

HEBREWS

The Danger of Drawing Back
Hebrews 10:26-39

Introduction

The Hebrew Christians had long been persecuted by their Jewish friends and families for their faith in Jesus Christ. They had “endured a great struggle with sufferings” (10:32). Now they were seeking to **end** rather than **endure** their sufferings. Something had changed.

In the spring of 66AD the Jewish population of Roman occupied Judea revolted. They seized control of Jerusalem and massacred a cohort of Roman infantry. There was a swelling of Jewish pride and patriotism. War was on the horizon and Jews were rallying together. In light of the current political situation the persecution against the Hebrew Christians had greatly intensified as they were pressured to rejoin their countrymen by returning to Judaism.

The entire Book of Hebrews is essentially a series of warnings to *not* go back to the Jewish sacrificial system. Going back would **end** the persecution; they ought to instead **endure** it.

Those two possible responses are defined more fully in our text, especially in the last verse of chapter ten. **Ending** their persecutions is defined as “draw[ing] back to perdition”; **enduring** is defined as “believ[ing] to the saving of the soul.”

This is the fourth of five sobering warnings, and it is one of the most severe. We’ll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Draw Back From Jesus And You Will Experience Ruin, and #2 Draw Blessings From Jesus And You Will Experience Reward.

#1 Draw Back From Jesus
And You Will Experience Ruin
(v26-31)

These are troubling verses – so much so that Bible commentators are disagreed as to the spiritual condition of the people being addressed.

Some say the people being addressed only *profess* to be Christians but do not yet *possess* salvation; by drawing back they prove they were never really saved in the first place. Others are just as certain that these people already possess salvation but forfeit it and become unsaved by their departure from the truth. A mediating position is that they are genuine Christians who forfeit eternal rewards, not eternal salvation.

It might help if we took a moment to understand both the biblical and the historical context of their situation. I mentioned in the introduction that the Jews had revolted against the Romans who occupied Judea. This was the beginning of the end for them: Titus and the Roman Legions would shortly come to retake the city and ruin the Temple.

Jesus predicted this event. He told His disciples that not one stone of the Temple would be left upon another that would not be thrown down (Matthew 24:2). This day of judgment was approaching.

We must read these verses in Hebrews with the approaching ruin of the Temple in mind. In fact, this warning passage is prefaced by the comment in verse twenty-five, “as you see **the day** approaching.” The “day” is probably a reference to the ruin of the Temple, not to the return of the Lord.

This warning begins with the reminder of the coming ruin of the Temple. It ends with an illustration from Jewish history. Verses thirty-seven and thirty-eight are a quote from the Old Testament book of Habakkuk. Habakkuk lived during a similar time of Jewish pride and patriotism that would end with the ruin of the Temple at the hands of an invading force (Babylon). The message of his book is to press forward in faith despite the approaching ruin of the Temple.

The physical ruin of the Temple is the overall context of this warning. Let's read the conclusion, in verse thirty-nine, with this context in mind. The writer told them to not “draw back to perdition.” “Perdition” *can* mean eternal judgment; but it can also mean *perish, die, waste, or ruin* (Wiersebe). Don't draw back from Jesus and return to Judaism or you will perish and die!

What does it mean to “believe to the saving of the soul”? It *can* refer to eternal salvation; but it can also simply mean the preservation of your physical life (Adam Clarke).

A return to Judaism by the Hebrew Christians – at least those in and around Jerusalem - would guarantee their own physical ruin. Indeed, the Romans did slaughter over a million Jews in their siege of the city. Here is the warning: *Don't draw back to Judaism or you will perish and die; instead, press forward in faith and preserve your life.*

It is insightful to read accounts of the ruin of the Temple in 70AD. Two such accounts, written by Eusebius and Epiphanius, claim that the ruin of the Temple happened only *after* all the Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem had managed to flee Jerusalem to safety (cited by Adam Clarke). These accounts are not biblical, but they bear out that the warning in this passage is about preserving physical life rather than perishing in the coming judgment.

