

Week 11 Devotionary™ Reading

A Daily Devotional on the Book of Hebrews

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What's Your Faith Fixated On?

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. – Hebrews 12:1-2 ESV

Let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so close. **How?**

Let us run. **To where?**

With endurance. **For how long?**

Looking to Jesus. **Why?**

After providing us with a long list of the faithful from history past, the author of Hebrews gives us the application. We are to do as they did. We are to live as they lived. Each of them are witnesses to the faith life to which we have been called. It is not easy. It is filled with moments of apprehension and periods of doubt. We are told to have an assurance of things hoped for and a strong conviction in things we can't even see. We are to take God at His word and rest in the promises He has given us, even when they seem doubtful and their fulfillment is so far out in the distance as to make them out of reach.

The two verses above are beautifully composed and provide a wonderful summary of the previous chapter, but do we believe them? Better yet, do we heed the counsel they provide? The four simple questions found at the beginning of this blog are legitimate and begging for answers. I will attempt to answer them, but in reverse order. First, why should we look to Jesus and, better yet, what does that even mean? The *New English Bible* translates it as "keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus." The *New International Version* says, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus." The English Standard Version has "looking to Jesus." The Greek word is *aphoraō* and it means "to turn the eyes away from other things and fix them on something" (Greek Lexicon :: G872 (KJV). Blue Letter Bible). This definition provides with invaluable insight into what it means for us to look to Jesus. This word does not refer to a casual glance or one-time look, but to an ongoing focus bordering on fixation. We are to look to Jesus and not take our eyes off of Him. And in doing so, we inevitably have to take our eyes off of other things. But first things first. What does it mean to look to Jesus? How are we supposed to pull that off when we can't even see Him?

The Scriptures provide us with some insight. Jesus Himself told the Jewish religious leaders, "But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God" (Luke 22:69 ESV). Stephen, just moments before he was stoned to death, received a vision of Jesus. "But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God'" (Acts 7:55-56 ESV).

Paul provided the believers in Rome with insight into the location or whereabouts of Jesus. “Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us” (Romans 8:34 ESV). And Paul told the Ephesian believers that the Father of glory “raised him [Jesus] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come” (Ephesians 1:16-21 ESV).

So where is Jesus? Seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven. So, when the author of Hebrews tells us to look to Jesus, to fix our eyes on Jesus, he is not just telling us to rely on Him. He is telling us to remember where He is and what He is doing at this moment. Paul tells us, “Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us” (Romans 8:34 ESV). Jesus is in heaven. It is from there that He intercedes for us. It is from there that He will return for us. And it is to there that He will take us. Just prior to His death, Jesus told His disciples, “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:1-3 ESV). Heaven is our destination. Eternal life with God the Father and Jesus Christ His Son is the objective. We must never forget where Jesus is because that is where we are going. That is the ultimate fulfillment of the promise of God. Our salvation culminates with our glorification.

When will our glorification take place? We don’t know. Which is why we need endurance. Jesus didn’t tell us when He would return. He didn’t tell us how long we would have to wait. But that is where faith comes in. It is the assurance of things hoped for. But do we hope for His return? Do we long for His coming? Do we prefer heaven over earth, our future life to this one? Like Abraham, are we “looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:10 ESV)? We must remain fixated on where Jesus is because that is where we belong and where we are going. And we are to run in that direction. That must be our aim and our objective. And to do so, we must lay aside every weight and sin which clings so close. The things of this earth can only inhibit our progress toward heaven, not enhance it. Earthly things can become distractions and weigh us down from the pursuit of our heavenly calling.

Jesus is to be our model for life. When He lived on this earth, He had a clear focus and calling. He knew why He had come and what He was to do. He also knew where He was going. And the author of Hebrews tells us, “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2 ESV). Jesus endured. He had a future-focused faith. He ran the race with endurance looking forward to His return to heaven and His reunion with His Father. He knew His time on this earth was temporary. His suffering would be intense but impermanent. His humiliation would result in His resurrection. His death would end in life. His agony would result in glory.

We must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. To do so, we have to take our eyes off of the things of this world. We can’t live as if this is our home. We can’t afford to act as if this is our final

destination. Focusing on where Jesus is will help us remember that heaven is where we belong, with Him. Paul said it well. “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” (Romans 8:18 ESV).

