

JUDGEMENT OR VINDICATION?

DEUTERONOMY 32 IN HEBREWS 10:30

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Summary

There is a case for the translation ‘vindicate’ rather than ‘judge’ in Hebrews 10:30, which is itself a biblical quotation from Deuteronomy 32. Four arguments contribute. The first is lexical: the verb κρίνω often does mean ‘vindicate’ in the LXX. The second is intertextual: Hebrews adopts Deuteronomy sensitively, and Deuteronomy has vindication in view. The third is text-critical: an unusual text-form in Hebrews raises the possibility that targumic readings may have insight to give. The fourth is rhetorical: the reading ‘vindicate’ sharpens our awareness of the author’s persuasive strategy in this part of Hebrews.

I. Introduction

The NRSV reading of this short sentence in Hebrews 10:30 – ‘The Lord will judge his people’ – seems a straightforward rendering of the Greek, κρινεῖ κύριος τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ. The Greek is itself a translation of a line of scripture, from Deuteronomy 32:36.¹ This essay, however, puts the case for a different understanding of Hebrews 10:30, and suggests how such a reading would connect more broadly with the

¹ I assume that the verse quoted is indeed Deut. 32:36, rather than Ps. 135:14 [134:14 LXX], where the same sequence of words appears. For earlier in the very same verse, in Heb. 10:30, there is a brief citation from Deut. 32:35. The suggestion, then, that Hebrews goes on directly to quote from the next verse of Deuteronomy seems entirely plausible – and much nearer to hand than an excursion into Psalms. Certainly Hebrews sometimes combines texts from different biblical books into a tight argument: 1:5-14 is the prime example. But there is also an example of two adjacent OT verses being cited one after the other: Isa. 8:17-18 at Heb. 2:13. I suggest that the same has happened at 10:30. The use of the conjunction πάλιν in both 2:13 and 10:30, to link the two adjacent quotes, may give modest support to this suggestion – although Hebrews can also use πάλιν to link quotes from diverse sources (1:5; 2:13; 4:5).

argument and situation of Hebrews, and also with the OT source of the text. Two concerns prompt the enquiry.

a. The verb ‘judge’ does not directly reflect the meaning of the OT text in its OT context. A number of modern Bible versions offer ‘vindicate’ (or something like it) in Deuteronomy and ‘judge’ in Hebrews.² Those translations lead one to suppose that a positive statement in Deuteronomy has been put to a different and negative use in Hebrews. So did the author to the Hebrews misunderstand Deuteronomy? Or might he have used his text more subtly than some translators have allowed?

b. The positive reading ‘vindicate’ fits better with both the social context of Hebrews and the thought of chapter 10. The readers are a minority within their community, and face pressure as Christians from elements in the wider society. Some are tempted to give up and leave the Christian fellowship (10:26). If they do this, they will – implicitly, even if not actively – be changing sides and joining the group that is causing the trouble. The writer urges against this, because he believes that God is going to intervene. The Lord will vindicate his people, and rescue them from opposition and distress. That hope can motivate the readers to hold on in Christian faith, so that they will be on the right side when God acts. All this fits the argument a little later, in 10:35-39, where Christian confidence and endurance will be rewarded, the Lord will come, and by faithfulness the readers may save their souls.

These two points do not make a firm or full case for the reading ‘vindicate’. But they provide reasons for looking again at what might be said for such a translation.

II. Some recent interpretation

The translation suggested would undoubtedly run against the main consensus of recent exegesis and commentary. Craig Koester, for example, says,

‘These words come from OT contexts (Deut 32:36; Ps 135:14 [134:14 LXX]) that speak of God providing judgment or vindication for his people against their

² Among English Bibles the AV reads ‘judge’ in both texts, as do the NIV (1978 ed.) and the REB; the NEB has ‘give justice’ in Deuteronomy and ‘judge’ in Hebrews; the RSV and NRSV give ‘vindicate’ and ‘judge’. The Luther Bible reads ‘Recht schaffen’ (vindicate) in Deuteronomy, and ‘richten’ (judge) in Hebrews.

enemies. Hebrews, however, speaks of God judging the sin of his own people – an idea that was common in the OT (e.g. Exod 34:7; Num 14:18; Ps 99:8).³

This sort of explanation is typical of a lot of recent commentaries. Some of these commentators go on to deal carefully with the contrast they find between OT and NT uses of the text.⁴ Yet very few writers opt for the meaning ‘vindicate’ in Hebrews. The thrust of this line of the letter, they argue, is directed against the readers: it is a direct warning rather than any kind of assurance. The only recent article to argue for ‘vindicate’ appears to be by James Swetnam, and the most recent commentator to do so Franz Delitzsch in the 1850s.⁵

