

committed in complete ignorance? No. That cannot be. Thomas Schreiner makes sense here;

“If one defiantly turns away from Christ after salvation, there is no sacrifice for their sins. To say there will be no sacrifice for their sins means there will be no forgiveness for them. Levitical sacrifices will not suffice, for the blood of animals can’t take away sins (10:4,11) or perfect the conscience of worshippers (9:9). They only remind people of their sins repeatedly (10:3). And they can’t receive forgiveness from Jesus Christ because they have repudiated him. One can’t receive forgiveness through the once-for-all offering of Jesus if one defiantly rejects him. Forgiveness only belongs to those who continue to trust in Jesus for forgiveness.”¹

Those who would lapse into a state of apostasy here are said to be those who do so after “*receiving the knowledge of the truth*” – so believers. This is in contrast to those described in Heb. 5:2, “*the ignorant and wayward*”, for whom a priest intercedes. This sort of condition is highlighted in Numbers 15:27-31, and Proverbs 2:12b-15 is also helpful. Such people turn away on purpose from what they have learned to be the truth. They sin against the light they’ve been shown, proving that they love darkness more than light (JN 3:18-20). Setting aside salvation and its many benefits, they choose judgment (cf. Deut. 30:15-20).

This verse is not a repeat of v. 18b, although the wording has some similarities. In v. 18, the reference is to those who come to Christ & find full forgiveness on the basis of Jesus’ once-for-all sufficient sacrifice, so there is no forgiveness found any more in OT sacrifices or offerings. Here in v. 26, the opposite of that is being warned against – going from belief to unbelief – having professed Jesus as Lord and Saviour, then intending to turn their back on His effectual sacrifice. If they leave the faith, they cut themselves off from the only means of forgiveness.

There is one point that needs to be made before we move on to v. 27. Remember, some of these people were intending to walk away from Christ to return to Judaism. This is one of the main reasons for this letter in the first place. Some of them at least were experiencing persecution as Christians. A quick read of Heb. 10:32-34 give us the impression of what some of that persecution consisted of. Unpleasant, life-shattering and very real. So, we may ask, if persecution gets so bad, so unbearable, can they be blamed for desperately wanting to escape it? Well, different people have different constitutions, and what some may endure with great steadfastness, others would crack under the strain, and the easy way out was to renounce their attachment to Christ. Is that apostasy? Was it apostasy when Peter denied Christ three times on the night of Jesus trials? Since Peter was restored in John 21 by Christ, we would correctly say, “no, it wasn’t.”

What the author is warning about here is a sinful hard-heartedness that pulls professed believers to choose to leave Christ because the persecution or sinful living have convinced them that they have made the wrong choice, and they refuse to continue to follow Christ.

¹ Schreiner, Hebrews, p. 324

But are all attempts to escape persecution by sinful methods to be called apostasy?

John Calvin defends those under severe persecution:

“Repentance on the part of those, who through human frailty have collapsed under persecution is clear evidence that they are not guilty of the hard-heartedness of apostasy.”² Those, though, who choose sin deliberately, have no atoning sacrifice available to them any longer. This certainly, due to the threats of this whole letter, would include a deliberate renouncing of Christ and a return to Judaism if the person’s mindset was deliberate and unyielding to the type of evidence of Christ’s superiority over everything given to them in this letter.

Richard Phillips comments;

“What this verse describes is not believers who are struggling with sin, or even those who have besetting sins which plague their spiritual life and displease the Lord. Rather, this refers to those who reject God’s authority to tell them what to do, and who flagrantly continue in their sin. Proverbs had this kind of person in mind when it described those “who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, who rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness, men whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their ways (Prov. 2: 13-15).”³

Verse 27 – Here is what is in store for those who decide to do what v. 26 warns against. It begins a section that (with a parenthetical insertion of an OT reminder in v. 28) ends in v. 31, *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”*

“Abandonment of God’s truth and reversion to Judaism amounts to contemptuous rejection of Christ, a profane regard for His sacrifice, and an insolent spurning of the Spirit of grace (v. 29). The penalty for forsaking the only effectual sacrifice for sins (v. 26b) is the divine judgment of discipline.”⁴

The ultimate reality of those who abandon Christ is both unforgiveness and what vv. 27-31 express. This is a reference to final judgment – the Great White Throne (cf, Rev. 20:11-15), and the consigning of all unbelievers to Hell. It is tempting to veer off the path at this point, and insert a lesson on Hell, but I have done that lengthy study in previous lessons on Revelation, so I won’t take the time to do that here.

