"The anchor of the soul that enters within the veil": the ascension of the "son" in the letter to the Hebrews

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Andrews University
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“THE ANCHOR OF THE SOUL THAT ENTERS WITHIN THE VEIL”: 
THE ASCENSION OF THE “SON” IN THE 
LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Felix H. Cortez

July 2008
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Date approved
To Alma

In the hope that
I might not forget
How much I owe her
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CRINT  Compendia rerum iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
CSJH  Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism
CTQ  *Concordia Theological Quarterly*
DA  Day of Atonement
DJD  Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
EBib  Études bibliques
EdF  Erträge der Forschung
EKKNT  Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
ESEC  Emory Studies in Early Christianity
EstAg  *Estudio Agustiniano*
EvQ  *Evangelical Quarterly*
ExpTim  *Expository Times*
FRLANT  Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GNS  *Good News Studies*
HB  Hebrew Bible
HDR  Harvard Dissertations in Religion
Hermeneia  Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible
Hex.  *Hexapla*
HNT  Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
HNTC  Harper’s New Testament Commentaries
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NTL  New Testament Library
NTS  New Testament Studies
NTTS New Testament Tools and Studies
OBO  Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OLZ  Orientalistische Literaturzeitung
OT   Old Testament
OTM  Oxford Theological Monographs
OTL  Old Testament Library
RB   Revue biblique
ResQ Restoration Quarterly
RevExp Review and Expositor
RRef La revue réformée
RSMS Religious Studies Monograph Series
SANT Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testaments
SBFAn Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Analecta
SBLAcBib Society of Biblical Literature Academia Biblica
SBLBMI  Society of Biblical Literature The Bible and Its Modern Interpreters
SBLDS  Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLEJL  Society of Biblical Literature Early Judaism and Its Literature
SBLMS  Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLSBS  Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Study
SBLSCS  Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies
SBLWAW  Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World
SC  Sources chrétiennes. Paris: Cerf, 1943-
ScrHier  Scripta hierosolymitana
SHR  Studies in the History of Religions (supplement to Numen)
SJLJ  Studies in Judaism
SJLA  Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SJT  Scottish Journal of Theology
SNT  Studien zum Neuen Testament
SNTSMS  Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
STDJ  Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
StPB  Studia post-biblica
StuBLit  Studies in Biblical Literature
SubBi  Subsidia biblica
SwJT  Southwestern Journal of Theology
1976


**THKNT**  Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament

**TJ**  *Trinity Journal*


**TLOT**  *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament.* Edited by E. Jenni, with assistance from C. Westermann. Translated by M. E. Biddle. 3 vols. Peabody, Mass., 1997

**TNTC**  Tyndale New Testament Commentaries

**TynBul**  *Tyndale Bulletin*

**VT**  *Vetus Testamentum*

**VTSup**  Supplements to Vetus Testamentum

**WBC**  Word Biblical Commentary

**WMANT**  Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament

**WTJ**  *Westminster Theological Journal*

**WUNT**  Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

**ZAW**  *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

**ZNW**  *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Ascension to heaven played an important role in ancient Mediterranean religions. The journey to heaven served different purposes and could be divided into four basic types or categories: invasion of heaven, revelation, entrance into immortal heavenly life, and foretaste of the heavenly world.¹

In the Bible, ascension to heaven is also an important theme. Five persons are reported to have ascended to heaven: Enoch (Gen 5:24; Heb 11:5); Elijah (2 Kgs 2:1–12); Jesus (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9); Paul (2 Cor 12:2–4); and John (Rev 4:1). There are also four other accounts in which a vision of the heavenly court is granted to humans: Moses, Aaron, and the elders of Israel (Exod 24:9–11); Micaiah (1 Kgs 22:19–23; 2 Chr 18:18-21); Isaiah (Isa 6:1–13); and Ezekiel (Ezek 1, 10).²

Of all the heavenly journeys attested in the Bible, however, Jesus’ ascension is the


² Tabor, 91.
most important and, arguably, the pivotal event in salvation history. J. G. Davies has claimed that “the witness of the New Testament writings to the Ascension of Christ is remarkable in its universality.”¹ In fact, Jesus’ ascension stands at the foundational core of NT theology. Jesus’ heavenly intercession and parousia cannot be explained apart from it, and the doctrine of God makes no sense without it.² It is not a surprise, then, that “belief in the ascension was universal in the early church, both East and West.”³

The state of affairs has changed in the meantime, however. In 2001, James D. G. Dunn noted that “the impression is easily given that the ascension is closer to the embarrassing end of Christian belief.”⁴ Presumably, the reason is that the historical nature


of the event is highly troubling for the modern mind. The idea of ascending to heaven itself is puzzling for a generation that no longer considers heaven as “above.”

Melanchthon was the first to attempt to harmonize the ascension with science in the 16th century, but after him theologians and biblical scholars have mostly shunned it. From the 19th century on most biographies of Jesus omit it and systematic theologians barely mention it. Friedrich Schleiermacher rejected it as not belonging to the doctrine of Jesus’ person—together with the resurrection and the prediction of his return to judge. Karl Barth, in his *Church Dogmatics*, opposed visualizing the ascension as a “literal event.”

In his work on Christology, Wolfhart Pannenberg refers to the ascension only incidentally.

Hengel and Otfried Hofius, no. 135 (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 2001), 302. Yet, Chiara Ombretta Tommasi notes that the ascension, understood as “a journey into divine realms where the soul, living or dead, reaps many rewards,” remains an important element of the majority of religious traditions (“Ascension,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones, vol. 1 [Detroit, Mich.: Thomson, 2005], 518).

1 Dunn, 301.


4 “There is no sense in trying to visualize the ascension as a literal event, like going up in a balloon” (*Doctrine of Creation*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance, vol. 3/2, *Church Dogmatics* [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1960], 453). He also noted, “This does not mean, however, that He ceased to be a creature, man.” Barth, 454.

There is also the problem of the complexity of the NT’s and the Church Fathers’
witness to the ascension. Both mostly assume it rather than describe it or discuss it. The
only three descriptions of the event itself in the NT are problematic: Luke 24:51 and Acts
1:9 seem to differ in their account regarding the circumstances of the ascension, and
Mark 16:19 is mostly considered not to be part of the original text.\(^1\) In the Apostolic
Fathers it is referred to directly—but not discussed—only in *Barn.* 15:9.\(^2\)

In summary, though ancient Christianity seemed to embrace the doctrine without
further discussion, today, cosmological questions, biblical criticism, and secularization
have reduced interest in it.\(^3\) John F. Jansen may be right when he claims that “no part [of
the Christian faith] has suffered such neglect and oblivion, as has the doctrine of the
ascension.”\(^4\) It is not surprising to find out, then, that no major work has been devoted to

\(^1\) In the UBS\(^4\), Mark’s ascension account appears in a section enclosed in double
brackets. See, Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*,

\(^2\) See Davies, 69-94.

\(^3\) Gulley, 473.

\(^4\) Jansen, 17. Several books have been written on the topic since; for example,
Peter Atkins, *Ascension Now: Implications of Christ’s Ascension for Today’s Church*
(Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2001); Andrew Burgess, *The Ascension in Karl Barth*,
Barth Studies, ed. John Webster, George Hunsinger, and Hans-Anton Drewes
(Hampshire: Ashgate, 2004); Gerrit Scott Dawson, *Jesus Ascended: The Meaning of
Christ’s Continuing Incarnation* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R; London: T & T Clark, 2004);
Douglas Farrow, *Ascension and Ecclesia: On the Significance of the Doctrine of the
Ascension for Ecclesiology and Christian Cosmology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans,
1999); Douglas Farrow, “Ascension and Atonement,” in *The Theology of Reconciliation*,
ed. Colin E. Gunton (London: T & T Clark, 2003); Gerhard Lohfink, *Die Himmelfahrt*
the study of the ascension in the Letter to the Hebrews.¹

Statement of the Problem

More than any other book in the NT, Hebrews brings out the theological meaning of Jesus’ ascension.² Hans Windisch claimed that “Die originellste und bedeutsamste


¹ Mostly, studies of the ascension in Hebrews are limited to a section in wider works dealing with the ascension in the NT or Christianity; e.g., Davies, 65-67; Donne, 562-3; Farrow, “Ascension and Atonement,” 67-92; Lohfink, 91-93; William Milligan, The Ascension and Heavenly Priesthood of Our Lord (London: Mcmillan, 1892); Toon, 53-72.

The only major work of which I am aware is Robert David Kaylor, “The Ascension Motif in Luke-Acts, the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the Fourth Gospel” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1964), 83-125. He notes how the ascension appears at “strategic points” and is essential to the idea of Jesus’ superiority, his high-priestly ministry, and the paraenetical purpose of the Letter (124-5). The ascension is preliminary to the session or glorification of Christ at the right hand of the Father: “The session is the state which has resulted from the accomplished deed of Jesus’ ascension; it is the imagery of the session, however, that defines the meaning and content of the image of the ascension for the author of Hebrews” (90).

² William J. Larkin Jr., “Ascension,” Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997), 98. Also, Davies, 44-45. The ascension has also an important paraenetical significance for Hebrews because it is the basis for the call to endure suffering (e.g., Heb 12:1-4).
Lehre des Hebr ist die von der Himmelfahrt Christi.” Hebrews itself asserts that a main point of the document is the fact that Jesus has ascended and been exalted to the right hand of God:

Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb 4:14-16 NRSV, emphasis mine)

Now the main point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent that the Lord, and not any mortal, has set up. (Heb 8:1-2, emphasis mine)

Nevertheless, the reason that the study of Jesus’ ascension in Hebrews has been neglected may not only be due to the unpopularity of this belief. The main reason seems to be of a different nature.

Hebrews asserts prominently three things about Jesus that are intimately related to each other: Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice, entered heaven, and sat at the right hand of God (session). Hebrews scholarship has focused on the first and the third elements,

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1 (The most original and significant teaching of Hebrews is that of Christ’s ascension to heaven.) Der Hebräerbrief, 2d ed., HNT, ed. Hans Lietzmann, no. 14 (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1931), 70.

