


Hebrews 12:9 revisited: The background of the phrase 'and live'

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In this article, the background of the phrase 'and live' in Hebrews 12:9 is investigated. Although most scholars are silent on the matter, the majority of those who venture to propose a possible background vaguely refer to Proverbs 6:23b. Only a handful of scholars propose other backgrounds. This article aims to fill this lacuna. The first part of the article gives an overview of the argument of Hebrews 12:9 in its context to determine a baseline for the interpretation of the phrase 'and live'. This is followed by investigating eight possible backgrounds of the phrase and weighing arguments for and against each proposal. Next, the article integrates the findings and concludes that, of all the proposed backgrounds, Deuteronomy 8:1–5 fits the best. If this is correct, the writer uses the phrase 'and live' in Hebrews 12:9 to positively exhort his hearers to live life as their heavenly Father intended it, now up to eternity, by wholeheartedly obeying his revelation in his Son.

Keywords: Hebrews; Hebrews 12:4–13; Hebrews 12:9; Deuteronomy 8:1–5; Proverbs 3:11–12; Proverbs 6:23; live; life.

Introduction

The conclusion of the *a fortiori* argument in Hebrews 12:9b asks:

... οὐ πολὺ [δὲ] ὑποταγησόμεθα τῷ πατρὶ τῶν πνευμάτων καὶ ζήσομεν;

... [S]hall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? (ESV)

The majority of scholars agree that the reference to 'the Father of spirits' (τῷ πατρὶ τῶν πνευμάτων) probably echoes Numbers 16:22 or 27:16,¹ although other possibilities are given (e.g. 2 Mac 3:24; Jub 10:3; 1 Clem 59:3; 64:1; 1 En 37:2).² However, when it comes to the possible background of the phrase 'and live' (καὶ ζήσομεν), most scholars are silent. The majority of those who venture to propose a background vaguely refer to Proverbs 6:23b.³ Only a handful of scholars propose other possibilities. Moreover, there is almost no scholarly discussion on the influence of the possible background of the phrase on the interpretation of the phrase itself or Hebrews 12:9 as a whole.

This article aims to fill this lacuna by investigating the possible background of the phrase 'and live' in Hebrews 12:9, and how this possible background influences the interpretation of the phrase and the passage as a whole.

The first part of the article gives an overview of the argument of Hebrews 12:9 in its context to determine a baseline for the interpretation of the phrase 'and live'. The second part of the article investigates eight possible backgrounds of the phrase, weighing arguments for and against each proposal. Proverbs 6:23 and Deuteronomy 8:1–5 enjoy special attention as possible backgrounds because, of all the proposed backgrounds, these two seem the most likely. The article concludes by integrating the findings to determine the most likely background of the phrase 'and live' in Hebrews 12:9, and how this background influences the nuance of the phrase and the interpretation of the passage as a whole.

As a result, this article contributes to the small but growing number of studies on Deuteronomy in Hebrews, as well as the even smaller amount of studies on Hebrews 12:4–13.

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1.Amongst others, Moffatt (1924:203), Montefiore (1964:221), Hughes (1977:530), Kistemaker (1984:378), Attridge (1989:363), Bruce (1990:344), Lane (1991:402,424), Weiss (1991:652), Ellingworth (1993:653), Croy (1998:201), DeSilva (2000:451), Koester (2001:529), Johnson (2006:322), France (2006:172), Mitchell (2007:272), Allen (2010:582), O'Brien (2010:467), Cockerill (2012:625) and Kleinig (2017:608).

2.For overviews of the possible background of the phrase 'the Father of spirits', see Ellingworth (1993:653) and Koester (2001:529).

3.Amongst others, Attridge (1989:363), Grässer (1997:270) and Koester (2001:529).

A baseline for the interpretation of the phrase 'and live' in Hebrews 12:9

The place of Hebrews 12:4–13 within the book

As a whole, the Book of Hebrews is a sermon that calls the hearers to persevere in faith. The hearers were subject to some form of persecution (Heb 10:32–34; 13:3, 13), which resulted in the backsliding (verging on apostasy) of some members of the community (cf. the warnings in Heb 2:1–4; 3:7–4:13; 5:11–6:12; 10:26–31; and 12:25–29). Consequently, the writer exhorts his hearers to persevere in faith, reminding them of who Christ is and what he has accomplished.

Hebrews 12:4–13 forms part of the penultimate chapter of the book, which is viewed by various scholars as the climactic chapter of the sermon (especially Heb 12:18–29; cf. Cockerill 2012:644; Ellingworth 1993:669; Lane 1991:448; Westfall 2005:278).

The chapter starts with Hebrews 12:1–3,⁴ which forms the conclusion of the long list of heroes of faith discussed in Chapter 11. This conclusion is in the form of an athletic metaphor⁵ and motivates the hearers to persevere in faith by giving Jesus as the example of perseverance par excellence. Hebrews 12:4–13⁶ continues the call to perseverance by inviting the hearers to consider the hardship they endured as discipline from God.

An overview of the argument of Hebrews 12:4–13

Hebrews 12:4, which forms a hinge between 12:1–3 and 12:5–13, gives a brief summary of the hearers' situation and indirectly exhorts them to persevere.⁷ This is followed by the main complaint (and both the main encouragement and exhortation) of the passage, namely, that in their hardship the hearers have forgotten what Scripture teaches (12:5a),⁸ specifically about divine discipline. This is made clear by a quotation of Proverbs 3:11–12 (12:5b–6) followed by the application of the passage to the situation of the hearers (12:7–11). The application starts with a short summary of the main point that the writer wants to make (12:7a), namely that they are to endure for discipline (εις παιδειαν υπομενετε), followed by three arguments that substantiate this claim

4. There is a difference of opinion amongst Bible translations and scholars whether Hebrews 12:3 forms part of 12:1–2 (e.g. KJV; NASB; NIV; UBS⁴; and Allen 2010:568) or 12:4ff. (e.g. NKJV; ESV; Kleinig 2017:589; Koester 2001:534). For a discussion of the matter, see Cockerill (2012:600–601).

5. See Coetsee (2009) for a(n Afrikaans) study of the athletic metaphor in Hebrews 12:1–3.

6. As with the place of Hebrews 12:3 within Hebrews 12, scholars differ whether 12:12–13 is the conclusion of 12:4–11 or the introduction of 12:14ff. See Ellingworth (1993:657) for a discussion of the 'smooth' transition in 12:12.