But the author draws on the theology of a number of OT verses to make his point in this verse – cf. Zeph. 1:18, 3:8; Isa. 26:11; 64:2. Many people express distaste for a ‘loving God’ who treats unbelievers this way. I had a Roman Catholic friend who would often say to me, when we had theological discussions, “My loving God would never send anyone to Hell.” So to him, and many like him, who cling to popular bromides⁵ (and not just Roman Catholics), God’s love and God’s wrath cannot co-

² John Calvin, as cited by Philip Hughes, Hebrews, p. 420

³ Richard Phillips, Hebrews, p. 373

⁴ Bruce Demarest, The Cross and Salvation, Crossway, 1997, p. 459-460

⁵ A bromide is a trite remark

exist. But, in biblical reality, God's wrath is not opposed to His love; the 2 elements are inseparable, because God's overarching attribute is Holiness, not love.

J.I Packer's comment is helpful here;

"God's wrath in the Bible is never the capricious, self-indulgent, irritable, morally ignoble thing that human anger so often is. It is, instead, a right and necessary action to objective moral evil. God is only angry where anger is called for...Would a God who did not react adversely to evil in His world be morally perfect? Surely not. But it is precisely this adverse reaction to evil, which is a necessary part of moral perfection, that the Bible has in view when it speaks of God's wrath...This is righteous anger – the right reaction of moral perfection from the Creator towards moral perversity in the creature. So far from the manifestation of God's wrath in punishing sin being morally doubtful would be for Him not to show His wrath in this way."⁶

And Richard Phillips bolsters Packer's point;

"What people who reject the idea of judgment and wrath really oppose is the very idea of God. It is not how he exerts his sovereignty, but his sovereignty itself that humanistic man recoils against. If God is sovereign, if he is responsible for the disposition of all things, then he cannot be a God of love without being a God of wrath; he cannot be good as God without being just in his punishment of sin."⁷

Apostasy & Its Accompanying Horror

vv. 28-31

In v. 28, the author draws another contrast between the OC and the NC. This contrast is based on the gigantic gap even for punishment of sin between the 2 covenants. Those who rejected Moses' law (at least some aspects of it) died without mercy as long as two witnesses would provide evidence of the sinner's wickedness. One example is found in Numbers 35:30-34, where capital punishment is prescribed for murder. Another is Deuteronomy 17:2-7, where the prescription is made even more clear, even placing the witnesses to take part in the execution of the sentence! A passage which many find distasteful is Numbers 15:27-36⁸ and see also Exodus 31:12-18, which explains why the transgression was so grievous as to elicit capital punishment. In Leviticus 24:10-16, we find another event in Israel's early history which seems harsh to us, but here God is establishing strict guidelines that the people needed to know in order to protect that which is of most value to God – His glory (His name). Also take note of Leviticus 20:1-9. Being "*cut off from his people*" means – in the extreme interpretation of it - that God will kill that person.

So the God of the Bible is holy and just, though we tend to view incidents like these described above through 21st century eyes and experiences, and think that this just goes too far! But, we live in a culture where even believers don't have the stomach to

⁶ James I. Packer, cited by Richard Phillips, Hebrews, p. 370

⁷ Richard Phillips, p. 370-371

⁸ The people felt it was harsh, and this was possibly the event that triggered Korah's rebellion in Numbers 16:1-50 & the subsequent plague and divine judgment on Korah, Dothan, Abiram and their families.

follow God's intentions for the punishment of capital crimes, thinking themselves as somehow more merciful and wise than God Himself. But these are now government decisions, as we no longer live in a theocracy as Israel did, and these severe, life-ending punishments were incorporated into OC law. But Christ has fulfilled the OC law and is the Mediator of the new covenant and the rules of the OC have been fulfilled and set aside, their purpose having been fulfilled.

However, because of the incomparable value of Jesus' sacrifice, the AH now ensures that believers understand that even though physical / capital punishment is not the authority or mandate of the church, but rather the secular government's, God does not overlook blatant sin.

