

Warning through song and legislation? An intertextual study of Hebrews 10:26–31 and Deuteronomy

**Author:**Albert J. Coetsee¹ **Affiliation:**

¹Unit for Reformational Theology and the Development of the South African Society, Faculty of Theology, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Albert Coetsee,
albert.coetsee@nwu.ac.za

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Just as in the rest of Hebrews, the warning passage in Hebrews 10:26–31 contains numerous references to the Old Testament. The passage has, among others, two explicit quotations from the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 (Dt 32:35a in Heb 10:30a; Dt 32:36a in Heb 10:30b), and one clear allusion to the legislation in Deuteronomy 17 (Dt 17:6 in Heb 10:28). The current article argued that Deuteronomy plays an even bigger role in the passage than has previously been noted. Moving from the clear to the less clear by discussing quotations from, allusions to, echoes and applications of, and conceptual and intertextual parallels with Deuteronomy, the intertextual study found that there are possible traces of Deuteronomy in every verse of Hebrews 10:26–31, and strikingly, that all these traces come from Deuteronomy 17 and 32. The article concluded by reflecting on the correlation between Deuteronomy 17 and 32, and how the author of Hebrews employs words and reminiscences from these chapters in order to warn his addressees against apostasy.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The article contributed to the investigation of the Old Testament in the Book of Hebrews, and more specifically, the investigation of the occurrence and use of the Book of Deuteronomy in Hebrews.

Keywords: Hebrews 10:26–31; Deuteronomy 17:6; Deuteronomy 17:12; Deuteronomy 32:22; Deuteronomy 32:35; Deuteronomy 32:36; Deuteronomy 32:39–41; intertextual study.

Introduction

In Hebrews 10:26–31, the author warns his addressees in vivid language against 'the nature and consequences of apostasy' (Ellingworth 1993:530). The passage has various parallels with the warning in Hebrews 6:4–6, but differs in the sense that it makes use of cultic categories (Lane 1991:291), and follows after the lengthy exposition of Christ's high priesthood in Hebrews 7:1–10:18, calling the addressees to the proper response to the 'now-explained salvation' (Cockerill 2012:482).¹

To substantiate his argument, the author uses numerous references to the Old Testament. The passage has, among others, two explicit quotations from the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 (Dt 32:35a in Heb 10:30a; Dt 32:36a in Heb 10:30b), and one clear allusion to the legislation in Deuteronomy 17 (Dt 17:6 in Heb 10:28). This much is noted by most scholars. But closer investigation suggests that Deuteronomy plays an even bigger role in the passage than has previously been noted. The concluding Hebrews 10:31 seems to echo subsequent verses from the Song of Moses (Dt 32:39–41), while the allusion to Isaiah 26:11 in Hebrews 10:27 has strong conceptual parallels with several verses from Deuteronomy, including Deuteronomy 32. This leads to the question: Without denying the occurrence and use of other Old Testament passages in Hebrews 10:26–31 or the creativity of the author, is it possible that the author in some way makes use of Deuteronomy throughout these verses?

With the aim to answer this question, the article investigates the possible occurrence and use of Deuteronomy in the words employed in Hebrews 10:26–31. The intertextual study moves from the clear to the less clear, discussing in descending order possible quotations from, allusions to, echoes and applications of, and conceptual and intertextual parallels with Deuteronomy. Each category is explained in more detail as the article unfolds. While this approach entails that the verses of Hebrews 10:26–31 are not discussed in sequential order, it strengthens cumulative

¹Gleason (2002:97–120) differs from the traditional interpretation of Hebrews 10:26–31 by viewing it as a warning against the physical judgement that will come upon Israel with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple during the first Jewish revolt (66–70 AD).

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reflection on the possible occurrence and use of Deuteronomy in the passage. The article concludes by drawing the lines together and by reflecting on how Deuteronomy influences the interpretation of Hebrews 10:26–31. By doing this, the article contributes to the growing number of investigations of the occurrence and use of Deuteronomy in Hebrews (cf. Allen 2008; Coetsee 2019; 2020; 2023b; Katz 1958; Steyn 2007).

Quotations from Deuteronomy: Hebrews 10:30

A quotation can be defined as a number of consecutive words in the New Testament with a high degree of conformity with a specific Old Testament verse or verses, accompanied by an introductory formula (cf. Beale 2012:26; Guthrie 2003:273; Moyise 2008:15).

Based on this definition, most scholars agree that Hebrews 10:30 contains two quotations from the Old Testament. The text reads as follows:

οἶδαμεν γὰρ τὸν εἰπόντα·

ἐμοὶ ἐκδίκησις, ἐγὼ ἀνταποδώσω.

καὶ πάλιν·

κρινεῖ κύριος τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ.

For we know the one who said, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay.'
And again, 'The Lord will judge his people.'²

The use of the conjunction 'for' (γὰρ) in Hebrews 10:30 indicates that the author provides scriptural proof for what he has said in Hebrews 10:29. Similar to most introductory formulae in Hebrews, the introductory formula in Hebrews 10:30 contains a verb of saying and has God as subject (note the use of κύριος in the final clause; cf. Coetsee & Jordaan 2015). The use of the verb οἶδαμεν (from οἶδα) in the introductory formula is unique in Hebrews. The use of the first-person plural invites the addressees to reflect on the words from Scripture that follows, and to agree that Scripture indeed teaches what follows about God.

The words of the first quotation stress that 'vengeance' (ἐκδίκησις) belongs to the Lord, and that he will 'exact retribution' (from ἀνταποδίδωμι). Emphasis is placed on the Lord as the agent of vengeance and payback by means of the personal pronouns ἐμοὶ and ἐγὼ.