7. The content of Hebrews 12:4 is quite enigmatic. However, it seems to have a threefold purpose: (1) It gives a summary of the hearers' situation: they have experienced persecution ('struggle'; ἀνταγωνίζομαι; for 'sin' as 'sinners', see Lane [1991:418–419]; Croy [1998:194]; Allen [2010:578]; cf. Heb 10:32–34), but no one has been asked to pay the ultimate price yet (cf. Koester 2001:525). (2) It contains an honest prediction of what the future may entail: more persecutions may follow, which may include death. (3) It indirectly calls on the hearers to persevere, which links on to the theme of perseverance found throughout the previous chapters (10:35ff.).

8. See Ellingworth (1993:646) for a good discussion on the debate whether Hebrews 12:5a contains a statement or question.

Hinge: Summary of the hearers' situation and indirect exhortation to persevere (12:4)

Main complaint: The hearers have forgotten what Scripture teaches (12:5a)

The words of Scripture they have forgotten: quotation of Proverbs 3:11–12 (12:5b–6)

Application of the quotation to the situation of the hearers (12:7–11)

Main point: Endure for discipline (12:7a)

Argument #1: God's discipline shows that he is treating them like true sons (12:7b–8)

Claim: God is treating them as sons (12:7b)

Rhetorical question arguing that every son is disciplined by his father (12:7c)

Argument: Unlike illegitimate children, true sons are disciplined (12:8)

Argument #2: God, when disciplining them, is worthy of even more subjection than their earthly fathers (12:9)

A fortiori argument proposition: Their earthly fathers disciplined them, and they respected them (12:9a)

A fortiori argument conclusion: Even more they should be subject to the heavenly Father and live (12:9b)

Argument #3: God's discipline, though unpleasant, is always for their best, and has long-term benefits (12:10–11)

A fortiori argument proposition: Their earthly fathers' discipline is temporary and subjective (12:10a)

A fortiori argument conclusion: God's discipline is always for the best, and has long-term benefits: holiness (12:10b)

Honest reflection: Discipline is always unpleasant (12:11a)

Future benefit: Later it yields its fruit, namely righteousness (12:11b)

Conclusion: Be strengthened and persevere (12:12–13)

FIGURE 1: The argument of Hebrews 12:4–13.

(12:7b–8, 9, 10–11).⁹ The conclusion of the passage is in the form of explicit exhortation (again by means of athletic imagery [cf. 12:1–3], this time taken from Is 35:3 and Pr 4:26a LXX), calling the hearers to be strengthened and to persevere (12:12–13). The argument of Hebrews 12:4–13 is presented in Figure 1.

Proverbs 3:11–12 as the heart of Hebrews 12:4–13

The quotation from Proverbs 3:11–12 forms the heart of the passage. In its Old Testament context, Proverbs 3:11–12 forms part of the extensive discourses in which a father conveys wisdom to his son (Pr 1–9).¹⁰

Although other delineations are possible, most scholars treat Proverbs 3:1–12 as a unit.¹¹ The passage contains the instruction of a father to his son on the necessities for quality of life, focusing especially on the need for piety. The son is called to obey his father (3:1–4) and the Lord (3:5–12), or to

9. Different delineations of the three arguments found in Hebrews 12:7–11 are possible. The primary difference has to do with whether 12:10 forms part of 12:9–10 or 12:10–11. The main argument for viewing 12:9–10 as a unit (as done by Attridge [1989:359]; Cockerill [2012:622]; Croy [1998:199]; Koester [2001:538–539]) is the comparison between earthly fathers and the heavenly Father in both verses. On the contrary, the main argument for viewing 12:10–11 as a unit (as done by Lane [1991:406]; Guthrie [2007:985–986]; Allen [2010:570]) is the fact that both verses describe the benefits of discipline. In my opinion, the latter is more convincing. However, the choice between the two does not substantially influence the interpretation of 12:7–11 as a whole.

10. See Fox (2000:44–49, 2009:499–506) for the differences between Proverbs 1–9 and 10–31.

11. Amongst others, Scott (1965:45), Murphy (1998:20), Fox (2000:141), Waltke (2004:238) and Longman (2006:130). Kidner (1964:63–64), Koptak (2003:117) and Wilson (2018:79) view 3:1–10, 3:11–20 and 3:21–35 as units, based primarily on the vocative 'my son' found at the beginning of each section. The unity of 3:1–12 is more convincing based on the structure, syntax and theme of the passage.

pursue 'steadfast love' (דִּינָה) and 'faithfulness' (אֱמֻנָה; 3:1–4), to trust, fear and honour the Lord (3:5–10), and to accept the Lord's discipline (3:11–12).¹²

Proverbs 3:11–12 forms the conclusion of the passage, and states:

The discipline of the Lord, my son, do not reject [it] and do not loathe his reproof, for the one whom the Lord loves, he corrects, even as a father a son he delights in. [Author's own translation]

For the purposes of this article, the following should be noted about Proverbs 3:11–12:

- Verse 11 comprises synonymous parallelism¹³ and is chiasmic in form: [A] noun ('discipline') – [B] verb ('do not reject') – [B'] verb ('do not loathe') – [A'] noun ('reproof').
- The words 'the discipline of the Lord' (מִצְוַת יְהוָה) are emphasised by two facts: they are the very first words of verse 11 and are followed up by the vocative 'my son'.
- Verse 12 states the reason or motivation for compliance to verse 11 ('for'; כִּי). Consequently, verse 11 can be seen as the exhortation and verse 12 as the rationale.
- 'Reproof' (תּוֹכַחַת; verse 11) and 'to correct or rebuke' (יָקַר; verse 12) belong to the same semantic domain and sound similar (-חַת- and -יָק-).
- The motivation for the Lord's discipline is given as his 'love' (חֶסֶד) and, by way of comparison, his 'favour' (חֶסֶד). Consequently, although discipline and correction may be unpleasant and painful (leading to its rejection), it is a sign of grace (cf. Koptak 2003:121; Longman 2006:135).
- The final clause of verse 12 compares the Lord's conduct towards the addressees with that of a loving father towards his son.¹⁴ Waltke (2004:238) indicates that this reference is unique because it is the only reference to God as Father in Proverbs.

For the purposes of this article, it is important to determine whether Proverbs 3:11–12 refers to educative or punitive discipline.¹⁵ References to 'rejecting' the Lord's discipline or 'loathing' his reproof seem to indicate a type of discipline that is unpleasant. However, it does not necessarily refer to punitive discipline; educative discipline in various cases could be unpleasant as well. Moreover, nothing in the immediate context leads to the interpretation of 'discipline' as mere 'punishment'. Rather, the reference to a father 'delighting' in his son supports the interpretation of 'discipline', 'reproof' and 'correction' in an instructive or

edifying sense (cf. Croy 1998:196–197; DeSilva 2000:449; Garrett 1993:81; Koptak 2003:121; Thiessen 2009:369; Wilson 2018:85).¹⁶ Consequently, it seems best to view 'discipline' in Proverbs 3:11–12 MT as instructive or educative discipline.

