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Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

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of New Testament Studies
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR
CHRISTIAN PROCLAMATION

COMMENTARY ON
HEBREWS

Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation

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BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR CHRISTIAN PROCLAMATION

COMMENTARY ON
HEBREWS

THOMAS R. SCHREINER



NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

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General Editors' Preface

In recent years biblical theology has seen a remarkable resurgence. Whereas, in 1970, Brevard Childs wrote *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, the quest for the Bible's own theology has witnessed increasing vitality since Childs prematurely decried the demise of the movement. Nowhere has this been truer than in evangelical circles. It could be argued that evangelicals, with their commitment to biblical inerrancy and inspiration, are perfectly positioned to explore the Bible's unified message. At the same time, as D. A. Carson has aptly noted, perhaps the greatest challenge faced by biblical theologians is how to handle the Bible's manifest diversity and how to navigate the tension between its unity and diversity in a way that does justice to both.¹

What is biblical theology? And how is biblical theology different from related disciplines such as systematic theology? These two exceedingly important questions must be answered by anyone who would make a significant contribution to the discipline. Regarding the first question, the most basic answer might assert that biblical theology, in essence, is *the theology of the Bible*, that is, the theology expressed by the respective writers of the various biblical books *on their own terms and in their own historical contexts*. Biblical theology is the attempt to understand and embrace *the interpretive perspective of the biblical authors*. What is more, biblical theology is the theology of the *entire* Bible, an exercise in *whole-Bible theology*. For this reason biblical theology is not just a modern academic discipline; its roots are found already in the use of earlier Old

¹ D. A. Carson, "New Testament Theology," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 810.

Testament portions in later Old Testament writings and in the use of the Old Testament in the New.

Biblical theology thus involves a close study of *the use of the Old Testament in the Old Testament* (that is, the use of, say, Deuteronomy by Jeremiah, or of the Pentateuch by Isaiah). Biblical theology also entails the investigation of *the use of the Old Testament in the New*, both in terms of individual passages and in terms of larger christological or soteriological themes. Biblical theology may proceed *book by book*, trace *central themes* in Scripture, or seek to place the contributions of individual biblical writers within the framework of the Bible's larger overarching *metanarrative*, that is, the Bible's developing story from Genesis through Revelation at whose core is *salvation* or *redemptive history*, the account of God's dealings with humanity and his people Israel and the church from creation to new creation.

In this quest for the Bible's own theology, we will be helped by the inquiries of those who have gone before us in the *history of the church*. While we can profitably study the efforts of interpreters over the entire sweep of the history of biblical interpretation since patristic times, we can also benefit from the labors of scholars since J. P. Gabler, whose programmatic inaugural address at the University of Altdorf, Germany, in 1787 marks the inception of the discipline in modern times. Gabler's address bore the title "On the Correct Distinction Between Dogmatic and Biblical Theology and the Right Definition of Their Goals."² While few (if any) within evangelicalism would fully identify with Gabler's program, the proper distinction between dogmatic and biblical theology (that is, between biblical and systematic theology) continues to be an important issue to be adjudicated by practitioners of both disciplines, and especially biblical theology. We have already defined biblical theology as whole-Bible theology, describing the theology of the various biblical books *on their own terms* and *in their own historical contexts*. Systematic theology, by contrast, is more topically oriented and focused on contemporary contextualization. While there are different ways in which the relationship between biblical and systematic theology can be construed, maintaining a proper distinction

² The original Latin title was *Oratio de iusto discrimine theologiae biblicae et dogmaticae regundisque recte utriusque finibus*.

between the two disciplines arguably continues to be vital if both are to achieve their objectives.

The present set of volumes constitutes an ambitious project, seeking to explore the theology of the Bible in considerable depth, spanning both Testaments. Authors come from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives, though all affirm the inerrancy and inspiration of Scripture. United in their high view of Scripture, and in their belief in the underlying unity of Scripture, which is ultimately grounded in the unity of God himself, each author explores the contribution of a given book or group of books to the theology of Scripture as a whole. While conceived as stand-alone volumes, each volume thus also makes a contribution to the larger whole. All volumes provide a discussion of introductory matters, including the historical setting and the literary structure of a given book of Scripture. Also included is an exegetical treatment of all the relevant passages in succinct commentary-style format. The biblical theology approach of the series will also inform and play a role in the commentary proper. The commentator permits a discussion between the commentary proper and the biblical theology it reflects by a series of cross-references.

The major contribution of each volume, however, is a thorough discussion of the most important themes of the biblical book in relation to the canon as a whole. This format allows each contributor to ground biblical theology, as is proper, in an appropriate appraisal of the relevant historical and literary features of a particular book in Scripture while at the same time focusing on its major theological contribution to the entire Christian canon in the context of the larger salvation-historical metanarrative of Scripture. Within this overall format, there will be room for each individual contributor to explore the major themes of his particular corpus in the way he sees most appropriate for the material under consideration. For some books of the Bible, it may be best to have these theological themes set out in advance of the exegetical commentary. For other books, it may be better to explain the theological themes after the commentary. Consequently, each contributor has the freedom to order these sections as best suits the biblical material under consideration, so that the discussion of biblical-theological themes may precede or follow the exegetical commentary. Moreover, contributors have some flexibility regarding format within these sections, as they consider their

own biblical books and decide how best to help readers understand the text.

This format, in itself, would already be a valuable contribution to biblical theology. But other series try to accomplish a survey of the Bible's theology as well. What distinguishes the present series is its orientation toward Christian proclamation. This is the *Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation* commentary series! As a result, the ultimate purpose of this set of volumes is not exclusively, or even primarily, academic. Rather, we seek to relate biblical theology to our own lives and to the life of the church. Our desire is to equip those in Christian ministry who are called by God to preach and teach the precious truths of Scripture to their congregations, both in North America and in a global context.

We hope and pray that the 40 volumes of this series, once completed, will bear witness to the unity in diversity of the canon of Scripture as they probe the individual contributions of each of its 66 books. The authors and editors are united in their desire that in so doing the series will magnify the name of Christ and bring glory to the triune God who revealed himself in Scripture so that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved—to the glory of God the Father and his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, under the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and for the good of his church. To God alone be the glory: *solī Deo gloria*.

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I am also thankful to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for supporting my writing and research so wonderfully. I finished the first draft of my commentary while I was on sabbatical, and I am thankful to Southern Seminary and to Southern Baptist church members who support scholarship in such a way. More specifically, I want to express my thanks to the president, R. Albert Mohler Jr., the vice president and provost, Randy Stinson, and the dean of the school of theology, Greg Wills, for their encouragement and support.



*To my son, John,
and daughter-in-law, Brooke.*

“I thank my God every time
I remember you.” (NIV)



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992
ALGHJ	Arbeiten zur Literatur Geschichte des hellenistischen Judentums
AnBib	Analecta biblica
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BBR	<i>Bulletin of Biblical Research</i>
BDAG	Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. R. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago, 2000
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BJRL	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca sacra</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
ca.	about
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CBR	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
ch(s).	chapter(s)
CTJ	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
CurBS	<i>Currents in Research: Biblical Studies</i>
EB	Echter Bibel

<i>EDNT</i>	<i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament.</i> Edited by H. Balz, G. Schneider. ET. Grand Rapids, 1990–1993
ESV	English Standard Version
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>ExpT</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>GTJ</i>	<i>Grace Theological Journal</i>
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
<i>Herm</i>	<i>Hermeneia</i>
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	Eusebius, <i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBMW</i>	<i>Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the</i> <i>Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament (Meyer-Kommentar)
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LN	Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene A. Nida. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament</i> <i>Based on Semantic Domains.</i> 2nd ed. New York, 1989
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text (of the OT)
NABPRDS	National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion Dissertation Series
NA ²⁸	<i>Novum Testamentum Graece.</i> Edited by B. Aland, K. Aland, J. Karavidopoulos, C. M. Martini, and B. M. Metzger. 28th rev. ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012

NAC	New American Commentary
NACSBT	New American Commentary Studies in Bible and Theology
NET	New English Translation
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplement Series
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
NTL	New Testament Library
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>OPTAT</i>	<i>Occasional Papers of Translation and Textlinguistics</i>
OT	Old Testament
par.	parallels
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
<i>PRSt</i>	<i>Perspectives in Religious Studies</i>
<i>ResQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
<i>RTR</i>	<i>Reformed Theological Review</i>
<i>SBJT</i>	<i>Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society for Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra pagina
<i>SPhilo</i>	<i>Studia philonica</i>
<i>STDJ</i>	<i>Studies in the Texts of the Desert of Judah</i>
StudNeot	Studia neotestamentica
SubBi	Subsidia biblica
SuppNovT	Supplements to Novum Testamentum

<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.</i> Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, 1964–1976
Th	Theodotion
Thayer	<i>Thayer's Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament</i>
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentary
<i>TrinJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
v(v).	verse(s)
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

INTRODUCTION

The words of Jesus on the cross, “It is finished!” (John 19:30), capture the theology of Hebrews. My aim in this commentary is to focus on the letter’s biblical theology. The emphasis on biblical theology shows up especially in the introduction and conclusion of this commentary where I consider theological structures and themes. In the introduction I will examine four different structures that are woven into the entire letter: (1) promise/fulfillment; (2) eschatology; (3) typology; and (4) spatial orientation (which can also be described as the relationship between heaven and earth in the letter). The commentary will conclude, after presenting an exegesis of each chapter, with a discussion of some major theological themes in Hebrews.¹

Most modern commentaries begin with significant introductions and then conduct an intensive exegesis of the text, chapter-by-chapter and verse-by-verse. By way of contrast, this introduction and the commentary are relatively brief and nontechnical. With the proliferation of commentaries today, a new commentary should have a distinctive approach. We now have many excellent commentaries on Hebrews that examine the letter in some detail. Many of these commentaries provide a useful function in that they draw on other parallels from both Jewish and Hellenistic literature to illuminate Hebrews. The advantage of such an approach is that the reader is plunged into the cultural world of the author. On the other hand,

¹ Given the constraints of this commentary, I cannot delve into the history of interpretation. For a start one should consult Jon C. Laansma and Daniel J. Trier, eds., *Christology, Hermeneutics, and Hebrews: Profiles from the History of Interpretation*, LNTS (London: T&T Clark, 2012); E. M. Heen and P. W. D. Krey, eds., *Hebrews*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005).

the careful sifting of various traditions may cause the reader to lose track of the letter's argument. At the same time, the author's theology may be muted, not because it isn't recognized but because it may be difficult to follow in the welter of information given to readers. I hope a commentary that probes the theology of Hebrews will prove to be helpful. I have been helped by many scholars in preparing this commentary, especially those who have written in-depth commentaries and those who have written monographs on the letter. No one writes from an objective standpoint, and hence I should state up front that I write as an evangelical Christian who believes that the Scriptures are the living and authoritative Word of God.

I. Author

The authorship of Hebrews is a fascinating issue that continues to interest Christians today. Clement of Alexandria (ca. AD 150–215) thought the letter was written by Paul in Hebrew and then translated into Greek by Luke.² Origen (ca. AD 185–253) said the thoughts are Pauline but suggested someone else made short notes and wrote up what the apostle taught and said.³ Origen passed on the tradition that either Luke or Clement of Rome was the writer, but he remained noncommittal on the identity of the author. Most scholars believe Origen was agnostic about the author since he wrote, “But who wrote the epistle, truly only God knows.”⁴ David Alan Black, however, argues Origen believed Paul was the author but someone else was the penman.⁵ Black's interpretation of Origen should be rejected. It has been shown that when Origen speaks of who wrote the epistle he was referring to the author, not merely the secretary.⁶ Hence, the notion that Origen believed Paul was the author fails to persuade. As time passed, however, the notion that Paul was the

² Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.14.1.

³ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.25.13.

⁴ This is my translation of Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.25.14.

⁵ David Alan Black, “Who Wrote Hebrews? The Internal and External Evidence Re-examined,” *Faith and Mission* 18 (2001): 3–26. See also David Alan Black, *The Authorship of Hebrews: The Case for Paul* (Gonzales, FL: Energion, 2013).

⁶ See David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, NAC (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 32.

author gained credence, and by the third century Pauline authorship was accepted in the East.⁷

The situation in the West was different. Tertullian (ca. AD 155–220) suggested that Barnabas was the author, which indicates there was no inclination in the early centuries in the West to ascribe the letter to Paul.⁸ Identifying the author as Barnabas is interesting since Barnabas was a Levite (Acts 4:36), which could explain the interest in and knowledge of priestly matters in Hebrews. Pauline authorship, however, finally triumphed in the West due to the influence of Jerome and Augustine.⁹ Pauline authorship reigned as the view of the church until the time of the Reformation. Erasmus inclined against Pauline authorship but said he would submit to ecclesiastical authorities since the matter was inconsequential.¹⁰ Luther rejected Pauline authorship, believing that Heb 2:3 proves the book could not have come from Paul. Luther had a novel but brilliant guess regarding authorship, proposing that the book was written by Apollos.¹¹ Hebrews is beautifully written and has an Alexandrian feel, fitting with Apollos's eloquence and Alexandrian roots (Acts 18:24). Calvin also agreed that Paul wasn't the writer based on Heb 2:3, suggesting that either Luke or Clement of Rome penned the letter.¹²

⁷ See here Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 1–2, n7. See, e.g., Eusebius who accepts Hebrews as Pauline, though he thinks it was written originally in Hebrew and translated by Clement of Rome into Greek (*Hist. eccl.* 3.3.5 and 3.38.2–3).

⁸ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 3.

⁹ For the views of Jerome and Augustine, see Philip Edgecumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 21–22.

¹⁰ For Erasmus's comments on Hebrews, see *ibid.*, 23.

¹¹ Guthrie nicely summarizes the evidence favoring Apollos, and he also provides a historical overview of those who have supported Apollos as the author (including Zahn, Lenski, Montefiore). Guthrie is not dogmatic on the matter but suggests Apollos as the author. George H. Guthrie, "The Case for Apollos as the Author of Hebrews," *Faith and Mission* 18 (2001): 41–56. For the development of Luther's views, see Hughes, *Hebrews*, 23; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 4. In support of Apollos, see Ceslas Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, 2nd ed., 2 vols., EB (Paris: Gabalda, 1953), 1:197–219.

¹² See John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, trans. J. Owen (repr.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 54, 358. Despite the

In the contemporary period scholars continue to propose various authors, such as Priscilla, Silas, Epaphras, Jude, Aristion, etc.¹³ In recent years a vigorous defense of Lukan authorship has been proposed by David Allen,¹⁴ and there is also a significant defense of Pauline authorship by David Alan Black.¹⁵

Pauline authorship should be rejected despite the attempts, both ancient and modern, to mount a defense. First, in Paul's 13 letters he identifies himself by name, thus the absence of a name in Hebrews renders it doubtful that Paul wrote the letter. Second, stylistic arguments should not be relied on too heavily since the Pauline corpus is so limited. Still, the polished Greek style of Hebrews doesn't accord with what we find in the Pauline letters. Third, the writer separates himself from the original eyewitnesses in Heb 2:3. Paul, by way of contrast, emphasizes repeatedly his authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ and refuses to put himself in a subordinate position to the apostles and eyewitnesses. This last reason, in particular, rules out the notion that Paul was the author.

Once Paul is excluded, the door is pushed wide open for any number of candidates. David Allen argues intriguingly for Luke, but one can only say that he has shown that Lukan authorship is possible. He has certainly not proved his thesis. The linguistic evidence is not decisive, and the differences between Hebrews and Acts call into question Lukan authorship.¹⁶ Barnabas is an attractive choice since he was a Levite, and the book has an interest in all things Levitical. Similarly, Luther's guess that the author was Apollos is appealing, for Apollos's eloquence accords with the letter's elegance, and his Alexandrian background fits with the character of

title of the commentary (which doubtless doesn't come from Calvin), Calvin clearly rejects Pauline authorship in his comments on 2:3 and 13:23.

¹³ Adolf von Harnack defended Priscilla as the author (Adolf von Harnack, "Probabilia über die Adresse und den Verfasser des Hebräerbriefes," *ZNW* 1 [1900]: 16–41). For Silas, see Thomas Hewitt, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, TNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960), 26–32. For Epaphras, see Robert Jewett, *Letter to Pilgrims: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (New York: Pilgrim, 1981), 7–9.

¹⁴ Allen, *Hebrews*, 29–61. David L. Allen, *Lukan Authorship of Hebrews* (Nashville: B&H, 2010).

¹⁵ See note 5 above.

¹⁶ Rightly Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 9.

the letter. Many scholars have seen an affinity between Hebrews and Platonic/Philonian thought, and Alexandria was a fertile center for such thought. But we come face-to-face here with the paucity of evidence in assigning an author. All the theories are guesses, though some are fascinating and alluring to be sure. We don't really know who wrote Hebrews. No theory of authorship has won the day and for good reason, for the answer to our quest lies outside the domain of historical knowledge. Origen's words about the author still ring true today: "God only knows." Hence, in this commentary I will refer to the writer as "the author." I will also use the title of the book as the subject so that the reader will find sentences like "Hebrews says."

II. Date

Dating NT documents is notoriously difficult, and Hebrews is no exception. No date was inscribed on the letter, and no historical referent in the letter gives us a definite date. Timothy was still alive (13:23) when the letter was written, and thus the letter was written in the first century. Since the author mentions the second generation of Christians (2:3), Timothy (13:23), and the death of some Christian leaders (13:7), the document was not written in the 30s or 40s. Furthermore, 5:12 indicates that the believers had been Christians for a while. The earliest date usually assigned is in the 60s.

Some date the book to the decades after AD 70, but there are reasons that suggest a date in the 60s, before AD 70.¹⁷ The author refers often to the tabernacle and the ritual carried out there. In fact, he uses the present tense to describe the cultic system, indicating, perhaps, that the temple was still standing when he wrote. Against this, however, is the fact that 1 Clement also uses the present tense when referring to the temple, and he wrote in AD 96, well after the time when the temple was destroyed (AD 70).¹⁸ Even though the argument from tense is not decisive, the reference to the tabernacle

¹⁷ See e.g., Donald A. Hagner, *The New Testament: A Historical and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012), 651–52.

¹⁸ The dating of 1 Clement is not certain. Eisenbaum suggests a date late in the first century or early in the second. See Pamela M. Eisenbaum, "Locating Hebrews Within the Literary Landscape of Christian Origins," in *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods—New Insights*, ed. G. Gelardini (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 224–31.

is still significant in calculating the date. One of the fundamental arguments of the book is that Jesus' sacrifice is definitive and final so that the sacrifices of the old covenant belong to a former era.¹⁹ The destruction of the temple in AD 70 would demonstrate conclusively (in accord with Jesus' prophecy; cf. Matthew 24) that temple sacrifices were no longer valid. Hence, it is improbable that the author would have failed to mention the destruction of the temple, suggesting that he wrote in the 60s before the temple was destroyed. A more definite date than this can't be assigned due to lack of evidence.

Another argument that may point to an early date also relates to 1 Clement. Most scholars date 1 Clement ca. AD 96, and Clement clearly cites Hebrews (e.g., 36:1–6). As noted above, this is not a knock-down argument since the date of 1 Clement is not certain either.²⁰ But if 1 Clement was written in AD 96, Hebrews had to have been around long enough to become part of the tradition, which suggests to me a pre-AD 70 date.²¹

III. Destination and Addressees

To whom was the letter written? It has been common to think it was written to a Jewish community since the readers, given the content of the letter, were tempted to revert to the sacrificial system from Judaism, perhaps to avoid persecution or to obtain assurance of forgiveness.²² Attraction to Jewish rituals and practices, of

¹⁹ The author probably refers to the rituals of the tabernacle rather than the temple worship of his day because he draws literarily from the account of the tabernacle in the Pentateuch.

²⁰ See William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1991), lxiii–lx; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 7–8.

²¹ Cf. Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2006), 38–40; Barnabas Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 20–21; Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 15–20; Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 33; Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, lxvi.

²² For a recent article that supports such a reading, see Susan Haber, "From Priestly Torah to Christ Cultus: The Re-Vision of Covenant and Cult in Hebrews," *JSNT* 28 (2005): 105–24. Cf. Lindars, *The Theology of Hebrews*, 11. Lindars argues that the readers struggled with their consciences and lacked confidence that their postbaptismal sins were forgiven (14, 59, 86). Selby shows that in Hebrews

course, does not necessarily point to Jewish readers. The presence of God fearers in synagogues and Gentile proselytes who converted to Judaism indicates that Gentiles may have found Judaism alluring as well. Indeed, the readers were possibly a combination of Jews and Gentiles.²³ Still, I side with the dominant view that the letter was written to Jewish Christians.²⁴ The title of the book “to the Hebrews” suggests that an address to Jewish readers is an old interpretation. Koester says the title was affixed by the end of the second century and hence isn’t of much value in determining the recipients.²⁵ Certainly the title doesn’t resolve the question of addressees, but it is an ancient witness for the letter being addressed to Jewish Christians, and it at least shows that the predominant view of the addressees reaches back to the earliest interpreters of the letter. At the end of the day, we can’t rule out that the letter was intended for Gentiles rather than Jews or included both Jews and Gentiles.²⁶ Still the title of the letter and its contents (with the focus on the Mosaic law and the Levitical priesthood) render it more likely that the book was addressed to Jewish readers who wanted to revert to Judaism.²⁷ Fortunately the interpretation of the letter doesn’t depend

the conscience signifies one’s “internal awareness of . . . sinfulness and guilt and resulting in a guilty conscience which stands as the one effective barrier to enjoying true fellowship with God.” Jesus’ sacrifice is superior since it has truly cleansed the conscience. See Gary S. Selby, “The Meaning and Function of συνείδησις in Hebrews 9 and 10,” *ResQ* 28 (1985–86): 153.

