

Doctrine of the Backslider

1. To “*backslide*” is to revert to sin or wrongdoing. It is to lapse morally, or in the practice of religion.
2. Most often backsliding has reference to the lapse of the nation of Israel into paganism and idolatry.
3. The term “*backslider*” is found in only three Old Testament books: Proverbs, Jeremiah, and Hosea.
4. The word “*backsliding*” in all of its forms is used only 17 times in *Scripture*. In each instance a spiritual truth is taught.
 - The essence of backsliding is selfishness. *Proverbs 14:14 The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man shall be satisfied from himself.*
 - One reason why God allows backsliding is to produce conviction of sin and personal accountability. *Jeremiah 2:19 Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord GOD of hosts.*
 - So holy is God that backsliding is expressed in terms of astonishment. *Jeremiah 3:6 The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? She is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot.*
 - Because of her backsliding God decided to divorce Israel. *Jeremiah 3:8 And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.*
 - Despite the severe dealing of God with the northern kingdom of Israel, the southern kingdom of Judah continued to act treacherously before God. So great became the sin of Judah that Israel was made to look righteous by comparison. *Jeremiah 3:11 And the LORD said unto me, The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah.*
 - God calls unto those who are backsliding to repent and receive His mercy and grace. *Jeremiah 3:12 Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger forever.*

Jeremiah 3:14 Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion: Jeremiah 3:22 Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the LORD our God.

- Part of the judgment of God upon those who backslide is an increase in natural evil. *Jeremiah 5:6 Wherefore a lion out of the forest shall slay them, and a wolf of the evenings shall spoil them, a leopard shall watch over their cities: every one that goeth out thence shall be torn in pieces: because their transgressions are many, and their backslidings are increased.*
- Two distinct characteristics of a backslider are persistency in evil and deceit. *Jeremiah 8:5 Why then is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding? They hold fast deceit, they refuse to return.*
- It is a precious moment when God grants repentance of this sin and open confession is made. *Jeremiah 14:7 O LORD, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy name's sake: for our backsliding are many; we have sinned against thee.*
- God asks specifically how long the heart intends to persist in rebellion for such is the essence of backsliding? *Jeremiah 31:22 How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter? For the LORD hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man.*
- The heart of a backslider finds a perverse glory in the activities engaged. *Jeremiah 49:4 Wherefore gloriest thou in the valleys, thy flowing valley, O backsliding daughter? That trusted in her treasures, saying, Who shall come unto me?*
- Those who will not cease to sin discover they cannot cease from sinning. The strength of sin is such that it is compared to a heifer sliding back from a forward pull. *Hosea 4:16 For Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer: now the LORD will feed them as a lamb in a large place.... 11:7 And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him.*
- *Hosea 14:4 I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him.*

5. The Hebrew words for backslider is:

- In Jeremiah 3:6 there is the word *meshuwbah* (mesh-oo-baw), which refers to apostasy. *Jeremiah 3:6 The Lord said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? She is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot.*

- There is the word *suwg* (soog) in Proverbs 14:14, which is from a primitive root meaning properly, *to flinch*, i.e. and so, by implication, to go back, literally (to retreat) or figuratively (to apostatize).
 - There is the word *showab* (sho-bawh) which is used in Jeremiah 3:14. The word means to be an apostate, i.e. idolatrous.
 - In Jeremiah 31:22 there is the word *showbeb* (sho-babe') which has reference to an apostate, i.e., heathenish or (actually heathen). *Jeremiah 31:22 How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter? For the LORD hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man.*
 - There is the word *sarar* (saw-rar') in Hosea 4:16 which refers to a primitive root; to be torn away, i.e. (morally) be refractory. *Hosea 4:16 For Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer: now the LORD will feed them as a lamb in a large place.*
6. The backslider is considered by God to be an apostate and an apostate does not have eternal life. An apostate has never had eternal life even though there has been a measure of gospel light. Like a dog returning to his vomit, like a pig returning to his wallowing in the mud, the backslider, the apostate, the wolf in sheep clothing, will show his true nature with the passing of time.
 7. By the grace of God a backslider can enjoy a genuine conversion experience by turning to God according to gospel terms.
 8. It is a false assurance of salvation for a person to believe that he can live as a backslider and still go to heaven.