

# WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY DEVOTIONAL

Hebrews 12:18-29

April 29, 2020

## Hebrews 12:14-29:

<sup>14</sup> Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. <sup>15</sup> See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. <sup>16</sup> See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. <sup>17</sup> Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done.

## The Mountain of Fear and the Mountain of Joy

<sup>18</sup> You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; <sup>19</sup> to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, <sup>20</sup> because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death." <sup>21</sup> The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."

<sup>22</sup> But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, <sup>23</sup> to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, <sup>24</sup> to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

<sup>25</sup> See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? <sup>26</sup> At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." <sup>27</sup> The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

<sup>28</sup> Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, <sup>29</sup> for our "God is a consuming fire."

Do you ever feel nostalgic? Do you ever wish you could go back to an earlier time in your life? Maybe not to junior high (!), but maybe to relive good times or hang out in old familiar places? Do old photos, or hit songs, or vacation souvenirs make you long for the past? I get nostalgic every once in a while.

I drive past my grandparents' house once a year. It's along the way to where I'm going, so I detour one block to see the place. It doesn't look quite the same – not like it used to. Good memories there, though, but it's not a part of my life anymore.

Of course we can't actually go back to what once was. Things change. Life keeps moving forward. Memories remain, but the past is gone. Today is new. So we look forward to what lies ahead.

Some Hebrew Christians wanted to go back. At least they were tempted. Their new-found faith in Jesus had carried them through some rough times, at least early on. But something's afoot, prompting the letter writer to remind them of certain truths – like the supremacy of Christ and his all-sufficient sacrifice for sin – and to encourage them to persevere in faith.

Had they become nostalgic? Did they long to go back to what was familiar and comfortable? Was persecution driving them back? Had they become weary of the struggle against sin or lazy in their spiritual pursuits? Was there pressure on them to return to Judaism? Had they begun to think that Jesus really wasn't enough for salvation? Maybe their faith wasn't genuine to begin with.

There's a lot at stake for these folks. If they were to reject Jesus and turn back to the old covenant, they'd lose out on an awful lot. It would be like Esau giving up his inheritance to satisfy immediate hunger. He didn't fight to keep it, he didn't try at all. He just gave it away. It shows how little he valued his birthright and the blessing of God that went along with it. He missed out on the grace of God. And so would they.

I don't remember who wrote it, but I read somewhere that for these Jewish believers who are being tempted, the old covenant law is like Esau's bowl of stew. It meets a need and satisfies in the moment. But you know what? Esau had to eat again. And under the law, sacrifices had to be repeated. Sin was never sufficiently dealt with.

The writer of Hebrews exhorts his readers – "See that no one is...godless like Esau" (12:16) who gave away his inheritance for temporary satisfaction. He warns them – don't go back to Judaism and lose your eternal inheritance in Christ. The old is gone and the new has come. Law has been replaced by grace, and if you have truly come to Jesus, you can't go back. You won't want to. You've tasted and seen that the Lord is good.

It's not always easy to persevere in faith, is it. Even the word "persevere" implies difficulty. There are often temptations to battle, road blocks to circumvent, or opposition that disheartens you. People may look at you funny if they know you're a Christian. They might think you're weird or old fashioned, or they might talk disparagingly about you behind your back. But perseverance has its reward. What a reward!

In Christ "you have come to Mount Zion," not to Mount Sinai. Coming to Christ has not brought you back to the old covenant. No, in him you're a new creation living in a new relationship under a new covenant with new promises. That "bowl of stew" met a need for a while, but it's empty now, it's gone, it's obsolete. It did its job of showing us that we needed something better, something that would satisfy long term. But it was not the final remedy. The word of God at Mount Sinai was not the final word.

Think about Mount Sinai at the giving of the law. If you had been there, what would have been your impression of God? How about frightening and unapproachable. His command to stay away or die? Terrifying. Israel's response? Fear and trembling. God is holy and people are sinful, and the chasm between them is great. But this scene at Mount Sinai is not new covenant. This is not where coming to Christ has landed you. Esau paid a much larger price for his meal than he realized in the moment. So will these believers if they go back to Judaism. So will anyone who rejects new covenant relationship with God.

You, however, faithful one, you've been rewarded. You're standing on the podium with your gold medal glistening in the spotlight. Well done, good and faithful servant! Wait, no, sorry, you get a better reward than that!

You get to spend eternity in relationship with the living God in his heavenly city! You get to worship God with countless angels and with every believer who ever lived. The Judge has declared you righteous along with those Old Testament heroes who died in faith having not received what was promised and who are now made perfect and complete because of Christ. And you get to be with Jesus, who, by the shedding of his blood, established the new covenant of grace, and whose blood, unlike Abel's that called for vengeance, speaks forgiveness and reconciliation and peace. There's no darkness or gloom, no fear or terror here. Only joy in the presence of a holy God.

You know what else? "*You have come*" to this heavenly place. You're already there...almost. The reward is already being realized in your life from the moment you came to Jesus. You're a new creation with a new perspective, new priorities, and a new purpose. In prayer and fellowship and worship you're already participating with the saints in heaven before the throne of God – a taste of heaven's joys here on earth that will be fully realized later on when you join their glorious company.

Don't miss the grace of God. Don't lose your heavenly reward. Be careful to listen to him. He spoke at Sinai; he speaks from Zion. Remember, the same God both judges and forgives. Those under the law were punished for refusing him; those under grace will be, too, and in greater measure if we turn away.

When he speaks, his voice has power and authority. The earth trembled once when he spoke. It will again, along with the heavens when Christ returns. All of creation, the entire cosmos will be utterly and dreadfully shaken, and only one thing will survive – a strong and everlasting unshakable kingdom in which Christ will dwell with all those who believe in him.

So worship God. That's your offering back to him. It doesn't seem like much, considering who he is and all he's done for us. Worship him with gratitude, sincerely from the heart. Honor him and bow before him in reverence and awe – He is great and mighty, a consuming fire, holy and righteous. The heavens and the earth will one day be destroyed, but our God remains steadfast and unchanging.

Persevere in faith. Don't turn back. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. Your heavenly reward awaits. Thanks be to God.

~ Jan Timlin