²³ So George Guthrie, *Hebrews*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 20; David deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 2–7.

²⁴ So O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 11–13; Hagner, *Introduction*, 646–48, and most commentators. See the helpful summary of the situation by Scott D. Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, WUNT 2/223 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 9–17.

²⁵ Koester, *Hebrews*, 46, 171–73.

²⁶ In support of Gentile readers, see James A. Moffat, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ICC (New York: Scribner’s, 1924), xv–xvii.

²⁷ Mason vigorously challenges this thesis (Eric F. Mason, “The Epistle [Not Necessarily] to the ‘Hebrews’: A Call to Renunciation of Judaism or Encouragement to Christian Commitment?” *PRSt* 37 [2010]: 7–20). He rightly says the author does not specifically call on the readers to avoid reverting to Judaism. Mason shows the main theme is a call to be committed to Christ and to avoid apostasy. So the interpretation of Hebrews offered here does not depend on the addressees being Jewish Christians. Still, despite Mason’s salutary cautions, it seems that the content of the

on the recipients. The meaning of the letter is fundamentally the same whether it addresses Jews or Gentiles, and thus the interpretation and biblical theology offered here do not rest on the identity of the addressees.

If we assume the letter was written to Jewish Christians, where were the Jews to whom the letter was addressed? Were they in Jerusalem, Palestine, Alexandria, or Rome? All of these locations make good sense. And scholars have also suggested Samaria, Antioch, Corinth, Cyprus, Ephesus, Bithynia, and Pontus.²⁸ It has even been argued that the letter was addressed to the Qumran community, but such a specific destination seems unlikely. No firm evidence in the letter ties it to Qumran, and the readers were almost certainly Christians, and there is no evidence of a Christian presence at Qumran.²⁹

The most important clue for determining the location of the recipients comes from the letter itself, for the author closes the letter with the words, “Those who are from Italy greet you” (13:24). It is possible, of course, that he wrote *from* Italy, and those with the author in Italy sent their greetings. But it seems more probable that he wrote *to* those in Italy (cf. Acts 18:2), i.e., to Rome itself, so that

book is directed to those tempted to revert to the Jewish cult to obtain forgiveness. The apostasy warned against has a particular profile that has to do with Jewish ritual practices. Mason says the author engages in syncrisis to encourage and instruct the readers. This is certainly the case, but the *content* of the comparisons and the detailed attention to the OT cult suggest the author employs syncrisis to address readers who were tempted to find forgiveness through OT sacrifices. Incidentally, the author doesn’t denigrate the OT or Judaism in making his argument. He argues salvation historically. The OT cultus was commanded and ordained by God, but its time, according to Hebrews, has expired. Now that Christ has come, the readers should not revert to the old covenant. The previous regulations were acceptable in their time and place, but they don’t apply in the new period. Still, the old is not rejected, for the author believes the old covenant is fulfilled in the new.

²⁸ For these proposals, see Attridge, *Hebrews*, 10. Allen argues that the letter was addressed to converted priests who migrated to Syrian Antioch (*Hebrews*, 61–74; cf. Spicq, *L’Épître aux Hébreux*, 1:221–31).

²⁹ I am not saying that the worlds of Qumran and Hebrews are completely segregated. Some fascinating correspondences exist between Hebrews and the writings found at Qumran. See, e.g., Eric F. Mason, “Hebrews and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Some Points of Comparison,” *PRSt* 37 (2010): 457–79. Mason notes parallels in cosmology, messianism, and the conception of Melchizedek.

those absent from Italy sent their greetings back to Rome.³⁰ If this is the case, then *Hebrews* was written to Jewish Christians in Rome. A Roman destination also fits with 1 Clement, for Clement wrote from Rome and knew the contents of *Hebrews*. His knowledge of *Hebrews* makes sense if the letter was directed to Rome. In addition, if we accept the nearly universal view that Paul didn't write *Hebrews*, it is suggestive that the West didn't accept Pauline authorship as early as the East did. If *Hebrews* was written to the Romans, they would have a more accurate historical memory regarding the author of the letter.

Carl Mosser, on the other hand, has made a sustained and powerful case for the letter's being written to Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.³¹ He argues that what the author says about the tabernacle in the letter applies to the temple of his day.³² The letter was written to persuade Jewish Christians to leave the city of Jerusalem, just as Rahab left the city of Jericho and identified with the people of God (11:31). Space is lacking, given the nature of this commentary, to investigate fully Mosser's thesis. He has certainly shown that a Jerusalem destination is possible, and such a destination has been rejected too quickly by scholars today. I still incline to a Roman destination, but the interpretation proposed here does not depend on such a hypothesis, and my reading of the letter in most respects could fit with a Jerusalem destination as well. We are reminded by Mosser's work that certainty often eludes us when it comes to historical reconstruction.

What we know from the letter is that the readers had experienced persecution in their early days as believers (10:32–34),³³ but they, apparently, had not suffered martyrdom (12:4). They were probably tempted to return to Judaism, perhaps to avoid persecution. Since Judaism was a legal religion under Roman law, it

³⁰ Cf. Lane, *Hebrews* 1–8, lviii–lx; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 29; O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 9.

³¹ Carl Mosser, "No Lasting City: Rome, Jerusalem and the Place of *Hebrews* in the History of Earliest 'Christianity'" (Ph.D. diss., St. Andrews University, 2004).

³² *Ibid.*, 194–206.

³³ See here Bruce W. Winter, "Suffering with the Saviour: The Reality, the Reasons and the Reward," in *The Perfect Savior: Key Themes in Hebrews*, ed. J. Griffiths (Nottingham: InterVarsity, 2012), 147–67. Lane thinks it refers to Claudian expulsion in AD 49 (*Hebrews* 1–8, lxiv–lxvi), but such a suggestion, though fascinating, is probably too specific.

would afford protection from Roman imperial power.³⁴ If Hebrews was written to Rome, then it was composed before Nero lashed out against Christians, putting many to death. The author's bracing words about staying true to Christ prepared the readers for what was to come. Nevertheless, the situation posited here is a hypothesis that can't be established with certainty. We know *what* the author wrote, but we don't know all the *whys* and *wherefores*.

IV. Genre and Structure

The epistle to the Hebrews is elegantly written and structured. The quality of the writing might provoke us to think it is a literary essay, especially since the writing doesn't begin as a typical epistle by introducing the author and the recipients. Chapter 13, however, makes clear that the letter is an epistle, concluding with features (benediction, news, greetings, grace benediction) typical of letters. Some scholars have argued that chapter 13 was not originally part of the letter, but such a view is a historical curiosity, for it has been demonstrated that the themes in the chapter fit with the rest of Hebrews.³⁵ When we think of the warning passages that pervade the letter, calling Hebrews an essay doesn't fit. The admonitions have a practical and urgent tone that don't fit with an essay. In fact, the writer identifies his words as "a word of exhortation" (λόγου τῆς παρακλήσεως, 13:22). The same expression is used for Paul's sermon in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:15). Hebrews, then, is a sermon, an exhortation, in epistolary form.³⁶ The author urgently exhorts the readers to hold fast to their faith, to persevere to the end. The letter was read orally to the congregation; hence we should attend to the letter's oral character.³⁷ The oral character of the discourse is but-

³⁴ See here Winter, "Suffering with the Saviour," 147–67, though I think Winter probably overemphasizes the role that imperial authority played in the lives of the readers.

³⁵ See especially Floyd V. Filson, "Yesterday": *A Study of Hebrews in the Light of Chapter 13*, SBT 2/4 (Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1967). Despite the recent objections of A. J. M. Wedderburn, "The 'Letter' to the Hebrews and Its Thirteenth Chapter," *NTS* 50 (2004): 390–405.

³⁶ See the discussion in Lane, *Hebrews* 1–8, lxix–lxxv; Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 13–16. Cf. L. Johnson, *Hebrews*, 10. Against this see Mosser, "No Lasting City," 210–39.

³⁷ So Steve Stanley, "The Structure of Hebrews from Three Perspectives," *TynBul* 45 (1994): 248–50; Lane, *Hebrews* 1–8, lxxv; Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 11.

tressed particularly by two features:³⁸ (1) the emphasis on speaking and hearing that pervades the letter; (2) the alternation between exposition and exhortation, where the exhortations take precedence. As O'Brien says, "The author is skillfully conveying the impression that he is present with the assembly and actually delivering his sermon to them."³⁹

NT letters have been examined as to whether they conform to Greek rhetoric, and Hebrews is no exception.⁴⁰ For instance, the commentaries by Attridge, Johnson, and Koester adopt a rhetorical stance, where the canons of Greek rhetoric are used to unlock the structure of the letter.⁴¹ Certainly the writer is exceptionally well educated and was familiar with Greek rhetoric. Despite the rhetorical artistry in the letter and the rhetorical features of the writing, evidence that the writer followed the rhetoric found in Greek handbooks is lacking.⁴²

Scholars have also investigated the structure of Hebrews carefully, and space is lacking to interact with the various structures

³⁸ Cf. O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 20–22. R. T. France rightly sees the oral and sermonic character of the letter but goes beyond the evidence in detecting seven discrete expositions in Hebrews ("The Writer of Hebrews as a Biblical Expositor," *TynBul* 47 [1996]: 245–76).

³⁹ O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 21.

⁴⁰ See the brief survey of scholarship in O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 24–27. See also Michael W. Martin and Jason A. Whitlark, "The Encomiastic Topics of Syncrisis as the Key to the Structure and Argument of Hebrews," *NTS* 35 (1989): 382–406, idem, "Choosing What Is Advantageous: The Relationship Between Epideictic and Deliberative Syncrisis in Hebrews," *NTS* 58 (2012): 379–400; T. H. Olbricht, "Hebrews as Amplification," in *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference*, ed. S. E. Porter and T. H. Olbricht, JSNTSup 90 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 375–87; Duane F. Watson, "Rhetorical Criticism of Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles Since 1978," *CurBS* 5 (1997): 175–207, esp. 181–87; Barnabas Lindars, "The Rhetorical Structure of Hebrews," *NTS* 35 (1989): 382–406. Cf. Timothy W. Seid, "Synkrisis in Hebrews 7: The Rhetorical Structure and Strategy," in *The Rhetorical Interpretation of Scripture: Essays from the 1996 Malibu Conference*, ed. S. E. Porter and D. L. Stamps, JSNTSupS 180 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 322–47. For a balanced approach, see deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 39–58.

⁴¹ Cf. Koester, *Hebrews*, 84–86; Johnson, *Hebrews*, 12–15.

⁴² So Guthrie, *Structure of Hebrews*, 32–33; Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, lxxx–lxxx; O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 26–27.

suggested.⁴³ Many outlines divide the letter up on the basis of content. Such approaches often ignore literary clues in the letter and underestimate the centrality of the exhortations. Hence, such outlines give the impression that Hebrews is a piece of systematic theology, which is misleading since it was addressed to a specific situation. The deficiencies evident in a content approach have been remedied by the careful studies of the structure of Hebrews in the work of Vanhoye,⁴⁴ Nauck,⁴⁵ Westfall,⁴⁶ Neeley⁴⁷ and Guthrie.⁴⁸ If anyone thought literary approaches would solve the problem, an analysis of the structures proposed by the scholars mentioned above demonstrates that such is not the case. It is evident from the diversity of opinion and the different outlines proposed that the outline of the letter is not an entirely objective issue. Indeed, the entire matter is remarkably complex and not easily solved, requiring a much longer discussion than is possible here.

The work of Vanhoye has been programmatic and suggestive, and yet virtually all scholars have concluded that it is not fully convincing.⁴⁹ Vanhoye set the course for future scholars through his careful analysis. He explored literary features that helped discern

⁴³ See the helpful survey and proposal of Barry C. Joslin, "Can Hebrews Be Structured? An Assessment of Eight Approaches," *CBR* 6 (2007): 99–129. Cf. Rodney J. Decker, "The Intentional Structure of Hebrews," *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* 4 (2000): 80–105; David J. MacLeod, "The Literary Structure of the Book of Hebrews," *BSac* 146 (1989): 185–97; Stanley, "The Structure of Hebrews," 245–71.

⁴⁴ See Albert Vanhoye, *La structure littéraire de l'épître aux Hébreux*, StudNeot 1, 2nd ed. (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1976); idem, *Structure and Message of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, SubBi 12 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1989), 18–44. Cf. David Alan Black, "The Problem of the Literary Structure of Hebrews: An Evaluation and Proposal," *GTJ* 7 (1986): 163–77. Black focuses on Vanhoye's contribution.

⁴⁵ Wolfgang Nauck, "Zum Aufbau des Hebräerbriefes," in *Judentum-Urchristentum-Kirche: Festschrift für Joachim Jeremias*, ed. W. Eltester (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1960), 199–206.

⁴⁶ Cynthia Long Westfall, *A Discourse Analysis of the Letter to the Hebrews: The Relationship Between Form and Meaning*, LNTS 297 (London: T&T Clark, 2005).

⁴⁷ Linda Lloyd Neeley, "A Discourse Analysis of Hebrews," *OPTAT* 3–4 (1987): 1–146.

⁴⁸ George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis*, NovTSup 73 (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

⁴⁹ For criticisms of Vanhoye, see O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 27–29; Guthrie, *Structure of Hebrews*, 34–35, 79.

the letter's structure, such as announcement of the subject (e.g., "angels" in 1:4 introduces the subsequent verses), framing devices (inclusio) which set the boundaries for a section, hook words (such as Melchizedek in 6:20 and 7:1), characteristic terms, shifts in literary genre (from exposition to exhortation), and chiasms (cf. the commentary on 5:1–10). Guthrie's work on the structure seems to have been the most convincing to scholars.⁵⁰ In any case, both literary features and content should be considered in determining the structure and outline of the letter. My approach here is rather eclectic and inevitably subjective. My outline takes into account rhetorical criticism, discourse analyses, and the content of the letter. Space is lacking to defend what is specifically proposed, but I hope it will prove to be illuminating in setting forth the message of Hebrews.

V. Purpose

Readers are immediately struck by the distinctive message and style of Hebrews, for it is different from anything else we read in the NT. By different I don't mean contradictory, for it fits well with Pauline theology. Still the theology is played in a different octave and a different key. In considering the theological message of the letter, it is important to locate the fundamental purpose of the writing. We may become dazzled and dazed by Melchizedek, angels, and the contrast between heaven and earth so that we fail to see why the letter was penned. The author isn't attempting to amaze us with his theological sophistication, his understanding of the relationship between the old covenant and the new, his reading of the Levitical and Melchizedekian priesthoods, and his construal of old and new covenant sacrifices. He writes for a practical reason, which becomes evident when we observe the warning passages that permeate the letter. The exact parameters of the warning passages are debated, but my concern here is not to delineate where the admonitions begin and end. What must be observed, regardless of where the warnings begin and end, is how pervasive the warnings are in Hebrews (2:1–4; 3:12–4:13; 5:11–6:12; 10:26–39; 12:25–29). Here we find the main

⁵⁰ E.g., Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, lxxx–xcviii; O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 29–34; Joslin, "Can Hebrews Be Structured?"

purpose of the letter.⁵¹ It is imperative to understand that the warnings, with all their diversity, essentially make the same point. In other words, the warnings should be read synoptically. They mutually cast light on one another. Hence the purpose of the letter becomes clear, for the warnings urge readers not to fall away. They must not turn away from Jesus and the new covenant and revert to the Mosaic law and the old covenant. The same message could be formulated positively. The readers are called on to persevere, to hold on, and to keep believing until the end. If they fall away, the author insists, they will face destruction and damnation.

The structure of the book also plays into the discussion. Some think Jesus' priesthood and sacrifice are the main point of the letter (cf. 8:1), while others see the main point as the exhortation. The strength of both positions can be acknowledged, for the priesthood and the sacrifice of Christ certainly pervade the letter. Still, to say that Christ's priesthood and sacrifice are central makes the letter too abstract and academic, and it misses the pastoral thrust of the work, for the theology of the book, the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ, serves the exhortation.⁵² The author's point is that since the work of Christ is so great, it would be folly to turn away from him. The main point in the theology of the letter (8:1), then, provides a foundation for the central purpose of the letter: don't fall away.

Why were the readers tempted to fall away? We have several clues that aren't mutually exclusive. The readers were persecuted and discriminated against for their faith (10:32–34). Perhaps such persecution accounts for their moral lethargy and temptation

⁵¹ Lane is particularly clear about this matter (*Hebrews* 1–8, xcvi–civ). See also Schenk, who notes that the exhortations are particularly linked to a loss of confidence in Christ's atonement relative to the Levitical cult. Kenneth L. Schenk, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews: The Settings of the Sacrifice*, SNTSMS 143 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 24–47.

⁵² Hooker argues that the letter was written after AD 70 and assures Jewish believers that they don't need the temple cult to obtain forgiveness of sins. Morna Hooker, "Christ, the 'End' of the Cult," in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, ed. R. Bauckham, D. R. Driver, T. A. Hart, and N. MacDonald (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 189–212. If it was written before AD 70 (which I favor), readers were likely tempted to revert to the temple cult, but in either case the admonition is largely the same: readers must put their confidence in Christ's sacrifice and continue to follow Jesus Christ.

to renounce their commitment to Jesus Christ (cf. 5:11–6:12).⁵³ Judaism was a legal religion in the empire, and hence identification with the Jewish cult could spare them from further distress and from the shame and dishonor attached to a new religion. At the same time they may have pined for the concrete picture of forgiveness obtained through the Levitical cult. Perhaps they had lost the assurance of cleansing through Christ's blood, which would explain why the author emphasizes the boldness to enter God's presence through Christ's sacrifice.

VI. Religious-Cultural Background

Scholars have proposed a variety of backgrounds to the letter.⁵⁴ The matter is extraordinarily complex and hence can't be treated adequately here. Of course, the most important background is the OT itself since the author is clearly immersed in and familiar with OT Scriptures.⁵⁵ Along the same lines, Hebrews stands in close affinity to other NT documents; thus it is most fruitful to consider the message of Hebrews in light of the OT Scriptures and the witness to Christ in other NT documents.

A number of monographs have been devoted to tracing the religious-historical background of the letter. Some have postulated a Gnostic background,⁵⁶ but the Gnostic turn in NT scholarship is yesterday's news and has been abandoned by most scholars.⁵⁷ Others,

⁵³ See Attridge, *Hebrews*, 13.

⁵⁴ See the thorough discussion of this matter in Lincoln D. Hurst, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: Its Background of Thought*, SNTSMS 65 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Hurst evaluates various alleged backgrounds, including Philonic, Qumranic, and Gnostic. He shows that the evidence is wanting for any of these to be postulated as the specific background for the letter. At the same time he demonstrates that the letter fits within the stream of other NT books. See also the compact but elegant survey in Lindars, *The Theology of Hebrews*, 21–25.

⁵⁵ See e.g., George B. Caird, "The Exegetical Method of the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Canadian Journal of Theology* 5 (1959): 44–51.

⁵⁶ Most notably, Ernst Käsemann, *The Wandering People of God: An Investigation of the Letter to the Hebrews*, trans. R. A. Harrisville and I. L. Sundberg (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1984).

⁵⁷ See e.g., Otfried Hofius, *Katapausis: Die Vorstellung vom endzeitlichen Ruheort im Hebräerbrief*, WUNT 11 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1970); Jon Laansma, "I Will Give You Rest": *The Rest Motif in the New Testament with Special Reference to Mt 11 and Heb 3–4*, WUNT 2/98 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997); cf. Graham

detecting fascinating parallels with Plato's thought, have seen a Platonic worldview akin to the writings of Philo.⁵⁸ The Platonic and Philonic connection with Hebrews still lives on today, but the work of Williamson and Hurst, among others, has severely damaged the hypothesis.⁵⁹ Another possibility is to see a Qumranic background to Hebrews,⁶⁰ and it has even been suggested that the letter was written to the Essenes. Certainly Hebrews has many points of contact with Jewish literature in the Second Temple period, but assigning it specifically to Qumran goes beyond the evidence since there is no testimony of a Christian presence at Qumran.

Many scholars have also argued for the influence of eschatology or apocalyptic notions on Hebrews.⁶¹ Schenk rightly suggests that Hebrews is fundamentally Christian, and yet such an admission does not rule out the influence of the OT or even Middle Platonism.⁶²

Hughes, *Hebrews and Hermeneutics: The Epistle to the Hebrews as a New Testament Example of Biblical Interpretation*, SNTSMS 36 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 137–42.

⁵⁸ For such a view, see Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, 1:39–91; James W. Thompson, *The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy*, CBQMS 13 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1982). L. Johnson thinks scholars reject Philonic influence too dogmatically and sees many affinities between Neoplatonic thought and Hebrews in his commentary.

