

The Heavenly Jerusalem

Hebrews 12

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,

Hebrews 12:22

The great hope of the Jews was to be in control of their city: Jerusalem. By the time Hebrews had been written, Jerusalem had been under foreign control for over five centuries. The longing of every Jew was to be rid of these “Goyim” (Gentiles) to once again worship freely. It was their expectation that the Messiah would accomplish this. Consequently, when many Jews suspected that Jesus might have been the Christ-Messiah they judged His claims by their expectation that He would deliver Jerusalem.

1. How do we know that even Christ’s disciples thought this way?
(Note Acts 1:6)

2. How did Christ correct this misunderstanding of what His Kingdom was truly about? (Refer to Luke 17:21; John 18:36)

A Disciplining Father

We know that the Jewish believers who survived through to the mid sixties of the first century had to endure much persecution and opposition. What many Bible readers have failed to grasp within the words of Christ found in Matthew 24, is that Christ said all of those things would happen within the generation of His original audience (Matthew 24:34).

3. Understanding this context of Matthew 24 (as it relates directly to the events occurring at the time of Hebrews being written) what did Christ urge His disciples to do in Matthew 24:13 and what does it reveal about those times?

Perhaps the Hebrew believers at this time felt like God was either abandoning or punishing them because of the intense persecution they were enduring.

4. But how does Hebrews 12:5-11 reinterpret what was really happening?

We need to have a right theology about how God deals with His people. It would be wrong to think that God is a harsh aloof father figure who demands unachievable goodness. Sometimes we hear people say that “*God has broken me.*” I question whether this is a theologically correct understanding. Understanding Hebrews 12:5-11 we can see that God may let us be broken by our wilful obstinance, but it is His desire that we be chastened now rather than be judged for eternity!

5. Therefore rather than simply being a believer who battles against their carnal nature, Hebrews 12:12 encourages a pro-active approach to spiritual living. How?

A Different Way To Live

All of the New Testament epistles conclude with the life implications of what has just been taught. In the first portion of the Epistle to the Hebrews the writer has made the case for Hebrew believers to remain faithful to Christ because He is the Promised Messiah; the Prophet foretold by Moses; the fulfilment of the Law; the End of Sacrifices; the Rest from works; the True High Priest; the True Temple; and the only worthy object of our faith.

This understanding has implications for how we live...together. For example, Hebrews 12:12 has plural overtones. That is, it is not simply an injunction for us to strengthen ourselves, but an urging for us to strengthen those among us who are weak (Note Isaiah 35:3, 4).

6. How do these Scriptures reinforce this thought?

(a) Romans 14:1-

(b) Romans 15:1-

(c) 1Corinthians 8:9-

(d) 1Corinthias 12:22-

7. Hebrews 12:13 seems to be citing Proverbs 4:26. One commentator says “*By taking care for the defective members of the congregation, the stronger members can help them along the way. Where the Christian life is in any way ‘out of joint,’ steps should be taken to revitalise it.*” How does the imagery of Hebrews 12:13 support this comment?

We need to make every effort to live peaceably with other brothers and sisters in Christ. One very successful and experienced pastor once said to me that for a congregation to experience real fellowship they needed to know how to love, forgive, forebear, and forget! (Note Hebrews 12:14)

The Heavenly Jerusalem

8. What are the two warnings found in Hebrews 12:14-15 for those who refuse to live peaceably within a congregation of believers?

9. How does Hebrew 12:16-17 warn us about making our fellowship and feelings our primary spiritual goal?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said –

*For Jesus Christ alone is our unity. “He is our peace.”
Through him alone do we have access to one another,
and fellowship with one another.*

Life Together, page 39

10. Who is Hebrews 12:15 addressing? What are the implications for us from this verse?

11. What does Hebrews 12:17 imply about being fooled into thinking that we can indulge in sin then repent?

May God help us to build the kind of Church which holy, humble, and hard-working. And may God give you the wisdom to know how to apply what we have just studied.

Amen.