2 Note that κεφάλασιν in Heb 8:1 lacks the definite article.

3 Biblical quotations will be from the NRSV, unless otherwise noted.

4 J. G. Davies is correct when he asserts that “as in the fourth Gospel the glorification of Christ is a single process consisting of three components, viz. Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension, so in the Epistle to the Hebrews the entrance of Christ upon His Priesthood [in the heavenly sanctuary] is a single process consisting of these same three elements” (Davies, 66). Also Milligan, 72-83. Both make their remarks in the context of Hebrews’ ambiguity regarding “when” Jesus began his work as high
while the second (ascension) has been considered mostly a *precondition* to or *subsumed* under the third. In other words, the fact itself that Jesus entered heaven is implicitly considered void of theological significance. Had Hebrews not mentioned Jesus’ ascension, no theological datum would be lost and Hebrews would be among those passages that jump directly from the cross to the session (e.g., Acts 2:32-33; 5:30-31; Phil 2:8-11; 1 Thess 1:10; 4:16; Rev 3:21; 6:1-7; 7:17) or fuse them (e.g., John 3:14; 12:32, 34). In fact, Robert David Kaylor—and others—states that when Hebrews speaks of the ascension, it really means session (or, glorification).¹ Thus, it could be argued that Hebrews’ scholarship has given attention to the topic from the perspective of the session and no further attention is necessary.

Franz Laub holds a different view. He argues that Hebrews assigns theological significance to the ascension itself. In his evaluation, Jesus’ entrance into heaven is the high point of Hebrews’ Christology and not what happens afterwards: “Ohne hier auf die schwierige Einzlexegese dieser Texte einzugehen, dürfte doch von vornherein soviel deutlich sein, daß gerade im Zusammenhang der für Hebr zentralen καταπέτασμα-Vorstellung das εἰσερχεσθαι selbst und nicht, was danach geschieht, als das heilsentscheidende hohepriesterliche Handeln Jesu erscheint.”² Thomas Aquinas, priest. Some texts would imply that Jesus was a priest here on earth (e.g., Heb 5:1-10), while others that Jesus’ priesthood begins at the ascension (Heb 9:11).

¹Kaylor, 90. Also Fitzmyer, “Ascension,” 414; Davies, 66; Torrance, 139; Lohfink, 91.

² (Without entering into the difficult detailed exegesis of this text, it should be clear from the beginning, especially in the context of Hebrews’ central idea of the
likewise, assigns theological significance to the ascension:

Just as the high priest in the Old Testament entered the sanctuary into God’s presence to represent the people, Christ entered heaven to intercede for us.\textsuperscript{14} The presence of his human nature in heaven is itself an intercession for us, for God, who exalted the human nature in Christ, will also show mercy towards those for whose sake this nature was assumed.

\textsuperscript{14} Hebrews 7, 25\textsuperscript{1}

It seems to me, then, that there are two main reasons that call for a fuller study of the ascension in Hebrews. First, Jesus’ entrance into heaven itself is emphasized in Hebrews and related—or equated, as Laub and Aquinas argue—to the achievement of salvation. Hebrews 9:11-14 affirms that Jesus “entered once for all into the holy place . . . thus obtaining eternal redemption.” Hebrews 6:19 defines Christian hope as Jesus’ entrance into “the inner shrine behind the curtain.” This idea is repeated in 7:19 and 10:19-23 (cf. Heb 9:24). Hebrews 4:14-16 refers to Jesus’ passing “through the heavens” as the basis for the exhortation to hold fast to the confession.

The second reason is the cosmology of Hebrews. The Letter emphasizes a clear distinction between earthly and heavenly realities.\textsuperscript{2} This emphasis enhances the

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t\eta\sigma\tau\omega\mathtt{	ext{a}}\nu\n
importance of Jesus’ ascension because it involves an overcoming of that separation.

This dissertation is a study of the nature of Jesus’ ascension and its role in the argument of Hebrews. It is focused on the theology of the ascension and not on its historicity or the elucidation of its circumstances, because Hebrews itself is not concerned with such matters. It consists, instead, of an analysis of those passages in which Jesus’ ascension is referred to and a study of the imagery Hebrews uses to couch its theology, giving special attention to the role of this imagery in the progression of the argument. This study, then, is both exegetical and theological in nature, seeking to provide an analysis of specific passages as well as systematization of their import.

State of Affairs: The Day of Atonement Ritual Provides the Analogy to Jesus’ Ascension

A great majority of scholars hold that the author of Hebrews uses Day of Atonement imagery to describe Jesus’ ascension and that a typological relationship exists between them. In this sense, the annual entrance of the high priest into the holy of holies explains the nature of Jesus’ entrance into heaven.¹ Marie Isaacs is explicit:

presupposes an intermediate sphere populated by angels. The other is horizontal and contrasts simply heaven and earth (no intermediate sphere). Therefore, the author’s terminology is “fluid, imprecise, and sometimes confusing; yet it is not incoherent” (350). See also Edward Adams, “The Cosmology of Hebrews,” Paper presented at the St. Andrews Conference on Hebrews & Theology (St. Mary’s College, St. Andrews, Scotland, 18-22 July 2006).

¹ E.g., “Nel mistero della sua morte e risurrezione Cristo ha quindi realizzato in pienezza tutti gli effetti che l’AT si proponeva con il suo complesso sistema sacrificale e con i solenni riti del Giorno dell’Espiazione” (In the mystery of his death and resurrection Christ has, therefore, carried out in fullness to all intents and purposes what the OT intended with its complex sacrificial system and with the solemn rite of the Day of Atonement). Fulvio Di Giovambattista, Il Giorno dell’Espiazione nella Lettera agli...
In his book, The Epistle of Priesthood (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 2nd ed., 1915), Alexander Nairne suggested that the main message of Hebrews was, ‘Think of our Lord as a priest, and I will make you understand’ (p. 136). We need to be more precise than that, however. It is not to priests in general, but to ancient Judaism’s high priest in particular, and even more particularly, to his part in the Day of Atonement ritual, that our author turns his thought.¹

There is no doubt that the Day of Atonement plays an important role in the argument of Hebrews. It is referenced directly in three passages (Heb 9:6-7; 9:24-25; 10:1-4) and possibly alluded to in several others (Heb 1:3; 3:2, 5, 6; 2:11, 14-15; 4:14, 5:3; 6:19-20; 9:5, 23, 28; 13:9-16).² The Day of Atonement was important for early

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¹ “Priesthood and the Epistle to the Hebrews,” HeyJ 38 (1997): 55. “In Hebrews, the ritual of the Day of Atonement metaphorically describes Jesus’ work of salvation as a Day of Atonement ceremony performed in heaven (Heb 6-9). Jesus is the high priest of a heavenly sanctuary. He enters into the most holy place with his own blood to achieve eternal redemption for the people.” Edgar V. McKnight and Christopher Church, Hebrews-James, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary, ed. Mark K. McElroy (Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2004), 115.


Christians (Acts 27:9; Barn. 7:3-11) and many have suggested that it was used in other NT writings beside Hebrews to describe and interpret Jesus’ death on the cross.¹

consecration of Jesus and the believers.


Hebrews 4:14: The “throne of grace” is said to be the antitype of the mercy seat of the old cultus before which the blood was sprinkled on the Day of Atonement. See, Johnsson, “Day of Atonement,” 114.

Hebrews 5:3: The high priest was required to offered sacrifices “for his house” in the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:6, 11, 17). Johnsson argues, however, that the inclusion of daily in the same phrase in Heb 7:26-27 “seriously weakens the case” for 3:2 and 5:3. Johnsson, “Day of Atonement,” 114.

Hebrews 6:19-20: It is commonly held that the phrase τῷ ἑσώτερον τῶν καταπετάσματος refers to the holy of holies (i.e., “within the [second] veil”) which was entered only on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:2). George E. Rice challenged this view arguing that in the context of the argument of Hebrews it could refer to the (first) veil that provides access to the sanctuary as a whole. George E. Rice, “Hebrews 6:19: Analysis of Some Assumptions Concerning Katapetasma,” AUSS 25 (1987): 65-71. Later on, Roy E. Gane responded that though Rice’s view is still “theoretically possible” . . . . The LXX tends to support rather than undermine this view [that it refers to the holy of holies].” “Re-Opening Katapetasma (‘Veil’) in Hebrews 6:19,” AUSS 38 (2000): 8.

Hebrews 9:5: The mercy seat is mentioned, but is not clear if this is an allusion to the Day of Atonement ritual. Johnsson, “Day of Atonement,” 114.

Hebrews 9:28: For a critique of the view that the author refers to the Parousia here, see César Augusto Franco Martínez, Jesucristo, su persona y su obra, en la Carta a los Hebreos: Lengua y cristología en Heb 2, 9-10; 5, 1-10; 4, 14 y 9, 27-28, Studia Semitica Novi Testamenti, ed. Jacinto González Núñez, no. 1 (Madrid: Ciudad Nueva, 1992), 317-384.

Hebrews 13:9-16: “On the Day of Atonement the carcasses of the bullock and Lord’s goat were burned outside the camp (Lev 16:27). But the point is not clear-cut because this procedure was also followed for some sin offerings, apart from the Day of Atonement (Exod 29:14; Lev 4:12; 8:17; 9:11).” Johnsson, “Day of Atonement,” 115.

It has been argued that the Day of Atonement motif dominates the thinking of the author of Hebrews to the extent that it shapes the form of his argument. For example, Aelred Cody, whose work on Hebrews has had a strong influence on later scholarship, considers that Hebrews’ emphasis on the ascension rather than the resurrection of Jesus is the result of the dominance of the Day of Atonement motif.\footnote{Paul Ellingworth claims that the author of Hebrews concentrates “in the Day of Atonement, as the lesser counterpart of Christ’s sacrifice, all his thinking about sin and forgiveness under the old covenant.”} Paul Ellingworth claims that the author of Hebrews concentrates “in the Day of Atonement, as the lesser counterpart of Christ’s sacrifice, all his thinking about sin and forgiveness under the old covenant.” Emile Guers calls Hebrews “[le] divin commentaire” of Lev 16.\footnote{Emile Guers calls Hebrews “[le] divin commentaire” of Lev 16.}