This passage in Hebrews is written to genuine Christians but it is not a warning that you can forfeit your salvation and be lost forever. It is a warning that you can draw back from Jesus and ruin your life.

Hebrews 10:26 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

Hebrews 10:27 but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.

“Sin willfully” means to *deliberately disobey* God when you know the “truth.” A return to Jewish ritual sacrifice would be a deliberate, willful sin against God. The phrase “there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins” is truly brilliant. In the Jewish Law, there **was no sacrifice** for willful and deliberate sinning – only punishment. There was only “a certain fearful expectation of judgment.” These Hebrew Christians were considering returning to the sacrificial system; **but to return would be a willful and deliberate sin for which there was no sacrifice!** To return would be to join their “adversaries,” their persecutors, and to experience the ruin of “fiery indignation” that was coming to “devour them” in the ruin of their Temple.

Hebrews 10:28 Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

Hebrews 10:29 Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

The Jewish Law prescribed capital punishment for certain offenses, **not** sacrifices. One of those capital offenses was rebellion against God. A return to the sacrifices would be a rebellion against God for which there was no sacrifice – only the death penalty.

The Hebrew Christians were seeking to end their severe persecutions. What could it hurt to return to Judaism outwardly as long as they were saved? The hurt is described as “tramp[ing] the Son of God underfoot, count[ing] the blood of the covenant by which [they] were sanctified a common thing, and insult[ing] the Spirit of grace.” To draw back from Jesus would be to disgrace Him in the eyes of their friends and families.

Hebrews 10:30 For we know Him who said, “*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,*” says the Lord. And again, “*The LORD will judge His people.*”

Hebrews 10:31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

These Old Testament quotes refer to God *disciplining* His children when they sinned. It is a warning to the Hebrew Christians that their willful and deliberate sin of disgracing Jesus Christ by returning to the Jewish sacrifices would discipline into their lives. Persecution was one thing... *but punishment from God was another!* You can and should rejoice in your persecutions; punishment calls you to repentance.

You and I are not considering returning to the Jewish sacrificial system; we couldn't even if we wanted to since the Temple remains destroyed since 70AD. But we *can* seek to end rather than endure certain situations; and we *can* deliberately sin when we know the truth. And, though we don't talk about it much, God's discipline for deliberate sin *can still involve capital punishment!* In several New Testament passages you read about “the sin unto death” or you are told that Christians were dying prematurely on account of their deliberate sinning (First John 5:16; Acts 5 – Ananias and Sapphira; First Corinthians 11 – believers defiling the Lord's Supper).

I don't want to give you a list of willful and deliberate sins. Let's just meditate on a few questions that come to mind in light of these

verses. How many lives are ruined by deliberate sin? How often is Jesus disgraced by His followers who refuse to endure a situation He has ordained for them? How much of our lives are spent being disciplined when we could be disciplining others?

I'm not trying to put a trip on anyone... But this is a severe and sobering warning to us. In a way I wish these verses were written to people who profess to be Christians but do not possess eternal life; then I could ignore them. I wish they were about forfeiting eternal life, because I don't believe in my heart I could ever do that; again, I could ignore them to an extent. No, they are written to **me** – a Christian who must sometimes endure a great struggle with sufferings and who can deliberately sin.

I don't want to draw back from Jesus and experience ruin; neither do you. Instead,

#2 Draw Blessings From Jesus And You Will Experience Reward (v32-39)

The key to this section is verse thirty-five, "therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward." "Confidence" refers to the access you have to Jesus as your great High Priest in heaven. From heaven you can obtain and receive all the spiritual blessings you require to live effectively on the earth. These immediate spiritual blessings are the "reward" referred to in this verse. We might instead refer to them as *resources*. You can draw resources from Jesus and experience them *right now* in your struggle with sufferings.

