffering (Heb 12:3-11), they would have been encouraged to greater faithfulness, for Isaiah 35:4 says, “Say to those who are fearful hearted, ‘Be strong! Do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you.’” What a message of hope and comfort to these (and all) Christians!]

13. “Pursue _____ with all people, and _____, without which no man shall _____ God.”

[The word here rendered “pursue” generally appears in the New Testament as “persecute.” The idea conveyed here is dogged pursuit of both peace and holiness. However, it is holiness that is the requisite to see God (cf 1 Thes 4:3, 7; 1 Peter 1:15-16).]

14. "Looking carefully lest anyone _____ of the _____ of _____: lest any root of _____ springing up cause trouble, and by this many become _____."

["Looking carefully" is from the same command given to the Ephesians elders of "taking the oversight" (cf Acts 20:28). Every member has a responsibility to be on the lookout for any brother or sister in danger of falling short of the grace of God. I am indeed my brother's keeper!]

15. Who sold his birthright and what did he receive? _____

16. Was he always pleased with this exchange? _____

[As Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of stew (cf Gen 25:29-34), Christians can also sell their divine birthright through bitterness and defilement. As Esau waited too long in the attempt to recover his inheritance, so also is the negligent Christian. Jesus admonishes us to diligent watchfulness, lest He return suddenly and find us sleeping (cf Mark 13:32-37).]

17. "For you have not come to the _____ which cannot be _____... but you have come to Mount _____ ..."

18. What eight descriptions accompany "Mount Zion?"

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____
- g. _____
- h. _____

Application: What two things should we connect to "Mount Zion?" _____

19. "See that you do not _____ Him who speaks. For if they did not _____ who refused Him who spoke on _____, much more shall we not escape if we _____ from Him who speaks from _____."

["Do not refuse Him who speaks." Not, "Him who has spoken," but "Him who now speaks." As the teaching and the call of Jesus continued in the days of the Hebrews, years after His ascension, His teaching and call continue today.

In this particular case, "Him who speaks on earth" is the Divine teaching given through Moses. The reference to "escape" harkens back to the statement in Hebrews 2:2-3. However, even that text points to Jesus as the source of the teaching and the one to whom all must give an account. By extension, this teaching ultimately originates with the Heavenly Father, who "in these last days has spoken to us by His Son" (1:1-2). This will be evident from our next question from verse 26.]

20. "Whose _____ then shook the earth; but now He has promised saying, 'Yet once more I shake not only the _____, but also _____.'

[This is a quotation of Haggai 2:6, wherein the Jews were encouraged to continue in their rebuilding of the temple of Zerubbabel, the temple in existence in Jesus' day. The historical reference is to Exodus 19:18 and the quaking of the mountain upon which Moses ascended to receive the Ten Commandments. The meaning of the shaking of the earth and heaven is explained by the writer in verse 27. The word so translated "shook/shake" is seismos, e.g., as an earthquake.]

21. "Now this, 'Yet once more,' indicates the _____ of those things that are being _____, as of those things that are _____, that the things which _____ be shaken may _____." (Read verses 26-27 again, three or four times, then read ALL three sub questions before formulating and writing your answers.)

- a. What are "the things that are being shaken" at the time of this writing? _____
- b. To what does the "things that are made" refer? _____
- c. To what does "the things which cannot be shaken" refer? _____

22. Therefore, we receiving a _____ which cannot be _____, let us have _____, by which we may _____ God _____ with _____ and _____."

["Shaken" and "moved" are from the same word, but not the same as found in verse 26, and mean to agitate or topple. Thus, the gospel system and the church are not subject to shaking or disturbance. We can serve God with the full assurance of faith knowing "the solid foundation of God stands" (2 Tim 2:19).]

23. "For our _____ is a _____."

[As God presented Himself as a consuming fire at the giving of the Law (Ex 24:16-17), so He will be a consuming fire watching over those who receive this greater and eternal covenant.]