Except for the more personal vocative,¹⁷ Hebrews quotes the words of Proverbs 3:11–12 verbatim from the LXX. It reads as follows:

Son, do not think lightly of the discipline of the Lord nor become weary when you are being reproved by him, for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines, and he chastises every son he accepts. [Author's own translation]

The following should be noted about Proverbs 3:11–12 LXX:

- The vocative is moved to the beginning of the sentence, and the more personal 'my son' is shortened to 'son'.
- The MT verb 'reject' (סָרָה) is translated with 'think lightly of' or 'despise' (ὀλιγορέω) in the LXX, and the verb 'loathe' (רָקַע) with 'become weary' or 'become discouraged' (ἐκλύω). Although the scope is retained, there is a difference in nuance.
- Explicit reference (by way of comparison) to the Lord disciplining 'as a father' is dropped. The LXX translates 'even as a father' (ὡς πατήρ) with 'and he chastises' (μαστιγοῖ δὲ). One possible explanation for this is confusion between the vav and the yod, namely that the Hebrew אָפַק was read as אָפַק or אָפַק, the hiphil form of the verb 'afflict' (אָפַק), which is translated as μαστιγοῖ (cf. Fitzgerald 2008:310; Kleinig 2017:606–607; Murphy 1998:20).
- Most strikingly, 'discipline' in the LXX seems to have more of a punitive nuance than in the MT, as is suggested by the use of the verb 'chastise' (μαστιγοῦ), which can also be translated as 'whip', 'scourge' or 'punish', and the verb 'reprove' or 'correct' (ἐλέγχω). The result is that the 'Greek text portrays God more severely than the Hebrew' (Croy 1998:196).

The nuance and meaning of Proverbs 3:11–12 LXX are retained in the quotation found in Hebrews 12:5b–6.

The keyword of Hebrews 12:4–13: Discipline

Flowing from the quotation of Proverbs 3:11–12, the keyword of Hebrews 12:4–13 is 'discipline' (παιδεία or παιδεύω). The word group refers to 'the act of providing guidance for responsible living' (Bauer et al. 2000:748–749) or, more specifically, to:

[T]he upbringing and handling of the child which is growing up to maturity and which thus needs direction, teaching, instruction and a certain measure of compulsion in the form of discipline or even chastisement. (Bertram TDNT 1976:5:596)

The verb is usually translated as 'educate', 'teach' or 'discipline', and the noun as 'training', 'instruction',

12. For good overviews of the structure or build-up of Proverbs 3:1–12, see Fox (2000:153–154) and Waltke (2004:238–239). Both view 3:1–4, 3:5–10 and 3:11–12 as the sub-units of the passage. Waltke (2004:238–239) indicates how the passage is made up of six admonitions or conditions (all the odd verses), each followed with an argument or promise (all the even verses).

13. Kleinig (2017:620), however, views Proverbs 3:11–12 as 'two sets of contrasting couplets'.

14. Along with Waltke (2004:237) and Longman (2006:129), it seems best to translate the Hebrew word יָקַר with 'even as or like a father', not just 'as or like a father'.

15. The noun 'discipline' (מִצְוָה) is very common in the Wisdom Literature, especially the Book of Proverbs. The noun occurs roughly 50 times in the MT, of which 30 (60%) are found in the Book of Proverbs (Sæbø 1977:2, 549). The verb יָקַר is found five times in the Book of Proverbs (of the 42 or 43 occurrences in the MT), which means that '[m]ore than a third of the occurrences' of the word group יָקַר or יָקַר 'are found in Proverbs' (Branson & Botterweck TDOT 1990:6:129). Branson and Botterweck (1990) refer to the Wisdom Literature as the 'natural Sitz im Leben' of the word group.

16. Waltke (2004:248–249) interprets discipline in Proverbs 3:11–12 as 'punishment', albeit punishment with the aim 'to restore the afflicted to proper conduct'.

17. Hebrews has 'my son' (Υιέ μου; like the MT) in comparison with the LXX's 'son' (Υιέ). Ellingworth (1993:648) is correct when he argues that the more personal vocative is a 'natural expansion', and not an indication that the writer is following the Hebrew text.

‘discipline’ or ‘correction’ (cf. Liddell, Scott & Jones 1996:1286–1287; Louw & Nida 1996:181). The word group links closely to the Hebrew word group ‘discipline’ (רָצוּ or מוֹרָה) and, unsurprisingly, the majority of references to the root in the MT is translated with παιδεία or παιδεύω in the LXX (Bertram TDNT 1976:5:608; Branson & Botterweck TDOT 1990:6:129). Just like the Hebrew word group, παιδεία or παιδεύω mainly refers to instructive and edifying discipline, although a small number of cases refer to punitive discipline.

A major question concerning the interpretation of Hebrews 12 is whether παιδεία or παιδεύω refers to edifying or punitive discipline. Although some disagree (cf. Bertram TDNT 1976:5:621; Calvin 1853:316–317), the majority of scholars argue that Hebrews 12 refers to edifying (non-punitive) discipline (cf. Allen 2010:580; Cockerill 2012:616–617; Croy 1998:217–219; Koester 2001:526–527; Thiessen 2009:369).¹⁸ The main reasons are:

- The context does not refer to the hardships that the hearers endured as punishment for sin, but as persecution.
- In his application of the quotation of Proverbs 3 to the situation of the hearers, the writer avoids any reference to words from the quotation that may have a punitive nuance, especially ἐλέγχω and μαστιγώω.
- The passage as a whole has education as primary concern, convincing the hearers of their sonship to enable them to endure.
- The motivation of the passage is God’s paternal affection and love.
- The passage forms a parallel with Hebrews 5:8, which states that (the sinless) Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered.