No Pain. No Gain.

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

*“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.
For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives.”*

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. – Hebrews 12:3-11 ESV

As we live our lives on this planet, we are to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. He is to be our focus. We must constantly remember that He returned to heaven and that one day He will return in order that we might receive our glorified bodies and spend eternity with Him. In the meantime, we must deal with the unmistakable reality that our earthly lives will be marked by difficulties and even the discipline of God. Which is why the author of Hebrews tells us to “Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself” (Hebrews 12:3 ESV). That word, “consider” is translated from the Greek word, *analogizomai* which means “to think over, consider, ponder” (Greek Lexicon :: G357 (KJV). Blue Letter Bible). In addition to fixing our eyes on Jesus and His glorified, resurrected state in heaven, the author wants us to give careful consideration to all that Jesus went through during His earthly ministry. His time on earth was anything but easy. He was the Son of God, yet He experienced rejection, ridicule, temptation, testing, and false accusations. He was considered a liar and a lunatic. He was called a “glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Matthew 11:19 ESV). He was regularly accused of blasphemy. The gossip spread that He was illegitimate. His own family thought He was crazy. The Jewish religious leadership hated Him and plotted to kill Him. To many He was nothing more than a novelty. To others He was a form of entertainment or a means to an end – either for healing or even a free meal. His life ended in death. His ministry appeared to be a total failure. But through it all, He was doing the will of His Father in heaven. Earlier in this same letter, the author wrote, “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him” (Hebrews 5:7-9 ESV).

Notice that the author qualifies what he says with the words, “in the days of his flesh.” He is specifically talking about Jesus’ incarnation, His time spent on earth in human form. During the thirty-plus years Jesus spent on earth, He was experiencing something He had never had to experience before: What it means to live life as a human being. He knew what it meant to grow tired, to experience pain, to hunger and thirst, to feel loneliness and sorrow. He regularly spent time in prayer to His heavenly Father, crying out “with loud cries and tears.” And he learned obedience through what He suffered. In other words, He learned what was required for a human being to obey God. In chapter four, the author reminded us, “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” (Hebrews 4:15 ESV). Jesus knew firsthand what it was like to suffer while serving. He knew what it felt like to experience the pain of rejection while attempting to obey the will of His Father. And He knew what it was like to obey God even if it required His own death.

But most of us have not had to suffer to that point. “In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood” (Hebrews 12:4 ESV). Very few of us have had to experience what Jesus went through. But we are encouraged to “not grow weary of fainthearted.” We are to view ourselves as sons and daughters of God, living under His loving discipline, as He molds and shapes us into the likeness of His Son. In the same way a human father would lovingly discipline or correct his son, God disciplines us because He loves us. He has our best in mind. He longs to see us grow in Christ-likeness and increase in dependence upon Him. He wants to see us filled with and controlled by His indwelling Spirit. He wants us to learn to rely on and rest in Him. God “disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness” (Hebrews 12:10 ESV). And while the discipline of God may seem painful and unpleasant while we are going through it, we must always remember the future outcome: “the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11 ESV). God is out to make us increasingly more holy. Our holiness is His goal (1 Thessalonians 4:3). Paul, in his letter to the Christians in Rome, made an interesting and seemingly paradoxical statement: “we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame (Romans 5:3-5 ESV). We rejoice in sufferings. Why? Because they teach us endurance and endurance improves our characters, and as we see our character being changed, it strengthens our hope. And in the end, our hope in the promises of God will not disappoint us. The day is coming when all our suffering, trials, testings, and lessons in discipline will be over. We will graduate, so to speak. John tells us, “Dear friends, we are already God's children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is” (1 John 3:2 ESV).

We must constantly focus on Jesus, remembering what He endured and where He is. He suffered, but He was glorified. He was crucified but brought back to life. He came to earth but returned to heaven. And one day He is coming back to get us. When that day comes, our days of suffering, discipline, testing and trials will be over. Which is what led Paul to say, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” (Romans 8:18 ESV). We must keep our eyes on the prize. We must constantly

remind ourselves that where Jesus is where we belong. This world is not our home. We truly are just passing through. And while the journey may at times seem difficult and the lessons of life may feel unfair, we must remember that God loves us and is transforming and preparing us for something far greater and better than this life could ever offer.

