
Into Thy Word Bible Study in Hebrews

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Hebrews 12:14-29: *Strive for Jesus!*

General idea: Are you having troubles in life? Then run with your faith; put into practice His call and precepts, and listen to God. Try to live at peace with everyone; live a clean and holy life and you will have His serenity. If we do not lead holy lives, how can we be in Christ? Also, look after one another so we can collectively grow in Christ and not miss out on what Christ has for us. But we must watch out for bitterness that rises from unfulfilled expectations when our focus is not on Christ. Just as Esau traded his birthright for food, being foolish caused him to lose his blessing, and resulted in a life of bitterness. So come to God, to Jesus Christ who gives us a new Covenant as Savior and Lord! Obey Him, live for Him, serve Him, and be grateful. Do not ignore Him; rather embrace Him head on, fast and hard. We have a God who is Most Holy and He will not be thwarted or misrepresented or disrespected. Therefore, let us put our faith and hope in Him. Remember your experience in His love and grace, and feel His fellowship and empowerment as we are His people and He is our loving Lord. As Christians, let us all be appreciative for who we are in Christ and what He has done for us, so we can worship Him and live contented lives!

Contexts and Background:

God desires us to be His, to listen to Him, and to trust and obey Him. He gives a warning about bad attitudes and shortsightedness. Bad attitudes cause us to reject God's Truth and we lose out because we forfeit our growing faith and righteousness. For example, when someone does something bad to you, your first human response is payback and revenge, but God has a better idea—that of being a peace maker. The author's point is: do not be like your bad ancestors who were bad influencers. Rather, be positive examples to encourage others. Pious Jews were embarrassed by Esau and their ancestors who wandered in the desert. We should be embarrassed by our lack of faith; we should be concerned that we might be worse than Esau and the generation of the Exodus.

Commentary; Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Make every effort.* A call to pursue God fervently and thus be “peacemakers” who build bridges and relationships, not just “peacekeepers” who force their will over others and end up just creating more dysfunction (Rom. 12:18; 1 Pet. 2:23).
- *Be holy.* What Jesus did on the cross gave us redemption and makes us holy before God. But our diligence is needed to make this applicable to our life situations. Thus, we know how to live lives of fruit and purity and not be grumblers and haters.

- *See the Lord.* Meaning be with God as in a personal relationship, and seek God, as in place Him first so you can be more like Christ (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:6; 1 John 3:2; Rev. 22:4)
- *Misses the grace of God.* A warning not to “fall short” or lose the focus on what Jesus did for you, of His grace. Also, a call to be responsible for one another (Heb. 2:1-4; 6:4-8).
- *No bitter root.* Meaning the fruits of the flesh: pride, animosity, rivalry, anger...anything that harms us or others, shows disloyalty, or causes trouble. When one is bitter, that bitterness spreads as a root spreads its undergrowth and like a weed that infects and destroys. Complaining, grumbling, gossiping, betrayal, and bad attitudes come from and lead others to apostasy, the opposite of what we are called to do, which is to support one another because we are content in Christ, and to warn others in love of possible threats and apostasy (Deut. 29:18).
- *Like Esau.* Meaning do not compromise your faith with ingratitude and do not hate values and/or God. Esau was a man famous for being apostate and immoral, shortsighted, making poor choices, and suffering the consequences because he did not look beyond his current situation and desire. He rejected his birthright for a bowl of soup. Then, he despised his call and role, took pagan wives, was ruled by anger, and did not look to God for his future. We need to look ahead because how we are and what we do—the choices we make—are not temporary. They last and last and impact others for generations (Gen. 25:29-34; 26:24-35; 27:29, 34-38; 28:8-9; Phil. 3:18-19).
- *Inheritance rights.* The firstborn son got a double share of the inheritance and carried the family name and reputation (Gen. 25:31-34; 27:36; Deut. 21:17).
- *Change of mind/place of repentance.* A legal term meaning a provision to reverse one’s decision for certain circumstances or provision, or an annulment. As before discussed, grace came when it was too late to repent or he refused to repent. Perhaps Esau’s sorrow was not "godly sorrow;" perhaps he only wanted to change his father’s mind to get a monetary inheritance, not to please God for an eternal one. But here, once the cat is out of the bag, he scampers off, no redos or reboots. Fortunately for us, we have grace, but we still have to take the responsibility to repent (Gen. 27:34-38; 2 Cor. 7:10; Heb. 6:12-18).
- *Sought the blessing with tears.* Meaning making bad choices and regretting it afterwards much as a drunk who destroyed his life and lays on his deathbed in tears and regret (Gen. 27:38).
- *Mountain.* Refers to the Exodus, the giving of the Law, and the rebellion at Mt. Sinai. The people were afraid of God speaking but not afraid to break His commandments and be ungrateful (Ex. 19:10-25; Deut. 4:11-12, 24; 5:22-26).

