

the sinner cannot escape God's judgment and, unless he has been forgiven in Christ, faces an angry God on that dreadful day.<sup>1</sup>

and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES. – To reinforce the gravity of meeting God on the day of judgment while still bearing one's sin, our author echoes the basic sense of Isaiah 26:11, utilizing similar vocabulary.

MT	Lxx	Hebrews
<p>יְהוָה רָמָה יָדָךְ בְּלִי יַחֲזִיזוּן יַחֲזִיזוּ וַיִּבְשׂוּ קִנְאֵת־עַם אֲרָץ אֲשֶׁר צָרִיךָ תֹאכְלֵם:</p> <p>ADONAI, Your hand is lifted up yet they do not see it. They see <i>Your</i> zeal for the people and are put to shame; Indeed, fire will devour Your enemies.</p>	<p>ζήλος λήμψεται λαὸν ἀπαίδευτον, καὶ νῦν πῦρ τοὺς ὑπεναντίους ἔδεται.</p> <p>jealously shall seize upon an ignorant nation, and now fire shall devour the adversaries.</p>	<p>πυρὸς ζήλος ἐσθίειν μέλλοντος τοὺς ὑπεναντίους.</p> <p>...the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.</p>

## 28 Anyone who has set aside the Torah of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

Here our author is setting up a *kal v'chomer* argument<sup>2</sup> (from the lesser to the greater), and the fulcrum that gives leverage to the argument is the eternal viability of the Torah. He chooses an example which he is certain no one will dispute, namely, the inevitable applicability of the Torah of Moses. Far from viewing the Torah as inoperative or abolished, our author appeals to its eternal validity as justification for his conclusion.

What is foremost in our author's example is outward rebellion against God and the penalty prescribed for it. One example that would illustrate his perspective is that of idolatry, which is blasphemy against God.

If your brother, your mother's son, or your son or daughter, or

1 Kistemaker, *Hebrews*, p. 294.

2 An *a fortiori* argument in common terms of logic.

the wife you cherish, or your friend who is as your own soul, entice you secretly, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods' (whom neither you nor your fathers have known, of the gods of the peoples who are around you, near you or far from you, from one end of the earth to the other end), you shall not yield to him or listen to him; and your eye shall not pity him, nor shall you spare or conceal him. But you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. So you shall stone him to death because he has sought to seduce you from ADONAI your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. (Deut 13:6–10)

Some might argue that a text of the Torah dealing with idolatry does not fit our pericope in Hebrews. But I would suggest that it does, for from our author's perspective, to deny that Yeshua is the true Messiah after having come to know the truth about Yeshua, is apostasy and constitutes nothing less than to say that God is a liar, for at Yeshua's *mikvah* the voice from heaven declared Him to be God's beloved Son. To deny Yeshua after having confessed Him to be one's Messiah and Savior is therefore blasphemy.

It is not uncommon to read Christian commentators who seek to interpret this verse as though our author were saying that "*in previous times anyone who set aside the Torah of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses,*" explaining that with the abolition of the Torah by Yeshua's death, our author was simply using an argument which would appeal to the Jewish people of his day. But such a view entirely weakens our author's *kal v'chomer* argument. For if he honestly believed that Yeshua had abolished the Torah and it therefore had no current ability to condemn the sinner, then his "how much more" argument applied to denying Yeshua entirely loses its force.

What is more, the Greek itself would support what appears to be obvious, namely, that our author viewed the Torah as active and applicable in his day. The Greek word translated "set aside," ἀτίθημι (*atithēmi*) means "to reject something as invalid" or "to rebel against established authority." This is precisely what some must have done, for having spent time within the believing community and then denying Yeshua altogether would be to reject as invalid what they knew and previously confessed to be true. What is more, the word "put to death" (ἀποθνήσκει, *apothnēskei*) is in the present tense. Now while this may not be overly significant (since the present tense could be a so-called "historical present"), it would seem more likely that had our author believed the Torah

was abolished by Yeshua at His death, he would have put the whole statement in a past tense. The present tense, however, could reinforce the ongoing viability of the Torah, something necessary for our author to establish his point.

*dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.* – The quote given above from Deut 13 highlights the fact that mercy was not to be given to someone who entices others to deny God by engaging in idolatry, for even the friend or relative of such a person was to agree to the enactment of the death penalty. Moreover, even if the person begged for mercy, it was not to be given to him. Some transgressions of the Torah resulted in irrevocable, capital punishment. This sense of finality parallels what our author has already taught us about those who apostatize from an outward confession of faith in Yeshua after having known the truth and witnessed it within a believing community.

For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. (Heb 6:4–6)

But even in light of severe transgression such as idolatry and blasphemy, the sanctity of life which is foundational to the Torah required two or three witnesses to establish the guilt of the person so charged.<sup>1</sup>

**29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?**

Now the *kal v'chomer* argument comes to its conclusion: if the death penalty prescribed by the Torah is meted out without mercy upon someone who deliberately committed a capital crime and did so with a “high hand” of rebellion against God, most assuredly a person who has regarded God to be a liar and His Son, Yeshua to be a fraud and a fake will receive an even more sever punishment.

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1 E.g., Num 35:30; Deut 17:2–7; 19:15. Cp. also Matt 18:16; John 8:17; 2 Cor 13:1; 1 Tim 5:19.

The charges against the apostate are three-fold: (1) he has *spurned the Son of God*, (2) *profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified*, and (3) *insulted the Spirit of grace*.

*spurned the Son of God* – The literal sense of the Greek (given above) is graphic: “who has trampled under foot the Son of God.” That which is “trampled under foot” is deemed to be worthless or even a nuisance. It is, to be blunt, to relegate the Creator of all things to the dung heap. What is more, it is interesting that our author uses the designation “Son of God,”<sup>1</sup> for this might indicate that the form of apostasy being combated by our author involved a scornful denial of the deity of the Messiah Yeshua, for most clearly the designation “Son of God” emphasizes Yeshua’s oneness with the Father, for the metaphoric language of “Son” and “Father” emphasizes a oneness in “nature” or “being.” Even though the controversy and councils which debated the issue of Yeshua’s deity were much later, we know that even in the Gospels themselves, Yeshua asserted His divine nature which in turn caused consternation among those who were against Him (e.g., John 8:21ff).

*profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified* – The “blood of the covenant” is the shed blood of Yeshua by which the New Covenant promised by Jeremiah (31:31–34) would be realized. This is Yeshua’s meaning when, at His last Pesach, He took the cup and said, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood” (Lk 22:20). And this is likewise our author’s meaning when he speaks of Yeshua’s death as “the blood of the eternal covenant” (13:20).

Thus, if the former charge related to a denial of Yeshua’s divine nature, here is denied the efficacy of His redemptive work, offering Himself up as a sacrifice for the sins of those who would be saved. Indeed, throughout the Epistle, “the blood” of Messiah is synonymous with His sacrificial death on the cross. Thus, “to profane the blood of the covenant” is to count His death as ordinary, as the death of any other human being, and as having no value whatsoever in terms of redeeming sinners.

What is more, the apostate profanes the blood of the covenant even though it is by the shed blood of Messiah that the believing community in which the apostate initially confessed Yeshua existed. And, it was within the believing community that the apostate partook of the spiritually rich environment, hearing the truths of the Scriptures and witnessing the sanctified and transformed lives of believers. As Hughes notes regarding the apostate who benefited by his or her association

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1 Used three other times in Hebrews, 4:14; 6:6; 7:3.

among the believing community:

