

1. “Let Us Run with Endurance ...” (Heb 12:1-3)

The author turns to athletics for his next exhortation, likening the Christian life to running a marathon. All encumbrances must be shed and all distractions ignored; we must “*run with endurance the race that is set before us ...looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith,*” who now waits for us across the finish line. To further enhance the image, the “cloud of witnesses” of chapter 11 are figuratively pictured as spectators urging the Hebrew brethren on. But as marathons exhaust the human body, so persecution tires the spirit of man. The author thus counsels his readers to carefully reflect upon Jesus “*lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls*” (Heb 12:3). Thoughtful contemplation of Jesus is always the best cure for what ails the true believer.

1. What, unfortunately, easily ensnares men?
2. What enabled Jesus to endure the cross?

2. The Pain and Profit of Chastening (Heb 12:4-11)

Ancient wisdom held that suffering indicated God’s disfavor, but revelation reveals otherwise. God, as a faithful Father, chastens, rebukes and scourges His children “*for our pro-fit, that we may be partakers of His holiness*” (Heb 12:5-6, 10). The author states several truths about chastening or punishment: 1) “*Whom the Lord loves He chastens*” (12:6); 2) The absence of chastening suggests illegitimacy or neglect rather than favor (12:8); 3) Discipline can be imperfectly administered and still be effective (12:9-10); 4) At the moment of implementation chastening is grievous; however, it is later appreciated for its instructional value (12:11). *Does suffering then imply guilt?* No, for while one may not be overtly sinful, he may still stand in need of further development of character, godliness and self-control which may best be forged by trial (Remember, sinless Jesus “*learned obedience by the things which He suffered*” – Heb 5:8). We would do well in times of tribulation to inventory our lives and search for what is amiss. But we may always take comfort in knowing that, whatever the cause, we can benefit from the hardships of life.

3. Persecution against these brethren had not yet gone to what length?
4. How do we feel about our earthly fathers who disciplined us in our youth?

3. “Lest Anyone Fall Short of the Grace” (Heb 12:12-17)

This section contains several exhortations and a grave warning. “*Hands which hang down, and the feeble knees*” (Heb 12:12) suggests weariness and discouragement among some in the congregation (comp. 12:3). They are in need of strength, healing and re-newed commitment to the “straight paths.” Three “lests” follow: 1) “*lest anyone fall short of the grace of God*” (12:15a), an odd thing to say if, as according to the Calvinists, one cannot be lost; 2) “*lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble ...*” (12:15b); 3) “*lest there be any fornicator or*

profane person like Esau ...” (12:16). Esau was so impulsive and base that he bartered away his birthright for the satisfaction of momentary hunger. The transaction was irrevocable. So it is with immorality, which is the immediate context. Regret for such thoughtless and foolish actions, though wrenching and torturous, cannot change many of the consequences which naturally follow.

5. No one will see the Lord without what quality?

6. What defiles **many** of God’s people?

4. Coming to the Mountain (Heb 12:18-24)

The author yet again turns to an OT contrast “to stabilize his readers in their faith and to convince them that there is no alternative open to them except Christ” (Lightfoot, *Jesus Christ Today*, p. 237). Mt. Sinai represents the vast gulf between man and God. So holy and mighty was God that neither man nor beast could approach the mountain without God’s express permission. “*And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, ‘I am exceedingly afraid and trembling’*” (Heb 12:21). Mt. Zion, on the other hand, stands for the heavenly abode of God into which access has been secured by Jesus. This is the city in which Abraham desired to dwell (Heb 11:10, 16), and it is yet to be possessed by the living (Heb 13:14). Nonetheless, citizenship in that city is assured by faith (Ph 3:20). This city is populated by countless angels, already departed saints and God, Himself. And the One who makes our residence in this city possible is Jesus, “*the Mediator of the new covenant.*” To abandon Him is to forfeit citizenship in heavenly Jerusalem.

7. What did Israel beg of God as He spoke to them from Mt. Sinai?

8. Described redeemed people from Hebrews 12:23.

5. Our God Is A Consuming Fire (Heb 12:25-29)

Hebrews 12:25 brings us back to the thoughts of the opening chapters. God has spoken from heaven through His Son: “*How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?*” (Heb 2:3); “*Much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven*” (12:25). While the author has declared the great promises of God regarding redemption fulfilled, he mentions the last and dreadful promise of God which is yet future – the promise to shake heaven and earth so as to annihilate all but His everlasting kingdom. “*Our God is a consuming fire*” (12:29), and when all around us begins to vaporize with the incendiary breath of God, how wonderful to be safe and secure in the insulated walls of the kingdom!

9. With what attitudes should we serve our awesome God?