Most scholars agree that the words are taken from a version of Deuteronomy 32:35a. The quotation in the same form is also found in Romans 12:19c, but the context differs.³ Paul adds the phrase 'says the Lord' (λέγει κύριος) after the

2. All quotations from the Greek New Testament are from the NA²⁸, while quotations from the Hebrew Bible are from the Biblical Hebraica Quinta (cf. McCarthy [2007] for quotations from Deuteronomy MT). The critical text of the *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Gottingensis editum* is used for quotations from the LXX (cf. Rahlfs [1979]; Ziegler [1967, 1983]; Wevers [2006]). All English translations from the Old and New Testament are from the NRSV, while English translations from the LXX are from the *New English Translation of the Septuagint* (NETS). Translations in tables are my own.

3. Paul uses the quotation to motivate his addressees to leave vengeance in the hands of God.

TABLE 1: The possible *Vorlage* of Hebrews 10:30a.

Source	Source text	Translation
Hebrews 10:30a	ἐμοὶ ἐκδίκησις, ἐγὼ ἀνταποδώσω	Vengeance is mine, I will repay
Romans 12:19c	ἐμοὶ ἐκδίκησις, ἐγὼ ἀνταποδώσω	Vengeance is mine, I will repay
Deuteronomy 32:35a LXX	ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἐκδικήσεως ἀνταποδώσω	In a day of vengeance, I will repay
Deuteronomy 32:35a MT	בְּיִשְׁרָאֵל יְיָ	Vengeance is mine and recompense

quotation, and this probably accounts for its addition to Hebrews 10:30a in some manuscripts (e.g., ^{sc} A D^c; cf. Moffatt 1924:152). The author's introductory formula, which already contains a verb of saying, makes this reading unlikely (Steyn 2011:305).

The text quoted in Hebrews 10:30a and Romans 12:19c differs from Deuteronomy 32:35a in both the LXX and MT, as can be seen in Table 1.

Based on this comparison, the quotation in Hebrews 10:30a and Romans 12:19c is closer to the MT than the LXX (Steyn 2000:269). The fact that both the author of Hebrews and Paul quotes the words in the same form, suggests that they 'are citing a familiar and popular form of the saying' (Hughes 1977:425 n. 22), possibly deriving the quotation from 'a collection of *testimonia*' (Bruce 1990:260–261 n. 130; cf. Guthrie 2007:980–981).⁴

The second quotation is linked to the first with the connecting phrase 'and again' (καὶ πάλιν; cf. Heb 1:5; 2:13^{2c}). The fact that the two quotations could have followed one after the other without the use of the connecting phrase slows down the pace of the passage, and emphasises the dire words of the second quotation. The second quotation is more ominous than the first, expressly stating that the Lord will 'judge' (from κρίνω) his people.

The source of the second quotation is easier to determine than that of the first: it either comes from Deuteronomy 32:36a LXX or Psalm 135:14 (134:14 LXX), as can be seen in Table 2. The fact that a version of Deuteronomy 32:35a is presumably quoted in Hebrews 10:30a strengthens the probability that the author quotes Deuteronomy 32:36a in Hebrews 10:30b (Allen 2008:60).

Hebrews 10:30b follows the text of Deuteronomy 32:36a exactly, except for dropping the causal conjunction 'for' (οὖν). The omission changes the quoted words to a declaration asserting a fact (Guthrie 2007:980–981).

4. A number of excellent studies have been conducted on the possible *Vorlage* of the quotation in Hebrew 10:30a. Various scholars indicate that the Hebrew בְּיִשְׁרָאֵל יְיָ ['in the day of vengeance'] could easily have been corrupted to בְּיָד יְיָ ['vengeance is mine'] (e.g., Katz 1958:220). Ellingworth (1993:542) is correct in arguing that the closer similarities between Deuteronomy 32:35a MT and the quotation in Hebrew 10:30a is 'no sufficient reason for believing that the author of Hebrews, contrary to his normal practice, followed the MT against the LXX'. The reading found in Hebrew 10:30a and Roman 12:19c is similar to that found in *Targum Onkelos*, *Targum Neofiti* and *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* (Cockerill 2012:492 n. 45). Steyn (2011:310), in his careful analysis of Deuteronomy 32:25a, indicates that two traditions can be traced in the text critical investigation of the text: 'the Samaritan Pentateuch, Philo (*Leg.* 3,105) and Luke 21:22 are closer to the LXX', while 'Roman 12:19, Hebrew 10:30, the Targum Onkelos and the Peshitta are closer to the MT'.

TABLE 2: The possible *Vorlage* of Hebrews 10:30b.

Source	Source text	Translation
Hebrews 10:30b	κρινεῖ κύριος τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ	The Lord will judge his people
Deuteronomy 32:36a LXX	ὅτι κρινεῖ κύριος τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ	For the Lord will judge his people
Deuteronomy 32:36a MT	יְיָ יִדְּוֶה עַמּוֹ	For the Lord will judge [or vindicate] his people
Psalms 134:14 LXX	ὅτι κρινεῖ κύριος τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ	For the Lord will judge his people

Literally, Deuteronomy 32:36a in the MT states that the Lord will ‘judge’ (from יָדָה) his people, but the rest of the verse (especially the reference to his ‘compassion on his servants’) suggests that the verb should be taken in the sense of ‘judge in favour of’ (Tigay 1996:312), that is, ‘vindicate’; the Lord will vindicate his people against their enemies. The verb κρίνω in the LXX can have either a positive meaning of ‘vindicate’ or a negative meaning of ‘judge’. While the remainder of the verse in the LXX can suggest that the verb is used with a negative connotation, namely that God will ‘be comforted over his slaves’ (the NETS translation of ἐπὶ τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ παρακληθήσεται), namely his people who rebel against him, it is more likely that the verse has a positive connotation: God ‘will be swayed by his servants’ (Mohrmann 2023:173); he will establish just order for them against their enemies.⁵ The author of Hebrews, however, uses Deuteronomy 32:36 LXX with a negative connotation (contra Swetnam 1994:388–394; Proctor 2004:65–80). This is confirmed by the parallelism between Hebrews 10:30a and 10:30b.

In sum, Hebrews 10:30 contains two explicit quotations from two consecutive verses from the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32.