In this case, the focus is on those who have professed salvation but were really never saved, and it is also a warning to true believers not to contemplate this way out of their temporal troubles, harsh though they undoubtedly were. They (the professors) had mentally grasped the Gospel, had understood who Jesus was and His superiority and Deity, but as v. 29 tells us, they are "*those who have trampled underfoot the Son of God...*". This is apostasy defined. It is not less of a sin than any of the OT sins worthy of death, but the death now associated with it in the NT era is a spiritual one, which follows physical death, which everyone will experience. But the eternal judgment component dominates this passage in Hebrews.

We have to clearly understand that v. 29 is not talking about believers who struggle with sin (cf. Romans 7) – that is not apostasy. No, this verse involves flagrant rejection of 3 things:

- Rejection of Christ as Son of God
- Rejection of Christ's saving work on the cross (the blood of the covenant)
- Rejection of the Holy Spirit who has brought the Gospel near (cf. Matt. 12:32)

The outrage of this passage is not that eternal judgment in Hell is an outrage against God's love and morality. Rather, the real outrage is that God sent His precious Son into the world to save us, not to judge us (JN 3:16). That God should judge sinners is not the outrageous thing here – the real outrage is that man (cf. JN 1:11), having received this gift from God would despise it and trample the Son of God underfoot, as if He were a worthless distraction from life – an irritation to be tossed aside onto the trash heap!

A.W Tozer says;

"There will be only one text in Hell, and it may be cut against the great walls of that terrible place!
"True and righteous are Thy judgments, O Lord!"⁹

Luke Johnson also makes a comment;

"The full title "Son of God" [in this verse] emphasizes the shocking character of apostasy: it not only falls from grace, it mocks the giver of grace."¹⁰

⁹ A.W. Tozer, cited in R. Phillips, p. 376

Tom Schreiner consider the profaning of the blood of the covenant, when he says; “The word ‘profane’ refers to what is unclean in both Judaism (1 Macc. 1:47,62) and the NT (MK 7:2,5; Acts 10:14,28; 11:8; Rom. 14:14; Rev. 21:27). The author has argued throughout the letter that Jesus’ blood secures “eternal redemption” (9:12), cleanses the conscience (9:14, cf. 12:24), removes sin (9:25-26), gives access to God’s presence (10:19), and sanctifies (10:29; 13:12). It is the blood of the covenant (cf. 13:20), in the sense that Jesus’ death inaugurates and ratifies the new covenant between God and his people, securing forgiveness of sins (8:13). Those who reject Jesus, however, do not seek purification by his blood. They reject his blood as unclean, tossing it aside as one would throw a menstrual cloth into the garbage.”¹¹

Note that v. 29 also says of this blood, “*by which he was sanctified*”. At this point, the warning is to believers, as we have stated in earlier lessons as we discussed who the warning passages are chiefly addressed to. If these people had been sanctified by this blood, then real salvation is in sight. The true believers had not committed apostasy yet (as vv. 32-34 will shortly show), and the author is here warning them of the consequences, should they decide to do so. Yet, as we understand the nature of true salvation, we cannot fall away (Rom. 8:29ff; John 10, etc.) so those who do apostatize are those who were never truly saved, but played the role of saved people while it was convenient to do so. Remember Judas Iscariot’s 3 year performance. His was the classic example of an apostate.

We are well into this verse, but we need to jog back a bit to the first question, “*How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the one...*?” That is, the one the author has been describing. Worse punishment? The death penalty was earthly, “cutting a person off from their people”, but this ‘worse punishment’ is deserved by those who commit apostasy, chiefly, because they know better.

Christ spoke of degrees of punishment & judgment in Hell, and His point about worse punishment had to do with those who had greater light (knowledge) and yet rejected it. See Matt. 11:20-24 re: Tyre and Sidon, Sodom; 12:41-42 (Ninevah). The more light one has, the more responsible they are to respond to that light. Even when service for God is involved, or better, especially when service for God is involved – the standard is higher – cf. James 3:1, which is a warning against hypocrisy. So the NC brings great blessings, but also carries a serious curse for those who refuse Christ once they’ve come to know Him and to know about Him.