But his faith has been simulated, not genuine, and his secession from the community of believers reveals that, far from thankfully trusting in the blood of Jesus for forgiveness, he has *profaned* it, or, literally, counted it as common. The blood which made it possible for him to enter into the sphere of God's holiness he has treated as a thing unholy, thus completely contradicting the profession he had formerly made.<sup>1</sup>

*insulted the Spirit of grace.* – This is the sense of the Greek word ἐνυβρίσας (*enubrisas*), and by the apostate's rebellion against the Gospel, centered as it is in Messiah Yeshua, he has (as it were) spit upon the very work of the Ruach by Whom the Gospel takes root in the heart of the elect. We are reminded that in the earthly ministry of Yeshua He taught that blasphemy against the Ruach HaKodesh, i.e., ascribing to Satan that work which can only be accomplished by God Himself, constitutes the "sin unto death."<sup>2</sup> For having tasted of the good things of God, and then to falsify the Good News, to exchange the truth of God for a lie (Rom 1:25), and to willfully reject the grace and light in favor of unbelief and darkness, this marks a person out as having the heart of an apostate.

Is God able to grant true repentance to one who has shown all of the signs of apostasy? Yes, of course He can. Nothing is impossible for the Almighty. But these strong words are given to us by the author of Hebrews in order to warn us away from even entertaining the enemy's lies and deceptions. Rather, we are to "hold fast our confession" and be continually strengthened in the "faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3).

**30–31 For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE." It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.**

Our author continues, now, to remind his readers and us that to deny Yeshua has dire, eternal consequences. For Yeshua is the only High Priest Who qualifies and is therefore able to establish true and

1 Hughes, *Hebrews*, p. 423.

2 Cf. Matt 12:31; Mark 3:29; Luke 12:10; 1Jn 5:16.

eternal forgiveness of sins, thereby redeeming sinners in order that they would stand righteous before the Father.

It seems quite reasonable to suggest that some within the Jewish community he addresses had abandoned the community of Yeshua and returned to synagogue communities whose leaders had rejected Yeshua as the Messiah. In doing so, they returned to the belief that obtaining a righteous status in God's sight was possible on the basis of their own legal Jewish status coupled with observance of the Torah's commandments.

But far from being secure within the covenant, those who reject Yeshua have marked themselves as God's enemies and therefore objects of His righteous wrath. This our author emphasizes by quoting from Deut 32:35–36<sup>1</sup> (cf. Ps 135:14) which gives a description of God's righteous judgment against those who have rejected Him, and vindication of those who are His chosen ones.

It is important to note a simple yet profound fact in the way that our author introduces the quotes from Deut 32:35–36. He writes "For we know Him Who said..." (*οἶδαμεν γὰρ τὸν εἰπόντα*). This emphasizes two important truths. First, that the Scriptures are inspired and thus reveal the very intent of the Almighty to speak to mankind through the agency of an author such as Moses. For while Moses wrote Deuteronomy, our author ascribes these words as being the very words of God.

Second, our author states that "we *know* Him Who said...." Here we see the emphasis upon the fact that God has revealed Himself to us in His inspired, written word so that through the work of the Ruach illuminating those who read, He can be known in truth. Surely the existence and sovereignty of God is revealed to all in the physical creation (Rom 1:20–23), but the grace of God in Messiah is known only in the Gospel—the promise theme—revealed in the written Scriptures, the Bible.

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1 Paul quotes the same text in Rom 12:19–20 to establish God's position as the One to Whom vengeance belongs.