An allusion to Deuteronomy: Hebrews 10:28

An allusion can be defined as a number of consecutive words in the New Testament with a high degree of conformity with a specific Old Testament verse or verses without being accompanied by an introductory formula, or ‘an overt weaving of at least a phrase from the antecedent text into the author’s own language’ (Guthrie 2003:273; cf. Beale 2012:26–27; Porter 2008:30). Based on this definition, the final phrase of Hebrews 10:28 falls within this category (Allen 2008:75; cf. Kibbe 2016:129). The verse states:

ἀθετήσας τις νόμον Μωϋσέως χωρὶς οἰκτιρῶν ἐπὶ δυσὶν ἢ τρισὶν μάρτυσιν ἀποθνήσκει

Anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy ‘on the testimony of two or three witnesses.’

Hebrews 10:28–29 contains an a fortiori (*qal wahomer*) argument (cf. Heb 2:2–3; 9:13–14; 12:25), with verse 28 providing the lesser situation. The author’s argument is that the penalty for ‘rejecting’ or ‘nullifying’ (from ἀθετέω; Bauer et al. 2000:24) the law of Moses under the old covenant was

⁵In his commentary on the verse, Mohrmann (2023:474) states that ‘[d]ark imagery ... begins to give way to light when Moses speaks in v. 36’.

TABLE 3: The possible *Vorlage* of Hebrews 10:28b.

Source	Source text	Translation
Hebrews 10:28b	ἐπὶ δυσὶν ἢ τρισὶν μάρτυσιν ἀποθνήσκει	on [the evidence of] two or three witnesses he dies
Deuteronomy 17:6a LXX	ἐπὶ δυσὶν μάρτυσιν ἢ ἐπὶ τρισὶν μάρτυσιν ἀποθανεῖται ὁ ἀποθνήσκων	on [the evidence of] two witnesses or on three witnesses, the condemned person, shall die
Deuteronomy 17:6 MT	עַדִּים אוֹ שְׁלֹשָׁה עֵדִים יוֹמַת עַל־פִּי שְׁנַיִם	on the mouth [i.e., evidence] of two witnesses or three witnesses the condemned person shall be put to death

severe (Heb 10:28); more severe, however, will be the judgement of those who apostatise under the new covenant (Heb 10:29).

The severity of the judgement under the old covenant is stressed by the use of the verb ‘die’ (ἀποθνήσκω) in combination with the prepositional clause ‘without pity’ (χωρὶς οἰκτιρῶν), and the confirmation that this judgement takes place upon the ‘evidence of two or three witnesses’. While other possible *Vorlagen* have been suggested, including Deuteronomy 19:15 and Numbers 35:30, the wording of Deuteronomy 17:6 forms the closest parallel with Hebrews 10:28 (as can be seen in Table 3), and consequently, various scholars view the latter as an allusion to the former (cf. Allen 2008:75–76; Steyn 2007:159).

The author of Hebrews adjusts the words of Deuteronomy 17:6 to avoid repetition and to make it syntactically more alluring (cf. Attridge 1989:294 n. 32): he drops the first reference to μάρτυσιν and the second occurrence of ἐπί, and conflates the Hebrew ἀποθανεῖται ὁ ἀποθνήσκω to the simple present indicative ἀποθνήσκει. The present tense emphasises ‘the contemporary application of the Scriptural principle’ (Allen 2008:76).

Deuteronomy 17:2–7 pronounces that a man or woman serving other gods must be stoned to death on the evidence of two or three witnesses. Two matters from the original context should be noted in the author’s allusion to Deuteronomy 17:6 in Hebrews 10:28: (1) the author of Hebrews seems to equate apostasy with idolatry; and (2) unlike the author of Deuteronomy 17:6, the author of Hebrews is not interested in the danger of a miscarriage of justice based on the evidence of a single witness, he solely stresses the end result of such transgression: death (Ellingworth 1993:537).

Attempts have been made to find the *Vorlage* of the author’s reference to ‘without pity’ (χωρὶς οἰκτιρῶν). The exact phrase is not found in the Pentateuch, although the ‘notion of pitiless punishment’ (Attridge 1989:294 n. 30), expressed in the metaphor of ‘your eye shall not spare’ (οὐ φείσεται ὁ ὀφθαλμὸς σου), is found in a number of passages in Deuteronomy, including Deuteronomy 13:9 (LXX), 19:13, 19:21 and 25:12. Of these, based on similar legislation concerning idolatry, Deuteronomy 13:9 forms the closest parallel. Consequently, some scholars view Hebrews 10:28b as a conflated allusion to Deuteronomy 13:9 and 17:6 (Cockerill 2012:487; Guthrie 2007:979; Lane 1991:293; cf. Thompson 2008:209).

An echo of Deuteronomy: Hebrews 10:31

An echo, which is closely related to an allusion (Porter 2008:36), can be defined as a recollection or resonance of an Old Testament passage or verse without any obvious reference to that passage or verse (cf. Guthrie 2003:273; Hays 1989:21–33). This is often done ‘by means of thematically related language of some more general notion or concept’ (Porter 2008:39).

Only a handful of scholars mention the possibility that Hebrews 10:31 contains an echo of Deuteronomy 32:39–41 (e.g., Cockerill 2012:494; DeSilva 2000:352; Ellingworth 1993:543; Kleinig 2017:517; Koester 2001:454). None of them, however, provide detailed support for their argument.

Hebrews 10:31 is the author’s grave concluding words of the passage. It forms a climactic summary of the entire argument (Lane 1991:295) by stating:

φοβερὸν τὸ ἐμπεσεῖν εἰς χεῖρας θεοῦ ζῶντος.

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

In the Old Testament, ‘hand’ (τῆς ἡ χειρ) is frequently used in a figurative sense to refer to someone’s ‘power’ or ‘strength’ (Coetsee 2021:125). References to God’s ‘hand’ in Scripture are used anthropomorphically to refer to his ‘power’ or ‘might’, either in a positive or negative sense. The positive use of the noun refers to God’s acts in creation, his providence, and salvation, while the negative use refers to his judgement. ‘Falling’ into someone’s hands expresses the idea of involuntarily being subjected to someone’s power (cf. Bauer et al. 2000:324). Despite a couple of positive occurrences of the phrase in the Old Testament (cf. 2 Sm 24:14; 1 Chr 21:13; Gleason 2002:119), the description in Hebrews 10:31 is anything but positive, as the use of the adjective ‘fearful’ (from φοβερός) makes clear.⁶ Apostasy leads to ‘falling into the hands of the living God’, that is, being subjected to his power, specifically his (eschatological) judgement.