\begin{enumerate}
\item “If Hebrews has emphasized the Ascension rather than the Resurrection, it is because in the Epistle’s typological exposition Our Lord’s crossing over into the new, spiritual, divine world of ultimate reality fits very well into the type-complex of the Day of Atonement’s sin-expiating ritual, while the Resurrection from the dead does not” \textit{(Heavenly Sanctuary and Liturgy in the Epistle to the Hebrews: The Achievement of Salvation in the Epistle’s Perspective} [St. Meinrad, Ind.: Grail, 1960], 174). On the dominance of the Day of Atonement motif, Marie Isaacs adds: “So much does the model of this particular ceremony dominate Hebrews, that even when he appeals to a wholly different sacrifice, that offered to ratify the covenant, the author makes that expiatory as well” (“Priesthood,” 55).\footnote{“If Hebrews has emphasized the Ascension rather than the Resurrection, it is because in the Epistle’s typological exposition Our Lord’s crossing over into the new, spiritual, divine world of ultimate reality fits very well into the type-complex of the Day of Atonement’s sin-expiating ritual, while the Resurrection from the dead does not” \textit{(Heavenly Sanctuary and Liturgy in the Epistle to the Hebrews: The Achievement of Salvation in the Epistle’s Perspective} [St. Meinrad, Ind.: Grail, 1960], 174). On the dominance of the Day of Atonement motif, Marie Isaacs adds: “So much does the model of this particular ceremony dominate Hebrews, that even when he appeals to a wholly different sacrifice, that offered to ratify the covenant, the author makes that expiatory as well” (“Priesthood,” 55).}
\item Quoted by F. Dunkel, “Expiation et Jour des Expiations dans L’épître aux Hebreux,” \textit{RRef} 33, no. 2 (1982): 63. Timo Eskola refers to the cultic argument of Hebrews as “christological pesher on the cultic text of Leviticus (16:15)” (357). Gabriella Gelardini has recently suggested that Hebrews is an ancient synagogue homily for \textit{Tisha be-Av}. This was the most important day of mourning in Jewish Tradition and
\end{enumerate}
A majority of expositors consider that Jesus’ ascension in Hebrews is structured in three stages that correspond to the Day of Atonement ritual: (1) the passion and death of Jesus correspond to the immolation of the victim (Heb 9:13, 14), (2) the ascension to heaven corresponds to the entrance of the high priest into the holy of holies (9:11-12), (3) and Jesus’ purification of believers corresponds to the purification of the heavenly sanctuary (9:23). Some add a fourth stage, Jesus’ second coming corresponds to the exit was intimately related to the Day of Atonement. These two days are the only ones in which the most rigorous fasting is required in the liturgical year. “Hebrews, an Ancient Synagogue Homily for Tisha be-Av: Its Function, Its Basis, Its Theological Interpretation,” in Hebrews: Contemporary Methods—New Insights, ed. Gabriella Gelardini, Biblical Interpretation Series, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and Ellen van Wolde, no. 75 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 107-27.

of the high priest from the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement (9:28).\(^1\)

The strength of this view lies in the rigorous antithetical parallelism (μεν...δε) that exists between 9:1-10 and vv. 11-14, which has been considered the heart of the argument of Hebrews’ central section.\(^2\) Hebrews 9:1-10 explains the regulations of the Mosaic covenant (see the inclusio in vv. 1, 10) by describing the two rooms of the sanctuary (vv. 1-5) and the ministries carried in each (vv. 6-10). This section places a clear emphasis on the holy of holies and the Day of Atonement liturgy.\(^3\) Hebrews 9:11-14 describes in contrast the priestly work of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary. The argument

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\(^1\) E.g., Craig R. Koester, Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, AB, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, no. 36 (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 423. Against, Johnsson, “Day of Atonement,” 115. César Augusto Franco Martínez has challenged the view that this passage refers to the Parousia, arguing that it refers to the “revelación del Resucitado, de la que sólo los que le acogen como Salvador son beneficiarios” (revelation of the Risen One, of which only those who embrace him as Savior are beneficiaries, p. 383).

\(^2\) Albert Vanhoye argues that Hebrews has a chiastic structure in which Heb 9:11 is at the center. Albert Vanhoye, Structure and Message of the Epistle to the Hebrews, vol. 12, SubBi (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1989), 40a-40b. Regarding the antithetical parallelism between vv. 1-10 and 11-14 see, for example, Koester, Hebrews, 412.

\(^3\) Laub, 69-70.
seems clear: Jesus’ heavenly ministry achievements are superior to those of the high priest on the Day of Atonement because they provide for cleansing of the conscience.

This antithetical parallelism also appears in other passages. Hebrews 9:24-25 again compares the Day of Atonement with Jesus’ heavenly ministry. The contrast emphasizes the superiority of Jesus’ ministry because it is carried on in heaven (versus the Day of Atonement liturgy in the “sanctuary made by human hands”) and offers a unique sacrifice (versus the Day of Atonement multiple “year after year” sacrifices).

A final explicit comparison is found in Heb 10:1-4 and vv. 5-10. Verses 1-4 focus on the inability of the Day of Atonement “to take away sins” (v. 4) arguing that, in fact, the Day of Atonement does the opposite: it is “a reminder of sin year after year” (v. 3). Verses 5-10 oppose the sacrifice of Jesus’ body and will, which provide forgiveness of sins (vv. 10, 18), to the Day of Atonement sacrifices of “bulls and goats.” Once again, the contrast emphasizes the superiority of Jesus’ achievements.

It is also argued that Hebrews not only compares Jesus’ sacrifice to the Day of Atonement sacrifices, but also uses Day of Atonement imagery to describe Jesus’ ascension. Norman Young, for example, provides in table form a comparison of Hebrews’ descriptions of the entrance of the high priest into the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement and Jesus’ entrance into heaven:

1 Most commentators consider that Heb 13:10-13 compares Calvary with the Day of Atonement in the fact that sacrificed animals on this day were “burned outside the camp” (Lev 16:27; e.g., Attridge, 397; Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 708-10; Gräßer, 3:382-3; Marie E. Isaacs, “Hebrews 13:9-16 Revisited,” NTS 43 [1997]: 268-84; Koester, Hebrews, 576). The issue is not clear-cut, however, because the same procedure was followed for other sin offerings apart from the Day of Atonement (Exod 29:14; Lev
The terms in Heb. 9. 11-12 and in 9. 25 [which describe Jesus’ sacrifice and ascension] follow an identical pattern to those in 9. 7 [which describe the Day of Atonement], as the table below demonstrates:

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In summary, it is argued that Day of Atonement imagery is the quarry where Hebrews obtains the construction materials for its theology of Jesus’ heavenly ministry.

Nevertheless, the issue is not as straightforward as it seems. Harold W. Attridge has warned that “the application of the model of the Yom Kippur ritual to the death of Christ in Hebrews is a complex and subtle hermeneutical effort.”² The discussion regarding Hebrews’ use of the Day of Atonement liturgy as a typological counterpart of Jesus’ ascension has gravitated around two questions: “(1) how detailed is the application of the OT data to the author’s picture (Bildhäftie) of Christ’s exaltation? and (2) what are the heavenly realities (Sachhäftie) to which, in our author’s view, the OT data point?”³ The second question has baffled several interpreters and drawn most of the attention:

Does a heavenly sanctuary require purification?⁴ It is the first question, however, that

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³ Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 445-6.

⁴ The difficulty of the second question relates prominently to the meaning of Heb 9:23: “Thus it was necessary for the sketches of the heavenly things to be purified with
interests us now: “How detailed is the application of the OT data [—Day of Atonement imagery in this case—] to the author’s picture (Bildhärte) of Christ’s exaltation?”

Critique of the State of Affairs: A More Limited Role for the Day of Atonement Imagery?

Several inconsistencies between Day of Atonement liturgy and the imagery of Jesus’ ascension in Hebrews have been identified by scholars. Mostly, it has been considered that this is because Hebrews is not concerned with “cultic minutiae.” A closer look may suggest, however, that it was not carelessness but that the author envisioned a more restricted use of Day of Atonement imagery for Jesus’ ascension than has been allowed by contemporary scholarship.

There Is Absence of “Affliction of the Soul” in Relation to Jesus’ Entrance into the Heavenly Sanctuary

F. F. Bruce notes that affliction of the soul, an important element of the

these rites, but the heavenly things themselves need better sacrifices than these.” First, what are these “heavenly things” that need purification? Answers fall mainly along two lines of interpretation: heaven itself or human beings (see, Koester, Hebrews, 421). Second, do heavenly things need purification? The mere idea of a purification of heaven is perplexing to many and “almost fantastic” for others, e.g., James Moffatt, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, ICC, ed. Alfred Plummer (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1924), 132. C. Spicq says: “L’idée d’impureté antérieure est un non-sens pour le sanctuarie céleste” (The idea of previous impurity is a nonsense for the heavenly sanctuary, p. 267).

1 Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 445-6.

2 Ibid., 452. Ellingworth’s conclusion is representative of the view of many others.
celebration of Yom Kippur, is absent.¹ Leviticus 23:29 says regarding the Day of Atonement: “For anyone who does not practice self-denial during that entire day shall be cut off from the people” (also 16:29, 31; 23:27, 32).

In the Second Temple period, “self-denial” was interpreted as fasting and assigned atoning power: “[The righteous] atones for (sins of) ignorance by fasting and humbling his soul, and the Lord will cleanse every devout person and his house” (Pss. Sol. 3:8 [OTP 2:655]).² By New Testament times, Yom Kippur could be referred to simply as “the fast” (e.g., Acts 27:9; Philo, Spec. Laws 1.188; 2.193-201; Moses 2.23-24; Aleg. Interp. 2.52; Embassy 306; Josephus J.W. 236; cf. Barn. 7.3). The Mishnah lists six prohibitions for this festival: “On the Day of Atonement it is forbidden to (1) eat, (2) drink, (3) bathe, (4) put on any sort of oil, (5) put on a sandal, (6) or engage in sexual relations” (m. Yoma 8:1 [Neusner, Mishnah]).³ In addition, others may wear sackcloth and put ashes on their heads (m. Ta’an. 2:1), abstain from sleep (b. Yoma 19b), induce tears and cry, and other more extreme afflictions.⁴

In Hebrews, however, the atmosphere that surrounds Jesus’ entrance into the heavenly sanctuary is that of feasting and rejoicing: “What used to be ‘the good things to

¹ F. F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 212.


⁴ Stökl Ben Ezra, 34.
come’ are now ‘the good things that have come’ [Heb 9:11].”

It is true that there are evidences of joy and celebration on the Day of Atonement:

Said Rabban Simeon b. Gamaliel, “There were no days better for Israelites than the fifteenth of Ab and the Day of Atonement.” For on these days Jerusalemite girls go out in borrowed white dresses—so as not to shame those who owned none. All the dresses had to be immersed. And the Jerusalemite girls go out and dance in vineyards. What did they say? “Fellow, look around and see—choose what you want! “Don’t look for beauty, look for family.” (m. Ta’an. 4:8 [Neusner, Mishnah])

These celebrations, however, came after the end of the solemnities. Mishnah Yoma 7:4 mentions that the high priest celebrated with his friends the fact that he had come forth whole from the sanctuary. Rabi Aqiba also considered forgiveness provided in this day a reason for celebration: “Happy are you, O Israel. Before whom are you made clean, and who makes you clean? It is your Father who is in heaven” (m. Yoma 8:9 [Neusner, Mishnah]).

Likewise, the atmosphere of celebration in Hebrews is due to the fact that Jesus has provided expiation for sins perfecting the believers and obtaining “eternal redemption” (Heb 9:11-14). This does not fit, however, with Hebrews’ use of Day of Atonement imagery. If scholars are correct in their reading, Jesus has not come out yet

1 Bruce, 212. Cf. the great scene of joy in Heb 12:22-24. Also, Wilson, 149.


3 See also, Roy E. Gane, Leviticus, Numbers, NIV Application Commentary, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004), 403-4.
from the “most holy place” (9:28). Thus, if Jesus’ “Day of Atonement” has not finished yet, it is probably too soon for Christians to celebrate.

