

**LESSON TWENTY-ONE
HEBREWS 10:26-39**

DAY ONE

Read Hebrews 10:26-31 and Numbers 15:30-31.

1. What do you think it means to sin willfully? How do you think this is related to the evil conscience?
2. Why is it important to distinguish between willful sins and sins committed in ignorance?
3. Why does the author of Hebrews make the statement that there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins for the one who continues in willful sin?
4. What can a person expect when they reject the sacrifice of Christ?

Read Isaiah 26:11

5. What is the positive side of God's judgment? What is the negative side? Does it make you uncomfortable to think about God's judgment? Why or why not?
6. According to Heb. 10:28, what was the penalty for setting aside (or willfully rejecting) the Law of Moses?

DAY TWO

7. According to Heb. 10:29, what three actions are attributed to the one who is governed by an evil conscience?

8. How does it make you feel to read these descriptions?

9. What kind of actions or thought processes do you think must be present for a person to “trample under foot the Son of God”?

Read Hebrews 4:4-7.

10. What attitude does the author of Hebrews attribute to those who failed to enter into the Promised Land? How important is this theme in the book of Hebrews?

Read Deuteronomy 32:35-36.

11. According to Dt. 32:36, what action of God accompanies judgment?

12. In Heb. 10:30-31, how is God the father described? Is this consistent with what you believe? Why do you think it is necessary for the author to present such a “terrifying” image of God?

DAY THREE

Read Hebrews 10:32-34

13. How does the author describe the “former days” of the readers? What does this say about their character?

14. According to Heb. 10:34, what enabled this audience to endure such hardship with a joyful attitude?

Read Hebrews 2:10, Romans 3:24-25, Hebrews 3:14, and Hebrews 4:15.

15. How do these verses relate to what the original readers of Hebrews have experienced?

16. What expectations do you think the author has of his readers by using the words “suffering,” “public spectacle,” “sharers,” and “sympathy”?

17. A believer is called to identify with Christ and to become like Christ, not only in His beauty, His kindness, and His empathetic compassion towards others, but also in His suffering? How have you experienced this in your life?

18. When you are faced with difficulty in your life, what do you draw upon in order to persevere?

19. Do you have any experiences in your walk with Christ that you would consider your “former days,” times of closeness, growth, or challenges that encourage you to draw closer to God?

20. How can we find encouragement in these verses? If you are feeling distant from God, what can you do with this feeling?

DAY FOUR

Read Hebrews 10:35-39.

21. How does the tone of this passage change from Hebrews 10:32-34?

22. What is the author’s overall perspective of his audience?

23. According to Heb. 10:36, what is God’s will for believers? Does this surprise you? Why or why not?

Read Isaiah 26:20 and Habakkuk 2:3-4.

24. Why do you think the author of Hebrews refers to the passage in Isaiah?

25. Why do you think the author of Hebrews refers to the passage in Habakkuk?

26. What does it mean to you to live by faith?

DAY FIVE

27. Have you had an experience where you have been tempted to shrink back or been challenged in your understanding of God?

28. How did you get through this (or are you still in the middle of this situation)?

29. Would you describe yourself as a person filled with a faith that enables you to persevere? If so, how did God develop this in you? If not, how do you think God can develop this in you?

30. What is your overall response to this passage now?

LESSON TWENTY-ONE SCRIPTURE

Hebrews 10:26-39 ²⁶ For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES.

²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on *the testimony of* two or three witnesses. 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? ³⁰ For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE." ³¹ It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. ³² But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, ³³ partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. ³⁴ For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. ³⁵ Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. ³⁶ For

you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. ³⁷ FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY. ³⁸ BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM.

³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

DAY ONE

Hebrews 10:26-31 ²⁶ For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES. ²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on *the testimony of* two or three witnesses. 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? ³⁰ For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE." ³¹ It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Numbers 15:30-31 ³⁰ 'But the person who does *anything* defiantly, whether he is native or an alien, that one is blaspheming the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from among his people. ³¹ 'Because he has despised the word of the LORD and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt *shall be* on him.'