This dire warning is made even more frightening by the description of God as ‘the living God’ (cf. Heb 3:12; 9:14; 12:22). In contrast to lifeless idols of wood or stone, who can do nothing, the Old Testament depicts God as the ‘living’ God, namely the only God able to act and accomplish things (Coetsee 2019:118; cf. Brennan 2022:134–135). Within the context of Hebrews 10:26–31, the specific acts of God referred to are his judgement and retribution (cf. Moffatt 1924:152). ‘Paradoxically, “the living God” poses a threat of destruction’ (Koester 2001:454).

Isaiah 33:14 and Deuteronomy 10:17 have been suggested as the possible background of the author’s argument in Hebrews 10:31. The former in the MT periphrastically refers to God as a ‘consuming fire’ (הִלָּחֵט אֵשׁ) in a context of judgement,⁷ while

6.The use of a form of φοβερός as the opening word in both Hebrews 10:27 and 10:31 stresses the unity of the passage, as well as the overall tone of the author’s argument. It is difficult to agree with Swetnam (2006:390–392) that φοβερός in Hebrews 10:31 is used in a positive sense.

7.Isaiah 33:14 in the LXX is different, eliminating the possibility of viewing ‘consuming fire’ as a periphrasis for God.

TABLE 4: The possible *Vorlage* of Hebrews 10:31.

Source	Source text	Translation
Hebrews 10:31	φοβερὸν τὸ ἐμπεσεῖν εἰς χεῖρας θεοῦ ζῶντος	It is fearful to fall into the hands of the living God
Deuteronomy 32:39–41 LXX	³⁹ ... ἐγὼ ἀποκτενῶ καὶ ζῆν ποιῶ ... καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ὃς ἐξελεῖται ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν μου. ⁴⁰ ὅτι ἄρῶ εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν τὴν χεῖρά μου καὶ ὁμοῦμαι τὴν δεξιάν μου καὶ ἐρῶ Ζῶ ἐγὼ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, ⁴¹ ... καὶ ἀνθῆξεται κρίματος ἡ χεῖρ μου I will kill, and I will make alive ... and there is no one who will deliver from my hands. For I will lift up my hand to the heaven, and I will swear [by] my right hand, and I will say: I live forever ... and my hand will take hold of judgement ...

the latter describes God as mighty and ‘awesome’ (Ditto: אֲרִיבִי || ὁ φοβερός). Both suggestions, however, are not very convincing. Much more convincing is the suggestion that Hebrews 10:31 echoes Deuteronomy 32:39–41.

Deuteronomy 32:39–41 forms part of the ending of the Song of Moses. These verses underscore in the first person that the Lord alone is God, that he is sovereign, and that he will judge and repay his enemies. Of special importance are the resonances of Deuteronomy 32:39–41 in Hebrews 10:31 by means of references to the ‘hand’ or ‘hands’ (χειρ/χειρες) of God, and God as ‘living’ or able to make ‘alive’ (from ζῶω). This can be seen in Table 4.

Two references in the ending of the Song of Moses link God to the verb ‘live’ (ζῶω): God declares that he has the sovereign ability to ‘make alive’ (Dt 32:39), and in the words of a typical oath formula, God swears that he ‘lives’ forever (Dt 32:40). References to God’s ‘hands’ are found in verses 39, 40, and 41,⁸ referring in turn to his sovereignty (Dt 32:39), a hand gesture accompanying oaths (Dt 32:40) and his judgement (Dt 32:41) (Coetsee 2019:119, 127).

These resonances suggest that the author echoes Deuteronomy 32:39–41 in Hebrews 10:31. The quotations from Deuteronomy 32:35a and 32:36a in Hebrews 10:30 strengthen this possibility. Although somewhat removed, the author’s quotation of a version of Deuteronomy 32:43 in Hebrews 1:6 confirms his fondness of the Song of Moses,⁹ as well as his knowledge of its ending.

An application of Deuteronomy: Hebrews 10:29

Hebrews 10:29 does not seem to contain a quotation from, allusion to, or echo of any specific Old Testament passage. What is clear, however, is that the passage forms the ‘greater’ part of the author’s a fortiori argument in Hebrews 10:28–29. Hebrews 10:29 states:

πόσῳ δοκεῖτε χειρόνος ἀξιωθήσεται τιμωρίας ὁ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καταπατήσας καὶ τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης κοινὸν ἡγήσάμενος, ἐν ᾧ ἡγάσθη, καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς χάριτος ἐνυβρίσας;

How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of

8.These are also the only references to the hands of God in the Song of Moses.

9.Kibbe (2016:135) argues that Deuteronomy 32 is the author of ‘Hebrews’ favourite portion of the book’. The popularity of the Song is also evidenced in the Pauline literature: Cf. Romans 10:19 (Dt 32:21); 15:10 (Dt 32:43); 1 Cr 10:20, 22 (Dt 32:17, 21); Philippians 2:15 (Dt 32:5). To this might be added Romans 3:5, 9:14 and Hebrews 6:10, which may contain a subtle echo of Deuteronomy 32:4 (cf. Coetsee 2023b).

the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace?

The author's argument is that if nullifying the law of Moses under the old covenant led to death (Heb 10:28), the one who is guilty of brazen 'contempt of the most flagrant kind' (Moffatt 1924:151) under the new covenant will receive a much worse 'punishment' (τιμωρία; Heb 10:29). The verse is in the form of a rhetorical question, directly addressed to the addressees with the use of the second-person plural verb δοκεῖτε [*you think*], inviting them to reach the evident conclusion (cf. Koester 2001:457). The verb ἀξιοθήσεται (from ἀξίω) is a divine passive, suggesting that the worse punishment 'deserved' will be administered by God.