The Azazel Ritual Is Omitted

Hebrews does not mention Azazel. This is an intriguing omission. The rite of Azazel’s goat was the culmination of the ritual expiation on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:7-10, 20-22). It was not until the sins of the people were placed on the goat for Azazel and sent to the desert that the sanctuary’s cleansing was achieved (Lev 16:20-22). The announcement that the goat had been pushed over a cliff, according to rabbinic tradition, was “relayed to the temple by the stations along the route. However, according to legend, a scarlet thread tied to the door of the sanctuary turned white at the very moment the goat was pushed over the precipice, as a sign that the people were cleansed of their sins (Yom. 6.8; cf. Isa. 1:18).”

If Hebrews follows a Day of Atonement typology relating the cleansing of the conscience (9:14) with the purification of the sanctuary (v. 23), we have the problem that

1 In fact, Jesus has arrived to stay. He has been enthroned in heaven over a kingdom that will not be shaken (Heb 12:28) and his priestly intercession is meant to last for ever (7:25)


4 See e.g., Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 262.
Jesus has not come out of the most holy place yet (heaven). As mentioned above, several scholars believe that this exit of the most holy place is described in Heb 9:28, which lies still in the future.\(^1\) If this is the case, then, Azazel’s rite lies still in the future, and the purification of sins has not been accomplished yet; but, for Hebrews purification of sin has been accomplished (Heb 10:10-13, 18).

It could be argued that this omission is due to the fact that Hebrews emphasizes the blood ritual of the Day of Atonement (goat and bull, Lev 16:6, 9; cf. Heb 9:12) as a counterpart to the cross and that no further eschatological events as a counterpart to the rite of Azazel are in view.\(^2\)

This is possible but does not explain satisfactorily the absence of Azazel. The cross does not have only an expiatory function in the argument of Hebrews, but a hortatory function as well. Jesus is the forerunner who has gone through rejection, shame, and abuse to glory and Christians are invited to follow him, enduring patiently the rejection, shame, and abuse he suffered (Heb 12:1-4; 13:13, 14; cf. 10:32-39). Early Christian writers commonly considered the rejection and abuse of the goat for Azazel a type of Jesus’ sufferings.\(^3\) In the Letter of Barnabas, the goat for Azazel, accursed,

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\(^1\) Page 16, n. 1.

\(^2\) Notwithstanding, the author is interested in events that will take place in the future as well (e.g., 9:28; 10:13 [cf. 1:13]; 12:26-28).

\(^3\) “Increasingly the people participated in the goat’s departure, pulling out its wool, pricking it, spitting on it, and urging it to be gone (Barn. 7.8; Yom. 6:4).” Rylaarsdam, 315. See also, Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, “The Christian Exegesis of the Scapegoat Between Jews and Pagans,” in Sacrifice in Religious Experience, ed. Albert I. Baumgarten, SHR, ed. W. J. Hanegraaff, no. 93 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 207-32.
abused, and sent to the desert with his head encircled “with scarlet wool” serves as a type of Christ who is accursed and “despised, and pierced, and mocked,” yet crowned (Barn. 7 [ANF 1:141]).

1 Justin Martyr, in his Dialogue with Trypho (ca. 155 C.E.), also considers the rite of Azazel as “declarative” of Jesus’ sufferings: “in which the elders of your people, and the priests, having laid hands on Him and put Him to death, sent Him away as the scape [goat]” (Justin, Dial. 40 [ANF 1:215]).

2 Yet, Hebrews does not mention the

1 The Letter of Barnabas is an important witness of early Christian traditions and could have been written before the end of the 1st century C.E. Since Bar. 16.3 refers to the destruction of the temple and is first quoted by Clement of Alexandria (ca. 190), the range of dates possible for Barnabas go from 70 C.E. to the end of the 2nd century. The application of the prophecy of Dan (7:7-14) to the contemporary situation (Barn. 4.4), the hope of the reconstruction of the temple, the separation of Christianity from Judaism, and an ecclesiastic organization in embryonic stages have been used as internal evidence for a more precise date, mostly in the times of Vespasian (69-79), Nerva (97-98), or Hadrian (118-138).


goat for Azazel on the Day of Atonement as a type of Christ. Instead, the author of Hebrews chooses the minor aspect of the ritual that “the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp” (13:11) to encourage the readers to “go to him [Jesus] outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured” (v. 13). In fact, the burning of the bodies of sacrificed animals outside the camp is not exclusive to the Day of Atonement and does not imply rejection and shaming.¹

Why is it, then, that Hebrews does not employ the Azazel rite? While Hebrews can and does elect imagery from a variety of OT rituals, election of the image of burning of the bodies “outside the camp” instead of the rite of Azazel for the paraenetic function of Jesus’ sacrifice undermines the idea that Day of Atonement imagery dominates the thinking of Hebrews.

**The Sprinkling of Jesus’ Blood in Heaven Does Not Refer to the Day of Atonement Ritual**

Hebrews emphasizes the cultic image of the sprinkling of Jesus’ blood in heaven but not in the context of the Day of Atonement.² Instead, it describes this sprinkling as


¹ For the burning of bodies “outside the camp,” see above p. 10, n. 2.

² The high point of the ritual of the Day of Atonement came when the high priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrifices upon the mercy seat and in front of it to purify the sanctuary (Lev 16:15-16). Interestingly, Hebrews departs from the language of the LXX to describe the manipulation of blood by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement: the blood is not “sprinkled” on the sanctuary but “offered” (9:7). See William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, WBC, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and Ralph P. Martin, no.
part of the inauguration of the new covenant (10:19, 29; 12:24; 13:20; cf. 9:15-23).

Hebrews typologizes a conflation of three rituals or events: the institution of the
coventional, the ordination of priests, and the inauguration of the sanctuary (Heb 9:15-23).¹

In this conflated event, the sprinkling of Jesus’ blood as the ratification of the new
covenant (not an eschatological Day of Atonement) purifies the worshipers, providing for
the forgiveness of their sins.²

Hebrews 9:15 explains that Jesus’ sacrifice has the purpose of redeeming
believers from “the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant” (Heb
9:15 NASB, emphasis original). As Scott W. Hahn has shown, these transgressions
provide the context for the discussion of Jesus’ death as a forgiveness of sin in Heb 9:15-
22.³ The debt incurred in these transgressions needed to be settled in order that believers
could enter into a second or new covenant. In other words, where there is a [broken]
covenant, “it is necessary that the death of the covenant maker be carried out” (Heb 9:16,
translation mine).⁴ Thus, Jesus died in order to provide forgiveness of sin and establish a

47b (Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1991), 223. Also Pursiful, 70.

¹ See, Mary Rose D’Angelo, Moses in the Letter to the Hebrews, SBLDS, ed.
Howard Clark Kee, no. 42 (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1979), 243-9. Also, Stökl

² D’Angelo, Moses, 246; Haber, 109-10. Also, Hahn, 416-36.

³ Hahn, 416-36. Also, Scott W. Hahn, “Covenant, Cult, and the Curse of Death:
Gabriella Gelardini, Biblical Interpretation Series, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and Ellen van
Wolde, no. 75 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 65-88.

⁴ This is based on the analysis of Hahn, “A Broken Covenant,” 432-3. See below
section “Heb 9:15-23 describes Jesus’ sacrifice and ascension as the inauguration of a
new covenant between God and the believers (9:15).

The cleansing of the sanctuary in Heb 9:23 should probably also be understood in the context of the inauguration of the new covenant and not of the Day of Atonement. Hebrews 9:23 says: “Thus it was necessary for the sketches of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves need better sacrifices than these.” The expression “these rites” in 9:23 refers back to the description of the cleansing of the sanctuary in its inauguration (9:21) and not in the Day of Atonement (9:7, 25).¹

It is commonly agreed that both Day of Atonement and inauguration of covenant imageries are used in Hebrews to describe Jesus’ sacrifice.² But, in this and subsequent sections, the ratification of the covenant (which in Hebrews conflates the inauguration of the sanctuary and the ordination of priests) becomes the primary typology for Jesus’ death. Jesus is described mainly as the mediator of a new covenant (7:22; 8:6; 9:15) and his sacrifice is referred to primarily as the “blood of the covenant” (10:29; 12:24; 13:20). In his study of Yom Kippur, James P. Scullion agrees: “It should be noted that the key to this central section is not Yom Kippur itself, but the connection that the author makes between the cult and the new covenant.”³ William R. G. Loader concurs:

Ein erseits muß klar gesehen werden, daß diese Typology [Yom Kippur] eine wichtige Rolle in den Gedanken des Vf in 9,1-10,18 spielt; andererseits darf ihre Besonderheit nicht so weit hervorgehoben werden, daß sie als eigentliches Thema

new covenant.”

¹ Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 477.

² E.g., Álvarez Cineira, 237; Haber, 105-24; Nelson, 252.

³ Scullion, 252.
oder vorherrschender Gedanke dieses Abschnittes bezeichnet wird.¹

In summary, the sprinkling of Jesus’ blood in Hebrews has the primary intention of creating an analogy to the sacrifice for the ratification of the covenant. If there is an analogy between Jesus’ sacrifice and the sacrifice of the Day of Atonement, it seems to be secondary.

**The Day of Atonement Provides Only Secondary Imagery to Jesus’ Sacrifice**

Finally, Hebrews’ argument seems not to rest on those things Jesus’ sacrifice and the Day of Atonement had in common.

Several characteristics of Jesus’ sacrifice are emphasized in the argument of Hebrews. First, Jesus’ sacrifice is a one-time event. He offered himself “once for all” for our sins (7:27; 9:12, 26, 28; 10:10). Second, Jesus’ sacrifice provides forgiveness. Jesus “offered himself . . . [to] purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!” (9:14). And third, Jesus’ sacrifice provides access to the presence of God. The author testifies that “we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus” (10:19-22).