Isaiah 26:11 O LORD, Your hand is lifted up *yet* they do not see it. They see *Your* zeal for the people and are put to shame; Indeed, fire will devour Your enemies.

DAY TWO

Hebrews 4:4-7 ⁴ For He has thus said somewhere concerning the seventh *day*, "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"; ⁵ and again in this *passage*, "They shall not enter My rest." ⁶ Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, ⁷ He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts."

Deuteronomy 32:35 (Greek Version) In the day of vengeance I will recompense, whensoever their foot shall be tripped up; for the day of their destruction *is* near to them, and the judgments at hand are close upon you.

Deuteronomy 32:36 (Greek Version) For the Lord shall judge his people, and shall be comforted over his servants; for he saw that they were utterly weakened, and failed in the hostile invasion, and were become feeble.

DAY THREE

Hebrews 10:32-34 ³² But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, ³³ partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. ³⁴ For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.

Hebrews 2:10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.

Romans 3:24-25 ²⁴ being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; ²⁵ whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;

Hebrews 3:14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are, yet* without sin.

DAY FOUR/DAY FIVE

Hebrews 10:35-39 ³⁵ Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. ³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. ³⁷ FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY. ³⁸ BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM. ³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

Isaiah 26:20 (Greek version) Go, my people, enter into thy closets, shut thy door, hide thyself for a little season, until the anger of the Lord have passed away.

Habakkuk 2:3-4 (Greek version) ³For the vision *is* yet for a time, and it shall shoot forth at the end, and not in vain: though he should tarry, wait for him; for he will surely come, and will not tarry. ⁴If he should draw back, my soul has no pleasure in him: but the just shall live by my faith.

LESSON TWENTY-ONE COMMENTARY

HEBREWS 10:26-39

After a lengthy discussion regarding Christ's superior priesthood and His superior sacrifice, the author of Hebrews draws this subject to a close by exhorting his readers to enter into this truth through trust in God's faithfulness toward them. He strongly implores his audience to remain in relationship with other believers so that they can mutually encourage one another to endure, to persevere and to stand firm in the face of conflict. The author's words of exhortation are immediately followed by the strongest warning passage in the book of Hebrews. It cannot be made any clearer that the one who trusts in Christ's sacrifice must allow this great reality to penetrate deep within their being so that the heart is changed. What now flows out of the heart should be oriented around the truth that there is nothing left for a person to do in order to gain acceptance from God the Father. Jesus' death on the cross has already provided the means for our acceptance, and our experience of His great love should impact our choices, our behaviors, and our emotional environment. If this is not happening then we need to ask ourselves and ask God what is hindering this experience in our lives.

In Hebrews 10:26-39, the author concludes his discussion of Jesus' superiority to the priesthood and to the Old Testament sacrifices. The whole story of the book of Hebrews is that of belief vs. unbelief. The Israelites in the wilderness were judged harshly for their unbelief and in Hebrews 10:26-31 our author uses the strongest language possible to deter his readers from falling into the same danger. Hebrews 10:32-34 provides a word of encouragement to the readers. It is clear that these readers had a real relationship with Christ which resulted in behavioral expressions of belief, compassion, and trust. They exhibited the character of Christ as they faced suffering, hardship, and cared for one another in previous situations, yet in their current situation it is clear that something has changed in their behavior. The author uses all of his persuasive power to draw his readers back to their original understanding of God's love which compelled Him to offer His Son on the cross. Heb. 10:35-39 follows with another exhortation that combines both warning and comfort. To endure means that the person has aligned their life and their heart with Christ and they are certain of obtaining what God has promised. To shrink back however, is to choose a path of unbelief and to stand under the sure judgment of God. The author of Hebrews is convinced that his audience will ultimately prove that they belong to the first category of people—those who believe, trust, and abandon themselves to the care of a God who is certainly terrifying, but always operates with the heart of a Father who cares for His children.