Grit and Grace

Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. – Hebrews 12:12-17 ESV

Even with your eyes focused on Jesus, the Christian life can be difficult. As sons and daughters of God we will experience His loving discipline so that we might share in His holiness. And as the author of Hebrews reminded us, “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11 ESV). Learning the life of holiness in the midst of a world and culture that is diametrically opposed to it is anything but easy. But holiness is to be our goal, because holiness is God’s will for us. “For this is the will of God, your sanctification...” (1 Thessalonians 4:3 ESV). Sanctification refers to our ongoing transformation into holiness and righteousness. Ultimately, God’s goal for us is our glorification, the day in which we will be completely free from the influence of sin and totally righteous in His eyes, both positionally and morally. Paul puts it this way: “but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved” (Romans 8:23-24 ESV). He told the Galatian believers, “For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness” (Galatians 5:5 ESV). Redeemed bodies, free from the effects of sin and a righteousness unhampered by a sin nature – that is to be our hope. That is to be our goal. Yet while it is something promised to us in the hereafter, we are to strive for it in the here and now.

We are to “strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14 ESV). The Greek word translated “strive” is *diōkō* and it means “to seek after eagerly, earnestly endeavour to acquire” (Greek Lexicon :: G1377 (KJV). Blue Letter Bible). But it can also mean “to persecute, in any way whatever to harass, trouble, molest one.” In this world where enmity and hostility are the norm, we are to pursue peace with all men. When the world returns our love with hatred, we are to persevere and keep on loving regardless of what happens. And we are to pursue holiness in the same way, persistently and purposefully. It will not be easy. That’s why the author tells us “take a new grip with your tired hands and strengthen your weak knees. Mark out a straight path for your feet so that those who are weak and lame will not fall but become strong” (Hebrews 12:12-13 NLT).

Notice that this is not to be an individual journey, but a shared one. “See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy” (Hebrews 12:15-16 ESV). We

have a mutual responsibility to our brothers and sisters in Christ to see that we all strive for holiness. No one is to be left behind. The pursuit of holiness is not a solo event. It is a team sport. We are members of the body of Christ and so, we are in this together.

The author warns us against three things: grace-lessness, bitterness and unholiness. Back in chapter four he wrote, “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16 ESV). Grace is undeserved favor or “the merciful kindness by which God, exerting his holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ, keeps, strengthens, increases them in Christian faith” (Greek Lexicon :: G5485 (KJV). Blue Letter Bible). Grace is made available to us by God. But to live grace-lessly is to attempt to live our lives without His help and apart from His strength. Holiness is impossible without God’s help. We cannot make ourselves holy. It is a work of the Holy Spirit within us. But we can become grace-less through prayerlessness. We can fail to enjoy God’s life-giving grace when we refuse to spend time in His Word and the fellowship with His people.

And grace-lessness can lead to bitterness. When we fail to live in God’s grace availing ourselves of His power, we become defeated. Our pursuit of holiness becomes nothing more than a self-fueled effort in futility. We try and fail. We strive, in our own strength, and experience nothing more than disappointment and disillusionment. This “root” can spread unseen through the body of Christ, strangling the life out of the fellowship and damaging its witness. When we see our brothers and sisters in Christ failing to avail themselves of the grace of God, we must be willing to step in and speak up. Grace-lessness is infectious and highly dangerous. It can become like a cancer, spreading unseen through the body of Christ, sapping the life and vitality from the people of God.

And the end result of grace-lessness and bitterness is unholiness. The author describes it as defilement. The Greek word is *miainō* and it means “to defile, pollute, sully, contaminate, soil” (Greek Lexicon :: G3392 (KJV). Blue Letter Bible). It was a word often used to refer to the dying or staining of a cloth. Grace-lessness can lead to bitterness and bitterness can end up contaminating the body of Christ, leaving it less than holy. The author uses Esau as an example of unholiness. Esau was the brother of Jacob who sold his birthright for a bowl of porridge. He was driven by his passions, his physical appetites, and gave up what was of value for what was temporal and, ultimately, worthless. And while he would live to regret his decision, it was irreversible. Esau was consumed with the here-and-now. And for the fleeting pleasure of a bowl of stew, he sold his future birthright. John Calvin describes someone like Esau as...