- *Burning with fire.* Referring to God's Holiness, that because of our sin, we can't approach Him. God did not want His people scared of Him. Rather, He wanted them to honor His Holiness and not sin. God's anger was meant to get our attention, much like a father yells to stop his child from getting hurt or help him or her learn the consequences of doing wrong (Ex. 19:12-13; 20:19-20; Num. 17:13; Deut. 9:19).
- *Storm; to a trumpet.* Relationship and example of the two main Covenants: old of law, and new of grace. We now have the joy of grace without the burden of the law, and thus the author's point. Our faith should make us stronger and more confident than even Abraham and Moses. So why would anyone want to return to the old ways?
- *No further word.* This type of fear of God was not necessarily reverence; rather, it was people being afraid for their lives or the fear of conviction (Ex. 20:19; Isa. 6:4-5; Matt. 17:6; Rev. 1:17).
- *Have come to.* Referring to our early sojourn or journey of life and faith and not arriving at our destination yet. Thus, Christ carries us to the Most Holy Place, the location of our worship of Him now and our eternal rest to come (Heb. 10:19-22; 13:14).
- *Mount Zion.* Referring to the heavenly city of God, where Jerusalem is figurative for God's dwelling on earth and the place of His giving us His Son in contrast to Mt. Sinai and the Law (Isa. 2:1-4; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 11:9-10).
- *Thousands of angels.* Showing God's presence, majesty, and importance by showing His entourage worshiping and celebrating a great event or holiday and giving Him glory (Deut. 33:2; Psalm 68:17; Dan. 7:10; Rev. 5:11-12).
- *The church/assembly.* Referring to the "joyful" people of God who are sanctified and consecrated before assembling to worship Him. This is also a connection to the Passover as God consecrating His people. This is not a building or a denomination or a religion; rather, it is the gathering of the people of God, led by God, who are the true Church. This also is a contrast between the assembly led by Moses and the one led by Christ.
- *Firstborn.* Meaning the Almighty Lord God (*Yahweh*), and is applied to Christ. This also means the inheritance rights and the ranking leader. In ancient Semitic cultures, the firstborn son held the right of heir and to rule. This paraphrased quote from Psalm 97:7 refers to coronation and the superiority of a king—in this case, the King. This does not mean Jesus was born, because He is eternal; rather, it is His role to rule. This also does not mean believers become angels; they (angels) are separate created beings (Ex. 4:22; Deut. 21:17; Psalm 89:26-27; 97:7; Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15-18; Heb. 1:6-14; 2:11-12; 10:19-25; Rev. 1:5).