⁵⁹ Ronald Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle to Hebrews*, ALGHJ (Leiden: Brill, 1970); Hurst, *Hebrews: Its Background of Thought*. Cf. Marie E. Isaacs, *Sacred Space: An Approach to the Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, JSNTSup 73 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992), 51–61; Kenneth L. Schenk, "Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews: Ronald Williamson's Study After Thirty Years," *SPhilo* 14 (2002): 112–35.

⁶⁰ For discussion of this view with a careful attention to the evidence, see F. F. Bruce, "'To the Hebrews' or 'To the Essenes'?" *NTS* 9 (1962–63): 217–32.

⁶¹ See C. K. Barrett, "The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology*, ed. W. D. Davies and D. Daube (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 363–93; Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation in Hebrews*. Barnard makes an interesting and learned case for apocalyptic mysticism. See Jody A. Barnard, *The Mysticism of Hebrews: Exploring the Role of Jewish Apocalyptic Mysticism in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, WUNT 2/331 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012). Still, weaknesses make the thesis less than convincing. See Nicholas J. Moore, review of *The Mysticism of Hebrews: Exploring the Role of Jewish Apocalyptic Mysticism in the Epistle of Hebrews*, by Jody A. Barnard, *Reviews of Biblical and Early Christian Studies*, November 13, 2012, <http://rbecs.org/2012/11/13/barnard>, accessed March 18, 2013.

⁶² Cf. Schenk, "Philo and the Epistles to the Hebrews," 112–35; idem, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews*, 3–6. In making this comment I am not endorsing every

Hebrews belongs broadly to the cultural and religious world of early Christianity. Naturally, it has contacts with the Greco-Roman world and the Jewish world. It resonates in some respects with themes found in Plato or Philo without being Platonic or Philonic.⁶³ The author did not write in a vacuum; his work has some affinity with what we find in Philo, but such correspondences do not mean the writer was drawing from the same well as Philo. Similarly, it has contacts with other Jewish and Christian writings, even though it is not Qumranic or Pauline. The letter has a distinctive character and stamp (even though it corresponds with themes in other writings) that set it apart. At the same time, it belongs with the other NT writings that form the canon of the NT, for it proclaims the centrality of Jesus Christ and insists that forgiveness of sins and entrance into the heavenly city are only through him.

VII. Hebrews Outline

- I. Prologue: Definitive and Final Revelation in the Son (1:1–4)
- II. Don't Abandon the Son Since He Is Greater than Angels (1:5–2:18)
 - A. The Son's Nature and Reign Show He Is Greater than Angels (1:5–14)
 - B. Warning: Don't Drift Away (2:1–4)
 - C. The Coming World Subjected to the Son (2:5–18)
 - 1. The Son of Man Exalted over Angels by Virtue of His Death (2:5–9)
 - 2. Jesus as the Merciful and Faithful High Priest Shares His Rule with His Brothers and Sisters (2:10–18)
- III. Don't Harden Your Hearts Since You Have a Son and High Priest Greater than Moses and Joshua (3:1–4:13)
 - A. The Faithful Son Greater than the Servant Moses (3:1–6)

comment made by Schenk. Still, he rightly maintains that some have underemphasized the similarities and common background of Philo and the author of Hebrews.

⁶³ Mackie rightly says that eschatology is central in Hebrews, but the author also draws upon the middle Platonism current in his day, though he did not embrace a Platonic worldview (*Eschatology and Exhortation in Hebrews*, 3–8, 105–20). See also Nash, who sees Philonic influence but carefully sets forth where the author of Hebrews differs from Plato. Ronald H. Nash, "The Notion of Mediator in Alexandrian Judaism and the Epistle to the Hebrews," *WTJ* 40 (1977): 100–109.

- B. Warning: Continue Believing and Obeying to Enter Rest (3:7–4:13)
 - 1. The OT Text: Don't Harden Your Hearts as the Wilderness Generation Did (3:7–11)
 - 2. Application of OT: Beware of Unbelief and Disobedience (3:12–19)
 - 3. Fear Lest You Don't Enter His Rest (4:1–5)
 - 4. Be Diligent to Enter His Rest While It Remains (4:6–13)
- IV. Don't Fall Away from Jesus' Melchizedekian Priesthood Since It Is Greater than the Levitical Priesthood (4:14–10:18)
 - A. Exhortation in Light of Jesus' Priestly Status (4:14–5:10)
 - 1. Hold Fast Confession and Draw Near Since Jesus Is Son and High Priest (4:14–16)
 - 2. Jesus Appointed by God as Perfect High Priest (5:1–10)
 - B. Warning and Assurance (5:11–6:20)
 - 1. Warning Against Falling Away from Jesus the High Priest (5:11–6:8)
 - a. High Priesthood Hard to Explain Because of Readers' Sluggishness (5:11–14)
 - b. Call to Maturity (6:1–3)
 - c. Those Who Fall Away Can't Be Renewed to Repentance (6:4–8)
 - 2. Assurance and Comfort (6:9–20)
 - a. Confident that Readers Will Be Diligent and Inherit the Promises (6:9–12)
 - b. Assurance and Hope Through God's Oath (6:13–20)
 - C. Jesus' Greater Priesthood as a Melchizedekian Priest (7:1–28)
 - 1. Melchizedek Greater than Levi (7:1–10)
 - 2. Arguments for a Changed Priesthood (7:11–28)
 - a. Imperfection of Levitical Priesthood (7:11–12)
 - b. Jesus from Tribe of Judah (7:13–14)
 - c. Prophecy of Melchizedekian Priesthood (7:15–17)
 - d. Setting Aside of Levitical Priesthood (7:18–19)

- e. Oath Accompanies Melchizedekian Priesthood (7:20–22)
 - f. Jesus a Permanent Priest (7:23–25)
 - g. A Sinless Priest and a Once-for-All Sacrifice (7:26–28)
- D. New Covenant Better than the Old (8:1–13)
 - 1. Jesus’ Heavenly Priesthood Shows He Is Mediator of a Better Covenant (8:1–6)
 - 2. Prophecy of New Covenant Shows Weakness of Old (8:7–13)
- E. A Better Sacrifice Under the New Covenant (9:1–10:18)
 - 1. Free Access to God Not Granted Under Old Covenant (9:1–10)
 - 2. Jesus Entered Heaven Itself with His Blood (9:11–14)
 - 3. Jesus as Mediator of New Covenant Bestows an Eternal Inheritance (9:15–22)
 - 4. Jesus’ Sacrifice: Better than OT Sacrifices (9:23–10:18)
 - a. Jesus’ Heavenly and Once-for-All Sacrifice (9:23–28)
 - b. Repetition of OT Sacrifices Shows Their Inadequacy (10:1–4)
 - c. Jesus’ Once-for-All Sacrifice Canceled Old System (10:5–10)
 - d. Jesus’ Completed Sacrifice (10:11–14)
 - e. Final Forgiveness Promised in New Covenant Realized (10:15–18)
- V. Concluding Exhortations and Warnings (10:19–12:29)
 - A. Exhortation to Draw Near, Hold Fast, and Help Others (10:19–25)
 - B. Warning: No Hope of Forgiveness for Those Who Turn from Christ (10:26–31)
 - C. Call to Persevere in Faith (10:32–12:3)
 - 1. Don’t Abandon Confidence but Endure in Faith (10:32–39)
 - 2. Description and Examples of Persevering Faith (11:1–12:3)
 - a. Nature of Faith (11:1–2)
 - b. Creation Through Noah (11:3–7)

- c. The Faith of Abraham and His Heirs (11:8–22)
- d. The Faith of Moses and Those Entering the Land (11:23–31)
- e. A Closing Catalog of Faith (11:32–40)
- f. Run the Race Looking to Jesus as Supreme Exemplar of Faith (12:1–3)
- D. Exhortations to Readers to Endure (12:4–29)
 - 1. Endure Discipline for Holiness (12:4–13)
 - 2. Pursue Peace and Holiness for the Final Blessing (12:14–17)
 - 3. You Have Come to Mount Zion Instead of Mount Sinai (12:18–24)
 - 4. Final Warning: Don't Refuse the One Speaking (12:25–29)
- VI. Epilogue: Final Exhortations (13:1–25)
 - A. Practical Expressions of Love in the Church (13:1–6)
 - B. Remember Your Leaders and Suffer with Jesus Outside the Camp (13:7–17)
 - C. Final Words (13:18–25)

VIII. Hebrews and the Story Line of the Bible

The story line of the Scriptures can only be sketched here briefly, but it is important to put Hebrews in canonical context, for it is part of a library of books that constitute Holy Scripture. We won't truly understand Hebrews unless we see how it relates at least in some fashion to the rest of Scripture.

The Scriptures open in Genesis with God as the sovereign King creating the world and everything in it. Human beings are made in the image of God and appointed to rule the world for God (Gen 1:26–27). They are mandated to rule the world under God's lordship and for his glory. Instead of trusting and obeying God, Adam and Eve defied him and refused to submit to him (Genesis 3). Because of their transgression incited by the words of the serpent, they were spiritually separated from God and introduced death into the world. Nevertheless, death is not the final word, for God promises that the offspring of the woman will crush the serpent (Gen 3:15).

The initial optimism engendered by the promise collapses, for human beings are radically evil. Cain was the offspring of the serpent

and murdered Abel.⁶⁴ The offspring of the serpent were triumphing over the offspring of the woman, though God granted Seth to Adam and Eve to continue the lineage through which the promise would be fulfilled (Gen 4:25). Because the corruption was so great, because the offspring of the serpent were spreading so rapidly, God had to destroy them with the flood, showing that he rules and reigns even when evil seems to have the upper hand. God established a covenant with Noah, pledging to preserve the world until he accomplished redemption (Genesis 6–9). Still, the story of the tower of Babel reveals that human beings had not changed (Gen 11:1–9); they were still inclined toward evil and lived to make a name for themselves instead of living for the glory and honor and praise of the one true God. Genesis 1–11 unveils the depth of human evil so that readers will grasp that victory over the serpent is a massive undertaking. The evil in human beings is no trivial matter. A demonic rejection of God and an embrace of evil afflict human beings.

Despite human evil, which defies the imagination, God is gracious. He chose one man through whom he would fulfill the promise made to the woman. He promises Abraham that he will have land (Canaan), offspring (Isaac), and universal blessing (Gen 12:1–3). Still the story rolls on slowly. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob never possessed the land, and Abraham found it agonizingly difficult to have even one child! The Lord teaches him through the birth of Isaac that the promise will only be fulfilled through God himself, that human beings can't contribute to the promise's fulfillment. Isaac and Jacob learned the same lesson so that, when Genesis ends, Israel was in the wrong land (Egypt), there were only about 70 Israelites (when God promised they would be as many as the stars of the sky), and there was certainly not universal blessing. What is said here could be misunderstood, for there could scarcely be countless descendants in three generations, and Joseph as Pharaoh's right-hand man did bless the nations.

When Exodus opens, the promise of offspring for Israel is being fulfilled, for their population was exploding, which terrified the Egyptians. The Lord intended to show Israel again and again that salvation is his work, not theirs. Hence, he freed Israel from

⁶⁴ All the offspring of Adam and Eve come into the world as the offspring of the serpent, and hence those who belong to God are the recipients of his grace.

Egypt through Moses with great signs and wonders (Exodus 1–18). The Lord crushed the offspring of the serpent (Pharaoh), who attempted to annihilate the people from whom the offspring of the woman would come (Gen 3:15). Israel recognized that the Lord had redeemed them, fulfilling his promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Israel was adopted as God's son (Exod 4:22), becoming his special possession and a kingdom of priests if they followed the Lord's instructions (Exod 19:5–6). The redemption from Egypt becomes a type and anticipation of the redemption that would be accomplished in Jesus Christ.

The Lord entered into a covenant with Israel, choosing them as his special people (cf. Exodus 19–24). If Israel obeyed the covenant stipulations, they would be blessed; but if they transgressed what the Lord commanded, they would experience the curses of the covenant (Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 26–28). The Lord didn't demand perfection to remain in the covenant, for sacrifices were instituted to grant forgiveness for Israel's transgressions (Leviticus 1–7, 16). The Lord also impressed on Israel his holiness. He dwelt with his people in the tabernacle (Exodus 25–40), but those who treated the Lord with contempt would be destroyed (Leviticus 10), as the thunderstorm which gripped Mount Sinai clearly taught the people. Hebrews, of course, focuses on the final inadequacy of the sacrifices offered, and emphasizes the inauguration of the new covenant. Ultimately, the old covenant was a failure. The sacrifices didn't cleanse the conscience of sin and provide free access to God, nor did the old covenant inscribe the law on the heart. But we are getting ahead of the story here!

The next element of the promise of Abraham was ready to be fulfilled. Israel was about to take possession of Canaan. We read in Numbers how the people failed to follow the Lord's instructions. After seeing the Lord's signs and wonders that routed the Egyptians, Israel, amazingly enough, didn't believe the Lord could bring them into the land, and hence they disobeyed his instructions. Hebrews picks up on the sin of the wilderness generation (3:12–4:13), using it to warn his readers not to follow the example of Israel. The story wasn't over, however, for under Joshua Israel possessed the land of Canaan, though the story clarifies that they didn't possess the entirety of the land. Israel's triumphs are the Lord's work, for they win impossible victories over foes that are far stronger than they

are. Joshua concludes by saying that the Lord has given rest to Israel (21:4; 22:4; 23:1). Hebrews picks up this theme, contending that the rest given to Israel under Joshua was not the final rest God promised. The rest under Joshua was a type and anticipation of a greater rest to come.

Upon opening Judges, we might think that paradise is around the corner. Two elements of the promise to Abraham are fulfilled: Israel had a large population and now inhabited the land of Canaan. Hundreds of years had passed since the promise was made to Abraham, but Israel now seemed to be on the cusp of blessing. It is rather stunning to see where the story goes next. Instead of moving forward, Israel slipped backward. They were in that sense like Adam in paradise. Instead of trusting and obeying the Lord, they turned toward idols so that the Lord unleashed their enemies upon them. Israel repeated a cycle of sin, defeat before enemies, repentance, and deliverance. Judges concludes with a story that echoes what happened to Lot in Sodom (Judges 20; Genesis 19). Israel was in the land, but they were not submitting to Yahweh's lordship. Instead of blessing the nations, they were being corrupted by the nations.

When 1 Samuel opens, Israel had a corrupt priesthood and was teetering toward collapse. Still the Lord was gracious, raising up Samuel to bring the nation back to him. The kingship was instituted under Samuel when Saul was installed as the first king. If we read perceptively, the theme of kingship is actually in the narrative from the beginning. The Lord promises that kings will come from Abraham and Jacob (17:6, 16; 35:11). Indeed, the scepter will belong to Judah, and the peoples of the world (universal blessing!) will obey him (Gen 49:10). Balaam prophesies that a star and scepter from Israel will crush (cf. Gen 3:15) the enemies of the Lord (Num 24:17–19). The offspring of the woman who will destroy the serpent will come from a king in Israel. The narrative poses an implicit question: is Saul that king? On first taking the reins of power, it looked as if he might be. But Saul turned out like Adam in the garden and like Israel after possessing Canaan. Instead of trusting and obeying the Lord, he followed his own desires, and hence the Lord pledges that there will not be a Saulide dynasty.

David was anointed as king instead of Saul, and Saul became David's mortal enemy, following the footsteps of Pharaoh (the

offspring of the serpent!) who tried to destroy the chosen of the Lord. David was persecuted and on the run, but he trusted in the Lord to exalt him instead of wresting the kingdom from Saul. Finally, the Philistines killed Saul in battle, and David as king reigned over all Israel. David's kingship was marked by his trust and obedience to the Lord. Indeed, the Lord made a covenant with David that is central to the scriptural story line. The offspring of the woman who would triumph over the serpent would come from David's line. He would be a Davidic king, for the Lord promised David a perpetual dynasty (2 Samuel 7). According to Hebrews and the remainder of the NT, this promise finds its fulfillment in Jesus the Messiah.

Despite all of David's virtues, he was not the one who would crush the serpent, for he too was a sinner needing forgiveness since he violated the covenant with the Lord by committing adultery with Bathsheba and murdering Uriah (2 Samuel 11). Still, when David's son Solomon ascended to the throne, it seemed that paradise was around the corner. Israel was at peace. Solomon was a wise and judicious king, and a marvelous temple was erected to worship the Lord. Could universal blessing be far behind? But Solomon recapitulated the story we have seen over and over again. He followed the pattern of Adam in the garden, Israel in Canaan, and Saul as king. He ceased to trust in the Lord and turned to idols.

The kingdom, after Solomon's day and as a result of his sin, was divided between the north and the south, with Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Every single king in Israel followed the pattern of the first king, Jeroboam son of Nebat, and worshiped idols. The kings of Judah had a more mixed record, for some were faithful to the Lord, though even the best of them failed to do all the Lord commanded. At the end of the day, though, both Israel and Judah gave themselves over to sin, and thus both kingdoms experienced the curses of the covenant: Israel was exiled to Assyria in 722 BC and Judah to Babylon in 586 BC. We see from this brief recapitulation of the story that Hebrews rightly maintains that the new covenant is better than the old. Such a judgment is verified by the history of Israel. The kingdom was not realized through the old covenant since both Israel and Judah did not and could not keep the prescriptions of the covenant.

The prophets came to center stage after the kingdom was instituted in Israel, warning both Israel and Judah that exile would come

unless they repented and turned to the Lord. The Day of the Lord will come, and it will not be a day of salvation but a day of judgment for disobedient Israel. The prophets, however, did not only proclaim a message of judgment. Israel would go into exile, but there would be a new exodus. Israel, by the grace of God, would return to the land. There would be a new start for the people of God, and the kingdom would come with the arrival of the new exodus. And that is not all. There will be a new covenant (Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 36:26–27) in which Israel's sins will be finally and fully forgiven. The Lord will write the law on Israel's heart by giving them the Holy Spirit, and so they will desire to do what the Lord says. The Lord will pour out his Spirit on his people, and a new age of salvation will arise (cf. Isa 32:15; 44:3; Joel 2:28). Creation will be renewed, and there will be a new exodus, a new covenant, and a new creation. The kingdom God promised has not been withdrawn. It will come, and a new David will reign on the throne (Hos 3:5; Mic 5:2–4; Isa 9:1–7; 11:1–10; 55:3; Jer 23:5–6; 30:9; 33:15–17; Ezek 34:23–24; 37:24–25; Zech 9:9). The new creation, the new exodus, and the new covenant will be fulfilled through a king! The serpent will be defeated, and the kingdom will come.

Israel returned from exile in 536 BC, and yet the promises of a new covenant, a new creation, and the coming kingdom were not realized. It seems that the prophecies found in the prophets only had an already-but-not-yet fulfillment. Remarkably Israel, by and large, did not surrender their faith. They continued to believe that the Lord would fulfill his promises to them. When the NT opens, there are a variety of opinions and sects in Israel, but there was a common belief that the Lord would keep his kingdom promises. Most believed that the great promises would be realized only if Israel was obedient to the Torah.

The events in the Gospels took place before Hebrews was written and hence are part of the theological backdrop of the letter. We can hardly do justice to the message of the Gospels here, but certain themes stand out. First, Jesus is the new David promised by the prophets. He is the one through whom the blessing promised to Abraham and David would be fulfilled. Second, Jesus teaches that the kingdom has arrived in his ministry. The kingdom has come because the king has come! Third, Jesus clearly teaches that he is the one who will give the Spirit to his people (cf. Matt 3:11–12 par.;

John 14–16); the promises of return from exile, a new covenant, and a new creation would come to pass through God's Spirit. Fourth, Jesus is the Son of Man who will receive the kingdom (cf. Dan 7:9–14). He is the Son of God who is Immanuel, God with us (Matt 1:23). He is the Word of God (John 1:1–18) who is fully divine (cf. John 5:23). He existed before Abraham was born (John 8:58). He is the Bread of the Life, the Light of the World, the Good Shepherd, the Resurrection and the Life, the Way and the Truth and the Life, and the True Vine. Fifth, at the Last Supper Jesus teaches that the new covenant is instituted with his death (Matt 26:26–29 par.). Jesus is the Servant of the Lord (cf. Isaiah 53) who took upon himself the sins of his people. The Gospels have been called passion narratives with an extended introduction, for the climax of the story comes with Jesus' death and resurrection, and all the Gospels teach that through Jesus' death and resurrection forgiveness is granted (e.g., Matt 1:21; 20:28; Mark 10:45; Luke 22:19–20; John 1:29; 6:51; 11:49–52).

Much more could be said. What is striking in the story of the Gospels is that the people of Israel, except for a few disciples, failed to see what was right before their eyes. The problem that plagued Israel throughout its history still persisted. They continued to resist God's revelation. Jesus wasn't embraced as Israel's deliverer. He was despised as a messianic pretender, especially since they thought his teaching didn't accord with the law. Hence, instead of crowning Jesus as the king, they crucified him on the cross. They didn't realize that Jesus was the Passover Lamb, the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Word of God, and the Servant of the Lord of Isaiah 53. They didn't understand that through Jesus' death on the cross the new covenant was instituted as he taught at the Last Supper. They didn't realize that the forgiveness that the new covenant promised (Jer 31:34) was accomplished through Jesus' death.