Swetnam’s reading depends quite heavily upon his ‘bipolar’ interpretation of the adjective φοβερός.⁶ In verse 27 he takes it as negative in tone, meaning ‘fearful’, but reads it positively in verse 31, to describe the ‘awesome’ experience of vindication. He thereby traces a major division in the overall structure of Hebrews, between negative and positive paraenetic sections, right in the middle of verse 30.⁷ Although I agree with Swetnam’s reading of κρινεῖν as ‘vindicate’, I have not wished to pursue these other points, either his distinctive reading of φοβερός as ‘awesome’ or his analysis of the letter’s structure.⁸

Delitzsch comments,

‘The sense of *din* [written in Hebrew] is in both places [Dt 32:36 and Ps 135:14], that Yahweh will vindicate his people against their enemies [‘Recht schaffen wird gegen dessen Feinde’], and the Greek translation cannot have had a

³ C. Koester, *Hebrews* (Anchor Bible; New York, Doubleday, 2001): 453.

⁴ E.g. F. F. Bruce *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rev. ed. 1990). ‘In the immediate context of this part of the Song [of Moses] the vengeance is evidently directed against Israel’s enemies ... But much of the Song is an indictment of Israel’s unfaithfulness and a warning of God’s ensuing judgment against her ...’ (pp. 264ff, n. 152). Bruce goes on: “‘Yahweh will judge his people.’ This certainly means that he will execute judgment on their behalf, vindicating their cause against their enemies, but it carries with it the corollary that, on the same principles of impartial righteousness, he will execute judgment against them when they forsake his covenant.’ (p. 265).

⁵ J. Swetnam, ‘Hebrews 10,30-31: A Suggestion’, *Biblica* 75 (1994): 388-394; Franz Delitzsch, *Der Hebräerbrief* (1857; repr. Giessen and Basel: Brunnen, 1989, with introduction by O. Michel).

⁶ ‘Bipolar’ is Swetnam’s word: see especially pp. 391-392 of his *Biblica* article.

⁷ Swetnam makes this particular point briefly on p. 392 of his *Biblica* article, and develops it more fully in ‘A Possible Structure of Hebrews 3,7–10,39’, *Melita Theologica* 45 (1994): 127-141.

⁸ Indeed section VII below, on ‘The Reading in Context’, runs counter to these points.

different meaning, for the parallel member reads in both cases καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ παρακληθήσεται. The LXX uses κρίνειν, by no means always in the sense of punitive judgment, but also to indicate favourable decision on someone's behalf ... so the author uses the citation, not counter to its original meaning, but in accord with it, that the Lord will take a judicial decision for his church against those who betray and harass them, that he will bring about their vindication and punish those others ['dass er ihr Recht schaffen und diese strafen wird'].⁹

With this line of argument I agree, and aim here to extend and strengthen it.

III. Hebrews and Deuteronomy: an overview

Moses' Song, which takes up most of Deuteronomy 32, raises some very distinctive issues for scholars. Its poetic structure, some unusual vocabulary, and questions about its age, all combine to distinguish it from adjacent material.¹⁰ We do not know whether any of these issues would have occurred to the writer to the Hebrews. But since Deuteronomy as a whole is a quarry where Hebrews digs a good deal of material, we shall look at chapter 32 within that wider exegetical context.

John Dunnill has argued that Hebrews adopts Deuteronomy largely because of the way in which Deuteronomy fuses horizons in time and space.¹¹ Deuteronomy shows Israel standing at the edge of the promised land, hearing Moses' final sermons, facing the alternatives of blessing and curse. Through this portrayal, it seeks to place its own readers in the shoes of their ancestors, and to engage them afresh with the commitments of covenant and law, with the life of blessing and the fear of curse, as if it were all brand-new. Deuteronomy reminds its readers that their ancestors' promise is their promise too. God is one, the covenant is one, the people are one. So all time is one time, and all places are as one place. Wherever they are, and whenever they hear the beckoning word, the people stand before God as their forbears did.

Hebrews, too, reckons with a single moment – the death of Christ – as having a time-spanning and space-crossing character. Though

⁹ Delitzsch (1857/1989), 500 (my translation).

¹⁰ P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976): 373-375; A. D. H. Mayes *Deuteronomy* (NCB; Grand Rapids/London: Eerdmans/Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1979): 380-382; J. H. Tigay *Deuteronomy* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996): 508-513.

¹¹ J. Dunnill, *Covenant and Sacrifice in the Letter to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: University Press, 1992): esp. 129-143.

historical, the cross is also eternal. It is an earthly event, yet it shapes the life of heaven. Though physical, specific and completed, it has a continuing capacity to enter the inner nature of every believer, and to kindle fresh moral vigour and holiness within. Though itself an occasion of death, it deals life to others. At every time and in every place, the Christian may 'draw near'.