Hebrews emphasizes, however, the opposite characteristics in the Day of Atonement ritual. The Day of Atonement is described not as a “once a year” event but as

¹ (On the one hand it must clearly be seen, that this typology [Yom Kippur] plays an important role in the thinking of the author in 9:1-10:18; on the other hand, its peculiarity must not be stressed so much, that it is described as the essential theme or predominant thought of this section) Sohn und Hoherpriester, 172.
a repetitive, “year after year” event (9:25; 10:1, 3).\(^1\) The Day of Atonement functions as a proof that the “way of the sanctuary” is not yet open (9:8). Finally, the Day of Atonement sacrifices do not provide forgiveness; instead, they function as a “reminder of sin” (10:3). The Day of Atonement seems to function in Hebrews, then, as an epitome of what was defective and imperfect in the old covenant system rather than as a type of what Jesus’ sacrifice would be.\(^2\)

On the other hand, Jesus is compared positively to the sacrifice for the ratification of the covenant. The comparison is explicit in Heb 9:15-22. First, Jesus’ sacrifice like that of Moses is unique (Exod 24)—that is, not meant to be repeated (Heb 9:15-18).\(^3\) Second, Jesus’ sacrifice for the inauguration of the covenant provides forgiveness. His death “redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant” (9:15, cf. 22). By means of his blood Jesus inaugurated [ἐνεκάνισεν] a “new and living way” into the presence of God (10:19-22), just as Moses inaugurated the first covenant with the blood

\(^1\) The exception is 9:7 where the Day of Atonement is described as a “once a year” event. For the purpose of Day of Atonement imagery in this passage, see Felix H. Cortez, “From the Holy to the Most Holy Place: The Period of Heb 9:6-10 and the Day of Atonement as a Metaphor of Transition,” *JBL* 125 (2006): 527-47. He argues that the Day of Atonement illustrates in this passage the transition from the first to the second covenant and not Jesus’ ascension to heaven.


\(^3\) The sacrifice for the inauguration of a covenant is by nature non-repeatable. The renewal of the covenant at Moab, for example, did not include the repetition of the sacrifice Moses performed at Sinai forty years before; it included only the repetition of its laws for the new generation (Deut 29-31).
of “calves and goats” (9:18-19; see below section “The sacrifice of ‘Goats and calves’ does not refer particularly to the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement.”).

This observation suggests that the Day of Atonement imagery provides only part of the elements of the comparison to Jesus’ sacrifice and that in this comparison it fulfills not a primary but a secondary function. We must not forget that the only explicit references to the Day of Atonement are found in Heb 8-10 (see p. 10), but it is in these chapters where the institution of the new covenant dominates the argument. Consequently, Jesus is primarily referred to throughout the work as the mediator of the new covenant (8:6; 9:15; 12:24; cf. 7:22), and his blood identified as the “blood of the covenant” (10:29; 13:20; cf. 12:24). Therefore, an analysis of the ascension of Jesus that considers the Day of Atonement ritual as its primary reference runs the risk of providing a skewed vision of the argument of Hebrews.

**Summary**

One question has ruled the discussion thus far. How detailed is the application of the Day of Atonement imagery to Hebrews’ picture of Christ’s ascension?

I have pointed out some limitations in Hebrews’ usage of Day of Atonement imagery as an analogy for Jesus’ ascension. First, several aspects of the Day of Atonement ritual are not part of the analogy. For example, the character of the Day of Atonement festival does not correspond to the character of Jesus’ ascension in Hebrews. Jesus’ entrance into the heavenly sanctuary is not a time of fasting for believers, but of rejoicing. Azazel, the culmination of the ritual, is not mentioned either. Second, the analogy for the sprinkling of Jesus’ blood in heaven does not refer to the Day of Atonement ritual but to a complex of events in which Moses inaugurated God’s covenant
with Israel. Moreover, the primary analogy for Jesus’ sacrifice as a forgiveness for sin is not the Day of Atonement ritual but the rituals for the inauguration of the covenant.

These limitations suggest that the imagery of the inauguration of the covenant plays a more important role for Hebrews’ exposition of Jesus’ ascension than the imagery of the Day of Atonement; yet few scholars allow for this connection.

Alternate Suggestion: Moses’ Inauguration of the Sanctuary Provides the Analogy to Jesus’ Ascension

Though often unmentioned, it also has been suggested that Jesus’ ascension follows the analogy of the inauguration of the tabernacle by Moses in the context of the inauguration of the covenant.¹

A recent advocate of this view is Richard M. Davidson. He suggests that Moses’ inauguration of the sanctuary is the OT background for Jesus’ entrance into the heavenly sanctuary in Hebrews. Following Albert Vanhoye’s and William H. Shea’s literary analysis of the structure of Hebrews, he notes that Heb 6:19-20; 9:11-14, 24; and 10:19-22 are parallel passages that refer to the same event and should explain one another.¹ He presents four main arguments:

1. Jesus is king and high priest.² The fact that he is described in Hebrews as being a high priest “according to the order of Melchizedek” makes clear that Hebrews does not wish to establish an Aaron-Jesus typology. Aaron is not king. Moses, instead, functions in Hebrews as a type of Jesus (3:1-6; 9:15-24). Moses functions as a king high priest, particularly in his role of inaugurator of the covenant, which includes the inauguration of the sanctuary. Moses entered the inner room of the sanctuary as part of the inauguration rites (Exod 26:33; 40:1-9; Lev 8:10-12; and Num 7:1).³

2. Hebrews 10:19-22 refers to the “new and living way which He [Jesus] inaugurated [ἐνεκαίνισεν] for us through the veil” (NASB). It is argued that the verb

299; Spicq, 267.


ἐγκαίνια is used here in a cultic sense just as in Heb 9:18 where it refers to the 
i inaugration of the first covenant—which includes the inauguration of the Mosaic 
tabernacle (vv. 19-21). Therefore, the “new and living way” denotes the heavenly 
sanctuary which is inaugurated by Christ.

3. Hebrews 9:12 refers to the sacrifices “of goats and calves” (τράγων καὶ 
μόσχων). The word for goats (τράγων) does not appear in the sacrifices of the Day of 
Atonement in Lev 16 (LXX) but appears only in Num 7 where the inauguration rites of 
the sanctuary are described. There, the sacrifices of calves (μόσχων) also appear. Thus 
Num 7-8 is the only place in the LXX where there is reference to the sacrifices of goats 
and calves (τράγων καὶ μόσχων). Hebrews 9:19 mentions both kinds of animals for the 
sacrifice of the inauguration of the covenant.

4. Hebrews 9:24 describes Jesus’ entrance into the heavenly sanctuary in the 
context of the inauguration of the new covenant and the tabernacle as described in 9:15-

1 Ἐγκαίνια means “renew, ratify, inaugurate, dedicate.” BDAG, 272. This 
verb, and its derivatives, is used for the inauguration of the tabernacle (Num 7:10, 11, 84, 88), Solomon’s temple (2 Chr 7:9; Ps 30:1; 2 Macc 2:9), the temple after the exile (Ezra 6:16, 17; 1 Esd 7:7), and the rededication of the altar in the time of the Maccabees (1 Macc 4:36, 56, 59; 2 Macc 2:19). In fact, this rededication in the time of the Maccabees 
had become an important festival by New Testament times and was known as Hanukkah or τὰ ἐγκαίνια (see John 10:22).

2 Davidson, “Christ’s Entry,” 180-81. Also, Dahl, 403.

3 Davidson, “Christ’s Entry,” 182-5.

4 The text without “καὶ τῶν τράγων” is supported by important mss.; e.g., P46, 
N, K, L, Ψ, 181, 1241, 1739, syrph, p. It is probable, however, that the words were 
 omitted either “accidentally (through homoteleuton) or deliberately (to conform the 
statement to Ex 24.5).” Metzger, 599.
22. Richard M. Davidson concedes, however, that in this case the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary remains ambiguous and refers to the inauguration of the sanctuary (9:15-22) as well as the Day of Atonement (9:25).¹

Thus, Heb 6:19-20, which is a parallel passage to 9:11-14, 24; 10:19-22, should be understood in the context of an analogy to Moses’ inauguration of the sanctuary and not to the annual ritual of the Day of Atonement.

Other scholars present further arguments in favor of this position.

Nils A. Dahl notes that the juxtaposition of sprinkling and ritual washing in 10:22 closely parallels the ceremony of the initiation of priests performed by Moses. Note that this ceremony was carried out together with the inauguration of the sanctuary (Exod 29:1-37; 30:22-33; 40:1-15; Lev 8-9). Likewise, Hebrews conflates the inauguration of the sanctuary with the consecration of the priesthood in a single event (Heb 9:18-21).²

The import of this analogy is that just as the sanctuary and priests were consecrated by Moses so they could have access to the sanctuary, Jesus consecrates believers by virtue of his sacrifice and ascension so they might approach God (10:19-22; cf., 9:11-14).

Mary Rose D’Angelo argues that the term ἐπίτελεῖν in Heb 8:5 should be translated as “complete” or “consecrate” and not “build” as normally translated.³ She notes that the sanctuary was completed only when it was consecrated (Exod 40:33; Num 7:1). She also argues that Heb 8:5 quotes Num 7:1 and not Exod 25:40 and, therefore,

¹ “Christ’s Entry,” 185-8.

² Also, D’Angelo, Moses, 244.

³ Ibid., 233.
the *typos* of the cult which Moses saw was a *typos* which instructed him precisely for the consecration. . . . The explication of the *typos* as especially the *typos* of the inauguration (*ἐγκαίνιωσις*) of the tent and the ordination of the priests helps to explain Hebrews’ definition of the purpose of the service as to perfect or ordain the worshipper (*τελειώσας τὸν λατρεύοντα*).\(^1\)

Ceslas Spicq also considers that 9:23 refers to the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary. He argues that the omission of the verb in the last clause of Heb 9:23 is important. He suggests that the verb to be supplied there is *ἐγκαινίζεσθαι* and not *καθαρίζεσθαι*. In his opinion, this helps to resolve the problem of the purification of the heavenly sanctuary, which for him is a “non sens”: it is not purification, but consecration that Hebrews is talking about in this passage.\(^2\) His explanation is unnecessary, however. The terms *ἐγκαινίζεσθαι* and *καθαρίζεσθαι* appear intimately related in the context of the inauguration or re-dedication of the sanctuary in Jewish thinking (1 Macc 4:36-59; 2 Macc 2:19; 2 Chr 29:15; Neh 13:9, 30).\(^3\)

Gregory K. Beale calls attention to the quotation of Hag 2:6 in Heb 12:26-27.\(^4\) That prophecy was given in the context of the construction of Zerubbabel’s temple. It promises that God “will shake the heavens and the earth” and the glory of that house

\(^1\) Ibid., 234.

\(^2\) Spicq, 267. Also, Ebrard, 299. Note the significant number of previous commentators he mentions who held the same opinion.


\(^4\) Beale, 303-9.
would be greater than that of Solomon’s temple. In his view, Hebrews interprets this prophecy as being fulfilled in the ratification of the new covenant and inauguration of a “greater and more perfect tabernacle” (9:11 NASB; cf. v. 24).