Death was not the end of the story. God vindicated Jesus by raising him from the dead. The resurrection (Isa 26:19; Ezekiel 37; Dan 12:2) signaled the arrival of the new creation and age to come. In Jesus the return from exile (which is the coming of the kingdom) had arrived, though it won't be consummated until the second coming. The new covenant was inaugurated with his death and the gift of the Spirit. The new creation had come with his resurrection, and he was most certainly the new David. The prophecies of the OT were

all fulfilled in him. And yet there was a proviso. The new creation, the new covenant, and the new exodus were inaugurated but not consummated. The kingdom had come but not in its fullness. All nations would be blessed through him, so that there was an opportunity for salvation for all peoples before the final day.

We see in the Acts of the Apostles the gift of the Holy Spirit given to the church (Acts 2), signaling that the eschaton had arrived. The new covenant is the age of the Holy Spirit, which came at Pentecost. In Acts the good news about Jesus Christ is proclaimed to both Jews and Gentiles, so that the promise given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob of worldwide blessing began to be realized. As the gospel was proclaimed and believed, resistance arose from both Jews and Gentiles. The early Christians taught that salvation was only in Jesus (Acts 4:12) and that God raised him from the dead and would judge the world through him (Acts 17:31). Hence, people were required to believe in Christ and repent of their sins and receive baptism to be saved (e.g., Acts 2:38; 16:31). Interestingly, Jewish Christians continued to worship in the temple, apparently participating in the burnt offering (Acts 3:1–10), and Paul offered sacrifices in accord with the Nazirite vow (Acts 18:18; 21:23–26; cf. Num 6:9–21). Such practices did not mean that Christians were obligated to keep the law. The Apostolic Council determined that circumcision and observance of the law were not necessary for salvation (Acts 15:1–21). Furthermore, Peter was clearly instructed that the food and purity laws were no longer required (Acts 10:1–11:18). The early Christians apparently kept some of the laws for cultural reasons (not because they were required for salvation) and to facilitate fellowship with Jews they were trying to reach with the gospel.

The place of Hebrews in the canon and the NT is significant. It comes after the Gospels and the book of Acts. Having given a brief survey of the Bible's story line, we are not surprised that Hebrews picks up central themes from that story line. First, God's promises have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God, the Messiah, and the Melchizedekian high priest. The new covenant promised in the OT has been realized in him. Believers, therefore, are forgiven of their sins through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Second, the fulfillment in Christ has an already-but-not-yet character. The new age has been inaugurated but not consummated. So the new covenant has indeed come, but believers are not yet perfectly

free from sin. They are forgiven of their sins through Christ's sacrifice, but they still struggle with feelings of guilt. The age to come has arrived through Christ's resurrection, and yet believers still await the coming of the heavenly city. Third, the OT is typological so that the institutions, events, and persons in the OT forecast what is to come. The OT sacrificial system points forward to the final and definitive atonement accomplished in Jesus Christ's sacrifice. The Davidic king and Israel as God's son point ahead to Jesus as the Messiah, the unique Son of God who fulfilled what Adam was called to do in paradise. Fourth, the earthly reflects the heavenly. The tabernacle and its furnishings on earth point to a heavenly tabernacle above, to the presence of God. The OT should be read eschatologically, typologically, and spatially.

The story line rehearsed here reminds us of one of the most important themes in Hebrews. The OT should be read in light of the fulfillment in Jesus Christ. It does not apply in the same way to believers in Jesus Christ as it did to OT saints or even to those who lived when Jesus was on earth. Hence, one cannot depend on OT sacrifices to obtain forgiveness of sin, for such an activity denies the once-for-all sacrifice in Jesus Christ. To revert to OT sacrifices would be to march backward in salvation history. It would, in effect, deny that Jesus Christ has come. It would be a blatant rejection of his sacrifice. Practically speaking, then, a return to the OT cult would constitute a rejection of Jesus as Messiah, as the Son of God, and as the Melchizedekian priest. It would say that Moses and Joshua were greater than Jesus, that animal sacrifices were worth more than Jesus' sacrifice. It would mean returning to earth when Jesus has lifted believers to heaven, to the presence of God. The warnings are so strong in Hebrews because the readers were tempted to deny Jesus and all that he had accomplished. They were close to denying that the "last days" had come and that God has spoken definitively and finally in his Son (1:2). They were on the brink of hardening their hearts to what God had done in Jesus, just as the wilderness generation had done (3:12–4:13). They were perilously close to acting like Esau, who sold his birthright for a pot of porridge (12:16–17).

They were probably tempted to revert back to Judaism because they were suffering (cf. 10:32–34; 12:4–11). The writer reminds them of the pattern of OT saints and the pattern in the life of Jesus.

First comes suffering and then comes glory. Already-not-yet eschatology means the reward promised to believers, the heavenly city, still awaits them.

One question that arises when comparing Acts and Hebrews should be answered here. If Paul offered sacrifices for a Nazirite vow and other early Christians continued to participate in temple activities, why does Hebrews reject so dogmatically OT sacrifices? Doesn't that contradict what believers actually did in Acts? Answering this question is difficult since the circumstances and situation of the readers in Hebrews are not completely clear to us. I suggest the following. In the case of Paul and Peter, no one believed they were compromising their belief in Jesus Christ by participating in Jewish sacrifices. It was clear they believed Jesus was the Messiah and that his death was the only means by which one could be forgiven of sins (Acts 2:38; 4:12; 13:38–39). Apparently the readers of Hebrews were communicating something different. If they reverted to OT sacrifices, they were sending the message that Christ's sacrifice was not sufficient, that one needed to offer animal sacrifices to be saved. In other words, the readers were in effect saying that animal sacrifices were necessary for salvation and the sacrifice of Christ could be dispensed with. Participating in worship and sacrifice with other Jewish believers for cultural reasons to reach them with the gospel was one thing, but in Hebrews the readers were inclined toward something different. They were suggesting (if they continued on their path) that the sacrifice of animals and the OT cult was fundamental and crucial to obtain forgiveness of sins. They were in effect denying Christ's sacrifice and were placing their trust in the old covenant rather than the new.

IX. Biblical and Theological Structures

The intent in this section is to touch on some of the structural themes that undergird the biblical theology of Hebrews. The structures discussed here are not completely discrete entities, for they overlap to some extent. Still, it is helpful for the sake of clarity to look at the theology of Hebrews from a number of different angles. Here I will note the structures that inform Hebrews and at the conclusion of the commentary will focus on major themes. I hope these two different ways of exploring the theology of Hebrews will be

enriching, indicating that the theology of the book can be explored from a variety of perspectives. I am not claiming that these are the only structures for examining Hebrews but that the structures here represent a helpful introduction to the letter. The structures explored here are: (1) promise-fulfillment; (2) already-but-not-yet eschatology; (3) typology; and (4) the spatial orientation of Hebrews.

Promise-Fulfillment

I understand promise-fulfillment in a particular way here. It refers to predictions or promises in the OT that, according to Hebrews, are now fulfilled. Even though promise-fulfillment is defined in such a way, there are instances where it is difficult to determine whether a particular passage is promise-fulfillment or typological. In some instances, since the categories overlap, I will argue that both categories apply.

The first verses of the book signal the theme of promise and fulfillment (1:1–2). God had spoken in a variety of modes in the OT, but he has spoken definitively and finally in his Son. The author communicates from the outset that OT revelation, which was diverse and incomplete, finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. It is clear in reading Hebrews that the entirety of the OT should be read in light of the fulfillment in Jesus, but for the sake of space the focus here will be on specific instances of fulfillment in Hebrews. We begin with what is perhaps the favorite OT Scripture for the author: Psalm 110. Verse 1 says, “This is the declaration of the LORD to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool.’” According to Hebrews this prophecy is clearly fulfilled in Jesus Christ, for he alludes to or quotes the verse five different times (1:2, 13; 8:1; 10:12–13; 12:2). The prophecy fits into the story line of the OT. God promises to reclaim his rule over the world through the offspring of the woman (Gen 3:15). As the story progresses, the promise is unpacked further, for the Lord reveals that the world will be blessed through Abraham’s offspring (e.g., Gen 12:1–3). The identity of the one through whom the promise will be realized is explained further in the time of David, for God’s rule over the world will be restored through a Davidic king according to the promise of the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7).

The citation of Psalm 110 fits into such a narrative, clarifying that according to Hebrews Jesus is the Davidic son and Lord (!)

through whom the kingdom will be established. The author quotes Ps 110:1, directly applying it to Jesus in 1:13. He also alludes at the outset of the book to Ps 110:1, declaring that Jesus “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (1:3). Hebrews returns to the fulfillment of this prophecy repeatedly, affirming that the “main point” in the letter is that Jesus as high priest “sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (8:1). Jesus’ sitting at God’s right hand is tied to his accomplishing final atonement for believers (10:12; 12:2) so that he now waits until his enemies are made the footstool for his feet (10:13). The author sees Jesus as the coruler of the universe with God, and as such he enjoys divine stature and worship (1:6).

Jesus also fulfills Ps 110:4, which reads, “The LORD has sworn an oath and will not take it back: ‘Forever, You are a priest like Melchizedek.’” In Psalm 110 the one who is David’s lord is also an eternal priest in the order of Melchizedek. The author of Hebrews sees this verse fulfilled in Jesus and exploits it to further his argument. Jesus’ calling as a high priest is affirmed by citing Ps 110:4 (5:5–6). Jesus did not assert his selfish will, claiming that he should serve as high priest. He was called and identified by God as a Melchizedekian priest so that Jesus responded to God’s claim on his life instead of deciding his own destiny.

Jesus also fulfilled the prophecy of serving as a priest like Melchizedek (5:10) because of his humanity and participation in suffering. He could not fulfill the priestly calling if he did not share the human condition. He knew anguish and misery, learning obedience and becoming perfect in the process (5:7–9). At the same time the author sees in Ps 110:4 a prophecy of the resurrection, for the verse says he will serve as a priest “forever” (7:17). Jesus fulfills this prophecy because he has “an indestructible life” (7:16), because he conquered death through the resurrection. Another element of the prophecy in Ps 110:4 is that it is accompanied by an oath. The author of Hebrews spies great significance in this, concluding that Jesus’ priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood since the latter was not accompanied by an oath (7:20–22).

I noted above that God’s kingdom, promised in the OT, would be realized through a Davidic king. Hebrews appropriates this theme and sees it as fulfilled in Jesus Christ. When the author says the Son is the “heir of all things” (1:2), he draws on a promise given to the

anointed king of Israel (Ps 2:8). A few verses later Hebrews actually quotes Ps 2:7, which confirms that the writer identifies the Son and king of the psalm to be Jesus himself. The Messianic promise, granted to the Davidic king, finds its ultimate realization in Jesus.

In the same verse (1:5) Hebrews also quotes 2 Sam 7:14, which comes from the chapter where the Davidic covenant is inaugurated in which the Lord promises that David's dynasty will never end. The prophets pick up on this Davidic promise and reaffirm it regularly (Hos 3:5; Mic 5:2–4; Isa 9:1–7; 11:1–10; 55:3; Jer 23:5–6; 30:9; 33:15–17; Ezek 34:23–24; 37:24–25; Zech 9:9). Hebrews leaves us no doubt that Jesus is the true Son of David, that he is the Messiah, and thus the kingdom promised in the OT is realized in him.

The fulfillment of the new covenant stands out in Hebrews. The author quotes Jer 31:31–34 twice (8:8–12; 10:15–18), and it appears at the heart of his argument. The old covenant failed because Israel did not keep the covenant stipulations, and hence they were thrust into exile. The Lord promised, however, that he would make a new arrangement, a new covenant, with his people. He would implant the law within them so they could actually do what the Lord commanded. Furthermore, he would forgive the sins of his people. Interestingly Hebrews doesn't emphasize the ability to do what the law commands. Instead, it focuses on the fact that the covenant is called "new." If it is new, he concludes, then the fulfillment has come, and the old covenant is obsolete (8:13). Another dimension of the new covenant is exploited. God would not make a new covenant if the old one were adequate. So the new covenant is also a "better" covenant (7:22; 8:6). The new covenant has "a better hope" (7:19), "better promises" (8:6), and "better sacrifices" (9:23), since Jesus' blood "says better things than the blood of Abel" (12:24). The new covenant shows that believers should no longer live under the old, for the old is inferior and ineffectual. The inadequacy of the old comes to center stage when the author considers forgiveness. What makes the NT superior is that sins are forgiven definitively and fully and forever in the sacrifice of Jesus (9:11–10:18). It doesn't make sense to revert to OT sacrifices since the repetition of such sacrifices illustrates their inability to cleanse the conscience from sin.

We see the promise and fulfillment theme also in terms of the rest (3:12–4:13), the land promised to the people of God.⁶⁵ In God's covenant with the patriarchs, he promised them land (Gen 12:1–3; 13:14–17; 15:18–21; 26:3; 28:4, 13–15; 35:12). The promise of the land is fulfilled under Joshua when Israel possessed Canaan, though the land was surrendered again when the northern kingdom was sent into exile by Assyria in 722 BC and the southern kingdom by Babylon in 586 BC. In NT times Israel was still in exile in that the Romans ruled over her. Hebrews teaches that the land promise has not been fulfilled in its fullness, but it doesn't look forward to Israel's possessing the land of Canaan. Instead, a future rest is promised to the people of God (4:1–13), a heavenly rest that is greater than any earthly rest. The patriarchs did not obtain the entirety of what God promised, living as sojourners on the earth (11:13). The promise of land, the promise of eschatological rest, will be fulfilled in the heavenly city, in the new Jerusalem which is coming (11:10, 14–16; 12:22; 13:14).

Already-but-Not-Yet Eschatology

One of the common features of NT eschatology is its already-but-not-yet character.⁶⁶ What this means is that God's eschatological promises have been inaugurated through Jesus Christ but not consummated. Fulfillment has truly come in Jesus Christ, but the fulfillment isn't complete. Hence there is an eschatological tension that characterizes the NT witness. Hebrews shares such a perspective, and this reality will be outlined briefly.

We see eschatological tension in Jesus' reigning at the right hand of God. As noted above, the reign of Jesus at God's right hand fulfills Ps 110:1 (cf. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12–13; 12:2). The last days have arrived (1:2), for the Messiah reigns as the OT prophesied.⁶⁷ It is striking for Christians today to realize that we have been in the last days for nearly 2,000 years. As Hebrews says elsewhere, the "end of the ages" has come through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ

⁶⁵ Oren Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land*, NSBT (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2015).

⁶⁶ For Hebrews, see especially Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation in Hebrews*, 29–152.

⁶⁷ See the discussion in Schenk, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews*, 78–111.

(9:26). But there is also eschatological reservation, for even though Jesus reigns in heaven, his enemies have not yet been completely vanquished (1:13; 10:13). “We do not yet see everything subjected to” Jesus (2:8), even though he is now “crowned with glory and honor” (2:8–9). We still await the coming new world that will be under Jesus’ authority (2:5). Hebrews clarifies that the rule promised to human beings is fulfilled in and through Jesus. The present heavens will perish and be rolled up like a cloak (1:11–12). The created things, the present heavens and earth, will be shaken and removed, and only God’s kingdom will remain (12:26–28).

The already-but-not-yet theme is also apparent with regard to salvation. On the one hand believers are waiting for Jesus to come again when he will bring salvation (9:28) and they will “inherit” the salvation promised (1:14; 9:15). The fullness of the promise has not yet become reality, but it will be realized when Jesus comes again (10:36–37). On the other hand salvation is also the present possession of believers (2:3; 5:9; 6:9–10). When we consider the temporal dimension of salvation, we find a both-and instead of an either-or. Believers *are* saved and *will be* saved. Both are true, and neither truth should be denied or neglected.

Similarly, believers are now “sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all” (10:10). They have been “sanctified” through “the blood of the covenant” (10:29; cf. 10:14), and thus sanctification is an already accomplished reality; it has been definitively accomplished through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But there is also eschatological reservation, a recognition that believers are not yet completely sanctified. They should “pursue . . . holiness,” for apart from it they will not “see the Lord” (12:14). If sanctification were complete in every sense, there would be no need to pursue holiness. The urgent exhortation to holiness demonstrates that believers are not yet all they should be. Believers are already truly sanctified and set apart through Jesus Christ, and yet they await the fullness of their sanctification, the completion of holiness that God intends for his people to enjoy. The same kinds of things could be said about perfection. Believers are “perfected” (τετελείωκεν) now and forever by the once-for-all offering of Jesus Christ (10:14). One would think from such a statement that no further work was needed, yet the author also exhorts the readers to go

on to perfection (τελειότητα, 6:1), indicating that perfection is not yet theirs in its entirety.

The provisional nature of the deliverance enjoyed by believers is evident in other ways in the letter. For instance, believers are “waiting” for the kingdom to come in all its fullness. The interval between the already and not yet is evident, for believers in Jesus Christ suffer (10:32–34) and experience discipline (12:4–11). Distress and affliction will not be the portion of believers when the kingdom is consummated. Another way to put it is that believers are freed from bondage to death and “the fear of death” now (2:14–15), and yet they are not spared physical death itself. They must die before enjoying new life in its fullness.

The eschatological tension in Hebrews is also communicated by the warning passages (2:1–4; 3:12–4:13; 5:11–6:8; 10:26–31; 12:25–29). The readers are admonished about the terrible consequences of falling away. If they turn away from Jesus Christ, there is no hope for them. Such admonitions are given to those who are “brothers” (3:12), to those who have been “enlightened” and have received the Holy Spirit (6:4–6). The Spirit, as the OT teaches, is an eschatological gift (Isa 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 36:26–27; 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28). Since the Hebrews had received the Spirit, they are members of the new age, participants in the new covenant (Jer 31:31–34). According to Jeremiah 31, beneficiaries of the new covenant have God’s law implanted in them. But if that is the case, why the need for warnings? Certainly residents of the heavenly city won’t need warnings. It seems here that we have another example of eschatological tension. The readers are members of the new covenant, the law is written on their hearts, and they are truly partakers of the Holy Spirit. And yet they need warnings to stimulate them to persevere until the end. The warnings are not inconsequential or insignificant. Even though the readers have already received eschatological promises, they must heed the warnings to obtain eschatological promises.

The call to faith is also a recognition of the “not yet” (10:39–11:40). Believers must continue to believe, as chapter 11 clarifies, to receive the promise, just as their ancestors believed in what God pledged to them. If the promise were visible (cf. 11:3) and the reward were given now (11:6), faith in God’s future promises would be superfluous. Faith places its confidence in what God will do in the future. Faith recognizes, then, that God hasn’t yet given everything

he promised, and it reaches out to the future, believing that God will make good on everything he has said.

The rest promised in Hebrews is clearly eschatological (3:7–4:11). Believers must enter God’s rest, and yet at the same time it seems that 4:3 teaches that those who believe have entered God’s rest even now.⁶⁸ The word “today” (4:7) may also suggest that the rest can be entered now. Still the rest is fundamentally an end-time reality (4:11). Believers are still exiles and sojourners (11:13), and in that respect they are like the wilderness generation (cf. 3:12–19), which was “on the way” to receive God’s promise.

Even if the rest is wholly future, which is the view of many scholars, believers enjoy many other present blessings, for they are members of God’s people and enjoy his presence during their earthly sojournings (7:19). Associated with the notion of rest is the promise of the city to come (11:10). God has prepared a heavenly city for his own (11:16). Presently believers are members of the city of man, which will not endure (12:27). At the same time they are distinct from the people of this world, for they seek the city of God, which is “to come” (13:14). The notion of the heavenly city is eschatological, but there is also a suggestion that believers have now “come” to the heavenly Jerusalem, that they are members even now of a great heavenly assembly (12:22–23). Even though believers await the heavenly city in all its fullness and beauty, they are also currently members of it.

Typology

Typology exists when there is a historical correspondence between events, institutions, and persons found in the OT and the NT.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ See the commentary on 4:3 for further discussion.

⁶⁹ In defense of the notion that Hebrews is characterized by allegory, see Stefan Nordgaard Svendsen, *Allegory Transformed: The Appropriation of Philonic Hermeneutics in the Letter to the Hebrews*, WUNT 2/269 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009). I suggest that the structure is better described as typological since there is a historical rootedness in the patterns discerned by the author. The author of Hebrews sees persons like Melchizedek and Aaron as historical, so too the tabernacle and sacrifices are anchored in the historical practices of Israel. Israel’s failure to enter the land of promise was also a historical event that speaks typologically to later readers. Even if some modern historical-critical readers don’t think such persons, events, or institutions are historical, it is certainly the case that the author of Hebrews believed they were.

I argue that typology does not merely represent correspondence but a correspondence *intended* by God.⁷⁰ In other words, there is a prophetic character to biblical typology. It is not merely retrospective but prospective. It is not merely the case that the author of Hebrews detects patterns and correspondences as he reflects on OT revelation. Since God is sovereign over all of history (e.g., Isa 46:9–11), he plans the end from the beginning. Hence, the events, institutions, and persons in which there is a typological relationship are not merely accidents of history, nor are they simply employed by God as helpful illustrations. On the contrary, the persons, events, and institutions were intended from the beginning as anticipations of what was to come.