In this respect, argues Dunnill, Hebrews and Deuteronomy adopt similar strategies. Deuteronomy places its readers at the 'edge of the land', and invites them to go forward in faith to realise their covenant blessings. Hebrews invites its own receiver community to go on to completion, along the pilgrim path that Jesus has pioneered; Jesus is ahead and above, yet also beside.

This approach means that, in each of the books, an event can be 'seen' from two different distances at once, both historical and contemporary. And this is how Hebrews uses Deuteronomy, knowing that the book speaks out of the past, and yet also likening the readers of the letter to the people of the wilderness era. Even though they are wearied by the journey, they must press on to the end. That is the hermeneutical frame into which Hebrews takes up Deuteronomy 32.

Deuteronomy 32 itself shows Israel facing temptation, danger and assault. It tells of election, guidance, protection and provision (vv. 8-14). Then come infidelity and covenantal amnesia on the part of the people; they feel the pull of other gods (vv. 15-18). God responds by chastising Israel (vv. 19ff), a punishment that includes war (v. 25), and the depredations of neighbours. But God stays his hand before the process reaches total ruin, lest other nations think they have won these battles in their own strength and that his covenant with Israel counts for nothing (vv. 26-30). Eventually he will show Israel's adversaries his power, and rescue his people from calamity. His judgments may have been severe, but they are not total. Ultimately he will avenge, defend and justify his troubled children.

Ostensibly this chapter shows a particular historical moment. The pilgrim journey is nearly over, settlement and security are not far away. Yet within the internal hermeneutic of Deuteronomy, this is the readers' time. They are to see themselves within the chapter, and to hear their trials and challenges told by it. So readers of Moses' Song might find in it resonances of their own temptations, of threats they faced from neighbours, and of God's vindicating purpose and power around and for them. It is, we shall argue, a very appropriate text for

the readers of Hebrews. But first we examine the two verses from which Hebrews quotes.

IV. The verses in Deuteronomy

1. Text and meaning

Deuteronomy 32:35 and 36 read (in the NRSV):

³⁵Vengeance is mine, and recompense,
for the time when their foot shall slip;
Because the day of their calamity is at hand,
their doom comes swiftly.
³⁶Indeed the Lord will vindicate his people,
have compassion upon his servants,
When he sees that their power is gone,
neither bond nor free remaining.

The first line of verse 36 is our main focus of interest. The Hebrew verb is *yadin*, the qal imperfect of the verb *din*. The opening entry for *din* in Koehler-Baumgartner reads ‘*Recht schaffen*’,¹² in English ‘plead one’s cause’. But perhaps something more active is implied. ‘*Recht schaffen*’ means ‘accomplish right, bring about right’ (Prov. 31:5, 8). There is an element of effect, not merely of appeal, when God acts to plead his cause. The most apparent meaning of this line of Hebrew text is not merely that God will speak on his people’s behalf, but that God will establish justice for them and in their situation.

There is a counter-view that the verb *yadin* should here be translated ‘judge’ rather than ‘vindicate’. Indeed this argument is made by Randall Gleason in a recent *Tyndale Bulletin*.¹³ He reads the first two lines of verse 36 as an antithetic parallelism, with the verb ‘judge’ in the first line standing in contrast to ‘have compassion’ in the second. However, there may be two reasons to question this reading. First, the two lines before and the two after are in synthetic parallelism, and one may expect a similar construction between them. Second, the flow of thought in Deuteronomy 32 has Israel’s enemies in view in verse 35. It

¹² L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Liberos* (Leiden: Brill, 1953): 208.

¹³ R. C. Gleason, ‘The Eschatology of the Warning in Hebrews 10.26-31’, *TynBul* 53 (2002): 97-120, n. 71, p. 118.

is they whose ‘foot slips’, whose ‘day of destruction is near’.¹⁴ That run of thought coheres most naturally with our reading in verse 36 that the Lord ‘vindicates’ his people.

