

## What is the larger context of Hebrews 12?

Notice what the following authors say about the context of this passage.

The writer to the Hebrews sets out still another reason why men should cheerfully bear affliction when it comes to them. He has urged them to bear it because the great saints of the past have borne it. He has urged them to bear it because anything they may have to bear is a little thing compared with what Jesus Christ had to bear. **Now he says that they must bear hardship because it is sent as a discipline from God...**<sup>1</sup>

So, then, the writer insists that we must look on all **the hardships of life as the discipline of God** and as sent to work, not for our harm but for our ultimate and highest good.<sup>2</sup>

The main purpose which the sacred writer has here in view is to reconcile the minds of his readers to the sufferings entailed by their Christian profession, that is, the cross in the proper sense of the word. But **all sufferings imposed by God upon His children, whether for discipline**, trial of faith, or witness for the truth, have this one feature in common, that they are all proofs of divine love, not signs of anger. The Christian in every trial sees a proof of the Father's loving care for his good.<sup>3</sup>

The classic treatment of chastisement is found in this portion of Scripture. Chastisement, therefore, involves discipline and correction of the child of God through directive punishment and **suffering**. It is altogether different from the penal retribution of the unsaved.<sup>4</sup>

The point of the statement (12:1) is that the experience of these Old Testament saints testifies to us of the importance of persistent faith (257). The second incentive to encourage faithful persistence in suffering is a reminder of the experience of Jesus (258). The explanation of suffering (12:4-11 [260]). He is not suggesting that God is responsible for the evil which wicked men bring upon believers. He is, however, saying that God has incorporated even these circumstances as instruments to accomplish His will. **In times of affliction caused by opponents to their faith, God's people are to realize that persecution is actually overruled by God and used for the training of believers.** It is all too common to conclude that sufferings are always sent by God as punishment for sin. It must be remembered that Christ, God's unique Son, learned through His suffering (2:10), and believers should adopt His mind on this matter (261). **When believers are confronted with the prospect of enduring hardships, they must understand that it is not as punishment coming from God's wrath, but is a part of the heavenly Father's program of educating His sons** (262).<sup>5</sup>

God's children may go through **excruciatingly painful experiences**. God has not promised to save His children from the fiery furnace, but He has promised to be with them in their time of need. The chastisement is hard to endure, but God will give the grace of endurance. The believer knows that God knows what He is doing.<sup>6</sup>

Two thoughts are suggested by the consideration of Christ's sufferings (3). The sufferings of the Hebrews were relatively light (4); and **all sufferings which come from God are the wise discipline of a Father** (5, 6 [p 396]). Sufferings are tempered by the providence of God, and they are a sign of sonship. (399)<sup>7</sup>

(vv.4-13) **This casts a new and a wonderful light on all the persecutions and the hardships the readers are to endure perseveringly, for these inflictions are plain evidence of the sonship of the readers: only a father who is deeply concerned for his sons chastises them.** (431, 432). (verse 6) Chastisement in its severest form is thus strong evidence of one's sonship. This casts the clearest light on all persecution that God lets us bear in this life for Christ's sake. It does correct us, drive out the sin that is still in us, but only in order that we may be more truly the sons that God would have us to be (434).<sup>8</sup>

**The persecutions** which we endure for the Gospel's sake, are on another account useful to us, even because they are remedies to destroy sin; for in this way **God keeps us under the yoke of his discipline**, lest our flesh should become wanton; . . .<sup>9</sup>

Suffering comes to all; it is part of life, but it is not easy to bear. Yet it is not quite so bad when it can be seen as meaningful. For Christians all suffering is transformed because of the Cross. The writer points to the importance of discipline and proceeds to show that **for Christians suffering is rightly understood only when seen as God's fatherly discipline, correcting, and directing us.** Suffering is evidence, not that God does not love us, but that he does.<sup>10</sup>

In light of the preceding statements, how can we rightly conclude Hebrews 12 as punitive for sin?

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<sup>1</sup> Barclay, *Hebrews*, 175.

<sup>2</sup> Barclay, *Hebrews*, 177.

<sup>3</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *Hebrews*, 2:312, 313.

<sup>4</sup> Gromacki, *Hebrews*, 200.

<sup>5</sup> Kent, *Hebrews*

<sup>6</sup> Pfeiffer, *Hebrews, Everyman's Bible Commentary*, 111

<sup>7</sup> Westcott, *Hebrews*

<sup>8</sup> R.C.H. Lenski, *Hebrews, etc.*

<sup>9</sup> Calvin, *Hebrews*, 314.

<sup>10</sup> Leon Morris, *Hebrews*, Expo Bible Commentary, 12:136