The strength of the inauguration view is that it seems to follow the straightforward argument of the text, at least of 9:11-23. Hebrews interprets Jesus’ sacrifice and ascension of 9:11-14 as the inauguration of the new covenant in 9:15-22.\(^1\) And Hebrews correlates Moses’ consecration of the tabernacle (v. 21) with the purification of the heavenly sanctuary in 9:23.\(^2\) Thus, Philip E. Hughes considers that “there is much to attract in this proposal, which has both simplicity and strength.”\(^3\)

Critique of the Analogy to Moses’ Inauguration of the Sanctuary

There are, however, several criticisms that have been leveled against this view.

First, several expressions in the ascension passages of Hebrews privilege an analogy to the Day of Atonement. For example, the only passage in the OT that speaks about the *high priest* going “within the veil”—the expression used in Heb 6:19 (cf. 10:20)—is Lev 16 (vv. 2, 12, 15) where the Day of Atonement is described.\(^4\) The idea

\(^1\) Note that the διὰ τοῦτο of 9:15 creates a causal relationship between both sections.

\(^2\) When Heb 9:23 says that “the heavenly things themselves need better sacrifices than these,” the demonstrative pronoun ταύτας refers to the sacrifices of the inauguration of the covenant (vv. 19-21). Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 477-8; Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 261.


\(^4\) Norman H. Young, “‘Where Jesus Has Gone as a Forerunner on Our Behalf’
that Moses went “within the veil” in order to consecrate the sanctuary is inferred from the consecration passages (Exod 40; Lev 8, Num 7) but not directly mentioned. Similarly, while Jesus is designated a high priest, none of the passages of the consecration of the sanctuary (Exod 40; Lev 8, Num 7) refer to Moses as a high priest. Also, Hebrews consistently draws a contrast between the Melchizedek order to which Jesus belongs and the Aaronic order to which Moses did not belong. Therefore, it is argued that there is no typological relationship between Moses and Jesus as far as Jesus’ entrance and cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary are concerned.

Second, the reference to τράγοι in connection to μόσχοι in Heb 9:12 does not necessarily imply the sacrifices for the consecration of the sanctuary. In Num 7 (thirteen passages in total), τράγοι form part of the animal sacrifices for whole burnt offerings. The blood of these sacrifices was not brought into the sanctuary (Lev 1:10-13) and thus may not refer to the blood that is brought into the sanctuary according to Hebrews. Note as well, that the context of Heb 10:4 implicates that the author uses the term τράγος to


1 Young, “Day of Dedication,” 62. Note, however, that Philo refers to Moses’ entrance into the sanctuary to anoint the holy furniture explicitly, including the ark of the covenant (Moses 2.146, 152-154).

2 Note, again, that Philo refers to Moses as high priest (Moses 2.3).

3 Young, “Day of Dedication,” 62.

4 Note, however, that there is an explicit comparison between Moses and Jesus in their relation to “God’s house” (Heb 3:1-6).

5 Young, “Day of Dedication,” 65.
refer to the he-goat sacrificed on the Day of Atonement. Likewise, the Greek versions of Aquila (early 2d c. C.E.) and Symmachus (late 2d-early 3d c. C.E.) use the term τράγος instead of χίμαρος for the he-goat of Lev 16.¹ Philo and Pseudo-Barnabas also prefer τράγος over χίμαρος in their description of Day of Atonement sacrifices.² Thus—it is argued—it is more correct to say that the phrase “blood of goats and calves” in Heb 9:12 is a generic expression that refers to the sacrifice of animals in general and not specifically to the inauguration of the sanctuary.

Third, Heb 9:23 may not parallel vv. 19-21. It has been argued that v. 22 functions as a “contextual break” and v. 23 is connected, instead, to vv. 24-28 that deal with mediation and not consecration.³ Another view is that the parallel to v. 23 is vv. 11-14 where reference is made to the cleansing of the conscience.⁴

Finally, Heb 9:23 does not say that the heavenly sanctuary is “inaugurated” but

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² Philo, *Spec.Leg* 1.188 (χίμαρος); *Leg.All* 2.52; *Post* 70; *Plant* 61; *Heres* 179. Pseudo-Barnabas, 7.4, 6, 8, 10. Josephus (37 – post 93 C.E.) is another first-century example of how fluid Jewish writers were in their choice of words for the sacrifices. He uses ερυφος (kid, he-goat) and ταύρος (bull, ox) for the sin-offerings of the Day of Atonement (*Ant*. 3.239-240). Young, “Day of Dedication,” 65.

³ Johnsson, “Defilement/Purification,” 95-96.

⁴ Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 261.
“cleansed” and these terms are not synonymous.¹ It is argued that the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary has to do with the remission of sins mentioned immediately before (v. 22), and the consecration of the sanctuary did not accomplish this.²

The consecration of the heavenly sanctuary as an alternative for the interpretation of Heb 9:23 is hardly mentioned in recent commentaries though we have reason to believe that serious scholars are acquainted with it. This view meets the same fate in other passages as well (4:14-16; 6:19-20; 9:11-14; 10:19-22). Apparently, the view of a Day of Atonement typology for Jesus’ ascension is so much accepted among scholars today that it is difficult for another idea even to be mentioned.³

I will argue below, in my analysis of these passages, that the critiques raised against this view are not compelling and that a study of the relationship between the inauguration of the covenant and Jesus’ ascension merits more attention than it has received thus far.

In my opinion, the principal shortcoming of both views introduced above is that neither of them explains adequately the interrelationship between the allusions to the Day of Atonement and the inauguration of the covenant in the Letter to the Hebrews. Both rituals are referred to explicitly in the text and both are related to Jesus’ sacrifice and

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² Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 261. Note, however, that Lev 8:15 mentions the purification of the altar after the priests laid their hands on the victim. See also Lev 9:7, where there were expiatory sacrifices for the people in the context of the inauguration of the tabernacle.

³ Young, “Where Jesus Has Gone,” 166.
ascension. The question is, why did the author choose to integrate allusions to two different rituals in the exposition of Jesus’ sacrifice and ascension instead of taking the more simple route of alluding to only one ritual? Is it possible to find coherence in Hebrews’ use of allusions to the rituals of the Old Testament? Until now, scholars have neglected one set of allusions or the other in their analyses.

A Third Way: The Enthronement of the Ideal Davidic King Provides the Analogy to Jesus’ Ascension

I want to suggest a third perspective that may better explain Hebrews’ exposition of Jesus’ ascension to heaven.

The author of Hebrews refers to the ascension of Jesus not only in chaps. 8-10, but throughout the work; therefore, we should study the ascension in the context of the general thrust of the document. The six passages that refer explicitly to Jesus’ ascension in Hebrews (1:6; 4:14-16; 6:19-20; 9:11-14, 24; 10:19-22) associate the ascension with different aspects of Jesus’ achievements. Hebrews 1:6 relates the ascension with Jesus’ enthronement (also 4:14-16); 6:19-20, with his appointment as high priest; 9:11-14, 24 and 10:19-22, with the inauguration of the new covenant. It seems clear, however, that all of these events form part of Jesus’ exaltation at the right hand of God (1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2) and contribute to his identity as “Son.” I will argue that the title “Son”—or “Son of God”—is used in Hebrews eminently as a royal title. Note that Jesus is the “Son” enthroned as king (1:3, 8), consecrated as high priest (4:14; 5:5, 8; 7:28), and mediator of the new covenant (10:29; cf. 6:6). In other words, I suggest that Hebrews conceives the ascension as the inauguration of his office as “Son” at the “right hand of God” (Heb 1:3, 13; 4:14-16; 8:1-2; 10:12-13; 12:1-2) and that it understands the title “Son” as the fulfillment of the promise made to David which is claimed for Jesus explicitly in Heb 1:5.
Thus, all the other achievements related to Jesus’ ascension are a function of, or derive from, his installation as Israel’s promised Davidic king.

In this sense, Jesus fulfills the expectations raised in the Old Testament regarding the rule of a future righteous Davidic king. The rule of righteous Davidic kings in Jewish history was characterized by seven actions—not always in the same order—that are intriguingly familiar to the argument of Hebrews. After ascending the throne, the king would (1) renew the covenant between God and the nation, (2) cleanse the land, (3) build or repair the temple, (4) reform the cult and reorganize the priests and Levites, (5) promote the reunification of Israel, and (6) achieve rest by defeating the enemies. The rise to power of the Davidic king often coincides as well with (7) the emergence of a faithful priest.

Thus, Jesus is the “son” enthroned at the right hand of God (1:3, 5-6). He has defeated “death,” the enemy (2:14-16), built the “house of God” (3:1-6; 8:1-5), and provided “rest” for his people (4:1-10). His ascension to the throne implies as well the emergence of a new faithful priest of the order of Melchizedek (chaps. 5-7) and a reformation of the cult—specifically of the law of sacrifices (9:24-10:18) and priesthood (7:13-28). The new king cleanses his people (9:11-14), mediates a new covenant (9:15-23), and reforms the cult by establishing one sacrifice that is effective “once for all” (9:24-10:18) and multiple spiritual sacrifices (13:10-16), all of which conclude in a joyous celebration at Mount Zion (12:22-29)—as the reforms of ancient Jewish kings did.

It is important to note, however, that the main thrust of Hebrews is not to prove that Jesus is the “Son” enthroned at the right hand of God; instead, the author of Hebrews refers to Jesus’ exaltation—and what it implies—as the basis for a call to the readers—or
exhortation—to remain faithful to him (e.g., 2:1-4; 4:14-16; 10:19-25, 35-39; 12:1-4).