The context, as always, determines the meaning of the word (cf. Croy 1998:197). Taking the above into account, it seems best to interpret ‘discipline’ in Hebrews 12:4–13 as non-punitive.¹⁹

The argument of Hebrews 12:9

All of the above form the background of Hebrews 12:9. Hebrews 12:9 is the second argument within 12:7–11 in which the author applies the quotation of Proverbs 3 to the situation of the hearers (12:7–8, 9, 10–11). The argument is in the form of an *a fortiori* argument. The verse states:

Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh as disciplinarians and we respected them; how much more should we be subject to the Father of spirits and live? [*Author’s own translation*]

The following should be noted:

18. Spellman (2016:490) argues that ‘discipline’ in Hebrews 12:4–13 refers to both punitive and non-punitive discipline, with the writer ‘exploiting the multifaceted sense of the term’. Consequently, Spellman (2016:503–506) argues for ‘a dual conception of discipline’ in Hebrews 12. In a similar vein, Kibbe (2016:131) argues that ‘Israel’s wandering in the wilderness after Kadesh Barnea was clearly punitive for those who would die there. But for those who would survive and enter the land after Moses’ passing, it was instructional’.

19. The reference to discipline as ‘painful’ (ἀλγύν) in Hebrews 12:11 need not refer to punitive discipline. It seems to be a generalisation used to motivate the hearers to persevere (cf. Allen 2007:88).

- The adverb εἰτα indicates something ‘in addition’ to what has just been stated (Bauer et al. 2000:295) and supports the interpretation of Hebrews 12:9, introducing a new argument within the index of arguments found in 12:7–11 (cf. O’Brien 2010:466).
- Linking on to the previous, the verse is made up of a concessive clause (μέν) followed by correlative clause ([δέ]).²⁰ The verse consists of an *a fortiori* argument in the form of a rhetorical question, indicated by the clause ‘how much more’ (οὐ πολὺ ... μᾶλλον).
- In this *a fortiori* argument, distinction is made between ‘fathers of our flesh’ (τοὺς ... τῆς σαρκὸς ἡμῶν πατέρας), namely earthly fathers, and ‘the Father of spirits’ (τῷ πατρὶ τῶν πνευμάτων),²¹ namely the heavenly Father. As argued above, the reference to God as ‘the Father of spirits’ probably has Numbers 16:22 or 27:16 as background.²²
- The earthly fathers are called ‘disciplinarians’ (or ‘instructors’, ‘teachers’; παιδευτής), a noun derived from the verb ‘discipline’ (παιδεύω). Most translations translate the word as ‘one who disciplines’ (cf. ESV; NIV; KJV; NASB).
- The verb ‘to be subject’ (the passive form of ὑποτάσσω) is a deliberative future indicating volition (cf. Wallace 1996:570).
- The final words of the verse, namely ‘and live’ (καὶ ζήσομεν), indicate result (Ellingworth 1993:654; Lane 1991:402). The build-up of the verse indicates that the phrase is emphasised.²³

The writer’s argument is the following: the hearers had earthly fathers who disciplined them. Despite the possible displeasure of being disciplined, the hearers respected their fathers. The question is then posed: if they accepted their earthly fathers’ discipline (the minor situation), how much more should they subject themselves to the discipline of their heavenly Father (the major situation)? The expected answer is ‘much more’. If they do this, concludes verse 9, they will ‘live’.

The phrase ‘and live’ in Hebrews 12:9

Taking the phrase ‘and live’ as a result clause, Hebrews 12:9b could be translated as ‘how much more should we be subject to the Father of spirits *in order to* or *so that we can* live?’

But what exactly is meant by ‘live’? It could be interpreted to refer to:

- Survival: If the hearers subject themselves to God, they will continue to live. If they do not, per implication, they will die.

20. Some manuscripts do not include δέ. For a discussion of its inclusion, see Ellingworth (1993:653).

21. For later (unwarranted) metaphysical interpretations of the phrase, see Hughes (1977:530–531).

22. Croy (1998:201) argues that the writer of Hebrews ‘probably altered the more traditional wording to provide a contrast to earthly fathers’ (cf. Cockerill 2012:624).

23. O’Brien (2010:467) correctly indicates that the fact that the phrase ‘and live’ has no parallel in the first clause of Hebrews 12:9 indicates that it is ‘particularly emphatic’.

- Quality of life: Subjection to God will result in his blessing, which will enable the hearers to prosper and to enjoy the fullness of life.
- Eternal life: Subjection to God will result in the hearers partaking in eternal life.

The intricate argument of Hebrews makes it possible for all three interpretations to fit. However, the interpretation of 'life' as eternal life is supported by the immediate context (12:18–29) as well as the sermon as a whole. Throughout the sermon the writer warns that disobedience could lead to apostasy and eternal judgement (cf. Heb 6:4–6; 10:26). Continued perseverance in faith, shown by the hearers by subjecting themselves to God in the midst of persecution, will guarantee them of the life to come. Accordingly, the vast majority of scholars interpret the phrase to refer to eternal life (cf. Bauer et al. 2000:425; Bertram 1976:5:622; Calvin 1853:318; Croy 1998:203; Ellingworth 1993:654; Grässer 1997:270; Kleinig 2017:608; Koester 2001:539; O'Brien 2010:467).

Eight possible backgrounds of the phrase 'and live' in Hebrews 12:9

With this baseline for the interpretation of the phrase 'and live' in Hebrews 12:9 within its context, the article now turns to the investigation of possible backgrounds of the phrase. Eight possible backgrounds are investigated,²⁴ weighing arguments for and against each proposal. Special attention is given to Proverbs 6:23 and Deuteronomy 8:1–5 as possible backgrounds because, of all the proposed backgrounds, these two seem the most likely.

No background

The first possibility is the most obvious one: the phrase does not have a specific background. It is either the writer's own composition, or he could have been drawing from a plethora of backgrounds without intending or knowing it.²⁵

This is indeed a possibility. The phrase 'and live' does not need to have a specific background, unless there are strong indications pointing towards one.

Numbers 16:22 or 27:16

The second possibility is that the background is Numbers 16:22 or 27:16. The primary reason for this is the writer's use of the phrase 'the Father of spirits', which most probably has Numbers 16:22 or 27:16 as background. It would make sense if the words that immediately follow come from these verses as well.

A closer investigation of Numbers 16 and 27, however, does not lead to this direction. Nothing in Numbers 16 or 27

²⁴This does not mean that there are no other possibilities. These eight possibilities are investigated either because they have been proposed by scholars or because of a possible link identified by the current author.

²⁵Kibbe (2016:129) fittingly acknowledges the difficulty of determining whether Hebrews 'consciously' alludes 'to a particular text' in his intertextual investigation.

suggests that these chapters are the background of the phrase 'and live' in Hebrews 12:9. Although Numbers 16, which describes the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, refers to death in general, it does not refer to life. The same is true for Numbers 27, which refers to the leader the Lord appointed in Moses' place. The chapter refers to Moses' death in general, but not to life. More specifically, neither Numbers 16 nor 27 refers to God as 'Father' or the word group 'discipline'. It therefore seems unlikely that Numbers 16:22 or 27:16 forms the background of the phrase 'and live' in Hebrews 12:9.