Hebrews 10:26-31

Hebrews 10:22 introduced the subject of the "evil conscience" that needs to be sprinkled clean, but what exactly the evil conscience is and how it manifests itself has not yet been explained. Following on the heels of the strong encouragement for the readers to remain in fellowship with one another, and to continue caring for one another; the author provides further detail in 10:26-31 regarding the specific actions that the evil conscience is capable of producing. This discussion is shrouded in a larger discussion

on the judgment of God, a topic that should strike terror in the hearts of those who do not know Him, and comforting assurance in the hearts of those who do know Him.

Hebrews 10:26 makes the strong statement “For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.” What does it mean to go on sinning willfully? William Lane writes, “The Greek word connotes a conscious expression of an attitude that displays contempt for God.”¹ The statement at first glance appears to be general, yet as the author’s argument progresses the sin becomes specifically identified as a rejection of the sacrifice of Christ. In Hebrews 3:17-19, the author speaks of those who sinned and fell in the wilderness due to their unbelief. The issue is between belief and unbelief, not between making mistakes and living perfectly. In Hebrews 10, the sin of unbelief is described specifically as rejecting the new covenant, rejecting what Christ has done on our behalf. How a person who has already “received the knowledge of the truth” can knowingly reject the only thing that can bring them eternal life is unclear, yet it is treated as a real possibility in the book of Hebrews. The author is not writing to unbelievers, he is not writing to those who are merely misunderstanding the truth, rather he is writing to a group of people who have clearly demonstrated a saving faith and are at a point where they are faltering in their commitment, where they are being tempted to turn their back on the new covenant and re-assimilate into a system that has no real power to affect their hearts.

Behind this discussion, once again, is Numbers 15-16, a passage recalling the rebellion and disbelief of the Israelites in the wilderness. In Numbers when the sacrifices for various sins are discussed, the point is made that there are numerous provisions for sins committed in ignorance, but no offering for those sins that are committed willfully. The penalty in the book of Numbers for setting aside the Law of Moses is death. Luke Timothy Johnson writes, “The law distinguishes between those sins committed “inadvertently” and for which sacrifices are efficacious, and sins that are “defiant” or “high-handed” or “insolent.” Those who sin this way must be cut off from the people according to Numbers 15:20.”² The author is trying to incite fear in the hearts of his readers, but it is not simply to frighten them, rather it is to shock them in to realizing the true danger involved. The ability for believers to walk in the throne room of God is secured by the sacrifice of Christ. If that one monumental act in history is disregarded, then there is no other way to access God. The one who remains in unbelief is subjected to the negative aspect of God’s judgment. For those who trust in Christ’s sacrificial death, there is new covenant life. For those who reject it, there is judgment and the judgment is terrifying. A quotation is taken from Isaiah 26, which is essentially a song of trust in God’s protection. The overall context of the chapter is one in which the people eagerly expect God’s judgment because they trust in God’s character and His promises to preserve His people. The converse part of the equation is that God will also judge those who oppose Him and those who oppose His people. Judgment is inevitable, but there is a choice as to which side of judgment a person takes. The judgment described here is terrible and consuming, and it recalls the judgment on Korah and his men who opposed Moses and misused the priesthood. These men were

¹ William L. Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 47b, *Hebrews 9-13*, 292.

² Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary*, 262.

destroyed for their lack of belief and their blatant opposition to Moses, the appointed leader of God (Numbers 16). The point is that there are two choices God offers to humanity: life with Him and life without Him. To walk away from the one thing that allows a person to access God's presence is to willingly choose the darkness. God does not punish the person who did not have enough information; rather the individual chooses to live life outside of God's presence. Those who choose this life are called "adversaries," a word which is consistently used in the Old Testament to describe those who are opposed to God and opposed to God's people. The author makes a very conscious choice with the use of this word.