...those in whom the love of the world so holds sway and prevails, that they forget heaven as men who are carried away by ambition, addicted to money and riches, given over to gluttony, and entangled with other kinds of pleasures, and give the spiritual kingdom of Christ either no place or the last place in their concerns. – William B. Johnston, trans., *Calvin’s Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and the First and Second Epistles of St. Peter*

The walk of faith can be long and arduous, but it is not impossible. Peter would have us remember, “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness,

through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire” (2 Peter 1:3-4 ESV). Through His grace, we have what we need to strive after holiness. We may experience drooping hands and weak knees, but we have the power of the indwelling Spirit at our disposal. Holiness is not only possible, but inevitable. It is the promise of God. And our pursuit of it in this life reveals our confidence that we will receive it in full in the life to come.

The Valley Between Two Mountains

For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. – Hebrews 12:18-24 ESV

The author of Hebrews compares the Christian life to that of a long and arduous journey. Because of his Hebrew audience, he most likely has in mind the more than 40-year journey the people of Israel took to get to the land promised by God to their forefather, Abraham. That had been an ultra-ultra-mega-marathon, covering thousands of miles and four decades. And it had required incredible endurance and a constant awareness that there truly was a goal in mind. They were headed somewhere. They had an actual destination. Even on those days when it all felt pointless and mind-numbingly repetitious, they had to keep walking and trusting that God knew what He was doing, and Moses knew where he was going. At times, they had their doubts and felt free to make them known.

In these verses, the author contrasts Mount Sinai with Mount Zion. The first mountain was from their past. It was the place, early on in the Exodus story, where God had met with Moses and given them the Ten Commandments. It had been a terrifying and life-changing moment for the people of God.

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. – Exodus 19:16-19 ESV

The physical manifestations that had accompanied the presence of God that day had left the people in a state of fear and anxiety. The Exodus account goes on to say, "when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, 'You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die'" (Exodus 20:18-19 ESV). The dramatic physical display they witnessed that day left them terrified. None of them missed the significance or symbolism of it all. Their God was powerful, holy, transcendent and not to be trifled with. The dramatic display on the top of Mount Sinai was intended to reinforce

in their minds the holiness of God. It was also a reminder of their own sinfulness. That fact would be reinforced by the giving of Ten Commandments by God to Moses. But if you recall, the first time Moses returned from the top of the mountain with the tablets in his hands he found the people worshiping the golden calf. Just days after the pyrotechnic display on the mountain that had left them trembling in fear, they had determined to make their own god. So Mount Sinai would forever be a symbol of God's holiness and their own sinfulness. The law God gave them would prove to be a constant reminder of their own sinfulness and incapacity to live obediently.

But Mount Zion was a different mountain and represents an altogether different encounter with God. Mount Sinai was physical in nature and could be seen and touched, albeit at pain of death. Yet Mount Zion is a spiritual mountain. There is no smoke, fire, thunder, lightning, or ban against coming near. Mount Zion is not only approachable, it is preferable. It is our final destination. It represents "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (Hebrews 12:22 ESV). During the reigns of David and Solomon, Jerusalem was a powerful city, the capital of the Jewish empire. It was in Jerusalem that Solomon built the temple. It was there that the people came each year on the Day of Atonement to make sacrifices to God. As the people journeyed from the surrounding areas up to Jerusalem, they would sing the Songs of Ascent found in the psalms. One of them says, "Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore" (Psalm 125:1-2 ESV). Jerusalem, Mount Zion, represented the presence of God. It was there that God dwelt in the Holy of Holies. It was to Zion the people walked in order to celebrate the various feasts and festivals. It was there they went to receive forgiveness of sin and to have their relationship with God restored.