2. Hebrew into Greek

The author to the Hebrews, of course, cites a Greek version which matches the reading of the LXX – as do most OT citations in Hebrews.¹⁵ In fact the earlier citation in Hebrews 10:30 from Deuteronomy 32:35 is an exception to this rule: it differs from the LXX and we shall return to consider that point.¹⁶ But the first half of 32:36 presents no such complication. The wording conforms precisely to the LXX, which is itself a formal translation of the Hebrew.¹⁷ The Septuagint translates the verb *yadin* as κρινεῖ, and the Letter to the Hebrews follows suit. The LXX renders the two verses as follows:¹⁸

³⁵ ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἐκδιθήσεως ἀνταποδώσω,
ἐν καιρῷ, ὅταν σφαλῇ ὁ πούς αὐτῶν·
ὅτι ἐγγὺς ἡμέρα ἀπολείας αὐτῶν,
καὶ πάρεστιν ἔτοιμα ὑμῖν.
³⁶ ὅτι κρινεῖ κύριος τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ
καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ παρακληθήσεται·
εἶδεν γὰρ παραλελυμένους αὐτοῦς
καὶ ἐκλελοιπότες ἐν ἐπαγωγῇ καὶ παρειμένους.

My translation of the above is:

³⁵ On the day of vengeance I shall repay,
at the moment when their foot slips;
for their day of destruction is near;
it is at hand and ready for you.
³⁶ For the Lord will vindicate his people
and will have compassion upon his servants,
for he saw that their strength had gone,
that they were deserted, distressed and helpless.

¹⁴ Among recent commentators this is the view of G. Braulik, *Deuteronomium II* (NEB; Würzburg: Echter, 1992): 234; I. Cairns *Word and Presence* (ITC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992): 287; Craigie (1976): 387; Tigay (1996): 311.

¹⁵ On this general point see, for example, Koester, *Hebrews*: 116 or H.-F. Weiss, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1991): 173.

¹⁶ See below, in section VI, ‘A known text?’

¹⁷ Nestle-Aland²⁷ notes two textual variants: the inversion of the two words κρινεῖ κύριος, and the insertion of ὅτι before them. But these do not materially affect the point made here.

¹⁸ This is the text both of A. Rahlfs, *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1935) and of *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum* vol III.2, *Deuteronomium*, ed. J. W. Wevers (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1977).

3. *The meaning of κρίνω*

The translation above takes the first two lines of verse 36 as parallel.¹⁹ But there is still a question about whether the author to the Hebrews would read κρίνω as ‘vindicate’. Clearly κρίνω does not always mean this in the LXX. It may mean negative and punitive judgment (Ezek. 38:22). It can refer to the ruling of national life by a powerful leader (Judg. 3:10), or the discerning judgments of a wise king (1 Kgs 8:32). It may denote, when followed by the phrase ἀνὰ μέσον, God’s umpiring a dispute between two parties (Gen. 31:53). But there remain a number of texts where κρίνω speaks about the sort of discriminating oversight that is quick to spot the needs of the weak and to act accordingly (1 Sam. 2:10; Ps. 72:2). From there it is a short distance to the places where κρίνω means, quite positively, that a judge acts to vindicate, defend, establish and protect the cause of a particular individual or group of people.

There are about twenty such places in the OT.²⁰ In about two thirds of these, κρίνω is followed by a noun or pronoun in the accusative. The rest show a construction with the dative.²¹ However, the dative usage may not shed much light on the accusative texts.²² For while the dative consistently implies vindication, the accusative construction, which appears in Hebrews and Deuteronomy, has a wider set of meanings – as the paragraph above illustrates. Even so, the following verses remain: all of them show κρίνω with the accusative and all imply that judgment will lead to a favourable outcome.²³

Ps. 7:9b	κρίνόν με, κύριε, κατὰ τὴν δικαιοσύνην μου
Ps. 25:1	κρίνόν με, κύριε, ὅτι ἐγὼ ἐν ἀκακίᾳ μου ἐπορεύθη

¹⁹ An argument for reading the Hebrew this way is offered in section 4.1, above. Both parts of that argument apply equally to the LXX reading.

²⁰ Commentators on Hebrews and Deuteronomy mention some of these texts in their discussions of Heb. 10:30 and Deut. 32:36: in particular H. Braun *An die Hebräer* (HNT; Tübingen: Mohr, 1984): 324; F. Delitzsch (1857/1989): 500; and Tigay (1996): 312, 405 n. 148. Other verses in this list were culled from E. Hatch and H. A. Redpath, *Concordance to the Septuagint* (repr. Graz: Akademische, 1954).

²¹ Gen. 30:6; 2 Sam. 18:19, 31; Ps. 9:39; Isa. 1:17, 23; 11:4.

²² So F. Schröger *Der Verfasser des Hebräerbriefes als Schriftausleger* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1968): 181. Use of the dative construction in the NT period is outlined (albeit briefly) in the Bauer-Aland lexicon: W. Bauer, K. Aland and B. Aland *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des neuen Testaments* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1988). The entry for κρίνω is on pp. 916ff: the fifth category of meaning given is ‘Recht schaffen’, to be followed by the dative. The texts cited as examples are 1 Clement 8.4 and, from the LXX, Isa. 1.17.