The detail of this brazen contempt is spelled out with the use of three aorist participles. The three participles do not seem to indicate three specific transgressions, but are used cumulatively for rejection of the new covenant (Attridge 1989:294).

The first aorist clause refers to 'trampling' (from καταπατέω) the Son of God. The verb is used in a figurative sense for the action of treating with disdain or showing contempt (Bauer et al. 2000:523). Some scholars suggest that the clause echoes Zechariah 12:3 based on its twofold use of the same verb, but the use of καταπατέω is hardly enough evidence to point to a convincing echo (Bruce 1990:262 n. 136). Moreover, in Zechariah 12:3 the verb refers to the trampling of Jerusalem by the nations.

The second aorist clause refers to considering the 'blood of the covenant' (τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης) 'profane' or 'common' (from κοινός; cf. the use of κοινώω in Heb 9:13). While Zechariah 9:11 employs the phrase 'by the blood of the covenant' (ἐν αἵματι διαθήκης), the much closer parallel is Exodus 24:8, which refers to Moses sprinkling the people with blood and calling it 'the blood of the covenant' (τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης). A version of Exodus 24:8 is also quoted in Hebrews 9:20, which supports the possibility that the author is alluding to this verse.

The third aorist clause refers to 'insulting' or 'outraging' (from ἐνυβρίζω) 'the Spirit of grace' (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς χάριτος). The author creates a paradox by juxtaposing the Spirit of *grace* with the one who *outrages* him. The verb is a hapax legomenon in the New Testament, and is not found in the LXX. The exact words are not found in any Old Testament passage. The closest parallel is Zechariah 12:10 (LXX), which refers to God pouring out 'a spirit of grace and compassion' (πνεῦμα χάριτος καὶ οἰκτιρμοῦ) on the house of David. There are, however, two major differences between Zechariah 12:10 and Hebrews 10:29: (1) The phrase 'a spirit of grace and compassion' in Zechariah 12:10 is used in a context of salvation, while 'the Spirit of grace' in Hebrews 10:29 is used in a context of judgement; (2) in Hebrews 10:29 'Spirit' is used to refer to the Spirit of God; in Zechariah 12:10, 'spirit' refers to the disposition of the people.

Overall, the most convincing parallel to Hebrews 10:29 is Hebrews 6:4–6. The latter is a similar warning against apostasy, which refers to the convert as sharing in 'the Holy Spirit' (πνεύματος ἁγίου), and the apostate as crucifying again 'the Son of God' (τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ).

Consequently, the discussion above seems to rule out any reference to Deuteronomy in Hebrews 10:29. There is, however, one possibility. A few scholars view the three aorist participle clauses in Hebrews 10:29 as an expansion of the three witnesses referred to in Hebrews 10:28 (more recently Steyn 2007:160). According to this view, Hebrews 10:29 provides the testimony of three witnesses who condemn the person who rejects the new covenant not only to death, but to God's terrible judgement. The three witnesses are the Son, the blood, and the Spirit. If this is correct, Hebrews 10:29 is an indirect continuation of the allusion to Deuteronomy 17:6 in Hebrews 10:28; it contains a Christological application of Deuteronomy 17:6.

This interpretation is not shared by many scholars. Ellingworth (1993:538) states that '[s]uch a way of arguing would not be foreign to Hebrews, but it is not made explicit'. Kibbe (2016:129 n. 77) errs on the side of caution by stating that 'this may be pushing the parallelism too far'. Nonetheless, the suggestion of Steyn and others is intriguing, and reading Hebrews 10:28–29 in this manner is not unnatural.

A conceptual parallel with Deuteronomy: Hebrews 10:26

Hebrews 10:26, the first verse of the passage, states:

Ἐκουσίως γὰρ ἁμαρτανόντων ἡμῶν μετὰ τὸ λαβεῖν τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν τῆς ἀληθείας, οὐκέτι περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἀπολείπεται θυσία,

For if we willfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

The opening clause contains a genitive absolute (ἁμαρτανόντων ἡμῶν), which, in light of the rest of the sentence, is best viewed as having the nuance of a condition: 'if we continue sinning' (cf. Wallace 1996:654–655). The keyword in the clause is the adverb ἐκουσίως, placed in the emphatic first position. It can be translated as 'willingly', 'deliberately', or 'intentionally' (Bauer et al. 2000:307; Louw & Nida 1996:295–296 [§25.65]). Its use indicates that the author is not concerned with sin in general, but deliberate or intentional sin. What makes deliberate sin unthinkable in the author's view, is that the addressees have received 'the knowledge of the truth' (ἡ ἐπίγνωσις τῆς ἀληθείας).¹⁰ This stock phrase for the Christian message (Koester 2001:451) follows after the lengthy exposition of Christ's high-priestly ministry in Hebrews 7:1–10:18. The author's argument is that the addressees should now know, based on their fuller understanding of Christ's ministry and sacrifice, that apart from Christ's sacrifice there is no 'sacrifice' (θυσία) for sins. The author emphasises this by

¹⁰ Some scholars argue that ἐπίγνωσις in Hebrews 10:26 refers to 'full and authentic knowledge' (Hughes 1977:421). Others, however, view it as a stylistic variant of 'knowledge'.

formulating Hebrews 10:26 in such a way that it forms a parallel with Hebrews 10:18:

οὐκέτι προσφορὰ περὶ ἁμαρτίας (Heb 10:18)

οὐκέτι περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἀπολείπεται θυσία (Heb 10:26)¹¹

Hebrews 10:18 argues that Christ's sacrifice for sin is perfect; no other sacrifice is required (cf. Heb 10:14). Hebrews 10:26 argues that no other sacrifice for sin than Christ's perfect sacrifice is possible. The addressees are consequently warned not to scorn Christ's sacrifice by sinning deliberately.

