

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



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The Backslider

Old Testament prophets had a favorite word to describe those who turn back from following God: “backslider.” Their descriptions of this character hold a sobering warning for God’s people today.

“Why has this people slidden back, Jerusalem, in a perpetual backsliding? They hold fast to deceit, they refuse to return” (Jer. 8:5).

“My people are bent on backsliding from Me. Though they call to the Most High, none at all exalt Him” (Hos. 11:7).

“Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings” (Jer. 3:22).

These verses are only a few of many places in the Old Testament (especially in Jeremiah and Hosea) where the word “backsliding” is used to describe someone who wanders away from God. The word literally means one who turns back from a set course. That change of direction constitutes a “sliding back” into a condition of rebellion against God—that is, the lost condition from which he was originally saved.

Why does someone backslide in their relationship with God? To put it simply: for the same reasons they were alienated from God in the first place: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 Jn. 2:16). The enticements of the world never cease calling to

the child of God, and when those enticements become too strong, it’s so easy to slip back into the old way of life.

We mustn’t think, however, that the backslider is someone who has totally abandoned his faith in God. Notice that Hosea describes the backsliders of his day as still “calling to the Most High,” although they were not exalting Him as they should. These people still went through the outward motions of religion, but it had no effect on their daily lives. Their faith was shallow and weak, incapable of prompting the kind of changes the Lord wanted them to make in their lives. The veneer of religion to which they clung fooled them into thinking that they were still okay with God; but they were blind to the huge gap that separated them from Him.

Is the backslider doomed to damnation? Not necessarily. Jeremiah reassured the backsliders of his day that if they would return to the Lord, the Lord would “heal your backslidings.” That’s a *conditional* promise: The backslider can be saved, if he will renounce his backsliding ways and return to God.

But what if the backslider holds fast to his stubborn rebellion and refuses to return to the Lord? Is he doomed to be lost? The prophets certainly thought so. “How shall I pardon you for this? . . . Shall I not punish them for these things?” says the Lord. ‘And shall I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this?’” (Jer. 5:7, 9). “Therefore the Lord does not accept them; He will remember their iniquity now, and punish their sins” (Jer. 14:10). God is not being unfaithful to His promise here. In fact, He is being quite true to His word: “Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. *Otherwise you also will be cut off*” (Rom. 11:22; emphasis mine).

In other words, God will not drag someone into heaven who doesn’t want to go there. When people backslide in their faith and turn away from God, they are making a deliberate choice in who they want to follow. If we do not want to share the backslider’s fate, we must take our faith seriously, and cling to God with everything we have.

– David King