Deut 32:35–36 (MT)	Deut 32:35–36 (Lxx)	Hebrews
<p>לִי נִקָּם וְשָׁלַם לְעַתְּמָוֹט  רָגַלְמִי בִּי קְרוּב יוֹם אִי־דָם וְחַשׁ  עַתְּדַת לְמִי: <b>בִּי־יִדְוִין יְהוָה</b>  וְעַל־עֲבָדָיו יִתְּנֶהֱמָם בִּי  יִרְאֶה כִּי־תִלְזֵלֶת יְדֵי וְאֶפְסָס עֲצֵי  ר וְעִזָּב:</p>	<p>ἐν ἡμέρᾳ <u>ἐκδικήσεως</u>  <u>ἀνταποδώσω</u>, ἐν καιρῷ,  ὅταν σφαλῆ ὁ πούς αὐτῶν· ὅτι  ἐγγὺς ἡμέρα ἀπωλείας αὐτῶν,  καὶ πάρεστιν ἕτοιμα ὑμῖν· ὅτι  <u>κρινεῖ κύριος τὸν λαὸν</u>  <u>αὐτοῦ</u> καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς δούλοις  αὐτοῦ παρακληθήσεται· εἶδεν  γὰρ παραλελυμένους αὐτοὺς  καὶ ἐκλελοιπότας ἐν ἐπαγωγῇ  καὶ παρειμένους.</p>	<p>ἐμοὶ ἐκδίκησις, ἐγὼ  <u>ἀνταποδώσω</u>. καὶ <u>πάλιν</u>·  <u>κρινεῖ κύριος τὸν λαὸν</u>  <u>αὐτοῦ</u>.</p>

The first part of the quote, “Vengeance is Mine,” is a direct translation of the Hebrew לִי נִקָּם, against the Lxx which has “in the day of vengeance....” The next clause, “I will repay” follows the Lxx except that our author adds the 1st person pronoun, *egō*, perhaps for emphasis.

The second part of the quote follows the Lxx verbatim, after using “and again” (καὶ πάλιν) as a way to connect the two parts of the quote extracted from the Deuteronomy passage. The verb κρινῶ (*krinō*), “to judge” can also carry the sense of “to ensure justice, vindicate,” so that having been made righteous by the work of God, Israel will be vindicated in respect to the nations who seek to destroy God’s chosen nation. Thus, in the context of Deut 32:35–36, the vengeance of God and His just retribution is upon those who have rejected Him and who sought the demise of His people Israel. But it is the attribute of God’s justice and wrath against sinners that our author here emphasizes. The basic principle is this: that God will vindicate the righteous and pour out His vengeance upon the wicked, and it is this principle, which flows from the very nature of God Himself, which our author wishes to stress. As Samson notes:

If retributive justice is one of God’s essential attributes, yea, *His alone*, except where He delegates it, and He is pledged to repay their full deserts to all evil deeds, and to vindicate all the wrongs of his people, there can be no escape for the backsliders above described. If the elements of guilt which the Apostle imputes are in them, the punishment will be upon them, in due time.<sup>1</sup>

1 Samson, *Hebrews*, p. 397.

*It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.* – We should note, first of all, the name utilized by our author, “living God” (θεοῦ ζῶντος), for it is the fact that God is the “living God” which is the foundation for terror to those who have rejected Him. We may note a number of important things as to why our author would have chosen this title. First, “living” differentiates the God of the Bible from all dead and dumb idols (cf. Ps 115:4–8; Is 44:9–11) which are the inventions of mankind’s own depraved and rebellious heart. But second, “living God” emphasizes His eternal glory and power, for life is the foundation of power. That which has no life can accomplish nothing. As Owen notes:

He who hath life in himself, who is the cause of all life in all other things that are partakers of it, must be the only spring of infinite power.<sup>1</sup>

It is, therefore, because God is eternal (infinite in time) and infinite in all of His attributes (thus omniscient, knowing all things) that He is trusted by those who love Him and dreaded by those who have rebelled against Him. As the “living God,” He is full of terror to those who sin against Him and even mock His existence, while at the same time full of comfort to those who, through His Son, have taken refuge in Him.