Why (v. 30) – “*For we know him...*” this verse, as it begins with “For” (thus is an explanation of the preceding), is a reinforcement of v. 29 especially. It is a citation of Deut. 32:35-36, right out of the Song of Moses (Deut. 32:1-43), which is a song about God’s goodness and grace to Israel, and Israel’s rebellion against Him. Note 32:35. If you recall Jonathan Edward’s famous sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”, this is the verse that he based that sermon on. When someone apostatizes their

¹⁰ Luke T. Johnson, cited in Schreiner, Hebrews, p. 236

¹¹ Schreiner, p. 326

faith, the direction they are going in will not result in ultimate good, because they placed themselves willingly under God's displeasure and wrath. In Jesus' words, from Matt. 7:29-30, count such people as fools who build their 'house' upon the sand, and should expect the storms of life to wipe them out.

The second quote the author uses from Deut.32:36 here is also just the first part of the original, which reads in the HCSB, ESV, and NASB as "*for the Lord will vindicate his people...*". The word "*vindicate*" is replaced with "*judge*" in the KJV, NKJV, NET, NIV and others.

The statement that begins Heb. 10:30, "*For we know him...*" is a bit unusual, but suggests that believers (the author includes himself, hence, "*we*") know the character of God because He speaks in Scripture (by this time, both OT & NT), and has shown His grace by sending Christ and thus, we know what His attitude toward sin is. So, he severely judges those who reject His NC and revert to the OC, because this is a rejection of Christ, the Mediator of the NC.

The decision of the author to use the interpretation of Deut. 32:36 as 'judge' rather than 'vindicate' here in v. 30, to reinforce the concept of the warning passage, which immediately follows with v. 31, "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!*" This is, of course, especially true if He is the ultimate Judge!

The real point being made here or at least undergirding these 2 verses (30-31) – is that to reject God's remedy for sin, given as a gift of love, to see God as objectionable because He displays His wrath is absolutely repulsive and repugnant.

JC Ryle was led to observe from this fact, and these 2 verses;

"Terribly black must be that guilt for which nothing but the blood of the Son of God could make satisfaction. Heavy must that weight of human sin be which made Jesus groan and sweat drops of blood in agony at Gethsemane and cry at Golgotha, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46)"¹²

Richard Phillips adds;

"The cross reveals the reality of sin as well as the reality of God's holy judgment upon it. But the cross reveals something else: the answer to the question about God's love. How can we call the God of the cross the God of love? Because the cross reveals how wide and long and high and deep is God's love. This is what it took for God to satisfy his holy justice, the full payment of the debt of sin. If this is what it took for God to love the world – the offering of his only Son, the only One who measured up to God's holy standards – then God was willing to do it. If the death of Christ was required for God to be reconciled to his creatures, then in that death we see the fulness of his love. "God so loved the world," and the death of Jesus was the provision of God's love for us.

Therefore, let us not trample Jesus Christ, the Son of God, under our feet in unbelief. Let us not count as unholy that blood, precious in its value and saving in its virtue, that was shed for us. Let us not insult the Spirit of grace who bears testimony to such love to our hearts. And if we do,

¹² JC Ryle, cited in R. Phillips, p. 377

should any of us repudiate this gospel of justice and love, then surely God will avenge, he will repay. And well he should. Even the thought of falling into his holy hands for justice, without the covering of Christ's blood received by faith, is dreadful. How terrible will it be for those who defy him today, but on that day will fall into his hands for condemnation."¹³

We must stress here that the author is not saying outright that any had committed this sin, but in their contemplation of going back to the familiarity of the religion they had left to follow Christ, they were in danger of doing so, and so he warns them of the dire consequences of doing so. Certainly the force of this warning passage is not construed to mean (as some would interpret of the chapter 5-6 warning passage) simply the loss of heavenly rewards. But final judgment is in view here without question. Compare v. 31 with Luke 12:4-7. It is no idle or inconsequential matter to believe that death after unrepentance in the face of knowing the gospel but ignoring or ridiculing it, will result in something good. In Heb. 12:25-29, the last warning passage in Hebrews, note in particular v. 29.