Another element of biblical typology, clearly present in Hebrews, should be mentioned at the outset. Biblical typology is characterized by escalation. This means the fulfillment is always greater than the type. Indeed, this element of typology is absolutely crucial for Hebrews, for it is inconceivable that the readers would turn back to the type now that what God promised has become a reality, for the fulfillment is far superior to the type. We see, then, that escalation in typology fits with the main purpose of the letter: how can the readers turn away from Jesus Christ when his person and work are far superior to what was adumbrated in OT persons and institutions? Hebrews, then, reads the OT (rightly so), as forward looking. The OT itself points to a better priest, a better king, a better covenant, a better land, and better promises. Hence, the notion of escalation is not arbitrary or foisted upon the text but is intrinsic to the OT witness.

Typology in Hebrews centers on Jesus Christ. We see from the inception of the letter that ultimately all the types in the OT point to and climax in him. God spoke in various ways to the prophets, but the prophets direct us to and anticipate one greater than themselves (1:1–2). Finally and supremely God has spoken in his Son. He is the

⁷⁰ For a recent discussion of typology, see Benjamin J. Ribbens, “A Typology of Types: Typology in Dialogue,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 5 (2011): 81–96.

Ribbens divides typology into three categories: christological, tropological, and homological. For the purpose of this discussion, I am limiting typology here to the category identified as christological in Ribbens. For further discussion on the matter, see also, Richard Ounsworth, *Joshua Typology in the New Testament*, WUNT 2/328 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 19–54.

greatest and final prophet. The author picks up this theme relative to Moses (3:1–6), for Moses is conceived of as the greatest prophet in the OT. Moses’ greatness isn’t attributed to his abilities but to his relationship with God, to his dependence on God for strength, and thus he is described as humbler than anyone else on earth (Num 12:3). Moses’ humility manifests itself in his response to criticism, for he did not take umbrage when censured by Aaron and Miriam (Num 12:1–2).

The greatness of Moses as a prophet is emphasized in OT revelation. Moses is esteemed as “faithful” and as God’s “servant” (Num 12:7–8). Therefore, God spoke to him “directly” and “openly” (Num 12:8). Indeed, the Lord “knew” him “face to face” (Deut 34:10). Despite the clarity of revelation given through Moses, Jesus is greater than he was, for Jesus like Moses was “faithful,” but Jesus was faithful as “Son” (3:2, 6). Jesus was a greater prophet than Moses, for he was not merely a servant or merely a prophet. He was God’s Son.

The title “Son” plays a major role in Hebrews relative to Jesus Christ (1:2, 5, 8; 3:6; 4:14; 5:5, 8; 6:6; 7:3, 28; 10:29), but the term is also used typologically. In the OT Israel was identified as God’s son and firstborn (Exod 4:22; Jer 31:9), showing Israel’s special relationship with God. As the OT story progressed, the Davidic king is appointed to be God’s son and the firstborn (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 89:27). The promises given to Israel would become a reality through the covenant enacted with David. As God’s son and firstborn, the Lord would rule the world through Israel and the Davidic king (cf. 1:5).

As the OT story progresses, we see that Israel as God’s son was sent into exile since they failed to keep the stipulations of the covenant. The Davidic kings followed the same course, or perhaps it is better to say, given the message of 1–2 Kings, that the kings led the nation down the same path. They were appointed as kings to lead the nation in righteousness and justice and truth, but the kings forsook the Lord and failed to obey the instructions of the Lord. God’s promise to bless the world through Abraham, therefore, did not become reality through the rule of the kings.

Hebrews, along with the rest of the NT, sets forth Jesus as the true Israel and the true Davidic king. He was the Son who invariably obeyed, never transgressing the will of the Lord (4:15; 7:26). The Lord promised Israel that his promises to them would be secured

through obedience (Gen 18:18–19; cf. Gen 26:5), and Jesus as God’s Son learned to obey in his suffering (5:8). His suffering did not propel him away from God but actually drew him closer to God. Israel was tested in the wilderness and sinned repeatedly, but when Jesus was tested, he didn’t fall prey to sin (2:18; 4:15), and thus he was perfected via his sufferings (2:10). We see escalation in that Jesus was always the obedient Son in contrast to Israel and the Davidic kings. But there is also escalation in another sense, for Jesus is not only a human son but also the divine Son. He is not only the heir like the Davidic king but also the agent by whom the universe was created (1:2) and is “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact expression of His nature” (1:3). Here is a Son who is worshiped (1:6) and is identified as God (1:8), showing that the Son shares in the divine identity.

The use of Psalm 45 in 1:8–9 is most interesting, for the psalm is originally a royal psalm about the Davidic king. It is a wedding song celebrating the king’s majesty and greatness. When the king is identified as “God” in the psalm (Ps 45:6), we have an example of hyperbole. The king (cf. Exod 7:1) is identified as God in the psalm given his stature and rule. As God’s vice-regent he is called “God,” but no one in Israel interpreted the wording literally as if the Davidic king were actually divine. But what is said about the Davidic king was no accident, for it pointed forward in a deeper and truer sense to Jesus Christ. For this one truly is the Son of God, the one whom angels worship and who created the universe (1:2, 6, 10, 12). We see a prime example of escalation in typology here.

The Son typology is exploited in still another direction. In 2:5–8 the author cites Psalm 8, which is a creation psalm celebrating the dignity of human beings. Even though human beings seem to be small in the world, God made them to rule the world as his vice-regents (cf. Gen 1:26–27; 2:15). Psalm 8 celebrates the majesty of God and the dignity of human beings created in his image. Hebrews, however, reads the psalm eschatologically and typologically. The author recognizes that human beings didn’t realize their potential. Human beings didn’t rule the world for God. Instead they sinned against the Lord, plunging the world into chaos so that death reigned instead of life and joy (2:5–18). Death and sin prevented human beings from reaching their intended goal (2:14–15, 17).

The creation of human beings anticipates and points to the one human being (Jesus Christ) who was faithful to God, the one who succeeded where everyone else failed. Because of his obedience, the world will be subjected to him (2:5), even though that reality has not yet been realized (2:8). The original plan that human beings would rule the world for God is realized in Jesus Christ. Jesus functions as the representative human being, helping those who can't help themselves (2:18). His help consists supremely in his priestly work of offering himself as a sacrifice on the cross, by which he atoned for the sins committed against God (2:17). Jesus' victory over sin and death is shared with all who are his "brothers" (2:11–12), with "the children God gave" him (2:13), with "Abraham's offspring" (2:16). Human beings can't rule over the world if death triumphs over them, but Jesus conquered death for their sake.

The Melchizedekian priesthood of Jesus is also typological.⁷¹ Melchizedek was not a preincarnate appearance of the Son of God, for Heb 7:3 says that Melchizedek was made like the Son of God. The wording here suggests that Jesus Christ as high priest was the goal and model of the priesthood from the beginning, and hence Melchizedek was always intended to point forward to him. This supports the claim made earlier that typology does not just happen to seize upon correspondences between persons, events, and institutions. Typology is prospective, reflecting God's sovereign plan for all of history.

Melchizedek's role as both a priest and a king (7:1) anticipates Jesus Christ who is both a priest after Melchizedek's order and the Davidic king.⁷² The combination of the priestly and kingly offices is anticipated in Psalm 110, which identifies David's son as his lord but also as a Melchizedekian priest who will serve forever (Ps 110:1, 4). Hebrews, then, picks up on what the OT itself develops. The phrases "king of righteousness" and "king of peace" assigned to Melchizedek (7:2) also apply to Jesus, for ultimately he grants

⁷¹ Against Cockerill, who limits typology to the Aaronic priesthood (*Hebrews*, 54). I would suggest that the author's typology is rather fluid so that he can argue that both the Aaronic and the Melchizedekian priesthood are typological.

⁷² In defense of reading the reference to Melchizedek typologically, see Dale F. Leschert, *Hermeneutical Foundations of Hebrews: A Study in the Validity of the Epistle's Interpretation of Some Core Citations from the Psalms*, NABPRDS 10 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1994), 228–41.

righteousness and peace to his people as their king and priest. When the text says that Melchizedek did not have a mother or father or genealogy, having no beginning or no end (7:3), we must beware of overinterpretation. The author isn't asserting that Melchizedek literally didn't have a father or mother, nor is he claiming that he wasn't born or that he didn't die. If Melchizedek didn't have a father or mother, he wouldn't even be a human being! Melchizedek is contrasted with Levitical priests here, for the genealogy of the latter is carefully traced; and if genealogical connections can't be proven, they can't serve as priests (Neh 7:64). It is remarkable, then, that Melchizedek served as a priest, though Genesis says nothing about his genealogy. The "silence" about Melchizedek's ancestry and birth and death is significant typologically, for it demonstrates that his priesthood is of a different character than the Aaronic priesthood. Certainly the language used here is not literally true of Jesus at every point, for he did have a mother.

The author contends that the Melchizedekian priesthood is superior to the Levitical, and thereby he establishes typologically that Jesus' priesthood is greater as well. Jesus cannot be a Levitical priest since he hails from the tribe of Judah (7:13–14). We see from Psalm 110 that the Melchizedekian priesthood is fulfilled in the Davidic king, so that the priesthood finds its ultimate fulfillment in the kingly office. Melchizedek's priesthood, according to Ps 110:4, remains "forever" (7:17). Certainly this wasn't literally true of Melchizedek, for he was dead and gone after his life ended. We see typological escalation here, for the word "forever" is literally true in Jesus' case, for he has "an indestructible life" (7:16). Jesus' priesthood never ends since he conquered death forever at his resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus is foundational to the superiority of his priesthood since the tenure of Levitical priests ends at death, whereas Jesus is a permanent and effective priest since he "remains forever" (7:24–25).

The author doesn't feel restricted or bound in considering the typological significance of Jesus. There is a sense in which the Levitical priests are types of Jesus as well (8:1–5). We see from 5:1–10 that the Levitical priesthood is the typological framework that anticipates Jesus' priesthood. Jesus, like the Levitical priests, was a human being appointed by God to his office. What is also emphasized, however, is the discontinuity between the two, for Jesus is a priest in the heavenly sanctuary, the true sanctuary, whereas the

Levitical priests are restricted to an earthly ministry. The earthly priests are “a copy and shadow of the heavenly things” (8:5). Moses himself signaled that the tabernacle pointed to a greater and more perfect tabernacle, for God instructed him to “make everything according to the pattern that was shown to you on the mountain” (8:5; Exod 25:40; cf. 25:9; 26:30; 27:8). The earthly priests point forward to a better priest, a heavenly one. Earthly priests stand because their work is never finished (10:11), but Christ sits because his sacrifice does not need to be repeated (10:12–14), for final forgiveness has been accomplished.

The author picks up on the typological significance of the tabernacle and its sacrifices in 9:1–10. The regulations for sacrifices are instructive, for the high priest was permitted to enter the most holy place only once a year on the Day of Atonement (9:7; Leviticus 16). The Spirit was revealing that the free access to God was lacking (9:8). Jesus’ sacrifice was superior, for he did not enter an earthly tabernacle but a heavenly one, securing access to God’s presence continually and forever (9:11–12). The animal sacrifices were a type of Jesus’ greater sacrifice, and we clearly have an example of escalation since Jesus’ sacrifice tore open the curtain in the temple/tabernacle separating human beings from God so that believers have constant access to God’s presence (10:19–20).

The physical washings and sacrifices of the OT (9:10, 13) anticipate a greater washing and cleansing, one that is effectual. The external washings, after all, only cleanse the body (9:13), but Jesus’ blood sprinkles the conscience clean of sin and washes the body with water so that the whole person is truly cleansed (9:14; 10:22). There is also a typological relationship in terms of covenantal practice. The old covenant was ratified by the blood of animals, signifying that forgiveness only comes with the spilling of blood, with the death of sacrificial victims (9:15–22). The typological connection is clear. The blood of animal sacrifices points forward to a greater and more effective sacrifice, to the blood of Jesus, which is a “better” sacrifice (9:23–24) since it brings access to God. Jesus’ once-for-all sacrifice secured forgiveness of sins forever (9:25–28).

The law and the sacrifices therein are “shadows” pointing to a greater reality (10:1), to a greater sacrifice. Animal sacrifices direct us to the sacrifice of Christ (10:2–10), for it is obvious that the blood of animals can’t atone for sin. True atonement can only be secured

by a human being, not by brute animals who are offered unwillingly and without any consciousness of what is going on. Christ, on the other hand, gave himself personally and gladly for the sake of his people. Animal sacrifices simply remind people of their sins year after year. The sacrifice of Christ, on the other hand, sanctifies once for all (10:10). What is offered at Jesus' altar (the cross) is better than the food of OT sacrifices (13:9–10), for the former brings grace while the latter is an external practice that points forward to a better sacrifice and a better altar.

The author suggests a correspondence with the life of Christ in a few other texts. For instance, the sacrifice of Christ is compared to the slaying of Abel (12:24). Both died as innocent victims, but Christ's blood speaks better than Abel's, for Christ washes clean those who trust in him. Abel's blood cries out for justice, but Christ's blood does something far more wonderful and startling. Through his death human beings can boldly enter God's presence. Similarly, the sacrifice of Isaac anticipated Christ's resurrection typologically (*παραβολή*, 11:17–19), for Abraham was convinced that God would raise Isaac from the dead if he sacrificed him (Gen 22:4), but Jesus, in contrast to Isaac, was truly raised from the dead, fulfilling what was adumbrated in the "sacrifice" of Isaac.

Typology also plays an important role in the letter's warning passages. We see again here the prospective nature of typology and escalation. For instance, under the old covenant those who transgressed covenant stipulations received a "just punishment" on earth (2:2). The punishment could be death for sins like adultery or homosexuality (Lev 20:10, 13) or covenant curses for departing from the Lord (Deut 28:15–68). They were banished and sent into exile for their failure to abide by the covenant. Such earthly punishments, however, anticipated the final judgment that would be experienced by those who drifted away from the salvation given by the Lord (2:3). In this case the punishment is escalated, for the readers are threatened with the eschatological wrath of God.

The same pattern of argumentation surfaces in 10:26–31. Those who violate the Mosaic law die without mercy. Such an earthly punishment forecasts a future and greater punishment if one tramples God's Son under his feet, considers the blood of the covenant unclean, and insults the Holy Spirit. The judgment in this case is more terrifying than physical death, for those who reject the Son will "fall

into the hands of the living God” (10:31). The warning in 12:25–29 runs along similar lines. Israel didn’t escape judgment when God warned them on earth, and so it is even more the case that those who ignore a heavenly word will not be spared God’s judgment.

We see the same paradigm in 3:7–4:13. The wilderness generation didn’t obtain rest in Canaan because they refused to obey the Lord’s will (3:11, 18; 4:3). The unbelief and disobedience of the wilderness generation function as an example to avoid for believers in Jesus Christ (3:12, 15, 18–19; 4:2–3). Parenthetically, but along the same lines, Esau also functions as a type in the same way as the wilderness generation. Esau surrendered an earthly birthright, but believers are admonished not to throw away their eternal birthright for temporal joys (12:16–17). When we consider the wilderness generation, the rest promised in Canaan was an earthly rest, but there is a better rest, a heavenly rest available for believers in Jesus Christ (4:1). The rest theme is complex and variegated, for it doesn’t only relate to the promise that Israel would inherit Canaan. The author also hearkens back to creation, where “God rested from all His works” on the seventh day (4:4; Gen 2:3). God’s rest on the seventh day, when he completed his creation work, has an anticipatory element to it. God rested because his work was completed, and hence his Sabbath rest points to and anticipates the new creation to come. When God’s kingdom is realized in its fullness, those who belong to God will enjoy Sabbath rest in its fullness, for then human beings will cease from their labor and work (4:10). The rest God enjoyed upon completing his work at creation anticipates the rest which will come when the new creation dawns.

The author pulls on another thread regarding the rest. The wilderness generation didn’t find rest, but under Joshua the people obtained the rest promised in Canaan (Josh 22:4). God’s promises regarding rest were fulfilled under Joshua (21:44–45; cf. 23:1). The author notes, however, that the rest Joshua gave to the people could hardly be ultimate (4:8). At the end of the day, the rest in Joshua is provisional, temporal, and earthly. Otherwise, the rest referred to in Psalm 95 would be extraneous (Ps 95:11). It would be pointless to offer rest at a later period under David if earthly rest was already secured under Joshua. It follows, then, that the rest under Joshua is a type of a better rest to come, which is identified as “a Sabbath

rest” (4:9).⁷³ Indeed, the name “Joshua” (Ἰησοῦς) here is actually the name “Jesus.” Jesus is a new and better Joshua, and the writing of Psalm 95 after the days of Joshua signifies that a new and better rest is coming, a rest that is given by Jesus the Christ, a rest that can never be disturbed by anyone. The author argues typologically, therefore, from God’s Sabbath rest and Israel’s rest (or lack thereof) in Canaan, seeing a future rest for those who believe and obey, and a future judgment for those who fall away. We have escalation in both instances: the future judgment and future rest are eternal.

The typology of a future homeland is picked up elsewhere in the letter. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were promised the land of Canaan (11:8). Canaan becomes a type of a heavenly homeland, a heavenly city that will be granted to believers (11:10, 13–16). Believers are exiles and resident aliens here, but the city to come is far better than any earthly city, for it is an enduring city (12:22; 13:14).

This brief foray into typology demonstrates that typology plays a significant role in Hebrews. The author often sees a typological connection between the OT and the NT, and he regularly sees an escalation between the type and its fulfillment.

The Spatial Orientation of Hebrews

Some scholars place the spatial orientation of Hebrews under the subject of typology or eschatology.⁷⁴ Creating a distinct section is useful, however, since typology is characteristic of many of the books in the NT, whereas the author’s spatial emphasis is distinctive. Hebrews quite frequently contrasts the earthly and the heavenly, so we have a vertical or spatial contrast. Hence, the author, in accord with the OT, “works with a two-story model of the created cosmos—heaven/s and earth” (cf. Gen 1:1; 2:1; Jer 10:11).⁷⁵ It also seems that

⁷³ Some argue that the author doesn’t argue typologically since he doesn’t have any interest in the land, but such a judgment is overstated. For the typological nature of the author’s conception of land, see David M. Allen, *Deuteronomy and Exhortation in Hebrews: A Study in Narrative Representation*, WUNT 2/238 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 143–55.

⁷⁴ Steyn says we have both a spatial and a linear eschatology in Hebrews. See Gert J. Steyn, “The Eschatology of Hebrews: As Understood Within a Cultic Setting,” in *Eschatology of the New Testament and Some Related Documents*, ed. J. G. van der Watt, WUNT 2/315 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 429–31.

⁷⁵ Edward Adams, “Cosmology in Hebrews,” in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, ed. R. Bauckham, D. R. Driver, T. A. Hart, and N. MacDonald

the author distinguishes between the sky, the visible heavens, and heaven as God's dwelling place.⁷⁶ Such a distinction is borne out since Jesus "passed through the heavens" (4:14), is "exalted above the heavens" (7:26), and has entered "heaven itself" (9:24). The last phrase refers to the presence of God. The nature of the heavens here can't be described adequately, for God's dwelling place is mysterious and beyond human access. We need to acknowledge here the symbolic character of the language found in Hebrews. Discerning where the language is symbolic is, of course, difficult. For instance, Christ truly has a resurrection body; the author doesn't engage in symbolism here. The language about a heavenly tent (8:2; 9:11, 24) and a city, however, should not be pressed to say there is a literal tent or a literal heavenly city.⁷⁷ Spatial imagery may be appropriated to express the inexpressible, to convey a reality that transcends our understanding in symbolic language. Hence, the reference to God's throne in the heavens points the readers to God's transcendence (1:3; 8:1–2; 10:12; 12:2).⁷⁸

Some in the history of interpretation have interpreted the writer's contrast between the earthly and heavenly sanctuary in Platonic terms, for what is heavenly is superior to what is earthly.⁷⁹ The notion sounds Platonic at first glance, as if the earthly is a pale replica of the perfect archetype which is in heaven. Furthermore, what the author says could be understood as critical of the physical creation, as if the author longs for a transcendent world undefiled by

(Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 130. Paul Ellingworth maintains that angels belong to an intermediate sphere, but it seems more accurate to say that angels belong to the highest sphere where God dwells in heaven ("Jesus and the Universe in Hebrews," *EvQ* 58 [1986]: 349). But such a perspective doesn't mean angels aren't also active on earth (so Adams, "Cosmology in Hebrews," 131–32).

⁷⁶ I am following Adams closely here ("Cosmology of Hebrews," 131), though I am not claiming he would agree with all the steps I make.

⁷⁷ I will argue further for this view in the commentary proper.

⁷⁸ Steyn, "The Eschatology of Hebrews," 437.

⁷⁹ On the cosmology of Hebrews, see Jon Laansma, "The Cosmology of Hebrews," in *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, ed. J. T. Pennington and S. M. McDonough, LNTS 355 (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 125–43; idem, "Hidden Stories in Hebrews: Cosmology and Theology," in *Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in Its Ancient Contexts*, ed. R. Bauckham, D. Driver, T. Hart, and N. MacDonald, LNTS 387 (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 9–18; Adams, "Cosmology in Hebrews," 122–39.

material reality.⁸⁰ Certainly the language is reminiscent of what we find in Plato or Philo.⁸¹ Still the worldview is dramatically different, and most scholars now agree that the writer was not appropriating Platonic notions in any technical sense, and hence he is ultimately world affirming instead of world denying. Most significantly, the language of heaven and earth is plotted on an eschatological time line. The eschatological and spatial are complementary, and we have no such conception in Plato.