Most scholars view the background of the author's reference to deliberate sin as Numbers 15:22–31 (cf. Bediako 2018:29–40; Bloor 2023:53; DeSilva 2000:344; Lane 1991:292; Lee 2021:199–200; Tanner 2006:64–66), especially verses 30–31. Numbers 15 distinguishes between unintentional (Nm 15:22–29) and intentional sins (Nm 15:30–31), and provides legislation for atonement for the former by means of specific sacrifices. Numbers 15:30 in the MT literally refers to someone who acts 'with a high hand' (תַּגְּדָה תַּגְּדָה), which is a figurative expression for arrogance or defiance (Smith & Hamilton 1997:1079). The LXX keeps the reference to 'hand', but captures the gist of the expression by translating 'high' with 'arrogance' (ὕπερηφανία; Bauer et al. 2000:1033). According to Numbers 15:30–31, a person who acts in this manner 'provokes' (from παροξύνω) God and 'despises' (from φαυλίζω) his word, and shall be 'completely destroyed' (from ἐξολεθρεύω) from the people and 'wiped out with a wiping' (ἐκτρίψει ἐκτριβήσεται).

Based on these parallels, Numbers 15 does seem to be a good fit as the possible background of Hebrews 10:26.¹² Cockerill (2012:483–484), however, warns that an uncritical adoption of Numbers 15 as the background of the verse is an oversimplification; Hebrews contains the thought, but not the terminology of Numbers 15. Following his cue, other possible backgrounds of Hebrews 10:26 should be explored.

The adverb ἐκουσίως is found five times in the LXX (Ex 36:2; 2 Macc 14:3; 4 Macc 5:23; 8:23; Ps 53:8), of which the closest parallel to Hebrews 10:26 is Psalm 53:8 (54:8 MT). In the MT, the poet declares that he will sacrifice a 'freewill offering' (הַקְדָּשׁ) to God, which is rendered as 'freely I shall sacrifice to you' (ἐκουσίως θύσω σοι) in the LXX.¹³ The parallel with Hebrews 10:26 is created by the use of the adverb ἐκουσίως and the verb θύω (Hebrews has the noun θυσία). This gives rise to the interesting question: Could the author of Hebrews be making a subtle contrast between the 'freewill' or 'voluntary' offering of the Old Testament and the sin which he warns his addressees not to commit? Put differently, could the author subtly be saying that instead of a 'freewill' sacrifice which they should present to God because of their deliverance

11. This parallel probably serves as the reason why some manuscripts contain περὶ ἁμαρτίας instead of περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν in Hebrews 10:26 (cf. Bruce 1990:260 n. 124).

12. Cf. Hebrews 9:7, which refers to the high priest who during Yom Kippur sacrifices for the sins 'unintentionally' (from ἀγνόημα) committed by the people.

13. For occurrences of ἐκουσίως in connection to sacrifices and gifts in the Pentateuch, see Leviticus 7:16; 23:38; Numbers 15:3; 29:39; and Deuteronomy 12:6.

(the context of Ps 54; cf. Heb 13:15–16), they are committing 'freewill' sin? Though the thought is intriguing, there are no further indications that the author refers to Psalm 53 in Hebrews 10:26.

One of the few occurrences of the noun ὑπερηφανία in the Pentateuch (Ex 18:21; Lv 26:19; Nm 15:30; Dt 17:12) is found in Deuteronomy 17:12. Deuteronomy 17:8–13 instructs Israel to carry out exactly the judicial decisions of the Levitical priests and the judge in office. A person who acts 'in arrogance' (ἐν ὑπερηφανίᾳ) by not obeying the priest or the judge, 'acts impiously' (from ἀσεβέω; Dt 17:13), and shall die. This description forms a conceptual parallel with Hebrews 10:26's reference to someone sinning 'deliberately' or 'intentionally'. Since Numbers 15:30 is viewed as the conceptual background of Hebrews 10:26 based on its use of the noun ὑπερηφανία, is it not equally possible that the conceptual background can be Deuteronomy 17:12 based on its use of the same noun?

What counts in favour of this possibility is the fact that Deuteronomy 17:6 is explicitly alluded to in Hebrews 10:28. In a sense, this makes Deuteronomy 17:12 a more likely fit than Numbers 15:30. If the author indeed has Deuteronomy 17:12 in the back of his mind, Hebrews 10:26 may have the additional message that those who sin deliberately are not obeying Christ, 'the priest in attendance' (τοῦ ἱερέως τοῦ παρεστηκότος; cf. Heb 10:21) who 'ministers in the name of the Lord your God' (λειτουργεῖν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ σου). Moreover, there might be a subtle reference to Christ ministering in 'the place' (τόπος) that God has chosen (Dt 17:8, 10), namely the heavenly sanctuary (cf. Heb 9:11–12, 24), which the addressees are called to enter with 'confidence' (παρρησία; Heb 10:19). Deliberate sin makes such an approach unthinkable.

The greatest objection to this interpretation is that Deuteronomy 17:8–13 refers to difficult judicial decisions related, among others, to 'bloodshed' (αἷμα), 'assault' (ἀφή), and 'dispute' (ἀντιλογία), which may involve sin, but it does not explicitly refer to sin like Hebrews 10:26 and Numbers 15:22–31 (note the use of ἁμαρτία in Nm 15:31). This tips the scale in favour of Numbers 15:22–31 as the conceptual background of Hebrews 10:26. Nonetheless, for the sake of the current investigation, the conceptual parallel between Deuteronomy 17:12 and Hebrews 10:26 is noteworthy.

An intertextual parallel with Deuteronomy: Hebrews 10:27

Hebrews 10:27, which is a continuation of the author's argument in Hebrews 10:26, depicts the grim expectation of those who deliberately persist in sin. For them, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

φοβερὰ δὲ τις ἐκδοχὴ κρίσεως καὶ πυρὸς ζήλος ἐσθίειν μέλλοντος τοὺς ὑπεναντίους.

but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

TABLE 5: The possible *Vorlage* of Hebrews 10:27.