Hebrews 10:38 = Habakkuk 2:4

A third possibility is that Hebrews 10:38, which consists of a quotation of Habakkuk 2:4, forms the background of the phrase 'and live' in Hebrews 12:9. The primary reason for this is the fact that a future form of the verb ζάω is found in 10:38 and 12:9, namely ζήσεται in the former and ζήσομεν in the latter (cf. DeSilva 2000:451–452; Mitchell 2007:273). Moreover, because 12:4 probably links on to the depiction of the hearers' persecution described in 10:32–34, it would not be strange if 12:9 refers to the verses surrounding 10:32–34 as well. Moreover, the context of both 10:38 and 12:4–13 is very similar; both exhort the hearers to endure in the midst of hardship. Finally, the passages contain a parallel in the words δίκαιος (10:38) and δικαιοσύνη (12:11).

However, the following count against this possibility:

- Both Hebrews 10:38 and Habakkuk 2:4 refer to living by faith, not living in general or eternal life.
- Neither Hebrews 10:38 nor Habakkuk 2:4 refers to discipline.
- Apart from the analogies mentioned above, nothing else points to Habakkuk 2:4 or Hebrews 10:38.

Consequently, it seems like there is a parallel between Hebrews 10:38 and 12:9 in the sense that both are calls for endurance. However, to view Hebrews 10:38 as the background of the phrase 'and live' in Hebrews 12:9 would perhaps be going too far.

Proverbs 3:2

A fourth possibility is that Proverbs 3:2 forms the background of the phrase 'and live' in Hebrews 12:9. Because the quotation of Proverbs 3:11–12 forms the heart of Hebrews 12:4–13, subsequent references to Proverbs 3 (especially 3:1–12, which has been identified as a unit) would be fitting.

In light of this, the phrase 'and live' in Hebrews 12:9 could have Proverbs 3:2 as background, which refers to 'length of days and years of life' (μήκος ... βίου καὶ ἔτη ζωῆς). This possibility is strengthened by the fact that the passages contain a parallel in the words εἰρήνη (Pr 3:2) and εἰρηνικός (Heb 12:10). Although it is a bit of a stretch, Proverbs 4:26 LXX is referred to in Hebrews 12:13, which strengthens the possibility of Proverbs as background.

What counts significantly against this proposal, however, is the referent of life; Proverbs 3:2 refers to longevity, although Hebrews 12:9 (as argued above) most probably refers to eternal life. Moreover, 'life' is a very common word in ancient literature, especially in the Book of Proverbs. Finally, although Proverbs 3:11 refers to discipline, Proverbs 3:2 does not. Consequently, the link between Hebrews 12:9 and Proverbs 3:2 seems to indicate a common parallel rather than literary dependence.

Jewish tradition that refers to the premature death of illegitimate children

A fifth possibility is that the phrase 'and live' in Hebrews 12:9 has Jewish tradition as background, specifically Jewish tradition that refers to the premature death of illegitimate children.

This is the argument of Fitzgerald (2008:312). He suggests that the phrase 'and live' in Hebrews 12:9 contrasts with illegitimate sons (νόθοι), especially undisciplined ones, who often die prematurely according to Jewish tradition. He refers to various Jewish texts to substantiate his claim (see Fitzgerald [2008]). A closer investigation indicates that these texts indeed refer (both directly and indirectly) to the short lifespan of illegitimate children and the longevity of disciplined ones. Because Hebrews 12:8 refers to illegitimate children (νόθοι), Fitzgerald consequently argues that the phrase 'and live' should be interpreted as referring to the longevity of disciplined sons.

A closer inspection, however, reveals that none of these texts refer to God as Father, or make any comparison between earthly fathers and the heavenly Father. Moreover, these texts do not refer to God as disciplining someone. Also, the interpretation of ζῶω in Hebrews 12:9 as 'survival' or 'long-life' – as in the Jewish texts referred to – does not fit the context of Hebrews as well as the interpretation of life as 'eternal life' does.

Finally, as argued above, there is a shift in argument in Hebrews 12:9; the use of εἰτα in 12:9 indicates that a new argument is reached within 12:7–11. Although it will be a mistake to make a watertight division between 12:8 and 12:9, this shift in argument weakens the possibility that 'illegitimate children' in 12:8 and 'live' in 12:9 should be linked together.

Consequently, as with other possible backgrounds discussed above, the argument for Jewish tradition as the background of the phrase 'and live' in Hebrews 12:9 – although not impossible – seems unlikely.

Exodus 20:12 or Deuteronomy 5:16

A sixth possibility is one that is not referred to in many sources, with the notable exception of Phillips (2006:548). He argues that the reference in Hebrews 12:9 to 'Father' and 'life' echoes the fifth commandment of the Decalogue, namely the

command to 'Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you' (Ex 20:12; Dt 5:16).²⁶

What counts for this proposal is the fact that both passages refer to 'father', and there is a semantic parallel between 'honour' (τιμάω; Ex 20:12; Dt 5:16) and 'submission' (ὑποτάσσω; Heb 12:9).

However, a couple of factors are noteworthy against this proposal:

- The fifth commandment makes no reference to 'discipline', the keyword of Hebrews 12.
- The fifth commandment makes no distinction between an earthly father and the heavenly Father. In fact, the Decalogue makes no reference to God as Father at all.
- Hebrews 12 contains no reference to 'mother'.
- Hebrews 12 contains no reference to the Promised Land or life in the Promised Land.
- Hebrews 12 does not refer to a long life (μακροχρόνιος),²⁷ but (eternal) life (ζῶω).

Accordingly, the parallel between Hebrews 12 and the fifth commandment is quite general. However, the popularity of the Decalogue does not exclude the possibility that Hebrews 12:9 would have recalled the fifth commandment in the minds of the hearers.

Proverbs 6:23

Apart from scholars who remain silent on the possible background of the phrase 'and live' in Hebrews 12:9, the most popular background amongst those who venture to propose one is Proverbs 6:23.

Proverbs 6 is part of the extensive discourses found in the book in which a father conveys wisdom to his son (Pr 1–9). Proverbs 6:23, more specifically, is part of Proverbs 6:20–35,²⁸ which contains a warning against adultery with a married woman. The argument of the passage is shown in Figure 2.

Proverbs 6:23 is a parenthesis within the passage,²⁹ reflecting on the nature and advantages of a father's teaching. It states, '[f]or the commandment is a lamp, and the instruction is a light, and disciplinary reproofs are the way to life' (author's own translation).