²³ Chapter and verse numbers for the Psalm texts follow the LXX numbering.

Ps. 34:24		κρίνόν με κατὰ τὴν δικαιοσύνην μου
Ps. 42:1		κρίνόν με, ὁ θεός, καὶ δίκασον τὴν δίκην μου
Ps. 53:3	*	ἐν τῇ δυνάμει σου κρίνόν με
Ps. 71:4		κρινεῖ τοὺς πτωχοὺς τοῦ λαοῦ
Ps. 81:3		κρίνατε ὀρφανὸν καὶ πτωχόν
Ps. 134:14	*	text as Deut. 32:36
Prov. 31:8	*	κρίνε πάντα ὑγιῶς
Prov. 31:9	*	διάκρινε δὲ πένητα καὶ ἀσθενῆ
Isa. 51:22		ὁ κρίνων τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ

and to these we may add, from the inter-testamental corpus:

Test. Judah 24:6²⁴ κρίναι καὶ σῶσαι πάντας τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους κύριον

In only four of these texts (asterisked*) does κρίνω translate *din*, which is the Hebrew verb for ‘judge’ in Deuteronomy 32:36.²⁵ But we need not depend only on these four: our concern is more directly with the meaning of κρίνω in the LXX than with its derivation. In all the texts listed above, God’s judging is described positively; a saving, redeeming, vindicating judgment is in view. To read κρίνω in this way is not marginal, erratic or odd, but a recognisable LXX usage.

This line of exegesis receives indirect but significant support in an article by Richard Beaton on the meaning of the cognate noun κρίσις in Matthew 12.²⁶ Beaton’s focus of interest is a Matthean OT citation, so he surveys various meanings of κρίσις in the LXX. He finds that κρίσις may often mean ‘justice’ rather than ‘judgment’ – a positive, redemptive justice, dealing hope and righteousness to the weary and worn. He refers especially to Psalm 72 [71 LXX]; Isaiah 11:1-5; 51:4-6; 1 Enoch 96–105 (esp. 102–104); and Psalms of Solomon 17.

This shows that in the LXX the verb κρίνω (and its cognate noun κρίσις) can connote vindication, deliverance, upholding rights, and giving or applying judgment in someone’s favour. The author to the Hebrews, who was no mean reader of the LXX, would surely have been sensitive to this possible connotation of the verb and able to carry it forward in his use of a verse like Deuteronomy 32:36. Indeed the context of that verse serves with special relevance the pastoral situation which Hebrews addresses.

²⁴ Text from *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Critical Edition of the Greek Text*, ed. M. de Jonge (Leiden: Brill, 1978).

²⁵ In Isaiah 51:22 κρίνω translates *rib*; in the other OT texts listed κρίνω translates *shaphat*; there is no Hebrew for Testament of Judah.

²⁶ R. Beaton, ‘Messiah and Justice: A Key to Matthew’s Use of Isaiah 42.1-4?’, *JSNT* 75 (1999): 5-23.

V. The situation in Hebrews

In Hebrews too both temptation and suffering are in view. We read of serious persecution, borne with credit (10:32-34). Another trial is ahead (12:7), and some Christians known to the readers are enduring prison and torture (13:3). The social cost of Christian profession is a present and pressing issue (13:13).

Some readers have been tempted to end their Christian association and revert to 'the natural alternative identity base' in wider Judaism.²⁷ So far as the author is concerned, this would be apostasy. The strong language in 10:26-29 indicates a very decisive sin, amounting to abandonment of the Christian way.²⁸ The problem is not simply one of internal church discipline, but concerns people who are moving out and placing themselves, socially and religiously, in other company. In this context, the judgment of God, when it comes, will separate those who leave (v. 25) and the 'opponents' (v. 27) from those who endure and save their souls (vv. 36-39).

Deuteronomy 32 then provides a biblical precedent in which both religious temptation and external pressure figure, an echo in various ways of the readers' situation in Hebrews. For they too are a company of believers under threat from 'opponents'.²⁹ As in Deuteronomy, they are urged to keep clear of apostasy, and to look beyond present troubles. To align themselves with the religious ways of neighbours would be foolish and faithless. To stay among the people whom God will vindicate is a reason for hope. It would be a 'fearful thing' (v. 31) to be among those against whom this judgment is exercised.

²⁷ The brief quotation is from Dunnill (1992): 24-25, who argues that the recipients are 'Christians for whom Judaism offers the natural alternative identity-base, and who are vulnerable to theoretical and social pressures to ... turn aside, to that alternative ... the kind of knowledge of the Septuagint assumed here could only be expected of those ... who were, actually or effectively, Jews'. Judaism was the wider matrix from which the messianic communities who believed in Jesus drew most of their earliest members (including the recipients of Hebrews), and within which they viewed and lived their life. The recipients of Hebrews were Jewish by background. If any of them left the Christian group, they would find their place in the wider Jewish community.