Source	Source text	Translation	Keywords
Hebrews 10:27	πυρὸς ζῆλος ἐσθίειν μέλλοντος τοῦς ὑπεναντίους	A raging of fire that will consume the opponents	πῦρ; ζῆλος; ἐσθίω; οἱ ὑπεναντίοι
Isaiah 26:11 LXX	ζῆλος λήμψεται λαὸν ἀπαίδευτον, καὶ νῦν πῦρ τοῦς ὑπεναντίους ἔδεται	Jealousy will take hold of an uneducated people, and fire will now consume the opponents	πῦρ; ζῆλος; ἐσθίω; οἱ ὑπεναντίοι
Zephaniah 1:18 LXX	καὶ ἐν πυρὶ ζήλους αὐτοῦ καταναλωθήσεται πᾶσα ἡ γῆ	And in the fire of his zeal the whole earth will be consumed	πῦρ; ζῆλος; καταναλίσκω
Zephaniah 3:8 LXX	διότι ἐν πυρὶ ζήλους μου καταναλωθήσεται πᾶσα ἡ γῆ	For in the fire of my zeal all the whole earth will be consumed	πῦρ; ζῆλος; καταναλίσκω
Deuteronomy 4:24 LXX	ὅτι κύριος ὁ θεὸς σου πῦρ καταναλίσκων ἐστίν, θεὸς ζηλωτῆς	For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous god	πῦρ; ζηλωτῆς; καταναλίσκω
Deuteronomy 9:3 LXX	κύριος ὁ θεὸς σου ... πῦρ καταναλίσκων ἐστίν	The Lord your God ... is a consuming fire	πῦρ; καταναλίσκω
Psalms 78:5 LXX (79:5 MT)	ἕως πότε, κύριε, ὀργισθήσῃ εἰς τέλος, ἐκκαυθήσεται ὡς πῦρ ὁ ζῆλος σου;	Until when, O Lord, will you be angry forever, will your jealousy burn like fire?	πῦρ; ζῆλος; ἔκκαυμα

The combination of words in Hebrews 10:27 expresses the seriousness of the eschatological judgement and wrath of God (Hughes 1977:420). Of special interest is the phrase *πυρὸς ζῆλος*, which literally means ‘a zeal’ or ‘ardour of fire’. Both the NRSV and ESV translate the phrase as ‘a fury of fire’. Ellingworth (1993:535) suggests that the genitive ‘of fire’ may be a genitive of apposition, and that the *καί* linking *φοβερὰ δέ τις ἐκδοχὴ κρίσεως* and *πυρὸς ζῆλος* is epexegetic. This leads to a translation of ‘only a fearful expectation of judgement, namely a zeal that is a fire’ (my own translation).

Various passages from the Old Testament have been suggested as the possible background for the words and imagery of Hebrews 10:27. An overview of the more convincing *Vorlagen* can be seen in Table 5.

Of all these passages, the similarity between Hebrews 10:27 and Isaiah 26:11 is the strongest in terms of both keywords and thought. Regarding the former, both passages make use of the nouns *πῦρ* and *ζῆλος*, the substantive adjective *οἱ ὑπεναντίοι* and the verb *ἐσθίω*. Regarding the latter, both Isaiah 26:11 and Hebrews 10:27 refer to God’s judgement of enemies in imagery of fire. Consequently, several scholars view Hebrews 10:27 as an allusion to Isaiah 26:11 (cf. DeSilva 2000:346; Dyer 2017:98–99; Gleason 2002:114–115; Tanner 2006:68–73). Additional support for this view is the fact that the phrase ‘in a very little while’ (*μικρὸν ὅσον ὅσον*) from Isaiah 26:20 is explicitly quoted in the dual quotation of Hebrews 10:37 (alongside Hab 2:3–4).

The difference in terms of context, however, is telling, as it indicates how the author of Hebrews applies the perceived allusion: in Isaiah 26:11, God’s judgement is directed towards the enemies of Judah; in Hebrews 10:27, those who apostatise are warned that they will be considered enemies of God, and should expect his judgement.

In light of the above, it does not seem as if Hebrews 10:27 contains a reference to any specific passage from Deuteronomy. There is, however, the chance of an indirect reference to Deuteronomy in Hebrews 10:27 by means of the possibility that Isaiah 26:11 was influenced conceptually by the Book of Deuteronomy, especially the Song of Moses.

The Song of Moses is possibly one of the oldest literary pieces in the Old Testament.¹⁴ Whatever its age, the Song was familiar among the Jews in the biblical and post-biblical era: the *Canticum Mosis* is included among the Odes in Codex Alexandrinus of the LXX (Steyn 2007:154), and the Song’s occurrence in the Qumran manuscript 4QDeuteronomy¹ bears witness to its liturgical use in the Second Temple period (Lundbom 2013:980). All of this confirms the popularity of the Song, which suggests that it could easily have influenced later biblical literature, including the Book of Isaiah.

The Song of Moses also expresses the judgement of God in images of fire. Deuteronomy 32:22 LXX states:

ὅτι πῦρ ἐκκέκασται ἐκ τοῦ θυμοῦ μου, καυθήσεται ἕως ἧδου κάτω, καταφάγεται γῆν καὶ τὰ γενήματα αὐτῆς, φλέξει θεμέλια ὀρέων.

For a fire has lit up from my anger and will burn as far as Hades below; it will devour earth and its produce and will light up foundations of mountains.

Deuteronomy 32:22 contains four verbs expressing the notion of ‘burn’ (*ἐκκαίω*, *καίω*, *κατεσθίω*, *φλέγω*) alongside the noun ‘fire’ (*πῦρ*) to express God’s anger towards Israel for their idolatry and unfaithfulness (cf. Mohrmann 2023:469). Although Isaiah 26:11 does not contain any of these verbs of burning, it does contain the semantically similar verb ‘consume’ (*ἐσθίω*). The difference is that in Deuteronomy 32:22, God’s fiery anger is directed towards Israel; in Isaiah 26:11, it is directed towards the enemies of Judah. This agrees, however, with the way the author of Hebrews employs the warning in Hebrews 10:27. A few verses on in the Song, in Deuteronomy 32:27, explicit mention is made of ‘the adversaries’ (*οἱ ὑπεναντίοι*) of Israel, the same noun that is used in Isaiah 26:11. Although the context is different (it refers to the collaboration of Israel’s enemies, especially in boasting that they and not the Lord defeated Israel), it is striking that the noun, which is found only once in the Book of Deuteronomy,¹⁵ is found in the Song, and in close proximity to Deuteronomy 32:22.