According to the author, the heavenly realm is superior to the earthly.⁸² Jesus' priesthood, in contrast to the Levitical priesthood, is heavenly (8:4), and therefore Jesus' priesthood is infinitely more valuable than the ministry conducted by the Levitical priests. Similarly, the message conveyed from heaven, from Mount Zion, represents God's final and definitive word (1:2; 12:25). The author doesn't reject the word given through Moses and the prophets, but the heavenly message is the consummation and completion and fulfillment of what God has revealed. Hence, those who reject such a heavenly message will face severe judgment if they renounce the word proclaimed to them.

Believers have a "heavenly calling" (3:1), and Jesus has "passed through the heavens" (4:14), entering God's presence as high priest. The earthly tabernacle established by Moses is contrasted with "the true tabernacle," which is in heaven (8:2). The author is clearly saying that the heavenly is superior to the earthly. Similarly, the earthly priests who offer sacrifices according to the law are contrasted with Jesus, who is a heavenly priest (8:3–4). Earthly priests, then, are "a copy and shadow of heavenly things" (8:5). Since the earthly reflects the heavenly, when Moses constructed the tabernacle, he did so according to the pattern specified by God (8:5; Exod 25:40). The earthly is again inferior, but the argument isn't that it is inferior

⁸⁰ Adams argues that Plato himself actually valued the physical cosmos, and hence the polarity is not apt; but he goes on to show how Hebrews claims in a number of places that God created the world, showing that the world of creation is good and not inferior ("Cosmology in Hebrews," 123–30).

⁸¹ See the careful and restrained conclusions of Adams ("Cosmology of Hebrews," 132–33). Adams points out that the term "copy" (ὑπόδειγμα, 8:5) is not used by Plato, nor is it evident that the term "model" or "copy" (NRSV) (ἀντίτυπος) was Platonic. Plato does use the term "shadow" (σκιὰ, 10:1), but, given the author's eschatology, it is unclear that Hebrews uses it in a Platonic sense.

⁸² See again, Adams, "Cosmology of Hebrews," 133–34.

because it comes from the material world. Its inferiority is linked to eschatology, for the superiority of Christ's priesthood is tied to the inauguration of the new covenant in his ministry (8:7–13). The earthly tabernacle points above to "a greater and more perfect tabernacle" in heaven (9:11), a tabernacle that is "not of this creation." The author isn't claiming that there is a literal tabernacle or place in heaven.⁸³ He simply uses the language of tabernacle to communicate the truth that the earthly tabernacle symbolizes God's presence in heaven. Jesus' sacrifice is better than animal sacrifices, for he entered the presence of God and cleansed the conscience of sin (9:12–14).

The "copies" (ὑποδείγματα, 9:23) of what is in heaven were purified with the sacrifices of animals. But "the heavenly things" (ἐπουράνια) needed "better sacrifices" (9:23). The blood of animals could not avail in heaven, in the presence of God. Since the earthly sanctuary is a "model of the true one" (ἀντίτυπα τῶν ἀληθινῶν), Jesus could not content himself with entering such a sanctuary (9:24). He entered a better sanctuary, a heavenly one, to "appear in the presence of God for us" (9:24). The law on earth is "a shadow" (Σκιά) of the heavenly world, which is the "actual form" (εἰκόνα) of things (10:1). Similarly, Mount Sinai was terrifying when God came down on it, rocking with thunder and blazing with lightning so that those present were awe stricken (12:18–21). But believers have come to a better mountain: Mount Zion (12:22), a heavenly mountain where the "living God" resides. Indeed, it is nothing other than "the heavenly Jerusalem." It follows, then, that no one will escape if they turn away from a message given from heaven (12:25), for even those who rejected the message from Sinai received an earthly punishment.

God will shake the created world so that created things are removed (12:26–27) and only the kingdom remains (12:28). Hence, the author departs from Plato, for in contrast to the latter he does not believe this world is eternal.⁸⁴ The author underscores the transience and impermanence of the present world by citing Ps 102:25–27 (1:10–12). But Edward Adams rightly remarks that the temporary

⁸³ Against William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1991), 237–38; Barnard, *The Mysticism of Hebrews*, 104–9.

⁸⁴ Adams, "Cosmology of Hebrews," 136.

character of the world does not mean the author of Hebrews believes the physical world is intrinsically evil.⁸⁵

Scholars debate whether the writer of Hebrews believes in a new creation or thinks the heavenly realm is nonmaterial. Adams rightly argues it is more convincing to say the author looks forward to a new creation.⁸⁶ As Jon Laansma says, “Creation has not been removed but rather cleansed (1:3) and reconstituted as God’s temple, city, fatherland, world, and kingdom.”⁸⁷ The Son will be heir of all things (1:2), “which implies that in the eschaton there will be a cosmos . . . for him to inherit.”⁸⁸ Furthermore, in Heb 2:6–8 the author cites Ps 8:4–6 when he predicts that Jesus will fulfill the destiny for human beings recorded in the psalm. But this destiny, according to Psalm 8, involves rule over the world, indicating that Jesus will rule over a physical cosmos. Indeed, Jesus will reign over the “coming world” (2:5; cf. 1:6).⁸⁹ The term “world” (οἰκουμένη) here designates “inhabited earth,”⁹⁰ signifying that the coming city (13:14; cf. 12:22) designates a renewed cosmos (cf. 6:5). Such a view fits with Revelation 21–22, where the heavenly city also describes a new creation.

Believers should follow the example of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and look forward to a heavenly city instead of longing to fit into the present social order (11:13–16).⁹¹ They should recognize that they are exiles and resident aliens in the present world. This present earth is not their home. They long for the city that is coming (13:14). This world is not rejected as inherently evil, for this is the place where Christ came to save his people (10:5–10). He is the incarnate Son (2:10–18) who suffered for the sake of his people, and he will return to earth to complete his saving work (9:28).

⁸⁵ Ibid., 135–36.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 137–38; cf. also Laansma “Hidden Stories in Hebrews,” 12–18.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 14.

⁸⁸ Adams, “Cosmology of Hebrews,” 137.

⁸⁹ I am not suggesting that 2:6–9 restricts the rule to Jesus, for his brothers and sisters will rule with him and because of him.

⁹⁰ So Adams, “Cosmology of Hebrews,” 137.

⁹¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 134. Adams contests the idea that the author uses Platonic conceptions here.

EXPOSITION

Hebrews 1:1–4

Outline

- I. Prologue: Definitive and Final Revelation in the Son (1:1–4)**
- II. Don't Abandon the Son Since He Is Greater than Angels (1:5–2:18)**

Scripture

¹Long ago God spoke to the fathers by the prophets at different times and in different ways. ²In these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son. God has appointed Him heir of all things and made the universe through Him. ³The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of His nature, sustaining all things by His powerful word. After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. ⁴ So He became higher in rank than the angels, just as the name He inherited is superior to theirs.

Context

The opening of Hebrews is elegant and eloquent, demonstrating the literary artistry of the author. The introduction gives no evidence that the writing is an epistle, for the author doesn't introduce himself, the recipients aren't identified, and there isn't a greeting. The opening suggests a literary work, something like a literary essay on the significance of Jesus Christ. We know from the conclusion of the work, however, that Hebrews has epistolary features, and thus

the book should not be classified as a literary essay. Still, the artistry and beauty that characterize the entire letter are evident from the opening. The author invites the reader via the elevated style of the letter to reflect on and apply his theology.

The main point of the first four verses is that God has spoken finally and definitively in his Son. The author beautifully contrasts the past era in which God spoke to the ancestors and prophets with the last days in which God spoke to us in his Son. A table should illustrate the contrast in the first two verses.

Long ago	In these last days
God spoke to the fathers	He has spoken to us
by the prophets	by His Son
at different times and in different ways	

Verses 2–4 focus on the identity of the Son and what he has done. Here we have a chiasm.

A He has spoken to us by His Son	D ¹ He is the exact expression of His nature
B God has appointed Him heir of all things	C ¹ sustaining all things by His powerful word
C He made the universe through Him	B ¹ After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high
D The Son is the radiance of God's glory	A ¹ He became higher in rank than the angels, just as the name He inherited is superior to theirs

The main point of the chiasm is found under A and A¹: the Son is superior to angels since he is the Son. Indeed, he is the heir and ruler of the universe since he is the Creator of the universe and shares God's nature.

Exegesis

1:1

God is a speaking God, and he has spoken to the prophets in a variety of ways and modes in the OT. The first verse is marked by alliteration in the Greek, with five different words beginning with “p”:

“at different times” (πολυμερῶς); “in different ways” (πολυτρόπως); “long ago” (πάλαι) “fathers” (πατέρας); and “prophets” (προφῆταις). From the outset the literary skill and the deft style of the author are apparent so that the reader sees a master craftsman at work. The diversity of revelation in the former era is featured. God spoke “at different times” and “in different ways.” OT revelation was transmitted through narrative, hymns, proverbs, poetry, parables, and love songs, through wisdom and apocalyptic literature. God communicated with his people for hundreds of years, speaking to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to Moses and Joshua, Samuel and Saul, David and the kings of Judah and Israel, and to the prophets, and to the people who returned from exile.

One of the major themes in Hebrews emerges: “God spoke to the fathers.” The one true God is a speaking God, one who communicates with his people and reveals his will and his ways to them. The “fathers” can’t be limited to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob but include and encompass all those addressed in OT revelation.¹ Similarly, the word “prophets” should not be restricted to books that are labeled as “prophetic” in our English Bibles.² The writer identifies the entire OT as prophetic. Finally, the revelation given in the past is described as occurring “long ago” (πάλαι). The author is not emphasizing primarily that the revelation occurred in the distant past. His main point, given the remainder of the book, is that OT revelation belonged to a previous era. A new day has arisen, a new covenant has arrived, and the old is no longer in force. The “first” covenant is “old” (παλαιούμενον) and hence obsolete (8:13). The words of the previous era are authoritative as the word of God, but they must be interpreted in light of the fulfillment realized in Jesus Christ.

1:2

The God who spoke in the past still speaks, but “in these last days” he has spoken finally and definitively in his Son. This Son is the Davidic heir promised in the Scriptures, and he is also the agent of all creation. He is the Davidic heir and more since as Creator he shares God’s nature.

¹ So Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 38.

² Ibid., 38–39. The word ἐν in the phrase “in the prophets” (literally) is instrumental and is rightly translated by the HCSB as “by the prophets” (cf. Attridge, *Hebrews*, 38n41).

The last days (Gen 49:1; Num 24:14; Isa 2:2; Jer 23:20; 25:19; Dan 10:14; Hos 3:5; Mic 4:1) represent the days in which God's saving promises are fulfilled, and they have now commenced with the coming of the Son. Believers no longer live in the days when they await the fulfillment of what God has promised. They live in the eschaton; "the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor 10:11). It is inconceivable that the readers would embrace the old era with its sacrifices and rituals now that the new has come in Jesus Christ.

God has spoken in his Son. If we look at the table introducing this section, we see that the one phrase with no corresponding phrase is "at different times and in different ways." Still the author expects the readers to fill in the gap. The revelation in the former era was diverse and partial, but the revelation in the Son is unitary and definitive.³ The final revelation has come in the last days for God has spoken his last and best word. No further word is to be expected, for the last word focuses on the life, death, and resurrection of the Son. As 9:26 says of Jesus, "But now He has appeared one time, at the end of the ages, for the removal of sin by the sacrifice of Himself." Believers await the return of the Son (9:28), but they don't expect a further word from God. No more clarification is needed. The significance of what the Son accomplished has been revealed once for all, and hence the readers must pay attention (2:1) to this revelation.

The author also emphasizes that God has spoken "by his Son." In the OT Israel is the Lord's son, his firstborn (Exod 4:22). And the Davidic king is also identified as God's son (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7). The author implies that Jesus is the true Israel and the true king. But the subsequent verses indicate that sonship transcends these categories, for Jesus is also the unique and eternal Son of God, one who shares the nature of God. Indeed, the following verses indicate why the readers must pay heed to the word spoken in the Son, for the Son is far greater than angels. He is the exalted and reigning Son, the one who rules the universe.

The reference to the Son begins the chiasm represented in the second table above, and it matches 1:4, which emphasizes that Jesus as the Son is greater than the angels because he has inherited a more excellent name. The author desires the readers to see the majesty of

³ Cf. also Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2006), 66.

Jesus as the Son so they understand that he is supreme over angels and any other entity in the universe.

Jesus as the Son was appointed (ἔθηκεν) by God as “heir of all things.”⁴ In the OT, inheritance language is typically used with reference to the land of Canaan, which was promised to Israel as an inheritance (cf. Deut 4:38; 12:9; Josh 11:23). But the Son is the heir of “all things,” which echoes the promise given to the Davidic king in Ps 2:8: “Ask of Me, and I will make the nations Your inheritance and the ends of the earth Your possession.” The Son is the heir because he is the Davidic king, the fulfillment of the covenant promise made to David that he would never lack a man to sit on the throne. The Son as heir matches in the chiasm his sitting down “at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (1:3). The Son’s heirship is tied to his kingship, to his rule over all, and hence it commences with his exaltation to God’s right hand.⁵

Jesus’ rule as the Son demonstrates that he is the Messiah, the Davidic king, the one through whom God’s promises to Israel are fulfilled. As the son of David, he is a human being, but he is more than a human being, for “God made the universe through him” (see §2.1). The phrase “the universe” (τοὺς αἰῶνας) is most often temporal, but here it designates the world God has made (cf. Wis 13:9), and the author features the Son as the agent of creation (cf. John 1:3; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16).⁶ The author likely draws here upon wisdom traditions, for we see in the OT that the Lord created the world in wisdom (Prov 3:19; 8:22–31; Ps 104:24; Jer 10:12; cf. Wis 7:22; 9:2). The Son is greater than wisdom, however, for wisdom is a personification, but the Son existed as a person before the world was formed.⁷ We can easily fail to see how astonishing this statement is.

⁴ The word τίθημι means “appoint” in other contexts as well (1 Thess 5:9; 1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 1:11; 1 Pet 2:8).

⁵ So Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 52.

⁶ Amy L. B. Peeler says that God chose to include the Son in creating, but this notion sounds a bit adoptionistic, as if the Son isn’t equally God. Peeler actually strongly emphasizes the Son’s deity elsewhere in her work (*You Are My Son: The Family of God in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, LNTS 486 [New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014], 16).

⁷ Against Kenneth L. Schenk, *Understanding the Book of Hebrews: The Story Behind the Sermon* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2003), 17. Rightly Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 99.

The one who was put to death in Jerusalem on a cross a few decades earlier is now praised as the one who created the world!⁸

1:3

Verse 3 unpacks further the nature and supremacy of the Son. First, the author speaks ontologically about the Son, maintaining that he fully shares the divine nature and identity. Second, the Son's role in sustaining the cosmos is affirmed. Third, and most crucial for his argument, the Son's reign at God's right hand is featured. The Son reigns and rules as the one who has accomplished full cleansing for sin.

The first two clauses in verse 3 focus on the nature of the Son,⁹ showing that the Christology here is not merely functional but also ontological.¹⁰ The Son is the King and the Creator because of who he is because he shares the nature of God. Similarly, the author grounds Christ's atoning work as high priest in who he is. Sometimes scholars focus on functional Christology and minimize ontology, but Hebrews makes ontology the basis for function so that Christ saves because of who he is.

The author begins by claiming that Christ "is the radiance of God's glory" (see §2.1). The word "radiance" (ἀπαύγασμα) could mean "reflection," so that the Son mirrors God's glory.¹¹ Or it could be defined as "radiance" or "outshining" to emphasize the manifestation of God's glory.¹² The use of the term in Wis 7:26 doesn't settle the issue,¹³ for the same interpretive issues arise there. It is difficult to determine which meaning is correct, though the active radiance

⁸ So L. Johnson, *Hebrews*, 68.

⁹ Some scholars detect dependence on a hymn here (see Attridge, *Hebrews*, 41–42).

¹⁰ John P. Meier says the participle "stands out like a metaphysical diamond against the black crepe of narrative" ("Structure and Theology in Heb 1,1–4," *Bib* 66 [1985]: 180). He rightly notes that the author here probes "speculative, philosophical implications" of the person of Christ (180). Against Caird and Hurst who limit what Hebrews 1 says to Christ's humanity. See G. B. Caird, "Son by Appointment," in *The New Testament Age: Essays in Honor of Bo Reicke*, ed. W. Weinrich, 2 vols. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), 1:73–81; Lincoln D. Hurst, "The Christology of Hebrews 1 and 2," in *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament: Studies in Christology*, ed. L. D. Hurst and N. T. Wright (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 151–64.

¹¹ So O. Hofius, "ἀπαύγασμα," *EDNT*, 1:117–18.

¹² See LN 14.48; G. Kittel, "ἀπαύγασμα," *TDNT* 1:508.

¹³ Rightly Attridge, *Hebrews*, 42.

seems slightly more likely.¹⁴ In either case God's glory is revealed in the Son, and it really doesn't matter much which we choose, for as Johnson says, "Reflection becomes radiance, and radiance is what is reflected."¹⁵

The Son is also "the exact impression of his nature." The word translated "exact impression" (χαρακτήρ) is used of the impression or mark made by coins.¹⁶ Here it denotes the idea that the Son represents the nature (ὑπόστασις) and character of the one true God.¹⁷ He reveals who God is, and thus he must share the divine identity. The Son cannot represent God to human beings unless he shares in the being, nature, and essence of God. The Son of God reveals the reality of the one true God.

Hebrews is not alone in the sentiments expressed in the previous two phrases. John's Gospel emphasizes that God speaks to human beings in Jesus Christ. He is the "Word" of God (John 1:1) through whom the world was created (John 1:3). John directly tells us in John 1:1 that the "Word was God" (1:1). God is invisible and in that sense inaccessible, but Jesus Christ explains to human beings who God is (John 1:18). In the same way Jesus instructs Philip that the one who has seen him has also seen the Father (John 14:9). Paul in Colossians celebrates and affirms the truth that Christ is "the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15), and in Philippians he says Christ "was in the form of God" (2:6 ESV).

After affirming the Son's ontological divinity, Hebrews returns to the Son's role in the created world. He is not only the one through whom the world was made but also sustains the universe "by His powerful word." The thought is similar to Col. 1:17, "And by him

¹⁴ Ellingworth slightly prefers "radiance" (Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993], 98–99). See also O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 69–70; Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 94. The Son's radiance is eternal and should not be limited to the time following his exaltation (rightly Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 95).

¹⁵ L. Johnson, *Hebrews*, 69. Barnard says the main point here is "the unique unity of the Son with the Divine glory" (Jody A. Barnard, *The Mysticism of Hebrews: Exploring the Role of Jewish Apocalyptic Mysticism in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, WUNT 2/331 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012], 151).

¹⁶ G. Kelber, "χαρακτήρ," *TDNT* 9:418; K. Berger, "χαρακτήρ," *EDNT* 3:456.

¹⁷ See H. Koester, "ὑπόστασις," *TDNT* 8:572–89.

all things hold together.”¹⁸ Not only did the created world come into being through the Son; it also continues, “And is upheld because of the Son. The created world does not run by “laws of nature,” so that the Son’s continued superintendence is dispensed with. The author of Hebrews does not embrace a deistic notion of creation. The universe is sustained by the personal and powerful word of the Son, so that the created world is dependent on his will for its functioning and preservation. Implied in the expression is that the universe will reach its intended goal and purpose.¹⁹

The author reprises the idea that the Son reigns over all, pre-saging one of the major themes of the book in doing so. The Son’s rule commences “after making purification of sins.” The word for “purification” (καθαρισμός) is cultic (cf. Exod 29:36; 30:10; Lev 14:32; 15:13; 1 Chr 23:28), anticipating the discussion on the efficacy of Levitical sacrifices in chs. 7–10 (see also Heb 9:14, 22–23; 10:2). The Son’s once-for-all sacrifice cleanses the sins of those who believe in him. Hence, those who are “purified” (κεκαθαρισμένους) “no longer have any consciousness of sins” (10:2). They are free from the stain of guilt that defiled them. Since atonement has been accomplished, the Son has now “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” The allusion as noted above is to Psalm 110 in the letter, a psalm that pervades the entire letter and plays a fundamental role in the author’s argument.

The allusion, as noted above, is to Ps 110:1, where David’s Lord sits down at God’s right hand (see also 1:13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2).²⁰ The right hand signifies power (Exod 15:6, 12), protection (Pss 16:8; 73:23; Isa 41:10), and triumph (Pss 20:6; 21:8). Indeed, it signifies that Jesus shares the same identity as God, as Bauckham argues. The “potent imagery of sitting on the cosmic throne has only one attested significance: it indicates his participation in the unique sovereignty

¹⁸ Against Peeler, the reference here is not to the Father’s powerful word (*You Are My Son*, 18).

¹⁹ O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 56.