ADONAI is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knows those who take refuge in Him. (Nahum 1:7)

The name of ADONAI is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe. (Prov 18:10)

Because of God’s infinite power and knowledge, and because He is eternally the “living God,” it is “terrifying” to have Him as one’s enemy, for He knows all things, even those sins which are considered “hidden” and “unknown.” The Greek word translated “terrifying” (φοβερός, *phoberos*) is found only three times in the Apostolic Scriptures, and all three are in the book of Hebrews (10:27, 31; 12:21). The Lxx of Hab 1:7 uses the word to describe the Babylonian armies. Similarly, Josephus uses the word in connection to the terrors of war.<sup>2</sup>

And this leads to the meaning of the metaphor, “to fall into the hands.” The metaphor pictures warfare in which one army is captured

1 Owen, *Hebrews*, 4.555.

2 Josephus, *Ant* 3.56, 88.



or in some manner falls prey to the opposing army. The narrative of Samson's victory over the Philistines yields a suitable example of this:

Then he became very thirsty, and he called to ADONAI and said, "You have given this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant, and now shall I die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?" (Judges 15:18)

To "fall into the hands" in our text pictures the helpless being overcome by the mighty and having no recourse to seek mercy or some negotiable treaty. And indeed, this is the very circumstance of all who rebel against God and His Messiah and who yet will stand before Him in the day of judgment. There will be no appeal to the infinite mercy of God, nor a just cause to be directed toward His love and grace. For all of these are communicated to man through the Son, Yeshua, Who is the mediator of all of God's saving grace.

This is why those who appeal to David's words as in some manner contradictory to our author's statement fail to see that the eternal and infinite power of God is, on the one hand, a source of comfort to those who are His, while at the same time a source of terrifying fear to those who are His enemies. For David, having realized his error in counting the people, and facing the inevitable punishment for his disobedience, concluded:

Then David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Let us now fall into the hand of ADONAI for His mercies are great, but do not let me fall into the hand of man." (2Sam 24:14)

In this case, however, David had a covenant relationship with God, a relationship which was founded upon David's faith in God and in the Promised One. As such, he already knew that the disciplining hand of God would be governed by the mercy He had already promised to David. David was not an enemy of God! He was a son who was being disciplined by his Father.

Not so with those who have openly rebelled against the Almighty. They have only a "terrifying expectation of judgment" (v. 27) and for them, the future hastens towards the day of reckoning.

One of the most important things for us to consider, however, is how these strong statements of our author regarding God's judgment against the wicked fit into the overall context of our text. The emphasis in this and the previous chapters has been the superiority of Yeshua as the heavenly High Priest after the order of

Melchizedek when compared to the earthly, Aaronic priesthood. And specific to the immediate context is the delineation of what is in store for those who, having initially confessed Yeshua to be their Messiah and Savior, then deny Him and turn their backs on Him.

But there is nothing in our text which would indicate that those who have become apostate, have in fact also denied God. Indeed, if these were primarily Jewish people who had once confessed Yeshua, but later denied Him and returned to their unbelieving synagogues, they would have never consider that their denying Yeshua was one and the same with denying the God of Israel! Yet our author makes it clear that in denying Yeshua, a person puts himself or herself on the path to eternal destruction. Thus, for our author as well as the other authors of the Apostolic Scriptures, to deny Yeshua is equally to deny the one, true God.

The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me. (Luke 10:16)

He who hates Me hates My Father also. (John 15:23)

Thus, our author reaffirms the unified message of the Scriptures, namely, that God has ordained one way of salvation and that is through the work of His Son, Yeshua. The person who denies and thus rejects Yeshua has at the same time denied and rejected the one, true God. As such, that person, apart from repentance and faith in the Messiah Yeshua, is destined to the terrifying experience of “falling into the hands of a living God.”

**32–33 But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated.**

Having noted the dire consequences which would befall any who turned back from their initial confession of Yeshua, denying Him, our author now goes on to admonish and encourage his readers to persevere in the faith they formerly confessed. In so doing, he applauds their exemplary example of persevering even under strong persecutions, and encourages them that, by God’s strength, they must persevere even in times in which persecution has greatly lessened or even ceased.