Although Hebrews does not explicitly call Jesus the “son of David,” the fact that it recognizes his descent from the tribe of Judah (7:14), applies to him the promises of the Davidic covenant (Heb 1:5; quoting Ps 2:7 and 2 Sam 7:14; par. 1 Chr 17:13), and refers to his enthronement as “son” “at the right hand of God” (1:3, 13; 5:6; 7:17, 21; 10:13; 12:2; quoting Ps 110:1, 4) makes it highly probable that Davidic traditions function as a subtext of the letter.¹

Traditions and expectations often provided powerful rhetorical subtexts in the ancient Mediterranean world. Here is an important example from close to the time when the book of Hebrews was written. In his fascinating work Nero, Edward Champlin gives us a glimpse of the power and role subtexts had in the political discourse of A.D.-first-century Rome.²

Historians inform us that after A.D. 59 Nero began to appear on stage at the theater, assuming a diversity of roles. (Nero considered himself a poet and lyre player as well.) Tradition has seen in these “inordinate artistic pretensions” irresponsibility and “puerile ambitions.”³ Edward Champlin, however, in a tour de force, attempts to subvert

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the received opinion suggesting that it was not sheer insanity that drove Nero’s sponsorship of and participation in the theater, but a rational delusion, a brilliant act of his artistic genius. He notes that the afterlife of Nero’s image was unique in antiquity.¹ He suggests that the reason for the fascination he exerted on the masses and history was that “he staged his life as a mythological enactment to shock and amuse his people.”²

In late March A.D. 59, Nero killed his mother, alleging she craved power and posed a threat to his reign.³ It was also rumored that he had committed incest with her.⁴ Nero, however, did not successfully cover up his crime, and soon the popular view of Nero’s guilt was expressed in pasquinades (lampoons) posted anonymously in public places. In fact, a cynic philosopher and an actor rebuked the emperor in public with oblique references to his crime. The remarkable fact is that Nero was exceptionally lenient in his dealing with them and others who dared to attack him in speech, verse, or other forms. He banished the actor and the philosopher but did not take action against a senator, and refused to allow such kind of accusations to be brought to court.⁵ Instead,

¹ Champlin, 9.
² Kathleen Coleman, review of Nero, by Edward Champlin, Roman Archaeology 18 (2005): 545.
³ Champlin, 88-89.
⁴ About the incest, historians differ regarding who was the seducer and if in fact it was consummated (Suetonius 28.2; Tacitus 14.2; Dio 61.11.3-4). Edward Champlin concludes: “Whatever the truth, the common version appears to be that Agrippina offered herself to Nero in 58 or 59 but was circumvented by her enemies; and that he himself did nothing either to prevent her or to suppress the rumor.” Ibid., 88.
⁵ Ibid., 92.
Nero decided to stage his defense at the theater using the power of imagery and myth to his advantage. He chose what roles he would play with care and modified the imagery (e.g., masks, wardrobe, and probably lyrics too) to produce a calculated effect on the audience.

Cassius Dio and Suetonius recorded several details of Nero’s theatrical performances:

In putting on the mask [he] threw off the dignity of his sovereignty to beg in the guise of a runaway slave, to be led about as a blind man, to be heavy with child, to be in labour, to be a madman, or to wander an outcast, his favourite rôles being those of Oedipus, Thyestes, Heracles, Alcmeon, and Orestes[.] The masks that he wore were sometimes made to resemble the characters he was portraying and sometimes bore his own likeness; but the women’s masks were all fashioned after the features of Sabina, in order that, though dead, she might still take part in the spectacle. All the situations that ordinary actors simulate in their acting he, too, would portray in speech or action or in submitting to the action of others—save only that golden chains were used to bind him; for apparently it was not thought proper for a Roman emperor to be bound in iron shackles. All this behaviour, nevertheless, was witnessed, endured, and approved, not only by the crowd in general, but also by the soldiers. (Dio 62.9.4-10.1 [Cary, LCL])

He also put on the mask and sang tragedies representing gods and heroes and even heroines and goddesses, having the masks fashioned in the likeness of his own features or those of the women of whom he chanced to be enamoured. Among other themes he sang “Canace in Labor,” “Orestes the Matricide,” “Oedipus Blinded,” and the “Hercules Mad.” (Suetonius, *Nero* 21.3 [Rolfe, LCL])

Edward Champlin emphasizes two aspects of these accounts. First, Nero used to wear a mask at the stage that “bore his own likeness.” Second, he infers that Nero’s “favourite rôles” had a political purpose: Nero was Orestes and Alcmeon the matricides, Oedipus who killed his father and married his own mother, and Hercules who killed his wife and children in a fit of madness.

The tale of Orestes was well known in antiquity. Orestes is ordered by Apollo’s oracle at Delphi to avenge his father’s death (Agamemnon) by killing the murderers: Clytemnestra (wife of Agamemnon and mother of Orestes) and Aegisthus (her lover).
After being tormented by the furies, Orestes is acquitted at a great murder trial at Athens by one vote, that of Athena. The key for Nero was that Orestes is “a justified matricide.” Orestes kills Clytemnestra not only because of Apollos’ command, but also because she had stolen his inheritance from him, and the people of Mycenae were suffering under the tyranny of a woman. Likewise, Nero avenges his adoptive father’s death (Claudius) by killing Agrippina, who had poisoned him, liberating also the people from her power-craving tyranny.¹

Nero pursues a similar objective in his assumption of the roles of Oedipus and Hercules. In “Oedipus Blinded” he described himself as one certainly guilty of incest, but only as an act of ignorance. In “Hercules Mad,” Nero reenacted his inadvertent killing of Poppaea Sabina, who was pregnant with his son, in the summer of 65. Like Hercules, in a flash of temper, he lashed out in blind ferocity killing the object of his love and his heir. Nero thus portrayed himself not as a murderer, but as the victim of divine madness.

Whether Edward Champlin is accurate in his interpretation of Nero’s artistic deeds is open to debate. Kathleen Coleman points out that several aspects of Champlin’s argument are not convincing; for example, Champlin’s argument that Nero did not suffer what scholars call damnatio memoriae, or his defense of the tradition that Nero started Rome’s fire. She concludes that the grand scheme in which Edward Champlin fits almost all of Nero’s actions as mythological enactments is more logical than reality probably

¹ Ibid., 97-98. The tale of Alcmeon is virtually a double to that of Orestes. For an analysis of it, see Champlin, 98-99.
was and perhaps more the result of Champlin’s dexterity than Nero’s own genius.¹

The important thing for us, however, is the forcefulness with which Edward Champlin portrays the power of subtext in ancient Rome. He concludes that “audiences expected to find contemporary relevance in the productions [and] performers expected to have their pointed remarks and actions caught, interpreted, and appreciated” to the extent that “the audience sometimes saw an allusion where none was intended.”²

Joseph P. Wilson shows that this phenomenon is based on a tradition that can be traced back to the 5th century B.C.³ He argues that Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus* played a political role “for the troubled Athenian *polis* in the last decade of the tumultuous 5th century” and that “it was understood that the messages of a play should be oblique, opaque, and apprehensible by inference and implication . . . [and], at the conclusion of the play, the audience was expected to retain images rather than dialogue.”⁴

Alan Cameron provides several examples of the same phenomenon in the times of imperial Rome:

> On one occasion the line ‘Videsne ut cinaedus orbem digito temperat’ (in fact referring to a priest of the Magna Mater striking a tambourine) was taken—and no doubt intended by the actor—as a homosexual allegation about Augustus.⁵ A reference to an ‘old goat licking the does (*capreae*)’ was taken to denote Tiberius’ supposed debaucheries on Capri.⁶ Galba’s ill-omened entry in Rome in 69 was hit at

¹ Coleman, 550.

² R. W. Reynolds, “Criticism of Individuals in Roman Popular Comedy,” *CQ* 37 (1943): 40, as quoted in Champlin, 95.


⁴ Ibid., 189.
by a line in a farce, and the people sang the whole song with one voice, to the accompaniment of suitable gestures. The unlettered Maximin was (perhaps fortunately) unable to understand a *risqué* song addressed to him in Greek by a bold actor.8

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6 Suet., *Tib.* 45.
8 *SHA Max.* viii.3-5 (possibly invented).1

He agrees with Cicero that in fact the theater—as well as the gladiatorial shows—became the only venue where popular opinion was truly expressed.

There is ample evidence that politicians usually traced their pedigrees to ancient heroes and used them as weapons, weaving myth into contemporary Roman political life.2 Paul Zanker aptly describes the role that images played in the struggle between Octavian and Marc Antony.3 Antony adopted the figure of Dionysus, favored in Asia Minor and previously adopted by Alexander the Great as appropriate for him as the “giver [of] joy and beneficent” (Plutarch, *Ant.* 24.3 [Perrin, LCL]). Octavian shrewdly took advantage of Antony’s disregard of the kind of impact these images could have in Rome and Italy and used them as a ready supply of ammunition in his attack of Antony as advocating revelry, luxury, and decadence. Instead, Octavian appropriated the image

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3 Ibid., 33-77.
of Apollos who “stood first of all for discipline and morality.”

It is clear, then, that literary subtexts were a powerful element of political discourse in Nero’s Rome and audiences were ready to discern every allusion and find a deeper meaning in them. Hebrews was probably written to Christians in Rome around this time (between A.D. 60 and A.D. 90) and, thus, its audience participated of this culture where imagery introduced a deeper meaning of discourse. Therefore, a correct

1 Ibid., 52.

2 Hebrews itself does not identify its addressees; therefore, many places have been suggested as the destination of Hebrews. Since at least the 4th century interpreters have suggested Jerusalem. Chrysostom, most medieval authors, Delitzsch, 1:20-21; Westcott, xl; George Wesley Buchanan, To the Hebrews: Translation, Comment and Conclusions, AB, ed. Raymond E. Brown, no. 36 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972), 256. A Jerusalem destination is not likely, however. The title “to the Hebrews” was added by a later hand. It is unlikely that the author would have written in an elegant Greek style to people in Jerusalem, or used the LXX as a basis for his argument (especially in those places where it differs from the MT), or that the readers had not heard Jesus preach (Heb 2:3), see Koester, Hebrews, 48-49. Others have suggested Spain, Palestine or Syria, Colossae, Ephesus, Galatia, Cyprus, Berea, Corinth and Asia Minor; see Spicq, 1:220-252; Donald Guthrie, New Testament Introduction, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1990), 700-701; Koester, Hebrews, 48, n. 104.

Rome has found growing support among modern interpreters on the basis of the following evidence: (1) the phrase “Those from Italy send you greetings” (Ἄπαξ ζωντας ημῖν οί ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰταλίας; Heb 13:24) probably means that some Italians who are away from Italy are sending greetings back home (cf. Acts 18:2), (2) Timothy (mentioned in 13:24) was known to the Roman Christians (Col 1:1; Phlm 1), (3) the use of the term ἡγούμενοι for the leaders (Heb 13:7, 17, 24) is similar to 1 Clem. 1:3 (cf. 21:6) which was written from Rome, (4) Hebrews is first attested in 1 Clem. 36:1-5 which was written from Rome (ca. A.D. 96), (5) the allusion to the generosity of the readers (Heb 6:10; 10:32) fits well with the known history of the Roman church from other sources, (6) reference to ceremonial food (Heb 13:9) is similar to the tendency seen in Rom 14, and (7) the spoliations of goods referred to in 10:32 could be explained by Claudius’ edict (A.D. 49) or Nero’s persecution. Guthrie, New Testament Introduction, 698-9. Those who propose a Roman destination include, Koester, Hebrews, 49-51; Lane, Hebrews 1-8, lvi-li; “Social Perspectives on Roman Christianity during the Formative Years from Nero to Nerva: Romans, Hebrews, 1 Clement,” in Judaism and Christianity in First-Century
interpretation of the cultic imagery that couches Jesus’ ascension is crucial for the interpretation of its message.