²⁰ See here David M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity*, SBLMS 18 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973); Martin Hengel, *Studies in Early Christology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 119–225; W. R. G. Loader, “Christ at the Right Hand—Ps. cx.l in the New Testament,” *NTS* 24 (1977–78): 199–217.

of God over the world.”²¹ Here the author emphasizes the forgiveness of sins, for the Son is seated at God’s right hand since his work is finished. And he reigns at God’s right hand as the Lord of the universe and as the Davidic Messiah. The exaltation of Christ is a common theme in the NT (see Phil 2:9–11; Col 1:15–18; Eph 1:21; 1 Pet 3:22), and thus we see Hebrews shares the worldview of the NT generally in presenting Christ as the exalted and reigning king over the universe.

1:4

Verse 4 is tied closely to 1:3. The Son who is seated at God’s right hand and rules the world as the Davidic Messiah and Lord has become greater than angels. Israel was called as God’s son to rule the world for God (Exod 4:22–23). David and his heirs had a special calling as God’s son and the king to mediate God’s rule to the world (2 Sam 7:14; Pss 2:7–12; 72:1–20). The kingly role of both Israel and David is fulfilled in Jesus as the one who rules over all. Clearly the author is not suggesting that he has become greater than angels as the eternal Son of God. His argument, anticipating chapter 2 as well, is that the Son has become greater than the angels as the God-Man. The author introduces here one of his favorite words: “better” (χρῆττων).²² Believers in Christ have a “better hope” (7:19), a “better covenant” (7:22; 8:6), “better sacrifices” (9:23), a “better possession” (10:34), a “better resurrection” (11:35), and “better” blood than Abel’s (12:24). The one who shares God’s nature and manifests his glory has purified believers of sins and now reigns at God’s right hand. In other words his reign commenced at a certain point in history. He began to rule at his resurrection and exaltation.

The author introduces angels here, which play a major role in the ensuing argument (1:5–2:16). Why does the author emphasize Jesus’ superiority to angels? Were the Hebrews assigning a particular significance to angels?²³ If we examine the letter as a whole, and what the author says in the next chapter, we discover the most

²¹ Richard Bauckham, “The Divinity of Jesus Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, ed. R. Bauckham, D. R. Driver, T. A. Hart, and N. MacDonald (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 33 (see his whole discussion, 32–33).

²² My translation.

²³ Cf. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 9. It is unlikely that the readers were tempted to identify Jesus as an

probable answer. The angels were the mediators of the Mosaic law (2:2; cf. Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19). In stressing the Son's superiority to the angels, the author features Jesus' supremacy over the Mosaic law and the Sinai covenant.²⁴ Hence, the reference to the angels ties into one of the central themes of the letter. The readers should not transfer their allegiance to the law mediated by angels. Such a gambit should be rejected, for they would be opting for what is inferior since the Son rules over angels as one who has "inherited" a name better than theirs. God promised to make Abraham's name great (Gen 12:2), and the same promise is given to David (2 Sam 7:9). And this covenant promise, first given to Abraham and then channeled through David, finds its final fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The word "inherited" (κεκληρονόμηκεν) reaches back to "heir of all things" (1:2). Such an inheritance has been *gained* through his suffering and death, signifying again the rule of the Son at his resurrection.²⁵

The more excellent name is typically understood to be Son.²⁶ But others argue that the name here is probably Yahweh, the name of God revealed to Israel. Joslin, in particular, makes a powerful argument supporting a reference to Yahweh.²⁷ First, the term "name" elsewhere in Hebrews almost certainly refers to Yahweh (2:12; 6:10; 13:5). Hence, the presumption is that the same name is in view here as well. Second, Joslin says that the term "Son" is not a name but

angel in order to soften a reference to his deity (against Donald A. Hagner, *Hebrews* [New York: Harper & Row, 1983], 10).

²⁴ Hence, the author is not countering those who unduly venerated angels, as if Hebrews addresses a problem similar to what Paul opposed in Colossae (against Robert Jewett, *Letter to Pilgrims: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [New York: Pilgrim, 1981], 5–13; Thomas W. Manson, "The Problem of the Epistle to the Hebrews," *BJRL* 32 [1949]: 1–17). Nor is there any evidence that he combats an angelic Christology (against Ronald H. Nash, "Mediator in Alexandrian Judaism and the Hebrews," *WTJ* 40 [1977]: 89–115, esp. 109–12).

²⁵ Schenk rightly says the author features the rule and enthronement of Christ over angels here, though he mistakenly suggests the Christology does not involve preexistence. See Kenneth L. Schenk, "A Celebration of the Enthroned Son: The Catena of Hebrews 1," *JBL* 120 (2001): 469–86.

²⁶ E.g., Attridge, *Hebrews*, 47; Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 98; Meier, "Structure and Theology," 187.

²⁷ Barry Joslin, "Whose Name? A Comparison of Hebrews 1 and Philippians 2 and Christ's Inheritance of the Name," unpublished paper. Cf. also L. Johnson, *Hebrews*, 71; Bauckham, "The Divinity of Jesus Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews," 21–22; Barnard, *The Mysticism of Hebrews*, 157–70.

a title or a description of Jesus (1:2, 5, 8; 2:6; 3:6; 4:14; 5:5, 8; 6:6; 7:3, 28; 10:29). The word “name” echoes the name of God that plays a central role in biblical tradition (cf. Exod 3:13–15), for God’s name signifies his character and in revealing his name God reveals himself. The superiority of Jesus’ name in a context where his exaltation and divine identity are communicated points to his deity.

It is difficult to decide between Son and Yahweh here, though I prefer the former for the following reasons. First, the word “Son” occurs four times in the chapter (1:2, 5 [twice], 8), so that the reader naturally thinks of the word “Son.” Second, in the chiasm of verses 2–4 presented in the table above the term “Son” (v. 2) matches the inheriting a more excellent name (v. 4). Third, the word “name” refers to the Lord elsewhere in the letter, but all these references are to the Father rather than to the Son, so the parallel isn’t as close as claimed. Fourth, verse 5 supports and grounds verse 4 with the word “for” (γάρ), and the verse twice calls attention to Jesus’ sonship, suggesting that Son is the name that makes Jesus greater than angels. Fifth, the author speaks of Jesus inheriting the name. It is difficult to see how Jesus could inherit the name of Yahweh. Such a state of affairs would suggest that there was a period when Jesus wasn’t divine and that he inherited such deity at some point. But doesn’t the same objection apply to the word *Son*? No, for in using the word *Son*, the author would be referring to Jesus’ exaltation and rule as God *and* man, and such a rule only commenced at his resurrection.²⁸

Bridge

Jesus is the culmination of God’s revelation. The OT Scriptures point to him and are fulfilled in him. We see in the introduction of Hebrews that Jesus is the prophet, priest, and king. He is the

²⁸ Perhaps there is also an echo of 2 Samuel 7 where “name” (7:9, 13, 23, 26) and God’s greatness (7:21, 26; cf. Heb 1:3) point to the “honor conferred by God on the Messiah as the Davidic heir at the establishment of his throne and in association with God himself” (so George H. Guthrie, “Hebrews,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007], 925). See also his discussion on p. 924. Guthrie maintains that the title here is “name,” which could fit with the view stated above (George Guthrie, *Hebrews*, NIVAC [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998], 50), though it seems to me that “Son” is the more natural reading.

prophet, for God's final word is spoken by him and in him.²⁹ He is the priest by whom final cleansing of sins is accomplished. He is the king who reigns at God's right hand. The last days have arrived in Jesus and the final word has been spoken, and hence there will be no further revelation until Jesus' return. The great revelatory events have taken place in Jesus' ministry, death, resurrection, and exaltation. Believers do not need any other word from God for their lives. They are to put their faith in what God has revealed in and through Jesus the Christ.

Hebrews 1:5–14

Outline

- I. Prologue: Definitive and Final Revelation in the Son (1:1–4)
- II. **Don't Abandon the Son Since He Is Greater than Angels (1:5–2:18)**
 - A. **The Son's Nature and Reign Show He Is Greater than Angels (1:5–14)**
 - B. Warning: Don't Drift Away (2:1–4)
 - C. The Coming World Subjected to the Son (2:5–18)

Scripture

⁵For to which of the angels did He ever say, You are My Son; today I have become Your Father, or again, I will be His Father, and He will be My Son? ⁶When He again brings His firstborn into the world, He says, And all God's angels must worship Him.

⁷And about the angels He says: He makes His angels winds, and His servants a fiery flame, ⁸but to the Son: Your throne, God, is forever and ever, and the scepter of Your kingdom is a scepter of justice. ⁹You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; this is why God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of joy rather than Your companions. ¹⁰And: In the beginning, Lord, You established the earth, and the heavens are the works of Your hands; ¹¹they will perish, but You remain. They will all wear out like clothing; ¹²You will roll them up like a cloak, and they will

²⁹ In saying God's final word is spoken in and by Jesus, I am including the entirety of the NT canonical witness to Jesus as the Son.

be changed like a robe. But You are the same, and Your years will never end.¹³ Now to which of the angels has He ever said: Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool? ¹⁴ Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve those who are going to inherit salvation?

Context

The author picks up on angels from verse 4, demonstrating in verses 5–14 that the Son is greater than angels, using many of the same arguments advanced in 1:1–4. I would structure the argument in 1:5–14 as follows.

The Son's Rule over All (1:5–9)
The Son as Creator (1:10)
The Eternal Nature of the Son (1:11–12)
The Exaltation of the Son over Angels (1:13–14)

Lane relates 1:1–4 to 1:5–14 as follows.³⁰

A Appointment as royal heir (v. 2b)	A ¹ Appointment as God's Son and heir (vv. 5–9)
B Mediator of creation (v. 2c)	B ¹ Mediator of creation (v. 10)
C Eternal nature and preexistent glory (v. 3ab)	C ¹ Unchanging, eternal nature (vv. 11–12)
D Exaltation to God's right hand (v. 3c)	D ¹ Exaltation to God's right hand (v. 13)

The table makes clear that the author puts forward the same kind of arguments we saw in 1:1–3. But here the author advances his case by citing the OT so that every argument is made by appealing to the OT for support. Hence, we can say that what is asserted in 1:1–4 is elaborated upon and scripturally supported in 1:5–14. The central theme is the Son's superiority to the angels. The content of 1:5–14

³⁰ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1991), 22. See also Meier, "Structure and Theology," 168–89; idem, "Symmetry and Theology in the Old Testament Citations of Heb 1,5–14," *Bib* 66 (1985): 504–33. Cf. also Victor (Sung Yul) Rhee, "The Role of Chiasm for Understanding Christology in Hebrews 1:1–14," *JBL* 131 (2012): 341–62. Attridge doubts the parallels are so precise (*Hebrews*, 50n14).

also forecasts the remainder of the letter, and it may function, as Jipp contends, as an *inclusio* with 12:18–29.³¹

Exegesis

1:5

Jesus is greater than the angels because the OT Scriptures designate him as God’s Son, which is a title not given to angels. Angels are designated as “sons” but are never identified as God’s Son. Quite remarkably the author claims that God was speaking to *Jesus* in the OT Scriptures quoted here, though they were originally directed to the Davidic king. The attribution “Son” in Ps 2:7 and 2 Sam 7:14 is ultimately addressed to Jesus.

The word “for” (γάρ) introducing 1:5 indicates that the author supports what he asserts in 1:4, which suggests, as I argued regarding verse 4, that the more excellent name that makes Jesus better than the angels is “Son.” The author’s goal is to support this claim from the OT Scriptures. He begins by noting that none of the angels was ever addressed as God’s Son. Angels were identified as “sons” but never as the Son (cf. Gen 6:2, 4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). Furthermore, two texts that in their historical context address the Davidic king are applied to Jesus as the Son of God, showing that he is superior to the angels as the reigning and ruling Son of God.³²

The first quotation hails from Ps 2:7, which is a messianic psalm.³³ The Davidic king will inherit the nations and rule the entire world (Ps 2:8–9), fulfilling the promise made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that the entire world would be blessed through one of their offspring (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; cf. Ps 72:17). Verse 7 of the psalm refers to the installation of the Davidic king. The language of begetting is not literal in the context of the psalm but refers to the appointment of the king, to his accession to the

³¹ Joshua W. Jipp, “The Son’s Entrance into the Heavenly World: The Soteriological Necessity of the Scriptural Catena in Hebrews 1:5–14,” *NTS* 56 (2010): 557–75.

³² Jesus’ royal authority over human beings as the exalted Son of God is especially emphasized by David M. Moffitt (*Atonement and the Logic of the Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, SuppNovT 141 [Leiden: Brill, 2011], 47–53). He underestimates, however, the argument from deity present here. It seems to me that the author makes *both* arguments in this context.

³³ The citation here matches the LXX, though it functions well as a translation of the MT as well.

throne. The nations should fear, for God has decreed that the kings of the world serve his Son. The author of Hebrews picks up the sonship theme, identifying Jesus as the Son installed by the Father as the messianic king (cf. Acts 13:33).³⁴ The reference is not to the eternal begetting of the Son by the Father, though this reading is rather common in the history of interpretation.³⁵ Nor is the reference to the virgin birth.³⁶ The author of Hebrews actually interprets the verse in light of the entire message of Psalm 2. In context the verse refers to the reign of the messianic king, which Hebrews sees as commencing at Jesus' resurrection and ascension.³⁷ Jesus is greater than the angels because he now reigns as the messianic king.

The second citation is from 2 Sam 7:14. Once again the quotation matches the LXX but also fits as a literal translation of the MT.³⁸ The quotation is embedded in the chapter (2 Samuel 7) in which the covenant with David is inaugurated, where Yahweh promises David an irrevocable dynasty.³⁹ Hence, the author has not randomly found the word *Son* and applied it to Jesus. He applies a text to Jesus that relates to kingship, so Jesus fulfills the covenant promise that a man will always reign on David's throne. Sonship is again tied closely to ruling and reigning. As Lane says, "Although Jesus was the

³⁴ The text is also alluded to at Jesus' baptism (Matt 3:16–17 par.), but in Hebrews Jesus' exaltation rather than his baptism is in view.

³⁵ Against, apparently, Bauckham, "The Divinity of Jesus Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews," 34.

³⁶ Athanasius saw a reference here to the Son's eternal generation and Gregory of Nyssa to the incarnation (see D. Stephen Long, *Hebrews, Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011], 47).

³⁷ Cf. Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 191; Philip Edgecumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 55.

³⁸ Most scholars agree that the author worked primarily from the Septuagint. The use of the OT in Hebrews is complex and can't be treated adequately here. See George H. Guthrie, "Hebrews' Use of the Old Testament: Recent Trends in Research," *CBR* 1 (2003): 271–94. For a careful study of 1:5–13, see Herbert W. Bateman IV, *Early Jewish Hermeneutics and Hebrews 1:5–13: The Impact of Early Jewish Exegesis on the Interpretation of a Significant New Testament Passage* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997). See most recently, Georg Q. Walser, *Old Testament Quotations in Hebrews*, WUNT 2/356 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).

³⁹ For the messianic character of 2 Sam 7:14, see Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 25 (cf. John 7:42).

preexistent Son of God . . . , he entered into a new experience of sonship by virtue of his incarnation, his sacrificial death, and his subsequent exaltation.”⁴⁰ Jesus is greater than angels because he is the enthroned Davidic king, because he is God’s unique Son, and as the Son he rules over all.

We should also note the promise in 2 Sam 7:13 that the future Davidic king will build a house for the Lord’s name.⁴¹ Later we are told that Jesus is the one who builds the house (Heb 3:3), which stands for the people of God (3:6). Jesus, as the builder of the new temple, as the elder brother (2:10–16), rules over the people of God.

1:6

We come to one of the most disputed verses in Hebrews, so before plunging in, we should set the context. The central theme in this section is that the Son is greater than angels, and hence the readers should not revert to an earlier period of salvation history, for they are no longer under the Sinai covenant. That covenant has been fulfilled in the new covenant that has arrived in the ministry, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus Christ. The author probably cites Deut 32:43, observing that the angels worshiped Jesus upon his resurrection and exaltation, showing Jesus’ superiority to angels (see §2.1). In its OT context, Deut 32:43 refers to Yahweh, but NT writers often apply to Jesus texts that refer to Yahweh (see 1:10–12 below). Apparently, they felt free to do so since Jesus shares the same identity as Yahweh.

Scholars dispute whether the author draws here upon Ps 97:7 or Deut 32:43. It is also possible that we have a conflation of both texts in which they are merged together, but it is a bit more likely that we have a citation from Deut 32:43.⁴² The MT of Deut 32:43 lacks any reference to angels, but a Qumran manuscript of Deuteronomy found in Cave 4 supports the reading in Hebrews, for it says the “sons of God” worship the Lord.⁴³ “Sons of God” in the plural almost always refers to angels (cf. Gen 6:2, 4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; cf.

⁴⁰ Lane, *Hebrews* 1–8, 26.

⁴¹ So L. Johnson, *Hebrews*, 79.

⁴² See David M. Allen, *Deuteronomy and Exhortation in Hebrews: A Study in Narrative Representation*, WUNT 2/238 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 44–51. For the use of the OT here, see also Bateman, *Hebrews* 1:5–13, 142–44.

⁴³ See Patrick W. Skehan, “A Fragment of the ‘Song of Moses’ (Deut. 32) from Qumran,” *BASOR* 136 (1954): 12–15.

Ps 29:1; 89:6; 138:1). Hence, in the Hebrew textual tradition we find evidence for a reference to angels even if it is lacking in the MT. The LXX also concurs with the Hebrew tradition from Qumran (“sons of God,” υἱοὶ θεοῦ), whereas Hebrews has “God’s angels” (ἄγγελοι θεοῦ). The difference between the LXX and Hebrews is not significant in terms of meaning, for as we have seen “sons of God” is another way of speaking of angels.⁴⁴

Whether Hebrews draws on Ps 97:7 or Deut 32:43, the context is similar, for both texts speak of the Lord’s sovereignty and rule over all, especially in his judgment over his adversaries. The author of Hebrews, as I will argue below, sees a reference to Jesus Christ and his exaltation at God’s right hand. The angels worshiped the Son as the one exalted over all, as the one who would be the final judge on the last day.

Hebrews describes Jesus here as the “firstborn.” Such language hearkens back to Exod 4:22 where Israel is identified as God’s “firstborn.” The notion of Jesus’ sonship surfaces here, for just as Israel was God’s firstborn son, now Jesus is God’s firstborn par excellence. Indeed, we see an allusion to God bringing his people up from Egypt at the exodus (cf. Exod 3:8; 6:8; Deut 4:30; 6:10).⁴⁵ God liberated his people from Egypt and brought them into Canaan where they were to reign as God’s vice-regents. Israel as God’s firstborn failed to rule the world as God intended, but now he has brought his firstborn Son into his heavenly habitation where he rules at God’s right hand, fulfilling the promise of victory over the serpent found in Gen 3:15. Because of the Son’s obedience, God vindicated him by raising him from the dead and by seating him at his right hand, and thus he brought the Son into the heavenly world to reign over all. When the angels saw the Son exalted in fulfillment of God’s promises that began in Gen 3:15, they were stunned, responding in worship and praise and adoration.

I have presented some evidence to support a reference to Jesus’ exaltation, but other commentators believe the author refers to Jesus’ incarnation or his *parousia*, and hence we should consider those interpretations. First, some see a reference to the incarnation instead

⁴⁴ We don’t have to resolve here which textual tradition Hebrews depends on. It is enough to note that the reading found here is represented in both Hebrew and Greek texts of the OT.

⁴⁵ Cf. O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 69.

of his exaltation at the resurrection.⁴⁶ The word “again” (παλιν) on this reading simply introduces another OT quotation, for other citations from the OT in the letter are also introduced with “again” (1:5; 2:13; 4:5; 10:30). According to this interpretation, the author reflects on Jesus’ coming into the world at his incarnation, alluding to the worship of angels in accord with Luke 2:13–14. Second, others see a reference to Jesus’ future coming.⁴⁷ Apparently, the HCSB (cf. NET) understands the verse in this way, “When He again brings His firstborn into the world, He says.” This reading fits with the notion that the world here refers to the place where human beings reside, and it connects the word “again” with the verb “brings.”

Finally, the emphasis on the Son’s exaltation in the context of chapter 1 supports the notion that the angels worshiped the Son when he was exalted.⁴⁸ On this reading “again” belongs with the verb “says,” as we see in the ESV (cf. NIV, NRSV), “And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says.”⁴⁹ The last option is preferable for several reasons.

First, the use of “again” (παλιν) is ambiguous and hence not decisive in construing the meaning.⁵⁰ It could well be linked to the verb “says,” as was pointed out above. Second, there is no clear evidence that the angels worshiped Jesus at the incarnation. In Luke the angels worship God, not Jesus. Indeed, Jesus’ time on earth indicates that he was lower than angels during his time on earth (2:6–9), and so a reference to the incarnation as the time when he

⁴⁶ E.g., Ceslas Spicq, *L’Épître aux Hébreux*, 2nd ed., 2 vols., EB (Paris: Gabalda, 1953), 2:17. A reference to Jesus’ baptism is unlikely (against Bateman, *Hebrews* 1:5–13, 222).

⁴⁷ E.g., B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The Greek Text with Notes and Essays* (repr.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 22–23.