- *Written/enrolled.* Meaning those who are redeemed, whose names are in the book of life. The roster, figurative or actual, is used by God to hold on to the names of those who are righteous, those who are His (Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12; 21:27).
- *Righteous men made perfect.* Righteousness by faith in God is testified to by one's action and fruit; it has now been perfected by Christ (2 Cor. 5:8-10; Heb. 11:40; Rev. 14:13).
- *Jesus the mediator.* He gives us confidence of our faith and is also the object of our joy because we are forgiven (Col. 1:20; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 7:22; 8:6, 13; 9:15; 1 John 1:7).
- *His voice shook the earth.* As the earth moved when God spoke at Mt. Sinai, His voice is real and He is to be heard; it is His earth and we are His people (Ex. 19:18; Judg. 5:5; Psalm 68:7-8; Isa. 13:13; Heb. 1:1-3; 4:14; 6:20; 7:26; 9:24).
- *Once more.* A quote from Haggai, this indicates God's promise as He brought His people out of captivity; He has done the same with our sin, as Christ paid our debt of sin. (Hag. 2:5-6).
- *Cannot be shaken.* Meaning it is eternal; this is also about how God's will and His glory will be done, and His second coming will come about in His perfect timing (Psalm 96:10; Heb. 2:7).
- *Be thankful/have grace.* This is gratitude—the essence of true worship, and how we respond to God. Our sacrifice is not of animals; it is the offering of ourselves with proper reverence and attitude. This also means that we now have a greater revelation, and thus a greater responsibility (John 4:19-24; Rom. 3:24-26; 4:23-25; 12:1-2; Heb. 11:40).
- *Worship God acceptably with reverence.* This means we must have gratitude for what Christ did for us. We have been forgiven and saved; why fret and worry? This fuels all of our motives and contentment. If we do not have gratitude, we will not live out our Christian lives well and we may even become like our Jewish ancestors—stiff-necked and an insult to God (Luke 10:20; John 4:19-24; Rom. 12:1-3; 2 Cor. 9:15).
- *Consuming fire.* Refers to God as Holy, who delivers the faithful and is rightfully jealous since He is Lord and Creator. He desires what is His to be His. This is a warning not to tread on God or disrespect Him, as he has the right to judge the apostate and wicked. His love never fails; thus, we should fear Him as in reverence Him in His chastening, and when it is given, gladly receive it; His goal is our faith formation, maturity, and Fruit production (Ex. 24:17; Deut. 4:24; 9:3; Rom. 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10; Heb. 12:6, 29; Rev 20:11-15).

Devotional Thoughts and Applications:

The quality of our faith and Christian life is exhibited in the quality of our preparations and discipline! Our receiving of His discipline is the entrance point to our spiritual formation which leads to our Christian maturity. Thus, when you are in a crisis or a troubling time, do not just ask for relief and divergence. Also seek Him by asking *what do I learn and take away to build me up further in faith and maturity?* God wants us to be squeezed so we produce *wine* and not *whine*. If we do not lean on Him, we will not learn and thus will not pass on our experiences to help others. Our trial will be a foolish waste of real suffering. But, if we learn and grow through that trial, it becomes the great classroom of life and educates us better than any university degree. Taking on His strength is what helps us produce our joy, not our conditions or unfulfilled desires (Neh. 8:10; Isa. 40:29; Matt. 11:30).

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. Are you having troubles in life? Why? How much of it is your input and how much is sin from others?
2. What does it mean to you to run with your faith and put into practice His call and precepts? How does it help to listen to God? How have you done this well? What needs work?
3. How well do you live at peace with everyone? How does having a clean and holy life enable you to have His serenity? What happens if you do not lead a holy life? How can you then be in Christ?
4. How does helping others to grow in Christ enable you to experience what He has for you?
5. Why do you think Esau traded his birthright for food?

6. Why are some people so foolish and shortsighted? What can be done to help such people experience the blessings Christ has for them and not trade them for a life of bitterness?
7. How simple is it to live a contented life? How do your faith and life depend on Jesus?
8. Why is it important that as Christians we need to be appreciative for who we are in Christ and what He has done for us, so we can worship Him and live contented lives? How so?
9. How have you seen in your life or observed in others that living a foolish life of bad decisions caused a loss of blessings and opportunities? How have these also caused a life of bitterness? What can be done to prevent this tragedy?
10. Do you need to watch out for bitterness? How have you seen bitterness arise from unfulfilled expectations when your focus was not on Christ? What can you do about it?
11. How can you be better at obeying, living, and serving Christ? How does being grateful for Christ's work on your behalf?
12. What are you going to do to better live a life of obedience and service to Christ and be more grateful? What would your life look like then?