Those who prove to be God's adversaries are further described in Heb. 10:28. Here, the author sets up a comparison between the Law of Moses and the New Covenant. No Jew would have even considered setting aside the Law of Moses. The Greek word for "setting aside" conveys the idea of rejecting, refusing, ignoring, or breaking;" it is a strong denial of the Law. Were a Jew to disregard the Law of Moses, the penalty was clear. Deuteronomy 17:2-6 states that death is required for the one who rejects the Law and commits blatant idolatry (Dt. 17:2-6). If a person is accused of such a breach of the Law, the Israelites were told to diligently inquire into the matter, and if the facts are proven and there is sufficient testimony against the offender, the idolater is to be put to death. Our author has already gone to great lengths to establish that the New Covenant is superior to the old, Jesus is superior to Moses, and Jesus' priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood. The corollary is then made that judgment under the New Covenant is also greater than that which resulted as a violation of the Old Covenant. The reason that this punishment is so much more severe is because that which is rejected is the sacrificial work of Christ. The person who rejects Christ is described as trampling under foot the Son of God, regarding the blood of the covenant as unclean, and insulting the Spirit of Grace (10:29). The evil conscience expresses itself in these three actions and the result of treating Christ's sacrifice with such blatant rejection is God's judgment, judgment that is reserved for an adversary of God. The hope that is extended in the New Covenant has a negative side. Those who choose any other way are subject to God's righteous judgment. The consequences for rejecting the cross are immensely grave. The penalty described under the Law of Moses is physical death, but the penalty under the New Covenant is eternal separation from God.

So how is the believer to respond to a message such as this? There are two relevant responses. The first is that we are to examine our hearts and ask God to reveal exactly what it is that we do believe about Christ's sacrificial death. Have we really trusted in the completeness and the fullness of what He has done or do we still labor under a false conception that our own work is more effective than His in gaining our acceptance in God's sight? Why do we do what we do? Is it out of gratitude for what has been done on our behalf or is it out of guilt? Do we live in freedom knowing that although we make mistakes, we have a loving Father who has dealt with the overall issue of sin through His Son's death, or do we live under our own self-made laws that nullify Christ's sacrifice? These are important questions to answer because God desires that we all come to terms with who we are in Christ. Until we do so, we will

have difficulty freely loving others and sharing the greatness of what God has to offer to the world. The second relevant response is to take seriously the negative side of judgment and allow ourselves to be motivated to care for the eternal destiny of others. It is easy to focus on the goodness and the grace of God, because this is what brings life to our souls. It is uncomfortable and troublesome to our hearts to think about God as a judge and that some of our friends, family members, or acquaintances may fall under the negative side of God's judgment. We have the obligation and the honor to care for those who are within the family of God and may be in need of encouragement to stay the course, but also to care for those outside the family of God. We hold the dual aspect of God's unfathomable love and His terrifying judgment in tension as we continue to walk out our life of faith. We trust in a God whom C. S. Lewis describes metaphorically as a lion. A lion is terrifying in its strength and power. Even a trained lion can turn on its trainer. God however exhibits a far greater majesty than any lion, and yet He is dangerous. To those who choose to surrender their lives to His great power, God may at times seem fierce, but He will only bring into our lives that which will transform us into the likeness of His Son.

Hebrews 10:32-34

This passage begins with the conjunction “but” which is a signal that the author is making a pivotal point in his argument. The preceding statement is “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” It is terrifying to fall into the hands of the living God, **unless** we have experienced the saving work of the cross and the enlightening power of God's cleansing, which should have the result of transforming our outward behavior. The author also shifts from speaking about “us” and “we” to addressing “you,” which is the way in which he moves from exhortation and encouragement to addressing specific behavioral concerns. The focus in this passage is upon the former behavior (which was concomitant with an internal heart change in response to the gospel) that was previously exhibited by these readers. They have a heritage from which they can draw, they know the truth and its saving power, but somehow they have drifted from it. The author of Hebrews encourages them to return to their first love, to renew their hearts, and to recall the depth of love for Christ's sacrifice that stirred them to certain behavioral responses. For some reason their love has dissipated and it has been evidenced by diminished behavioral responses. Rather than telling his readers that they need to get back up and visit prisoners, get busy and get to work, our author is trying to arouse in them an awareness that their current behavior (or lack of behavior) is a signal that something in their heart attitude has changed.