Tom Schreiner's comments are a fitting end to this section of our study; "One can't renounce Christ and still expect to receive forgiveness of sins. The punishment for those who apostatize will be terrifying. The punishment is great because the sin is heinous since it involves trampling the Son of God, scorning his blood, and despising the Holy Spirit. The things of God can't be belittled without horrific consequences. The author lovingly warns the readers about the judgment to come, urging them to avoid it by staying true to their confession."¹⁴

Recall What You Have Been Through

vv. 32-34

Verse 32 starts with the contrast word, "But", so the author now wants to remind his readers to "*recall the former days*", and this is not a call to remember 'the good old days', because as these verses unfold, we realize that these people had come through some very tough times. It is not the times of plenty and ease that shape our Christianity. It's the times of struggle , when things are not necessarily going well that really define us – because in large part, they train us to be more like Christ, which is God's main intention for those times in our lives [cf. Rom. 8:29]. These periods that make up the highlights of our personal history, that make up our times of maturing in the faith, are often those of trial, difficulty, danger, grief, and loss.

Richard Phillips comments;

"This tells us something about how we should approach trials when they come. Things happen, circumstances suddenly change, a great problem arises, and we think this way in the face of sickness or job loss, the death of a loved one, or a sudden loss of a key leader. Of course, we do not look forward to such things. But this passage reminds us that these are the occasions that make us rise up in our faith and character. It is when supports are stripped away that we find out

¹³ Richard Phillips, p. 377-378

¹⁴ Schreiner, p. 329

what our faith is really made of. In this sense we should view trials as opportunities to glorify the Lord, as positive challenges to bring out and display our faith in God.”¹⁵

Look at the things they are being asked to recall – a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes public exposure to reproach (ridicule), and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those who are receiving this undesired attention and suffering. Yet, the author’s point is not to bring up bad memories either – but to recall, “*after you were enlightened [i.e., saved], you endured...these things!*” In other words, their newfound faith carried them through, although the endurance was theirs – they lived it out.

In North America, we as believers do not face stark persecution as a result of our faith as these people did, but the milder forms of persecution we tend to encounter (so far) is ridicule, loss of friendships, the scorn of unsaved family, being ostracized in certain social situations or at our workplace, etc. It seldom results in violence against us. We worry that we might deny our faith, or more likely, simply clam up and not let anyone know we follow Christ. We are exhorted in a passage like Heb. 12:3-4 to not ‘grow weary or to be fainthearted’.

But in the case of these people, look at how v. 34 continues their story – their memories. Some were imprisoned, some had their property confiscated (plundered), and yet they were visiting those in prison, probably bringing them food and water (things not covered by the state in that era). Just being associated with those imprisoned (the implication here is for their faith in Christ) meant that one would be scrutinized and potentially a target for the same treatment – a dangerous relationship to be involved in. Consider Peter on the night Christ was betrayed, denying his connection with Christ 3 times, so he would not be arrested (Cf. Matt. 27:69-75). “The believers’ solidarity with those persecuted for their faith stands out here.”¹⁶

We read a passage like this, compare it to our own condition, and the unlikeliness that this kind of thing could never befall us, and we wonder, ‘How did they endure it?’ We are provided with the author’s answer in v. 34c... “*Since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.*”

What did Jesus teach about enduring? See Luke 9:23-24; John & Peter – see Acts 5:41; Paul – see Romans 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17. Richard Phillips recounts a saying that came from his wife’s friend:

“Early in our married life, my wife had a friend whose powerful faith during trials left a lasting impression on our lives. One of her favorite sayings went very well with the thinking of the writer of Hebrews. “There are only three things that can happen to a Christian,” she would say, “and all three of them are good. First, you can be blessed, and that of course is good. Second, you can die, and that takes you into the presence of Jesus. That is very good. Third, you can suffer, and the Lord uses that to make you more like Jesus, and that too is a very good thing.” This is precisely

¹⁵ Richard Phillips, p. 381

¹⁶ Schreiner, p. 332

how faith in Christ reasons, and it was this attitude that had empowered the Hebrew congregation in its prior success.”¹⁷

This reminded me of something Matt Chandler, who has had his share of suffering (he has cancer), said as he makes a more humorous point about Paul’s thinking when faced with trouble;