The Hebrew Christians were familiar with the confidence of spiritual resources; they had already experienced them:

Hebrews 10:32 But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings:

Hebrews 10:33 partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated;

The "former days" were right after they were saved ("illuminated"). They entered immediately into a "great struggle with sufferings." They "were made a spectacle by reproaches and tribulations."

“Spectacle” is the word for *theater*. The picture here is of a person on a stage and the audience hurling both insults and objects at them! What a picture of the Christian life: We are seen as foolish clowns on the stage of life. As such we experience insults and sometimes even injury from unbelievers.

Some of them were suffering because of their compassion:

Hebrews 10:34 for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.

“On me” could be translated “on them” and refer to persons other than the author. Some of them had evidently been imprisoned for their faith. Showing compassion for those in prison led to the “plundering of” their possessions. They accepted it “joyfully” as they kept their focus on their future inheritance in heaven.

Hebrews 10:35 Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.

The verb tense is, “do not begin to cast away.” Jesus had blessed them with the spiritual resources they needed to endure; He could and would certainly go on doing so. **Increased suffering could not deplete heaven’s resources!**

Hebrews 10:36 For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:

“Endurance” means to *remain* or *abide under* the pressure of persecution. The “will of God” in this book means to press forward in faith. They were being encouraged to draw from heaven all the resources they needed to press forward as Christians despite the intensified persecutions.

They were given a promise:

Hebrews 10:37 *“For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry.*

Hebrews 10:38 *Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.”*

In the sixth century BC Habakkuk wondered why God was not disciplining the Jews for their sins. God revealed to him that their discipline was coming in the form of the invading Babylonian army

which would besiege the city and (eventually) ruin the Temple. For his part Habakkuk was told to remain true to the Lord and he would receive the spiritual resources he needed to endure.

In the first century AD the Lord's prophesied ruin of the Temple was coming in the form of the Roman army. If they remained true to the Lord they would receive all the spiritual resources to endure despite the severity of their current persecutions.

Habakkuk would survive the ruin of the Temple and live to rejoice in the Lord. *So could the Hebrew Christians!* But in order to do so they must not return to the sacrificial system. They must **endure** rather than **end** their persecutions by the Jews.

The writer was confident in their choice:

Hebrews 10:39 But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

As I said earlier, there are many fine Bible commentators who see this as referring to eternal damnation or eternal life. "Draw back" through deliberate sin and you are headed for "perdition," the eternal damnation of your soul in the Lake of Fire. "Believe" and persevere in believing and you prove "the saving of your soul."

They may be right, but I don't think so. The *physical* ruin of the Temple was imminent; it would mean the *physical* death of over a million Jews at the hands of the Romans. Jesus had already told them that these things would occur; why return to Judaism and die? Why deliberately disobey God, disgrace Jesus, and bring themselves under discipline?

It made no sense... **Except that suffering can seem so intense that your spiritual resources seem to have been depleted!** Those are the times you must walk by faith and not by sight, believing that you have all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, every resource you need for life and godliness.

Conclusion

You can be a modern Habakkuk. I've told you that his book is about the ruin of Jerusalem and the Temple at the hands of the invading Babylonian army. The Babylonians would come; they would kill; they would destroy. Habakkuk says of it,

Habakkuk 3:17 Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls -

Habakkuk 3:18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

Habakkuk 3:19 The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's *feet*, and He will make me walk on my high hills.

The KJV is much more beautiful:

Habakkuk 3:19 "...He will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places..."

You are to have "hind's feet on your high places." The "hind" is a mountain deer. It's a picture of the sure-footedness of the deer even when it is forced by enemies to escape to higher, rockier ground.

Danger is turned into **devotion** as you are forced upward.

Habakkuk calls them "**my** high places." The high places sufferings direct you to are **yours**; they are personalized, they are individualized. They are the ways God causes you to walk *in* and *through* to conform you more and more into the image of His Son, your Lord, Jesus Christ.

Don't **draw back** from Jesus; **draw blessings** from Him!