The way in which this group of people originally experienced Christ left them with the ability to endure hardship. The author recalls the stalwart faith that enabled them to stand up under suffering, to be made a public spectacle, to become partakers with others who endured the same, and to exhibit tremendous compassion to others who were also suffering. All of these are behaviors demonstrated by Christ in His life and ministry. We are called to pattern our lives after Christ. We are not dependent upon our works as a measure of our value and worth or as a means to secure the right to

boldly approach God the Father, but there is an expectation that a person who has received and internalized the forgiveness offered in the ultimate sacrifice of Christ should be hitting developmental milestones in their spiritual growth. Just as we have expectations that a child should grow and develop in their emotional, physical, social, and intellectual capabilities, God has expectations that His children grow and develop in their ability to understand what Christ has done and to then reflect Him and become more like Him in the way we live out our faith. In this particular passage, the focus is upon endurance, compassion, empathy, and maturity. These are all traits that enable a person to look beyond the temporal to the eternal. There are two sides to the concept of grace. One side of grace tells us that when we were at our very worst, Christ died for us. We are loved, we are accepted, and we are cherished not because of what we do but because we belong to the family of God. Out of this understanding then, a life of faith, trust, and growth should ensue. Paul asks the question, “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace (Rom. 6:15)?” Paul answers the question by saying that if we have been saved by grace then what we want to do should align with what God wants for us. There is a distinct understanding that the heart transformed by grace is a heart that now wants to be alive to God. If behavioral change does not flow from an internal heart change, Paul’s solution is to address the believer’s understanding of their identity in Christ. It is not the behavior that is the problem, but a person’s misunderstanding of God and who they are in relation to Him that enables them to engage in the wrong behavior. The solution is to change the heart perspective and when that occurs, the behavioral changes naturally flow. The problem our author faces is that he is addressing an audience entrenched in Judaism. These readers had great moral character. They were not coming out of a lifestyle of debauchery and idol worship. Instead they were trying to understand the issue from within the framework of Judaism. The challenge our author faces is to penetrate the mask of moralism and delve into the deeper heart issues. There was specific behavior that needed to be corrected, but the greater issue was how the readers were relating to Christ’s sacrifice. If they, if we, do not get this right, then nothing else matters.

The author brings to mind for his readers their experience of faith, determination, and their ability to stand firm in the light of adversity. For some of us, it may be difficult to connect to what the readers are facing in this book. We may have never been physically threatened or imprisoned as a direct result of our faith and yet this letter to the Hebrews does have practical impact for all of us. How many of us can look back upon times in our life that we might consider our “former days?” Times when we may have undergone challenge; times when we may have experienced a deep closeness to God and an ability to face our life circumstances with grace and with abandonment to the caring hand of God? The author encourages his readers to remember those days, to reflect upon those experiences where the reality of what was to come (eternal life with the reigning King) was a greater preoccupation than the daily struggle (or oftentimes lack of struggle) of everyday circumstances. The character that was previously demonstrated on behalf of this audience is undeniably Christ-like. This is the picture that the author of Hebrews places before his readers. I have a friend who keeps a photo of herself as a little girl in her journal. This little girl is in a leotard, dancing with joy, and it is her reminder that this is a part of who she is. In much the same way, the