“I have never met a man as free as Paul. You can’t touch him. If you say, “I’m gonna kill you Paul,” he says, “All right! Time to go home.” If you say, “We’re gonna let you live,” he comes back, “All right; to live is Christ.” You say, “Okay, we’re gonna beat you,” and he says, “well, you know, that’s sharing in the sufferings of Christ. I welcome that.” If, “We’ll put you in prison”, no problem, “I’ll convert all your guards and most of your prisoners.”¹⁸

Paul himself stated a lot about his faithful view of life in Christ in Philippians 4:11-13. You know, we do not have to win the culture wars (and given the end time prophecies, we won’t, but Christ will), and we shouldn’t expect huge, sweeping worldwide triumphs, but our ultimate goal must be to be true to our profession of faith, by building our houses on the rock – our Saviour & Redeemer, Jesus Christ. [Matt. 7:25]

We can overcome our fears about suffering and loss by substituting a greater fear – the fear that we might fail to suffer gladly for Christ – to bring Him glory and share in His sufferings – note 2 Tim. 3:12. The Puritan, Jeremiah Burroughs, who was personally acquainted with persecution said this;

“When a Christian can walk in the midst of fiery trials, without his garments being singed, and has comfort and joy in the midst of everything...it will convince men, when they see the power of grace in the midst of afflictions.”¹⁹ (from his book, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*)

This “better and abiding possession” is spoken of throughout the Scriptures, especially in the NT. The passages and verses that still encourage us, especially when we face trials, give us comfort. Some of these verses are: 2 Cor. 5:1; I Pet. 1:4-5; Rev. 7:16-17, to name only a few. But within the context of our text – Heb. 10:37 – our hope is found in a major way in the promised return of Christ.

“*Therefore*” (v. 35) – the author is drawing a conclusion in this verse from the people’s willingness to endure in the past – to stand for Christ and support their fellow believers. That took boldness and confidence – in short – it took faith being applied to their situation. Therefore, the author exhorts them “*not to throw away their confidence*”, because it will result in great reward. The word “confidence” has been used before in this letter, at 3:6, “*we are his house if we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in hope.*” And in 4:16, they were to “*...with confidence draw near to the throne of grace...*”

¹⁷ Richard Phillips, p. 382

¹⁸ Matt Chandler, in *The Scriptures Testify About Me*, DA Carson, Gen. Ed., Crossway, 2013, p. 116-117

¹⁹ Cited in Richard Phillips, p. 383

They had exhibited that sort of confidence in what was reported of them in 10:32-34, where it was associated with boldness. The great reward mentioned here is of course, eschatological. It is eternal life, and so this confidence and boldness they had at first displayed early on, must fuel them again to endure to the end. In the past, God had sustained them and will continue to do so in the future, so long as they don't discard their faith in His promises. He is there now, and in eternity – waiting for our arrival. We are to persevere to the end (Matt. 24:13). Faith is the victory that overcomes the world.

To live without perseverance, to hide our faith in fear of recrimination, and to live like the world so we won't be ridiculed or persecuted is living in presumption. AW Pink tells us: "No prescription is worse than entertaining the idea that I am bound for Heaven, while I live like a child of Hell."²⁰ We need to be sure that A.W. Pink is not describing us!

Thomas Watson, a well-known Puritan joins in:
 "Christians do not arrive at perseverance when they sit still and do nothing. It is not with us as with passengers in a ship, who are carried to the end of the voyage while they sit still in the ship; or, as it is with noblemen, who have their rents brought in without their toil or labour; but we arrive at salvation in the use of means; as a man comes to the end of a race by running, to victory by fighting."²¹

Living by Faith

vv. 37-39

As usual, we are given an indication of the relationship between v. 37 and what precedes it by the word "*For*", which means an explanation is coming. And as he so often does, the author refers back to the OT by citing first, in v. 37, a conflation of Isaiah 26:20-21, and then flowing into Habakkuk 2:3-4 in vv. 37-38.

The author's point here in these 2 verses is that we will receive what God has promised in His time. "*Yet a little while...*" when used in Isaiah 26, from which he quotes, he is telling Judah that the Lord will come soon and comfort His people, while judging their enemies. Though they may be under persecution, captivity and even the threat of death, the Lord will intervene on their behalf soon. Even when their exile spanned the prophesied 70 years (cf. Daniel 9:2; Jeremiah 25:11-12), that is brief in light of God's eternal promise.

