

Hebrews 12:14-13:25

- 1) Regarding the two mountains, Sinai and Zion of Hebrews 12:18-24:
 - a) Why could they not touch Sinai, and why can we touch Zion? How is it a comfort that we can't touch Zion?
 - b) What did Abel's blood call for, and what word does Jesus' blood speak?
- 2) We "have come" to the city where our hearts can finally rest (12:22). Yet in 13:14, we are "looking for the city that is to come." The city – Jerusalem--was of incalculable importance to the Jews, as the irreplaceable home of the Temple, a center of fellowship and cultural unity to which Jews from all over the world would make pilgrimage. This author, perhaps knowing the Christians would not always be welcome in Jerusalem, talks of a new city, a city inhabited both by "innumerable angels" and "the assembly of the firstborn," the company of saints described also in chapter 12's "cloud of witnesses." (Recall that the readers fearfully sought the protection of angels.) In what ways is this in the present tense, either for the first-century readers, or for us? And if it's not present tense, just how encouraging would it have been for his readers?
- 3) Verses 13:1-2 encourage love for brothers and sisters in Christ (*philadelphia*) as well as hospitality toward others – literally, love for strangers (*philoxenia*).¹ At RCRC we offer "mutual love" in various for the members of the church: (a) the deacons' fund to help those in need; (b) meals for the sick and bereaved; (c) prayer for the sick and needy; (d) visitation for the shut-ins; (e) fellowship for all through koinonia night, picnics, and small groups; just to name some of our ministries. List the ways in which we show love toward the stranger, outsider and sojourner.
- 4) The readers are invited to remember their leaders and "consider the outcome of their way of life" (13:7). "Outcome" is *ekbasin*, which can also mean "the end of one's life" (BDAG). In the words of Brown, rather than simply considering the way their leaders lived their lives,

...it is probably far more natural here to see in this statement a reference to the death of these leaders, possibly even by martyrdom. Even if they did not pay that supreme price, the very way in which they had passed from this life serenely and unafraid was a radiant example in a world terrified by death and an unknown future. Christians of this kind have an abiding influence; the readers are encouraged to *imitate their faith*. (Brown, 256)

¹ In the first century hospitality of strangers was considered virtuous by both Greeks and Jews and was especially necessary given the lack of resources available to travelers when inns were both expensive and morally suspect. For Christians, true love of outsiders began, but went beyond, simple hospitality, as the parable of the Good Samaritan demonstrates.

Read D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord*, pp. 114-116. Who have you known—leaders or otherwise—who brought glory to God through the virtue of “dying well”? In addition to meditating on these people what can each of us do to begin to develop this eternal viewpoint?

- 5) Verse 13:14 reminds the readers that “here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.” It follows a “for” – what action or attitude is it supporting?
- 6) Verse 13:14 articulates the “pilgrim principle,” that we are never at home in a fallen world, but are “strangers and aliens” (1 Peter 2:11). This is held in tension with the “indigenizing principle,”² which says that Christians do not discard entirely their culture and relations upon conversion, but “live as a Christian and yet as a member of one’s own society” (reminiscent of Jer 29:4-7; 11-13).

The pilgrim principle reminds us never to be too at ease with this passing world and its pursuits; the indigenizing principle encourages us to not just be Christians but be Christians in a particular place and time and culture. The indigenizing principle allowed the Jerusalem council to free Gentile converts of the strictures of the law and circumcision; the pilgrim principle required them to understand their Hellenistic culture using the lens of the Gospel, and to circumcise their hearts through lives of holiness.

The readers of Hebrews are being told their true home is not Mt. Sinai but Mt. Zion – they are being driven away from the Jewish roots of Christianity to a fundamental understanding of the Gospel. They are being given a big dose of the pilgrim principle lest they compromise their faith for the sake of the safety afforded by Judaism.

Both principles are necessary: too much “pilgrim” and we not only artificially separate ourselves from those around us we need to reach, we fail to understand what the Gospel means to our culture; too much “indigenizing” and we blend into the culture and forget our true home.

- a) Which of these does Hebrews (as a whole) emphasize, and why?
- b) Various churches tend to emphasize one principle over the other, as do various ages and personalities. Where are you on the pilgrim-indigenous scale? Which denominations or traditions tend toward pilgrim, and which toward indigenizing? Where is RCRC? Most importantly, how is your balance? Do you need more pilgrim or more indigenizing?

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Fun fact: The Greek word *agape* is never used in Hebrews.

² These terms are borrowed from Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 7-9, who sees these principles as indications of the degree to which we are to embrace the culture we are born into.