26. Deuteronomy 5:16 extends Exodus 20:12 by inserting two clauses: (1) the commandment to honour parents is motivated by the clause 'as the Lord your God commanded you' and (2) the promise of prolonged days contains the secondary promise 'that it may go well with you'. The LXX inserts the clause 'that it may be well with you' in Exodus 20:12, which reflects assimilation between Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16.

27. The LXX changes the MT words 'that your days may be prolonged' (לְמַעַן יִאָּרְכּוּ יָמֶיךָ) to 'that you may live long' (ἵνα μακροχρόνιος γένη), which, though by no means identical, still convey the same idea.

28. Most commentators (cf. Fox 2000:227–237; Longman 2006:176–182; Murphy 1998:34–40; Waltke 2004:348–361; Wilson 2018:111–114) and translations (cf. NIV; ESV) take Proverbs 6:20–35 as a unit.

29. The parenthesis does not interrupt the flow of the argument. It is unnecessary to change the order of the verses 'for clarity', as Fox (2000:227) does.

Main exhortation: Son, take my teaching to heart (6:20–21)

Result: It will provide guidance and safety in life (6:22)

Parenthesis: The nature and advantages of the father's teaching (6:23)

Application to the case of adultery with a married woman (6:24–35)

FIGURE 2: The argument of Proverbs 6:20–35.

The context supports the interpretation of 'disciplinary reproofs'³⁰ as the father's correcting words that keep his son on the right path. Consequently, the passage most probably refers to educative, non-punitive discipline.

Within this context, 'life' should be understood as survival, or more specifically, the full or rich or meaningful life that is the result of heeding the father's words.

The translation of Proverbs 6:23 in the LXX (which the writer of Hebrews would have alluded to if Pr 6:23 is the background of Heb 12:9) has a number of interesting differences:

- The LXX joins 'commandment' and 'instruction' by means of a genitive, namely 'commandment of instruction' (ἐντολὴ νόμου).
- The LXX inserts the conjunction 'and' between 'reproof' and 'discipline', making it 'reproof and discipline' (ἔλεγχος καὶ παιδεία).³¹
- The LXX has the singular 'reproof' instead of the plural.

Fox (2015:137), after weighing different arguments for the differences between the MT and the LXX, concludes that the reasons for the variations 'remain unclear'.³²

Taking the above into consideration, the following can be said in favour of viewing Proverbs 6:23 as the background of the phrase 'and live' in Hebrews 12:9:

- Both passages refer to the 'discipline' word group (παιδεία or παιδευτής) and link it to 'life' (ζῶω or ζωή).
- Both passages refer to educative, non-punitive discipline.
- Hebrews 12:9 refers to a father disciplining a son, although Proverbs 6:23 refers to a father instructing his son. Moreover, in both cases, the motivation for the father's conduct is his love or compassion.
- The primary background of Hebrews 12:4–13 is Proverbs, as is made clear by the quotation and application of Proverbs 3:11–12. Moreover, Proverbs 6:23 has a strong parallel with Proverbs 3:11–12. Like Proverbs 3:11–12, Proverbs 6:23 is part of the extensive discourses found in the book, and both passages refer to 'reproof' (ἐλέγχω [Pr 3:11]; ἔλεγχος [Pr 6:23]) and 'discipline' (παιδεύω [Pr 3:12]; παιδεία [Pr 3:11; 6:23]) and its advantages.

However, the following could be mentioned against this proposal:

30. The words 'reproofs of discipline' probably form a hendiadys because 'reproof' (τοῖς) and 'discipline' (μοῖς) are synonymous and often parallel (cf. Pr 3:11; 5:12; Fox 2000:229; Hartley 1997:2, 444; Longman 2006:168).

31. Although this distinction makes a punitive interpretation of the words possible, the context overall still supports the interpretation of discipline as non-punitive.

32. See Cook (1997:184) and Waltke (2004:349) for further discussions of the reasons for the variations.

- Hebrews 12:4–11 does not touch on the case of adultery (although Hebrews 12:16 possibly does).³³
- Hebrews 12:9 does not refer to 'lamp', 'commandment', 'instruction', 'light' or 'way' (Pr 6:23a).
- Hebrews 12:9 does not say that discipline leads to life, but subjection to the Father leads to life (which, however, would include subjection to the father's discipline).
- Hebrews 6:23 does not compare earthly fathers with the heavenly Father.
- Proverbs 6:23's 'way to life' is not exactly the same as Hebrews 12:9's final clause 'so that you may live'.³⁴
- Life in Proverbs 6:23 does not refer to eternal life, but either to physical life (surviving the cheated husband's rage) or fullness and quality of life.

In conclusion, there are a number of striking parallels between Hebrews 12:9 and Proverbs 6:23. When it comes to proposals for the background of the phrase 'and live' in Hebrews 12:9, this one is the best so far. However, the argument that Proverbs 6:23 is the background of Hebrews 12:9 is not conclusive.

Deuteronomy 8:1–5

Throughout the scholarly discourse on the Book of Hebrews, a couple of scholars have noted the parallel between Deuteronomy 8:5 and Hebrews 12:9. In recent years, a small group of scholars has suggested that Deuteronomy 8:1 or 2–5 (in some way related to Pr 3:11–12) forms the background of the whole of Hebrews 12:4–13 (Allen 2007:86–90; Spellman 2016:487–506; Thiessen 2009:366–379; cf. Kibbe 2016:131). More specifically, these scholars argue that the writer of Hebrews 'exegetes the quotation [of Proverbs 3:11–12] on the basis of Deut[eronomy] 8:2–5' (Allen 2007:89), or that 'discipline' in Hebrews 12:4–13, although quoting Proverbs 3:11–12, refers to the discipline 'that Israel experienced in the wilderness period' as expressed in Deuteronomy 8:5 (Thiessen 2009:367, 369).³⁵ Of these scholars, only one explicitly links the phrase 'and live' in Hebrews 12:9 to Deuteronomy 8:5, and he does this in passing (Allen 2007:89). In the following, this possibility is investigated in more detail.³⁶

Within the Book of Deuteronomy, Chapter 8 forms part of Moses' second speech (Dt 4:44–28:68) and, more specifically, the 'basic commandments' (Dt 5:1–11:32). As a whole, Deuteronomy 8 exhorts Israel to continued obedience to the Lord in the Promised Land they are about to enter. The

33. Hebrews 12:16 gives Esau as a negative example of someone who was 'sexually immoral' (ESV). However, the word 'immoral' (πόρνος) in the context of Hebrews 12:16 probably does not refer to sexual sin, but unfaithfulness to God (cf. Lane 1991:454–455).