²⁸ Not only in 10:26-29, but elsewhere in Hebrews too, the strength of language in the warning passages suggests that apostasy is in view.

²⁹ The word ὑπεναντίοι describes Israel's enemies in the LXX of Deut. 32:27, and the same term is taken up in Heb. 10:27, to refer to the church's adversaries. This adds weight to the view that Hebrews has reached with knowledge and insight into this chapter of Deuteronomy.

Was the writer to the Hebrews aware of the context in Deuteronomy from which this text came? One further consideration may support this possibility. There is a long reflection on the Exodus journey in Hebrews 3:1–4:13, as precedent for the church’s pilgrimage to God’s final rest. Then from 5:1 the epistle takes up an extended consideration of the priesthood of Jesus Christ. This discussion, involving covenant and sacrifice too, only ends at 10:18, where the letter turns towards its long final exhortation. As we leave the section on priesthood, there is an inclusion with the way we came in. The transition paragraph at the end (10:19–25) has a number of verbal correspondences to the one at the start (4:14–16).³⁰ Might there not, then, be a recollection of the place we came in from, of wilderness, in the verses that follow?

For the theme of journeying has not been forgotten. It will be important in the later exhortations, beginning with 12:1. The writer has kept this theme in mind from chapters 3 to 12.³¹ That may support the thought that he recognised the journeying context of Deuteronomy, and of the citations in 10:30. And if he understood where his text came from, he might well have been sensitive to its original meaning.

VI. A known text?

1. *Hebrews and Romans*

Some support for the interpretation above comes from the one other place where the NT quotes from Deuteronomy 32:35–36: the first line of verse 35 is used in Romans 12:19.³² In two respects we may connect the uses of this text in Romans and Hebrews.

³⁰ ἔχοντες, ἀρχιερέα μέγαν, κρατῶμεν τῆς ὁμολογίας, προσερχόμεθα, μετὰ παρρησίας (4:14–16) echo in ἔχοντες, παρρησίαν, ἱερέα μέγαν, προσερχόμεθα, κατέχουμεν τὴν ὁμολογίαν (10:19–23). See also W. L. Lane, *Hebrews* (WBC 47 vol. 1; Dallas: Word, 1991): xciii – drawing on work by G. H. Guthrie, now published as *The structure of Hebrews: A text-linguistic analysis* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

³¹ The resonance of 3:1 and 12:2 (κατανοήσατε τὸν ἀπόστολον καὶ ἀρχιερέα τῆς ὁμολογίας ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν with ἀφορῶντες εἰς τὸν τῆς πίστεως ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτὴν Ἰησοῦν) may suggest a continuity of thought and purpose.

³² H. W. Attridge, *Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989): 295 n. 55, suggests that several references to Deut. 32 in the NT come at points where either the fragility of the Christian community or Jewish rejection of the gospel is in view. He mentions Rom. 10:19; 12:19; 1 Cor. 15:20, 22; Phil. 2.15. This is a helpful insight, but may not easily be generalised. There are many citations or allusions to Deut. 32 in the NT (thirty six, most of them allusions, are listed in Nestle-Aland²⁷: 78) and one could not claim that all of these appear in discussions of fragility or Jewish rejection. The

First, the context in Romans is one of reassurance in the face of hostility. Christians should not seek vengeance, but should leave the matter in the hands of God, who will sort the situation out in his own time and way. This corresponds to the pastoral context of Hebrews, where the church is also urged to remain firm under persecution and to trust in God's vindication, however harsh their present trials.

The second correspondence between the Romans and Hebrews citations is in text-form, which is the same in both places and is rather distinctive. The wording of the quote lies between that of the Masoretic Text and that of the Septuagint. The wordings are (in English translation):

Deut. 32.35 MT	Vengeance is mine, and recompense
Deut. 32.35 LXX	On the day of vengeance I shall repay
Rom. 12.19	Vengeance is mine, I shall repay
Heb. 10.30	Vengeance is mine, I shall repay

Commentators offer two possible explanations of these data. Either there was a common oral tradition in this period, known within Christian circles and possibly more widely. Or there was an alternative written text-type, diverging from both LXX and MT.³³ We consider these possibilities one at a time.

The first hypothesis is that the use of Deuteronomy 32:35 in Hebrews 10 represents a common oral lore, a text well-known among early Christians that surfaces in more than one place. This text is used in Romans to encourage the persecuted, and to shape a mood of calm confidence under pressure. This observation strengthens, a little, the argument for tracing the same mood in Hebrews, and reading 'vindicate' in the citation of Deuteronomy 32:36 that immediately follows.