⁴⁸ So Ardel B. Caneday, “The Eschatological World Already Subjected to the Son: The Οἰκουμένη of Hebrews 1:6 and the Son’s Enthronement,” in *Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in Its Ancient Contexts*, ed. R. Bauckham, D. Driver, T. Hart, and N. MacDonald, LNTS 387 (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 28–39; Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of the Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 56–69; Meier, “Symmetry and Theology,” 507–11; Bruce, *Hebrews*, 17; L. Johnson, *Hebrews*, 79; Koester, *Hebrews*, 192; Lane, *Hebrews* 1–8, 26–27. It seems unlikely that the word *firstborn* denotes here that Jesus was also a priest, but see Peeler (*You Are My Son*, 52) for support of that notion.

⁴⁹ See Caneday, “The Eschatological World,” 32–33.

⁵⁰ The phrase here is ὅταν δὲ πάλιν, which is not found anywhere else in Hebrews.

was worshiped doesn't fit as well with the theology of Hebrews.⁵¹ Third, the "world" (οἰκουμένη) in 2:5 refers to the heavenly world, and hence it is likely that it has the same referent here.⁵² As Caneday points out, we have numerous indications of a coming world before 2:5:⁵³ (1) salvation as a future inheritance (1:14–2:4); (2) "the consummation of the Son's reign" (1:13); (3) the eternity of the Son over against creation (1:10–12); (4) "the Son's enduring dominion" (1:8–9); and (5) the worship of the Son by angels when he enters the heavenly world (1:5–6).

Fourth, the use of the word "firstborn" (πρωτότοκον), as noted earlier, strengthens the case for the Son's being brought into the world at his exaltation. The word "firstborn" doesn't emphasize Jesus' incarnation (as in Luke 2:7) but his sovereignty and rule. The previous verse in Hebrews (1:5) describes Jesus' rule as the messianic king, and therefore we have grounds for expecting a similar theme here. The word "firstborn" is used of the Davidic king in Ps 89:27: "I will also make him My firstborn, greatest of the kings of the earth." In Psalm 89 "firstborn" designates sovereignty and rule. Such a notion fits well with angels worshiping the Son, for they worship him as their sovereign; and his sovereign rule began, as chapter 2 will also emphasize, at his resurrection/exaltation.

1:7

We saw in verse 6 that angels worshiped the Son when he was exalted as the messianic king. Angels, on the other hand, are messengers and servants and hence are clearly subordinate to the Son. The use of the OT here is fascinating. The author cites Ps 104:4 where the Lord's creative power is celebrated for "making the winds His messengers, flames of fire His servants." Hebrews departs from the LXX only at the last word, though what we find in Hebrews and

⁵¹ Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of the Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 55–56.

⁵² See especially *ibid.*, 58–63. He gives seven reasons for linking the two uses. The most compelling are these: (1) the author continues the discussion of angels from chapter 1; (2) the salvation to be inherited (1:14) and the great salvation (2:3) are other ways of referring to the "world" in 1:6; (3) when the author says he speaks of the world to come (2:5), he most naturally refers back to the same word used in 1:6. For a fuller study of "world" (οἰκουμένη), see Moffitt's discussion (*ibid.*, 63–118).

⁵³ Caneday, "The Eschatological World," 34.

the LXX functions as literal translation of the MT as well.⁵⁴ In the OT the author refers to physical forces in the world. Yahweh rules over all so that the winds do not blow by chance or even by the laws of nature but at God's personal direction.⁵⁵ Similarly, the flames that consume are God's servants. The Scriptures regularly ascribe what happens in nature to God. He is personally involved in the created order (cf. Heb 1:3).

The author of Hebrews reads the verse a bit differently from the way it is translated in Ps 104:4. It should be noted at the outset that the meaning presented by Hebrews fits with the wording of the verse in the MT as well. His construal of the verse is not exegetical fantasy but represents a legitimate reading of the text. The author of Hebrews likely believed both readings of the text were legitimate ways of construing its wording. According to Hebrews, the creaturely nature of angels is featured. God has made "his angels winds" and "his ministers a flame of fire." The statement should not be interpreted literally, as if the winds are actually angels and the flame that burns should be identified as God's messengers. The author *could* be making such an assertion, but it seems unlikely that he is teaching that winds *are* angels and that flames *are* his ministers. So I understand Hebrews to be saying that angels are God's ministers who serve God in the natural order. In other words God uses angels as his agents in sending wind and fire and presumably other natural phenomena like rain and sunshine as well. Regardless of what we think of such an interpretation, the verse's main purpose is clear: angels are God's messengers and servants. They are not worshiped as the Son is, for they did not create the world, but are part of the created order. They are not the Son but couriers who carry out the will of God.

1:8

Jesus as the Son is contrasted with the angels, for in distinction to them, he does not serve but rules as the divine king. The divinity

⁵⁴ See here L. Timothy Swinson, "'Wind' and 'Fire' in Hebrews 1:7: A Reflection upon the Use of Psalm 104 (103)," *TrinJ* 28 (2007): 215–28. Swinson observes that the translator of the LXX may have been influenced to render the text the way he does because of the clear references to angels in the preceding psalm (Ps 103:20–21).

⁵⁵ Cockerill (*Hebrews*, 108–9) thinks the emphasis is on the angels' temporality, and this is certainly possible, but I would suggest that the focus is on their role as servants.

of the Son and his reign over all are heralded here. Jesus' reign will not be limited but will endure forever, for as the obedient Son he has been rewarded with an eternal reign.

The author cites Ps 45:6–7 in Heb 1:8–9. Psalm 45 is a royal psalm penned in honor of the king of Israel. Truth and righteousness and justice are ascribed to the king. The psalmist envisions the triumph of the king over his enemies so that the cause of truth is advanced. Because of the king's righteousness, he has been exalted. The daughters of foreign kings should find their delight in the king, and their children, their sons, will reign in the land as princes. In the story line of the OT, the psalm is about the Davidic king, and David comes closest to living out the high ideals of the psalmist. In identifying the king as "God" (Ps 45:6), the psalmist is not literally identifying the king as divine.⁵⁶ The author anticipates royal succession (Ps 45:16), which hardly makes sense if the king is literally God. What we have here is similar to what we see in Exod 7:1 where Moses is as "God" to Pharaoh in that he speaks God's authoritative word to him. So too, judges in Israel are identified as "gods" in the sense that they pronounce (or are supposed to pronounce) God's judgment for the people (Ps 82:1, 6).⁵⁷

The author of Hebrews appropriates the psalm, seeing it as fulfilled in the Son. Even though the psalm says nothing about the Son, in the words introducing the citation, he says, "But to the Son," indicating that the king is none other than the Son, Jesus Christ. The writer picks up the words where the king is identified as God, "Your throne, God, is forever and ever." Clearly divinity is ascribed to the Son (see §2.1). It makes little sense to translate the phrase, "Your throne is God." Furthermore, the deity of the Son fits with the Son's role as Creator (1:2, 10), his divine nature (1:3, 11–12), his preservation of the world (1:3), and his being worshiped by angels (1:6). The use of the OT is instructive here. The author argues typologically.

⁵⁶ For a careful study of Psalm 45 in its historical context and for arguments that fit closely with what is argued here, see Dale F. Leschert, *Hermeneutical Foundations of Hebrews: A Study in the Validity of the Epistle's Interpretation of Some Core Citations from the Psalms*, NABPRDS 10 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1994), 23–78.

⁵⁷ Attridge understands Ps 45:7 to say, "Your throne is (a throne of God), eternal" (*Hebrews*, 58), but this reading of the verse is unpersuasive. See Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 190–202.

Jesus as the greatest king in the Davidic line literally fulfills the words of the psalm. The wording of the psalm can be construed poetically (so in the original context of Psalm 45) or literally. Psalm 45 is read in light of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, in light of the entire story line of Scripture. The Davidic king, as he is revealed in Jesus Christ, is himself God (Isa 9:6–7). All the threads of OT revelation are woven together to proclaim that the king that has come is both divine and human.

The NT doesn't often identify Jesus Christ as "God" explicitly, but such a statement is clearly made in John 1:1 and 20:28. Furthermore, such an ascription is the most probable reading of Rom 9:5; Titus 2:13; 2 Pet 1:1.⁵⁸

As readers we can so concentrate on the ascription of deity to the Son that we miss the emphasis on kingship. The throne, the rule, of this divine king lasts forever. He is greater than the angels because he enjoys eternal sovereignty. Furthermore, his rule is righteous, for the "scepter" of his kingdom is characterized by rectitude (εὐθύτης). Often kings rule with cruelty and selfishness, mistreating and taking advantage of their subjects. The Son's rule, however, is dramatically different, for he rules justly and righteously.

1:9

The humanity and deity of the Son are closely intertwined in Hebrews. The rectitude of the Son's kingdom is elaborated upon in verse 9. Because he has loved what is righteous and hated what is wicked, he has been anointed by God with a position above his companions.⁵⁹ Here the author refers to the exaltation, presumably at the resurrection, of the Son as King. In the OT priests (Exod 28:41; 29:7; 30:30), prophets (1 Kgs 19:16), and kings were anointed (1 Sam 9:16; 15:1; 16:3, 12) to signify that they were appointed to office. In the Gospels Jesus' anointing for ministry occurs at his baptism (Matt 3:16–17), and Jesus proclaims in Luke at the outset of his ministry that God has anointed him (Luke 4:18).

According to Hebrews, Jesus is anointed to serve as king and is superior to the angels and all others because he has received a

⁵⁸ See the careful and convincing work on this matter by Harris, *Jesus as God*.

⁵⁹ Alternatively, the anointing refers to gladness in God's justice (O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 74).

position that exalts him above all other human beings.⁶⁰ The reason for this exaltation is his pursuit of and love for what is righteous. Conversely, he detested and rejected evil in all its forms. The one exalted above other human beings was exalted because of his goodness and his devotion to righteousness. Here we have a foreshadowing of Jesus' obedience, faithfulness, and sinlessness in testing, topics that run like a thread throughout the letter (2:18; 3:2, 6; 4:15; 5:8–9; 7:26, 28; 9:14; 10:7–10; 12:3). We have a preview of what we find elsewhere in Hebrews. Jesus learned obedience from what he suffered (5:8). He was tested and tried but never succumbed to sin (4:15). As 7:26 says, Jesus was "holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens." Though 1:8 speaks of the divinity of the Son, here the humanity of the Son is featured (see §2.2). The two references to "God" (θεός) in verse 9 both refer to the Father.⁶¹ The Father rewarded him with rule over all because he was the obedient Son, because he never strayed from doing God's will.

1:10

The author cites Ps 102:25–27, showing that the Son is greater than angels because he is the Creator of all and because he is eternal in contrast to the created world which is temporary (see §2.1). In Psalm 102 the psalmist laments the distress he faces, the brevity of his life, the opposition of his enemies, and the indignation of the Lord. Yet he has hope that the Lord will restore Zion, for the Lord reigns and will fulfill his covenant promises. The psalmist pleads with the Lord to show mercy, knowing that the Lord has the power to do so as the Creator of all and as the eternal God. Hence, he has confidence that the Lord will establish and protect Israel in coming generations.

It is fascinating to see that a psalm about Yahweh is appropriated by the author of Hebrews and applied to Jesus Christ as the

⁶⁰ In the psalm the king is exalted over his other earthly companions. In Hebrews the "companions" could be identified as angels (Meier, "Symmetry and Theology," 516; Barnard, *The Mysticism of Hebrews*, 262; Bateman, *Hebrews 1:5–13*, 229). Alternatively and more likely, he refers to the sons and companions of 2:10 and 3:14 (so Bruce, *Hebrews*, 21; O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 74–75; Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 111; Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of the Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 51). Hughes thinks Jesus' exaltation over other kings is intended, but he goes on to say the referent is general (*Hebrews*, 66).

⁶¹ For the view that the vocative refers to the Son, see Attridge, *Hebrews*, 59–60.

Son. Apparently the author, since he has identified Jesus as divine, feels free to cite a psalm about Yahweh and apply it to Jesus Christ as well. Such a move is typical of NT Christology, where texts that refer to Yahweh as Lord in the LXX are applied to Jesus Christ (e.g., Rom 10:13; 14:11; 1 Cor 1:31; 2:16; 10:22, 26; 2 Cor 10:17; Phil 2:10–11; 1 Thess 3:13; 4:6; 2 Thess 1:7–8; 2 Tim 2:19). Ellingworth suggests several reasons the author may have selected Psalm 102. He sees thematic similarities between Psalm 45 and Psalm 102, including the reference to divine rule (Pss 45:6; 102:12) and divine victory (Pss 45:4–5; 102:15). In addition, we see connections between Hebrews and the psalm with references to Christ's exaltation (Ps 102:12), "the renewal of Zion" (vv. 13, 16), freedom from the fear of death (v. 20), and the claim that what was written will be fulfilled in a later generation (v. 18).⁶²

We have in seed form here what has been called in Trinitarian theology "coinherence." Whatever is true of one member of the Trinity in terms of the shared divine nature is true of the others. The Father is divine by virtue of being Creator, and hence it follows that the Son, since he is divine, is the Creator as well. Elsewhere in the NT (e.g., John 1:3; Col 1:16) and Hebrews (1:3), of course, we have explicit statements that the Son is the Creator.

The psalm is introduced in verse 10 merely by the word "and." The Son is greater than the angels because he created the earth and the heavens. Metaphorical language is used to depict the creation of the world. The Son laid the foundations for the earth as a builder erects a foundation for a building. The heavens, which here represent the sky and the sun, moon, and stars, are fashioned by the hands of the Son, as an artist fashions a vase or a sculpture. The creative work of the Son was accomplished at the beginning, when history began, when the heavens and the earth were created. The language echoes Gen 1:1 where God is said to create the heavens and the earth at the beginning (cf. also Prov 8:22–31). All of created reality was made by the Son.

1:11

The created world is temporary and will not last forever. Here it stands in contrast to the Son who is eternal and remains forever. The author foreshadows his argument in chapter 7, which features Jesus

⁶² Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 125–26.

as an eternal Melchizedekian priest.⁶³ Creation is compared to a garment that grows old as time elapses, as it is subject to the elements and wear and tear of everyday life. The temporary character of the present creation is also taught in 2 Peter: “The heavens will pass away with a loud noise” (2 Pet 3:10), and “The elements will melt with the heat” (2 Pet 3:12). The changelessness and eternality of the Son demonstrate his divinity, indicating that he shares the same identity as God (1:3). God never changes in his character (Mal 3:6; Jas 1:17) and will always fulfill his promises. The author anticipates 13:8 where he proclaims that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever.⁶⁴

1:12

Verse 12 reiterates and drives home what was said in 1:11. The created world will come to an end and will not persist forever, but Jesus as the Son will never change and is eternal. The author portrays the end of this world as a cloak that is rolled up. The same Greek verb “roll up” (ἐλίσσω) is used elsewhere to denote the cessation of the present creation. “The skies will roll up like a scroll” (Isa 34:14) on the day of the Lord when the Lord judges the world for its evil. Revelation picks up the same image, describing the “sky” as a scroll that is “rolled up” on the final day of the Lord (Rev 6:14).

In Hebrews the present creation comes to an end, just as one rolls up a cloak when it is no longer useful (cf. 12:27). The created world is compared to a garment that wears out and changes over time. By way of contrast, the Son remains the same. He does not grow old or grow weary or wear out, but as 13:8 powerfully affirms, he remains the same forever. The passing years do not detract from his person, for he does not grow “older” with the years.

Statements about the temporary nature of this present creation should be placed against the promise of the coming new creation (Rev 21:1–22:5). A new heaven and earth are promised to believers (2 Pet 3:13). Believers realize they are sojourners on this earth (11:10, 13–16), and hence they desire a better homeland, the city to come (13:14). The author describes it as “the city of the living God (the heavenly Jerusalem)” (12:22). Scholars have long debated whether the present universe is destroyed and God makes a new one,

⁶³ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 61.

⁶⁴ So L. Johnson, *Hebrews*, 81.

or the present world is transformed and purified. It is probably the latter, though space is lacking to pursue that matter here.⁶⁵ In any case the world as it is now is temporary and evanescent in contrast to the Son who is unchanging and never ending.

1:13

The author cites Ps 110:1 to demonstrate that the Son is greater than the angels, for the Son sits at the right hand of God, reigning with him; no privilege like this was ever given to angels. The contrast with angels is paramount, for the OT text is introduced with the words, “Now to which of the angels has He ever said . . .” The rule given to the Son was never intended for angels.

The superiority of the Son is established by quoting Ps 110:1. The psalm is clearly a favorite for the author, for the psalm speaks of a priest-king, and this king functions as a priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4). The author alludes to Psalm 110 in 1:3 where he declares that the Son “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” The letter elaborates upon the Melchizedekian priesthood of Jesus (5:6; 6:20; 7:1–28), drawing on Ps 110:4. When the author summarizes his “main point,” he alludes to Ps 110:1 again, claiming that Jesus as the “high priest” “sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (8:1). The psalm verifies one of the fundamental themes of the letter. Jesus’ priestly work is finished, and hence he now reigns as king at the right hand of God. The author finds incredible that the readers would turn away from the forgiveness achieved once for all by Jesus as the priest-king and latch onto the law and its sacrifices to experience forgiveness of sins.

Psalm 110:1 was also cited by Jesus during his ministry (Matt 22:41–46 par.). He befuddled the Pharisees by asking how the Messiah could be both David’s Lord and son since according to verse 1 David’s heir was also his Lord. Hebrews, among other books in the NT, supplies the answer. Jesus is both human and divine. He is both David’s son as a human being and his Lord as the Son of God. New Testament writers regularly quote or allude to Ps 110:1 to indicate that God exalted Jesus (Acts 2:34; 5:31; Rom 8:34; 1 Cor

⁶⁵ In defense of the notion that this world is renovated rather than annihilated and recreated, see Douglas J. Moo, “Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” *JETS* 49 (2006): 459–69.

15:25; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; 1 Pet 3:22). The reference to Jesus' exaltation, therefore, draws on a common Christian theme, a staple of NT theology. Jesus reigns at God's right hand.

The message of Psalm 110 as a whole should be summarized briefly here. Yahweh will extend the rule of David's Lord from Zion so that he will triumph over his enemies. The people will gladly join this ruler who will introduce a new day of victory for Israel, a new dawn. He will reign as a priest-king. Since he sits at the Lord's right hand, he will crush his enemies. It is difficult in vv. 5–7 to distinguish where the text refers to Yahweh and where it refers to the priest-king who triumphs in Yahweh's name. This close identification suggests that the priest-king has the same stature as Yahweh. In other words, the ambiguity is itself intentional, for the king's victories are Yahweh's victories. The king will "lift up His head" in triumph and exultation (110:7), restoring Yahweh's rule over the world.

In verse 13 the author cites verse 1 of the psalm. The quotation follows the LXX, which in turn is a literal translation of the MT. The Son is invited to sit at God's right hand while Yahweh makes his enemies submit at the footstool of the Son. One of the prominent themes of chapter 1 is the Son's sovereignty and rule. Through the Son the victory promised to Israel and the Davidic king becomes a reality.⁶⁶

1:14

By way of contrast, angels do not rule but serve. They are sent by God to carry out his wishes. Indeed, they are not greater than human beings but subservient to them, for they carry out God's bidding for the salvation of human beings. Angels are identified as "ministering spirits" (λειτουργικά πνεύματα), underscoring that their role is to serve. The ministering function of angels is underscored throughout the verse, for they are commissioned to fulfill the will of the one who sent them. Their service is for the sake of human beings, for angels do their work for "those who are going to inherit salvation." The salvation of human beings is conceived of here as eschatological, as something human beings will receive on the final day.

⁶⁶ The author probably envisions the rule of the Son until the day of victory (so Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 131; O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 78n211), but others think the reign of the Son will last forever (e.g., Hughes, *Hebrews*, 70–71).

Bridge

The supremacy of Jesus as the Son is the theme of this section. Jesus' sonship is tied to his being the Davidic king and the ruler over the world. The divinity and the humanity of the Son are both central to the argument. He rules as the Davidic king and as one who is fully divine. The angels worshiped him when he was raised from the dead and exalted, and as God he rules over all. Indeed, the Son is the eternal and unchanging Creator. By way of contrast angels are servants, carrying out God's will. Since the Son is superior to angels, since he is divine and rules over all, why would the readers consider returning to a revelation (the Mosaic law) mediated by angels?

Hebrews 2:1–4

Outline

- I. Prologue: Definitive and Final Revelation in the Son (1:1–4)
- II. **Don't Abandon the Son Since He Is Greater than Angels (1:5–2:18)**
 - A. The Son's Nature and Reign Show He Is Greater than Angels (1:5–14)
 - B. **Warning: Don't Drift Away (2:1–4)**
 - C. The Coming World Subjected to the Son (2:5–18)

Scripture

¹ We must therefore pay even more attention to what we have heard, so that we will not drift away. ² For if the message spoken through angels was legally binding, and every transgression and disobedience received a just punishment, ³ how will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was first spoken by the Lord and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him. ⁴ At the same time, God also testified by signs and wonders, various miracles, and distributions of gifts from the Holy Spirit according to His will.

Context

The reason for the elegant theological argument in 1:1–14 now surfaces. The author warns the readers that they should not drift away from the message they received. The main point of the