In citing Habakkuk 2:3-4, he refers to the historical vision Habakkuk received from God of impending judgment on Judah for her refusal to do God's will – cf. Hab. 1:5-17. But now, the author of Hebrews uses this typologically – as a precursor to the coming final judgment. What is coming, therefore, is not the realization of this vision from Habakkuk, but Jesus Himself. The final judgment in history, as depicted in Heb. 9:27-28, will occur, and God will reward the faithful and punish the disobedient. Habakkuk 3:3,8 speaks of the coming of God, and in the NT we are taught that the fulfillment of

²⁰ Cited in Phillips, p. 386

²¹ IBID, p. 387

this will be Jesus Christ returning to earth to set up His kingdom. They (and we) must endure until that time, and if it is delayed, until our lives have expired, we live that span of our time eagerly and expectantly waiting to see His face – running the race. If sudden death takes us in the meantime unexpectedly, then we are in heaven with Christ. (cf. Phil.1:19-25)

Since Christ will return (‘soon’ is relative, as we are doubtless aware in 2019), the readers are now exhorted to continue to trust in God and not to shrink back in unbelief. If they do shrink back, God will not be pleased with them, and they’ll face judgment and wrath rather than God’s desired “*Well done good and faithful servant!*”. Look at the way the very next chapter opens – Hebrews 11:1, and the even more forceful 11:6. Chapter 11 is a recounting of the lives of faith lived out by OT saints, as a lengthy example of how God wants all believers to live – hence v. 38’s “*but my righteous one shall live by faith...*” (also cited in Romans 1:17; Gal. 3:11). This is how believers are to live as they persevere and suffer to wait for Christ’s return. In that sense, really, vv. 38-39 are introductory to chapter 11.

But notice how the author only partially cites Hab. 2:3-4 – see v. 4, “*Behold his soul is puffed up; it is not upright in him...*”. The man who ‘*shrinks back*’ (10:38) is precisely the man who is puffed up with self-sufficiency and is therefore blind to the need for trustful and patient endurance.²² The one whom God calls “my righteous one”, that is, the man accounted as righteous by God, is by contrast the man who lives by faith – one who has abandoned every pretense of self-sufficiency, and whose life is one of trust in God (cf. Gal. 2:19f).²³ This is the underlying theme of Hebrews 11, which we will (DV) begin to look at next week.

On this verse (v. 39), the fourth warning passage ends, as the author expresses his own confidence that his readers will not shrink back. He writes “we” so he includes himself in this. Note that this shrinking back is not limited to some loss of rewards, but it results in destruction! This is a serious warning. No – the author is confident that his people will continue to believe until the end, and that their souls will be preserved. IOW, eternal life will be their reward (cf. 10:23) – they will be saved to the uttermost (cf. Romans 8:29-30); Christ will raise them up on the last day (cf. John 6:40,44).

The author of Hebrews is quite aware (that’s why he wrote the letter) that his readers were on the verge of becoming so ensnared by their trials and circumstances that they were losing their joy. They are being exhorted to recall that earlier joy and fervor, and to look ahead with fresh confidence and faith – to keep enduring in order to receive that final reward. If they draw back in defeat, what awaited them was destruction and eternal ruin. But this warning passage, along with the first 3, keeps exhorting them to hold fast, don’t give up, don’t renounce Christ, and don’t go back to a dead system – keep on trusting and fighting for faith until the end.

²² Philip Hughes, p. 436

²³ IBID, p. 436

We will end this lesson with a helpful citation from D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones;
“Either we view our lives in terms of our belief in God, and the conclusions which we are entitled to draw from that; or our outlook is based upon a rejection of God and the corresponding denials. We may either “withdraw” ourselves from the way of faith in God (Heb. 10:38), or else we may live by faith in God. The very terms suggest corresponding ways of life. As a man believes so is he. A man’s belief determines his conduct. The just, the righteous, shall live by faith, or in other words, the man who lives by faith is righteous. On the other hand, the man who ‘draws back’ is unrighteous because he is not living by faith. Here is the great watershed of life, and all of us are on one side of it or the other.

Either my life is based on faith or it is not. If it is not, it does not much matter what my views may be, or whether I am controlled by political, social, economic, or any other considerations.

What matters is whether I am accepting God’s rule or not.”