34. The nuance of both passages, however, may be the same. With 'way of life' the writer of Proverbs 6:23 is probably saying that discipline and reproof 'leads to life' (Longman 2006:178; Waltke 2004:352; cf. the translations of the phrase by Fox [2000:227] and Koptak [2003:192]).

35. Allen (2007:89) indicates that the possible link between Deuteronomy 8 and Hebrews 12 is briefly mentioned by Spicq (1953:391) and Wright (1996:125). Lane (1991:424) links the phrase 'and live' with Deuteronomy 30:11–20, and Phillips (2006:547) links the phrase with Deuteronomy 30:15–20.

36. I noted this possibility the first time when investigating the possible occurrence of Deuteronomy's concept of life in Hebrews (cf. Coetsee 2019a:7–8).

Main exhortation: Be careful to obey the whole commandment of the Lord (8:1)
 Motivation: Remember the lessons learned in the wilderness-period (8:2–5)
Main exhortation repeated: Keep the commandments of the Lord (8:6)
 Motivation: Description of the Promised Land they are about to enter (8:7–10)

FIGURE 3: The argument of Deuteronomy 8:1–10.³⁸

first half beseeches Israel to be careful to ‘do’ (עָשֶׂה [8:1]) and ‘keep’ (שָׁמַר [8:6]) the commandments of the Lord in the Promised Land (Dt 8:1–10), although the second half warns them not to ‘forget’ (שָׁכַח [8:11]) the Lord by not keeping his commandments, which they might do when they prosper (Dt 8:11–20).³⁷ The argument of Deuteronomy 8:1–10 is presented in Figure 3.

The passage starts with the main exhortation that Israel should be careful to do the whole commandment that Moses commands them (Dt 8:1a), which, in the context, probably refers to the whole Deuteronomic law (cf. Lundbom 2013:347). This is followed by the result clause which states that doing this will result in life. From the overall context of Deuteronomy, ‘life’ refers to more than physical life, namely being alive or continued survival. It refers to well-being or quality of life, ‘namely the fullness of life that comes from living in relation and obedience to’ the Lord (Coetsee 2019b:108).

The main exhortation is followed by historical reflection in Deuteronomy 8:2–5, which recalls the lessons the people learned in the wilderness period. These verses describe the 40 years in the wilderness not merely as punishment for rebellion, but as education for the present moment and future life in the Promised Land (cf. Tigay 1996:92; Wright 1996:122).

The most famous lesson Israel learnt is arguably that of Deuteronomy 8:3, which states that the manna in the wilderness taught Israel that their existence does not depend on food alone, but of everything that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. Israel learnt that their continued survival depended on God’s providence (cf. Tigay 1996:91; Weinfeld 1991:389). Once more, this verse links the obedience expected from Israel and well-being or quality of life that is the result of that obedience (cf. Block 2012:229).

The final lesson in Deuteronomy 8:2–5 states that the period in the wilderness taught Israel that the Lord disciplines his people. This is strikingly stated by means of comparison in 8:5: ‘[a]nd you will know with your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you’ (author’s own translation).

The comparison found in Deuteronomy 8:5 says that Israel knows from experience that the Lord disciplines his people, and that the Lord, by disciplining his people, does what a man does to his son. The keyword in the comparison is the verb ‘discipline’ (יָדַע). The overall context of 8:2–5, especially

the references to the wilderness period as a humbling and test, strongly suggests that ‘discipline’ should be understood in the instructive and edifying sense (cf. Allen 2007:88; Merrill 1994:186; Thiessen 2009:369, 373; Tigay 1996:93). This is supported by the fact that Deuteronomy 8:5 suggests that God’s discipline shows his compassion (Craigie 1976:186; Merrill 1997:2, 480).

The translation of Deuteronomy 8:5 in the LXX is mostly true to the MT. The following should be noted:

- The qal perfect (יָדַע) is translated with the future indicative (γνώσῃ), which could be interpreted as an imperatival future: ‘know!’ (cf. Wallace 1996:569).
- In the first part of the comparison in the LXX potentiality is on the foreground, as is clear from the use of the optative (παιδεύσαι) and the indefinite pronoun (τις): ‘a certain man *might* discipline his son’.
- In the second part of the comparison, factuality is emphasised: ‘the Lord your God *will* discipline you’.
- The LXX broadens the reference to ‘the Lord’ (יהוה) who disciplines Israel to ‘the Lord your God’ (κύριος ὁ θεός) (8:5).

But for these smaller changes, the nuance and thrust of Deuteronomy 8:5 MT is kept in the LXX.³⁹

Coming back to the question at hand, a number of arguments support Deuteronomy 8:5 as the possible background of the phrase ‘and live’ in Hebrews 12:9:

- Both Deuteronomy 8:5 and Hebrews 12:5–11 refer to the discipline of the Lord: Deuteronomy 8:5 explicitly (‘the Lord your God will discipline you’) and Hebrews 12:9 indirectly by means of comparison between earthly fathers and the heavenly Father (‘we have had fathers of our flesh as disciplinarians’).
- Both Deuteronomy 8:5 and Hebrews 12:9 refer indirectly to God as a Father disciplining his son. In fact, the combination of father and son imagery with divine ‘discipline’ is quite rare within Biblical literature, found only in Deuteronomy 8:5 and Hebrews 12 (Allen 2007:86).⁴⁰
- Both Deuteronomy 8:5 and Hebrews 12:9 refer to edifying or instructive discipline (cf. Thiessen 2009:369).
- The context of both Deuteronomy 8:5 and Hebrews 12:9 indicates that God’s discipline shows his compassion and favour.
- Both Deuteronomy 8:1, 3 and Hebrews 12:9 refer to life as a result of obedience. Israel is commanded to obey the Lord wholeheartedly that they may live (Dt 8:1; ὅνα ζῆτε), although the addressees of Hebrews are to subject themselves to the heavenly Father, which will result in life (Heb 12:9; καὶ ζήσομεν). Overall, obedience to God which results in life has a strong Deuteronomic ring to it (cf. Coetsee 2019b:107–114).

39. Although the question remains which Greek version of Deuteronomy was available and used by the writer of Hebrews (cf. Coetsee 2019a:4), Wevers’ (2006) critical edition can be used as a baseline. A comparison between Deuteronomy 8:1–5 in Rahlfs’ (1996) edition of the LXX and Wevers’ (2006) edition of Deuteronomy contains only minor changes that do not change the meaning or interpretation of the passage.