audience of the book of Hebrews needs to be reminded that they are the people in this picture. At one point in time, they have demonstrated great faith and character, they have entered into the suffering of Christ, and they have experienced deep joy and compassion in the midst of it. At their very core, they are not the kind of people to shrink back, or to drift away, but they need to be reminded again of who they are in Christ and who they have already proven themselves to be. What was reflected in their previous actions was an attitude, a moral disposition, of joy. The author is not focusing as much on the specific actions exhibited by his audience as he is highlighting the orientation of their hearts. It is not about their possessions being taken away and the afflictions that they endured, it is about the resolute choice to focus on what has been promised to them, and to do so with a contentedness and a conscious awareness that in that moment they are uniquely joined to Christ. Is joy something that characterizes our daily lives? Are we transformed by a forward look to what is certainly ours, or do we struggle through the daily siphoning of our mental and emotional strength? We all have a lesson to learn through the past experience of this audience. Joy is something that we choose when our circumstances threaten to stifle it. Joy is what infuses us with the ability to stand up under duress and with the ability to persevere. If faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen, then joy is the emotional and spiritual fuel that moves us toward our intended goal.

Hebrews 10:35-39

In light of God's judgment and in light of the past demonstration of faith on behalf of his readers, the author continues on a note of encouragement. He urges them not to treat their confidence lightly, but to hold onto it tightly for there is the promise of a great reward. Throughout the book of Hebrews, much has been promised: sanctification, cleansing, family relationship, and unrestricted access to God the Father. The rewards are held in front of the readers to remind them of what awaits them at the finish line. They started the race well, but now some are faltering and dropping out altogether. At this point the readers need to be reminded again of their original purpose. The statement is made that when they have done the will of God, they will then receive what was promised to them. In this context the will of God is defined as running the race, reaching the finish line, and enduring to the end. There are no specific behavioral commands other than to nurture one's faith and remain in an environment that allows mutual encouragement in our lives.

Again, a quote is drawn from the pages of the Old Testament prophets. This quotation combines ideas both from Isaiah 26:20 and Habakkuk 2:3-4. The passage in Isaiah reads "Go, my people, enter into thy closets, shut thy door, hide thyself for a little season, until the anger of the Lord have passed away." It is likely that there were some in this Christian congregation who used this verse to justify their withdrawal from the faith community. In the greater context of the passage however, Isaiah was encouraging his audience to persevere in the midst of hardship. The focus is on the greater expectation of the one who is coming and the impending judgment that will be delivered to the adversaries of Israel. The second passage (Heb. 10:38) is taken from Habakkuk 2:2-4. Habakkuk was a prophet to the nation of Judah prior to their fall into

the hands of the Babylonians. He examines the tumultuous situation of Judah in light of God's promises to those who have been proclaimed righteous. His confidence in God comes from looking forward to what God has promised to the nations of Israel and Judah, but more importantly to those whose faith is in Him. In drawing upon this verse, the author of Hebrews also pulls these themes into his letter. When he says, "the just shall live by faith," it is not just a statement about faith, but a statement of the absolute certainty we can have in God's character. He enables us to transcend our circumstances and experience His presence in our lives. This faith is motivated by a forward look to what He promises, a present look at what we already possess, and a backward look to what He has already done in our lives. Chapter Eleven will delve into the subject of faith in great detail, providing a large arsenal of illustrative material to demonstrate how the life governed by faith manifests itself in the face of life's trials.

In Deuteronomy when Moses presents the covenant to Israel and asks for their commitment, he issues the challenge, "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants (Dt. 30:19)." In the Old Testament, to choose life was to obey the covenant and receive blessing. To choose death, was to disobey the covenant and to fall under the curse. The author of Hebrews dramatically places the same choice in front of his readers. They can choose to shrink back to destruction (and fall under the curse) or to lead a life of faith, enduring to the end, and reaping the great blessing of their decision. And with this thought, the author wraps up with an encouraging proclamation that he believes his readers to be the kind of people who will make the right choice. The overall passage (Heb. 10:26-39) began with a fierce warning that the audience's behavioral choices were leading them down a path of unbelief. The author intervenes in order to change their path. He is entirely confident that his readers are characterized by faith and that they can return to their former days. They have already exhibited the new covenant understanding that regardless of external occurrences, there is a hope of a greater and better inheritance than anything the material world can offer. One day they will take hold of their reward, and this is what should fuel their confidence.