There are other possible traces of Deuteronomy in Hebrews 10:27. Ellingworth (1993:535), for example, argues that the closest parallel to Hebrews 10:27 is Hebrews 12:29, which

14. See Coetsee (2023a:206–207 n. 4–6) for references.

15. The noun is found nine times in the Pentateuch: Genesis 22:17; 24:6; Exodus 1:10; 15:7; 23:27; 32:25; Leviticus 26:16; Numbers 10:9; and Deuteronomy 32:27.

contains an allusion to Deuteronomy 4:24 ('God is a consuming fire'). The only other reference to images of fire for God's judgement in Hebrews is Hebrews 6:7–8, which contains reminiscences of Deuteronomy's blessing and cursing imagery (cf. Dt 11:26–28; 28:14–66; Allen 2008:140) by warning the addressees in an agricultural image that the end of ground that produces thorns and thistles is 'to be burned over' (εις καυσιν). Finally, like Hebrews 10:27, Deuteronomy 29:19 LXX warns that God's anger and 'zeal' (ζηλος) towards the sinner who silently disowns the covenant will 'blaze out' (εκκαυθησεται from εκκατω) against him.

In conclusion, it seems best to follow other scholars in viewing Hebrews 10:27 as an allusion to Isaiah 26:11, which forms an intertextual parallel with Deuteronomy 32:22 LXX. Whether or not Isaiah 26:11 was influenced conceptually by Deuteronomy 32:22 LXX, is beyond the bounds of the current investigation. The hypothesis, however, is intriguing.

Conclusion

The article set out to investigate the possible occurrence and use of Deuteronomy in the words employed in Hebrews 10:26–31. Without denying the occurrence and use of other Old Testament passages in Hebrews 10:26–31 or the creativity of the author, the intertextual study discovered that possible traces of Deuteronomy can be found in all six verses of Hebrews 10:26–31. An overview of the findings can be seen in Table 6.

As argued above, not all these traces of Deuteronomy are equally convincing. The author's quotations of Deuteronomy 32:35a and 32:36a in Hebrews 10:30, allusion to Deuteronomy 17:6 in Hebrews 10:28 and echo of Deuteronomy 32:39–41 in Hebrews 10:31 are explicit references to the Book of Deuteronomy. Less likely, but still a possibility, is the author's application of Deuteronomy 17:6 in Hebrews 10:29. While the conceptual parallel between Numbers 15:30–31 and Deuteronomy 17:12 in Hebrews 10:26 and the intertextual parallel between Isaiah 26:11 and Deuteronomy 32:22 in Hebrews 10:27 can be confirmed, it is difficult to prove that the author deliberately (albeit indirectly) referred to these passages from Deuteronomy for the sake of his argument.

It is significant, however, that all these traces of Deuteronomy in Hebrews 10:26–31 come from two chapters in the Book of Deuteronomy, namely Deuteronomy 17 and 32. This leads to the questions: Is Hebrews 10:26–31 a warning by means of reminiscences of the Song of Moses and the legislation of Deuteronomy 17? And is there some

kind of connection between the two chapters that link them together? The fact that Deuteronomy 17 consists of three distinct pericopes, namely Deuteronomy 16:21–17:7 (forbidden forms of worship), Deuteronomy 17:8–13 (legal decisions by priests and judges), and Deuteronomy 17:14–20 (laws concerning Israel's king), makes it difficult to identify a single theme linking Deuteronomy 17 and 32. The greatest common denominator is that both Deuteronomy 17 and 32 address idolatry: Deuteronomy 17:2–7 legislates that a person who is found committing idolatry must be put to death; Deuteronomy 32:16–21 and 32:37–38 bemoans Israel's idolatry, and indicates how it provoked God to judgement.

If the author of Hebrews warns the addressees against the nature and dire consequences of apostasy in Hebrews 10:26–31 in words and reminiscences of Deuteronomy 17 and 32, the interpretation of the passage boils down to the following: the addressees are viewed as disobedient to Christ, the priest in attendance in the place chosen by God (Heb 10:26; Dt 17:12). In addition, they are viewed as covenant breakers against whom God's fiery wrath burns (Heb 10:27; Dt 32:22). Their sin of apostasy is as good as idolatry (Heb 10:28; Dt 17:6), and their brazen contempt witnesses against them, confirming that they are deserving of death (Heb 10:29; Dt 17:6). Consequently, God's judgement is not directed towards the enemies of his people, but the apostatising addressees themselves (Heb 10:30; Dt 32:35a, 36a). This is nothing short of terrible, as God is the only living, sovereign God, from whom there is no escape, and who will repay his enemies (Heb 10:31; Dt 32:39–41).

The purpose of Hebrews 10:26–31, just like that of Deuteronomy 17 and 32, is not to condemn the addressees. Rather, Deuteronomy 17 and 32 are used in Hebrews 10:26–31 to call the addressees to repentance, since there is still hope, as the subsequent passage in Hebrews indicates (Heb 10:32–39).

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TABLE 6: Possible traces of Deuteronomy in Hebrews 10:26–31

Hebrews	Deuteronomy	Type of reference
Hebrews 10:26	Deuteronomy 17:12	Conceptual parallel
Hebrews 10:27	Deuteronomy 32:22	Intertextual parallel
Hebrews 10:28	Deuteronomy 17:6	Allusion
Hebrews 10:29	Deuteronomy 17:6	Application
Hebrews 10:30	Deuteronomy 32:35a, 36a	Quotations
Hebrews 10:31	Deuteronomy 32:39–41	Echo

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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