40. Allen (2007:86), however, links Deuteronomy 8:5 with Hebrews 12:7, not Hebrews 12:9.

37. Deuteronomy 8 has a number of parallels with Deuteronomy 6:10–15 (cf. Block 2012:226), which warns that prosperity may cause Israel to forget God.

38. This outline is indirectly supported by Brueggemann (2001:103), Otto (2012:898) and Lundbom (2013:346).

TABLE 1: The possible background of the phrase ‘and live’ in Hebrews 12:9.

Hebrews 12: Baseline	Numbers 16 or 27	Hebrews 10:38	Proverbs 3:2	Jew. trad.	Exodus 20 or Deuteronomy 5	Proverbs 6:23	Deuteronomy 8:1–5
Context: persecution	-	X	-	-	-	-	-
Links on to Proverbs 3:11–12	-	-	X	-	-	X	X
Reference to illegitimate sons	-	-	-	X	-	-	-
Reference to ‘discipline’	-	-	±	X	-	X	X
Specifically educative discipline	-	-	±	-	-	X	X
Discipline shows compassion	-	-	-	-	-	X	X
Comparison fathers and Father	-	-	-	-	-	-	X
Reference to ‘respect’	-	-	-	-	±	-	-
Reference to ‘life’	±	X	X	±	±	X	X
Life in a result clause	-	-	-	-	X	-	X
Life as eternal life	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Future form of the verb ζάω	-	X	-	-	-	-	-

X, Yes; -, No; ±, To some extent; Jew. trad., Jewish tradition.

- The broader context of Hebrews 12 refers to Deuteronomy: the majority of quotations from, and allusions to, Deuteronomy appear in the latter portions of Hebrews, especially Chapter 12 (Kibbe 2016:121, 132). Hebrews 12:3 probably alludes to Deuteronomy 20:3 (Steyn 2007:160), and Hebrews 12:15 to Deuteronomy 29:17 LXX (Guthrie 2007:988).
- Finally, there is a possibility that Proverbs 3:11–12 is based on Deuteronomy 8:5, or at least that ‘the concept of discipline’ in Deuteronomy 8 ‘informs the writer of Proverbs’ (Spellman 2016:499).⁴¹ This would explain several of the parallels between Hebrews 12:9 and Proverbs 3:11–12.⁴²

The following points, however, are noteworthy against viewing Deuteronomy 8:5 as the background of the phrase ‘and live’ in Hebrews 12:9:

- Deuteronomy 8:5 does not refer to ‘life’; Deuteronomy 8:1, 3 does.
- ‘Life’ in Deuteronomy 8:1, 3 refers to quality of life; in Hebrews 12:9, ‘life’ refers to eternal life.
- The context of the two passages differs: although the backdrop of Deuteronomy 8 is the testing of the Lord because of the previous generation’s sin and rebellion, the backdrop of Hebrews 12 is persecution.

In conclusion, the number of parallels between Deuteronomy 8:1–5 and Hebrews 12:9 makes it a strong possibility that Deuteronomy 8:1–5 forms the background of the phrase ‘and live’ in Hebrews 12:9. But again, as with other proposed backgrounds, the argument is not conclusive.

Integration of findings

The most likely background of the phrase ‘and live’ in Hebrews 12:9

The findings of the investigation of the possible background of the phrase ‘and live’ in Hebrews 12:9 are shown in Table 1.

41. It may be vice versa (that Dt 8:5 is based on Pr 3:11–12), but it seems less likely.

42. Thiessen (2009:374) argues that the writer of Hebrews presumably ‘uses Prov 3:11–12 and not Deut 8:5 since the Proverbs citation can be used as a direct exhortation to his readers’.

Although Table 1 may be an oversimplification, it gives an idea of the number of parallels between the different proposed backgrounds and Hebrews 12:9. These parallels suggest that, of all the proposed backgrounds for the phrase ‘and live’ in Hebrews 12:9, the most likely is Deuteronomy 8:1–5.

Intertextuality, however, is always in the eye of the beholder. In a sense it is and will remain a subjective enterprise. Consequently, it is not conclusive that Deuteronomy 8:1–5 is the background of the phrase ‘and live’ in Hebrews 12:9. It is clear, however, that Deuteronomy 8:1–5 as the background is a strong possibility, and that scholars should give more attention to this possibility in their interpretation of the phrase ‘and live’ in Hebrews 12:9, and the interpretation of Hebrews 12:4–13 in general.

The interpretation of the phrase ‘and live’ in Hebrews 12:9

If Deuteronomy 8:1–5 is the background of the phrase ‘and live’ in Hebrews 12:9, the implications for the interpretation of the phrase are the following:

- *The meaning of ‘life’:* ‘Life’ in Hebrews 12:9 should be interpreted in the way it is used in the context of both Hebrews 12 and Deuteronomy 8, namely as eternal life (Heb 12:9) and quality of life (Dt 8:1, 3). Consequently, eternal life in Hebrews 12:9 does not refer to a mode of being that lies ahead or starts somewhere in the future, but to an existence that the hearers already share in. Moreover, in the context of Hebrews, quality of life means to respond to God’s gracious revelation in his Son by obeying him. Quality of life is to draw near to God through his Son and to grow spiritually. For the writer of Hebrews, this is what it truly means to live; this is life in the complete sense of the word.⁴³ This interpretation is supported by passages in Hebrews that refer to the present riches of a life of faith (e.g. the positive experiences listed in the grave [Heb 6:4–6]), and the immediate context which expresses the aim of life as sharing in God’s holiness (Heb 12:10) and acquiring ‘the peaceful fruit of righteousness’ (Heb 12:11).

43. This interpretation of ‘life’ has previously been proposed by Buchanan (1972:213) and Peterson (1982:174), and recently by O’Brien (2010:466–467). All of these scholars, however, note this in the passing without elaboration.

- *The purpose of the phrase 'and live'*: Taking the above into account, as well as the non-punitive interpretation of 'discipline' in Hebrews 12:4–13, the result clause in Hebrews 12:9 is not so much a warning as a positive call to a rich life experience that comes through faith. By subjecting themselves to the Father of spirits, they will be living life as God intended it. Consequently, the phrase 'and live' in Hebrews 12:9 links on to the overall theme of Hebrews (especially Heb 10:35ff.) for exhorting the hearers to persevere in faith.

In brief, if Deuteronomy 8:1–5 is the background of the phrase 'and live' in Hebrews 12:9, the writer uses the phrase to positively exhort his hearers to live life as their heavenly Father intended it, from now up to eternity, by wholeheartedly obeying his revelation in his Son.

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Author's contributions

I declare that I am the sole author of this research article.

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