For believers, our final destination is also Mount Zion. It represents our heavenly home – "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." We are on a journey to a place where we will encounter God, but rather than experiencing fear and trembling, we will enjoy peace, acceptance, joy, and a freedom from sin and sorrow. There will be no condemnation. There will be no need for the law to remind us God's holy expectations. We will be holy. There will be no conviction of sin or any need for the law to expose our sin anymore, because we will be sinless. In a sense, the Christian life is a journey from one mountain to another. It is a long, sometimes difficult trip away from the mountain where man's relationship with God was marked by law, rule-keeping, disobedience, fear and failure. It is a daily walk toward another mountain where we will find complete forgiveness, the redemption of our bodies and our final glorification. Paul reminds us, "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body" (Philippians 3:20-21 ESV). We are on our way to Mount Zion. That is our final destination. It is our home. And while the journey there may seem long and at times difficult, we must keep our eye on the prize. We must never turn back to Mount Sinai, marked by rules and a constant reminder of our guilt and sin. Mount Zion is our home, where we will be with all those who have gone before us and enjoy unbroken fellowship with God and "Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant" (Hebrews 12:24 ESV).

An Unshakeable Kingdom

See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire. – Hebrews 12:25-29 ESV

It pays to listen to God. That should go without saying. Yet when God had spoken to the Israelites from Mount Sinai, they trembled in fear, but refused to obey what He had to say. They had been scared out of their wits by all the booming thunder, lightning and smoke, but that fear didn't turn into faithful obedience to His commands. The author tells us “the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them” (Hebrews 12:19 ESV). They heard, but they felt like they had heard enough. Even Moses trembled in fear at the sight of God descending upon the top of Mount Sinai. And it was from the top of that mountain that God would give him the Ten Commandments. From that point forward, the righteous expectations of God would be clearly articulated and scrupulously regulated. Sin went from being a somewhat subjective, arbitrary thing to a highly objective, non-debatable trespass against a holy God.

The author of Hebrews warns his readers not to repeat the mistake of their ancestors. “See that you do not refuse him who is speaking” (Hebrews 12:25a ESV). God had come down to earth. He had descended upon Mount Sinai. And there He gave to Moses His list of commands. His voice had shaken the heavens and His physical glory could be seen in the thunder, lightning, smoke and fire. But they had refused to listen to God. “And they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth” (Hebrews 12:25b ESV). Even while Moses was up on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments from God, the people were down in the valley worshiping and dancing before a false god they had made. As a result of their disobedience, Moses commanded the Levites, “Put your sword on your side each of you, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor.”² And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And that day about three thousand men of the people fell” (Exodus 32:27-28 ESV). The rest of the history of the people of Israel would be marked by disobedience and disloyalty to God. In spite of them hearing His voice, they had refused to listen and had to suffer the consequences.

And so, the author of Hebrews warns his readers not to repeat the same mistake. This time, God is speaking from heaven, where He is accompanied by His Son. And quoting from the Old Testament book of Haggai, the author of Hebrews credits God with the words, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens” (Hebrews 12:26 ESV). The actual quote from the prophecies of Haggai is “For thus says the Lord of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I

will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land” (Haggai 2:6 ESV). At this point in Jewish history, the people of God had returned from exile in the land of Babylon and had rebuilt the temple. It was just a shadow of its former glory. The city of Jerusalem was still being reconstructed and the nation was in a highly weakened state, with no king and no army to protect them. Haggai went on to prophecy, “And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the Lord of hosts. The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the Lord of hosts” (Haggai 2:7-9 ESV). That prophecy has yet to be fulfilled. But the author of Hebrews is telling his readers that it one day will be.

God is going to one day shake the earth again. This time, it will involve “the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain” (Hebrews 12:27 ESV). God is going to redeem what He has made. He will destroy the old created order, marred by sin, and replace it with something new and free from the effects of sin.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” – Revelation 21:1-4 ESV

Isaiah speaks of the same incredible event:

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. – Isaiah 65:17-19 ESV

Peter gives us another glimpse of that coming day.

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which

the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. – 2 Peter 3:8-13 ESV

So, what should our response be to all of this? The author of Hebrews tells us, “let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:28-29 ESV). We have much for which to be grateful. Our God is in control. He has a perfect plan. He will one day complete that plan and restore things back to the way He made them before the fall. Let us listen to His words of promise and rest in His holy character, fully believing that we will receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