2. The relevance of the targums: verse 35

The second suggestion, of a distinctive written text-type, would prevent us making such a direct link between the texts in Hebrews and Romans. But we may have other access to this textual tradition, from the

quotations, for example, of 32:43 at Heb. 1:6 and Rom. 15:10 would not easily fit these categories. For that reason we work here on a narrower front, and look simply at Rom. 12:19, which has some clear-cut and relevant insight to offer.

³³ These two possibilities are mentioned by Koester, *Hebrews*: 453 and are outlined more fully by Erich Grässer, *An die Hebräer* (EKK, 3 vols; Zürich/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger/Neukirchener, 1990, 1993, 1997): 3.50. Both mention that the form found in Hebrews appears also in the targums, which is a point we pursue below.

targums. They read as follows, at Deuteronomy 32:35 (again in English translation):³⁴

Onqelos	Before me is punishment and I will dispense it
Neofiti	Vengeance is mine and I am he who will repay
Ps-Jon	Punishment is before me and I will repay
Fragment	Vengeance and retribution are his

Clearly there is a good match in three of these targums to the text-form found in Hebrews and Romans. (The Fragment Targum, with its use of two nouns, is nearer to the Masoretic Text.) That may suggest some contact between the interpretive tradition that led into the targums and the early Christian use of this text.

3. *The relevance of the targums: verse 36*

When we look on at the targum versions of verse 36, we find the following readings:

Onqelos	For the Lord will judge the case of his people and the cause of his righteous servants will be avenged
Neofiti	For the Lord judges in his good mercies the judgments of his people the children of Israel and he is remorseful over the humiliation of his servants who are just
Ps-Jon	For the Memra of the Lord judges mercifully the case of his people Israel and there will be pity before him for the evil that he will decree upon his servants
Fragment	For he will vindicate: For the Memra of the Lord, in his good mercies, will vindicate His people, the House of Israel; and he will be remorseful for His righteous servants

In all four versions God's judgment is for Israel's good. This is a vindicating, pitying, restoring work – in favour of God's people, not against them. If there was any contact – even indirect – between the

³⁴ Targum texts in translation are taken from M. McNamara et al. (ed.), *The Aramaic Bible* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark): vol. 5A, *Targum Neofiti: Deuteronomy* (M. McNamara, 1997); vol. 5B, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Deuteronomy* (E. G. Clarke, 1998); vol. 9, *Targum Onqelos to Deuteronomy* (B. Grossfeld, 1988). The Fragment Targum comes from M. L. Klein, *Genizah Manuscripts of Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch*, 2 vols (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1986).

targumic tradition and the use of this text in Hebrews, we might expect a positive reading of the verb ‘judge’ from verse 36.

Either explanation, then, of the textual similarity between Hebrews 10:30a and Romans 12:19 – direct oral contact or common dependence on a distinctive text-type – tends to support the possibility that ‘judge’ means ‘vindicate’ in Hebrews 10.30b. If there is direct contact, then since Romans invokes this passage in Deuteronomy to encourage the persecuted, Hebrews may be doing the same. Whereas if there is a common textual *Vorlage*, this is similar to the text-forms appearing in the targum tradition; therefore we may find in the targums an indication of how verse 36 would have been read by the writer to the Hebrews. These are not compelling arguments, but in either case they help to argue for a positive reading of the verb κρίνω in Hebrews 10:30.

VII. The reading in context

Finally, we look at how the reading ‘vindicate’ contributes to the exegesis of the adjacent verses in Hebrews.

After a long exposition of the priesthood and sacrifice of Jesus, from 5:1 to 10:18, a transition to exhortation begins from 10:19. The readers are urged to ‘draw near’ (v. 22), to hold fast their confession (v. 23), to stir one another up to love and good works (v. 24) and to carry on meeting together (v. 25). This last point is vital. It is not merely about how often one comes to church, but it asks the readers whether they are committed to staying in the Christian group, or on the point of abandoning their Christian links and moving out.

Verses 26-27 then set verse 25 in theological context, by talking about believers who willingly sin, after once coming to know the truth. Apostasy is in view, and it is a critical matter. No other sacrifice is available for the person who steps aside from the sacrifice of Christ (v. 26), but only ‘a fearful prospect of judgment’ (v. 27). Such a person would be linked implicitly with those who have made the church’s life difficult.³⁵

³⁵ Although I took issue with Gleason’s reading of Deut. 32:36 (section 4.1, above), the setting he suggests for Hebrews would connect well with the line I take here in section 7. He inclines to the view that the recipients lived in Palestine either shortly before or during the first Jewish revolt, and were under particular threat from militant Jewish patriots (Gleason, ‘Eschatology of the Warning’: esp. 100-103). He then reads

Yet the word ‘opponents’ (τοὺς ὑπεναντίους, v. 27) creates some rhetorical space between readers and text. Within the course of a sentence, the author distances the readers a little from the gravity of his warning. His most solemn words apply, as he hopes, to someone else. So the grammar shifts from the embrace of the first person plural to the more detached third person: from ἡμῶν (v. 26) to τοὺς ὑπεναντίους (v. 27), ἀθετήσας τις (v. 28) and ὁ ... καταπατήσας, καὶ ... ἡγησάμενος ... καὶ ... ἐνυβρίσας (v. 29). Even when the second person δοκεῖτε appears (v. 29), it involves only by asking for opinion. The rhetoric of the text invites the readers to stand over against ‘the opponents’, to see themselves in a different light, and to hold back from going out to join them.

Out of this perspective the first person returns: οἶδαμεν (v. 30). Christians ‘know’ that God will right the wrongs done against them. Vengeance and vindication are a divisive process. Christians look for the positive side of vindication. But even vindication is still κρίσις, and has a sharp edge, against those on whom it bears. For those people it will be ‘a fearful thing’ (v. 31) to fall into God’s hands. Yet the text expresses this in an implicitly distancing way, in language that recalls what was said of ‘opponents’ in verse 27. The ‘fearful prospect’ (vv. 27, 31) is for those outside, rather than for the readers who heed the warnings of the letter and persist in faith. The writer is in fellowship with them and can say ‘we’ and ‘you’. But he has used third-person language to describe a path and position he wants them to avoid.

Verses 32-34 then look back to persecution which the readers had borne bravely, confident that a secure future was ahead. In this section, where the ideas are more assuring, the rhetorical gap starts to close. Memories are recalled in the second person, and they are creditable: ἀναμνησθε ... ὑπεμείνατε ... συνεπαθήσατε ... προσεδέξασθε. With these in mind, the present period of difficulty is surely not a time for the readers to cast aside their παρρησία, the believing ‘boldness’ with which they faced previous trouble: the verb ἀποβάλητε is in the second person (v. 35). For the Lord will come, to help those who live

‘going outside the camp’ (13:13) in the context of the Jerusalem church’s flight to Pella (p. 120, n. 73). They are not to succumb to the pressure upon them, but to adhere steadily to the distinctiveness of their Christian profession. I suggest that the coming ‘crisis’ and the prospect of avoiding it are then two sides of one coin, judgment and vindication. The expectation would have something of the sense of a new Passover (cf. Heb. 11:28).

by faith (vv. 37-38). If they endure they will grasp the promise: again we find the directness of second person verbs, ἔχετε ... κομίσηθε (v. 36). Surely they will not fall back and perish, but will press on in the faith that can save their souls. The chapter ends on a note of assurance and confidence, with first-person forms, ἡμεῖς ... ἐσμεν (v. 39). Having pressed the readers confidently into the path of faith, not only by the substance but also by the rhetoric of his argument, the author goes on to outline the nature, cost and effects of faith more fully in chapter 11.

VIII. Conclusion

This essay has suggested that the verb κρινεῖν in Hebrews 10:30 means ‘vindicate’ or ‘judge in favour of’, rather than ‘condemn’ or ‘judge against’. There are four arguments.

First, this verb can mean ‘vindicate’ and often does have a positive flavour in the LXX. The author of Hebrews would be able to recognise this.

Secondly, the writer to the Hebrews adopts Deuteronomy, in such a way as to make its message contemporary for his own readers. In addition the situation depicted in Deuteronomy 32 matches that addressed in Hebrews, in the themes of temptation, persecution and (importantly) final vindication.

Thirdly, Deuteronomy 32:35 is used in Romans, in identical text-form to Hebrews 10:30a, referring to God judging those who persecute his people. The same thought may therefore be in view in Hebrews. Furthermore, the similarity of the text-form found in Romans and Hebrews to targumic readings of Deuteronomy 32:35 suggests that the targums to verse 36 may reflect an interpretation that Hebrews too has known and assumed.

Fourthly, the reading ‘vindicate’ fits the context in Hebrews. In particular it gives insight into the author’s persuasive use of first-, second- and third-person forms, to associate the readers implicitly with his hopes and to distance them from his fears.³⁶

³⁶ I am grateful to a Cambridge colleague Dr Arnold Browne, and to the editors of the *Tyndale Bulletin*, for helpful comment on earlier drafts of this material.