I want to suggest that the same rhetorical function that the literary traditions of Orestes and Alcmeon (the matricides), Oedipus (who killed his father and married his own mother), and Hercules (who killed his wife and children in a fit of madness) had for the interpretation of Nero is the function the author of Hebrews assigns to the Davidic traditions for the interpretation of Jesus’ rule. In both cases the traditions are applied tacitly, but this does not lessen their impact.

**Delimitations and Methodology**

The present work is structured in three sections, which amount to three chapters of the dissertation. Chapter 1 introduces the state of affairs regarding the theology of the ascension in Hebrews. It explores how Hebrews’ scholarship has associated the ascension

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It is difficult to set a precise date for Hebrews. The latest date is set by Clement’s epistle to the Corinthians (ca. A.D. 96) which is the first to use Hebrews. Timothy is mentioned in Heb 13:23. If this Timothy is the companion of Paul, the letter should have been written after A.D. 49 (Acts 16:1-3). The persecution mentioned in Heb 10:32-34 was probably not instigated by Nero because no reference is made to Christians being killed (Heb 12:4; Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.6). If Rome is the destination, Claudius’ expulsion of the Jews from Rome in A.D. 49 better fits the evidence. Koester, *Hebrews*, 52. Several recent scholars believe that the absence of any reference to the destruction of the temple favors a date before A.D. 70. Others favor a date in the 80s or 90s on the basis that the text deals with the fatigue of second-generation Christians or the sense of loss over the destruction of Jerusalem. For a list of scholars and the dates they propose, see Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 33, n. 105; Koester, *Hebrews*, 54, nn. 114, 115.
to the rituals of the Day of Atonement and/or the rituals for the consecration of the
Mosaic tabernacle and the problems of both approaches.

Chapter 2 analyzes the elements associated with the rule of a righteous Davidic
king in the Hebrew Bible and early Judaism. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the
traditions concerning the rule of the ideal Davidic king as it is attested in the Hebrew
Bible and writings from the early Judaism period.

Chapter 3 analyzes every passage in the Letter to the Hebrews that refers to Jesus’
entrance into heaven.\(^1\) The passages are Heb 1:6; 4:14-16; 6:19; 9:11-14; 24; 10:19-22.
Those passages that implicate Jesus’ ascension by referring to his session at the right
hand but not referring to it explicitly are studied in the context of the explicit passages
mentioned above.\(^2\) I explain in this section, as well, my understanding of the function of
the rituals of the Day of Atonement and the inauguration of the covenant in relation to the
ascension of Jesus.

The conclusion summarizes and systematizes the findings of the dissertation.

\(^1\) I will also refer throughout this chapter to the results of several monographs and
articles that have been devoted to the concept of heavenly ascent in early Jewish writings
and Greco-Roman literature. For example, Bietenhard; John J. Collins, “A Throne in the
Heavens: Apotheosis in Pre-Christian Judaism,” in *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly
Journeys*, ed. John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane (Albany, N.Y.: State University of
Motif in Hellenistic Jewish Literature*, Judentum und Umwelt, ed. Johann Maier, no. 8
(Frankfurt: Lang, 1984); Ellingworth, “Jesus and the Universe,” 337-50; Lohfink; Segal,
1333-94; James D. Tabor, *Things Unutterable: Paul’s Ascent to Paradise in Its Greco-
Roman, Judaic, and Early Christian Contexts*, SJud, ed. Jacob Neusner (Lanham, Md.:
University Press of America, 1986); Tabor, “Ascent”; Charles H. Talbert, “Myth of a
Ascending-Descending Redeemer in Mediterranean Antiquity,” *NTS* 22 (1976); Wright,
*Heaven*.

CHAPTER 2

THE DAVIDIC COVENANT AND THE EXPECTATION OF AN IDEAL KING IN THE HEBREW BIBLE AND EARLY JUDAISM

I have suggested that the Epistle to the Hebrews introduces Jesus to its audience as the ideal king-priest who ascended to heaven and has been enthroned at the “right hand of God” (Heb 1:3, 13; 2:9; 4:14-16; 8:1; 10:12-13; 12:2) and that the author invites his readers to interpret their historical situation in the light of this fact (2:1-4; 4:14-16; 10:19-25; 12:18-29). In this way, the author subscribes to the view—held by other NT authors as well—that Jesus is the “son” in whom God’s promises to David find fulfillment (1:2, 5; 3:6; 4:14; 5:5-6, 8, 7:28; 10:29; cf. 2 Sam 7:12; 1 Chr 17:11).1

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The purpose of this chapter is to explore the range of beliefs regarding the
Davidic covenant that existed toward the end of the early Judaic period (ca. 100 C.E.).


1 It is difficult to establish clear-cut chronological boundaries in history. G. W. Nickelsburg and Robert A. Kraft have suggested that the early Judaic period goes from 330 B.C.E. (Alexander the Great’s conquest of Palestine) to 130 C.E. (Roman Emperor Hadrian). “Introduction: The Modern Study of Early Judaism,” in Early Judaism and Its Modern Interpreters, ed. Robert A. Kraft and George W. E. Nickelsburg, SBLBMI, ed. Douglas A. Knight, no. 2 (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1986), 1-2. This time limit seems appropriate since it is commonly believed that Hebrews was written towards the end of this period, no later than 96 C.E. Lane, Hebrews 1-8, lxiii. The traditional view that there was a uniform system of belief, or at least expectation, regarding a Davidic Messiah in early Judaism—e.g., Emil Schürer, The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ, ed. and rev. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Matthew Black, 3 vols., Revised English ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 2:514; George Foot Moore, Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), 2:323-76—has been impugned in recent years. Scholars have pointed out that such system is constructed from late sources and is heavily influenced by Christian theology. They also show that a Davidic messianic hope in Second Temple literature is strikingly scarce, incoherent, and seems to have arisen late only as a reaction to the faulty restoration of the Jewish monarchy by the non-Davidic Hasmoneans. See John J. Collins, The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature, ABRL, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 3-4, 40-41; James H. Charlesworth, “From Jewish Messianology to Christian Christology: Some Caveats and Perspectives,” in Judaism and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era, ed. Jacob Neusner, William Scott Green, and Ernest S. Frerichs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 225-64; “From Messianology to Christology: Problems and Prospects,” in The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1992), 3-35; Kenneth E. Pomykala, The Davidic Dynasty Tradition in Early Judaism: Its History and Significance for Messianism, SBLEJL, ed. William Adler, no. 7 (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1995), 265-71. The pendulum, however, may have swung too far, according to John J. Collins, The
This will provide us with a conceptual map, a set of references, that will assist us in better understanding Hebrews’ appropriation of the Davidic traditions and their application to Jesus.

This chapter does not attempt to provide a critical history of the Davidic traditions in early Judaism. It is not necessary—nor possible—to address the historical-critical problems related to these texts in order to understand how the writer of Hebrews in the second half of the 1st century C.E. understood them. Early Jewish authors perceived these texts synchronically; that is, as a group of writings belonging to the heritage of their nation. It is not difficult to recognize that, not being concerned with modern critical questions, “they perceived the Bible as a ‘flat text.’” Thus, wherever possible, I will analyze each passage in the chronological order the passage claims for itself.

I will survey in this chapter the different expectations for the rule of the ideal Davidic king that existed in early Judaism. I will proceed in four stages. The first analyzes the institution of the Davidic covenant and the purposes for the Davidic dynasty established there (2 Sam 7; 1 Chr 17). The second stage surveys the story of righteous

\[\text{Scepter and the Star, 4. William M. Schniedewind argues that the evidence suggests that there was in fact “a continuous and widespread discourse on the meaning of the Promise to David,” though he admits that it led to a variety of interpretations. Society and the Promise to David: A Reception History of 2 Samuel 7:1-17 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 168.}\]

This dissertation does not seek to understand Hebrews’ appropriation of Davidic traditions in the context of an allegedly coherent view of such traditions in 1st century C.E. Judaism, but in the context of a scope of possibilities that Second Temple documents permit us to delineate.

\[\text{1 This has been already done. See Pomykala and Schniedewind.}\]

\[\text{2 Pomykala, 11.}\]
Davidic kings to find out how their actions expressed—in the mind of the biblical writers—the ideals established for the dynasty in the Davidic covenant. The third stage examines the references to the Davidic covenant in the rest of the Hebrew Bible. Special attention will be given to the reinterpretation of the Davidic covenant in the prophets as a reaction to the failure of the Davidic dynasty. Finally, the fourth stage studies the references to the Davidic covenant in the writings of early Judaism. This is a period characterized by the fragmentation or pluralism of Jewish religious beliefs. The intention of this section is to understand the different ways in which the Davidic covenant is referred to and how it is reinterpreted during this time.

The Institution of the Davidic Covenant

Second Samuel 7 is commonly considered among modern scholars as “the fountainhead of all texts dealing with the Davidic promise or covenant in the Hebrew Bible,” a charter for the Davidic dynasty. Coincidentally, it is also the first reference to the Davidic covenant in the Hebrew Bible. It contains the narrative of God’s promises to David structured around a play on the word “house,” which at different moments of the argument denotes David’s house, God’s temple, and the Davidic dynasty.

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2 This word occurs 15 times in the chapter. Bill T. Arnold, 1 & 2 Samuel, NIV Application Commentary, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003), 473.
This is the story: once God has given David “rest from all his enemies” and he “has settled in his house,” David expresses to the prophet Nathan his intention to build a “house” for God. Nathan agrees immediately with him (vv. 1-3). God announces to Nathan, however, that David will not build a “house” for him but God himself will build a “house” for David—meaning a dynasty (v. 11). God will accomplish this through a “son” who will be adopted by God as his own. This “son” will build the temple for God and God will establish his throne for ever (vv. 12-16). Thus, God promises to David a house (dynasty) that is “made sure for ever” (v. 16). This promise is understood by David and Judah as a covenant (2 Sam 23:5; 2 Chr 13:5; 21:7; Ps 89:28).

The Davidic covenant is divided in two sections, which include two different kinds of promises: those to be fulfilled during his lifetime (2 Sam 7:8-11a; par. 1 Chr 17:7-10a) and those to be fulfilled after his death (7:11b-16; par. 1 Chr 17:10b-14). The first section is a first-person address; the second takes a third-person form. See, Bruce K. Waltke, “The Phenomenon of Conditionality within

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1 Verses 11c-16 form the theological and literary center of the oracle. This is signaled by a change of the verbal forms from the second person used elsewhere to the third person here. Bruce C. Birch, “The First and Second Books of Samuel,” in The New Interpreter’s Bible, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 2 (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1998), 1257. Some commentators consider that the phrase תְּנַצֵּחַ הָאָדָם אֶלֶף הָאָדָם (the Lord declares to you) should not be read in sequence with those preceding it, but as “a perfect with the force of a solemn declaration” more accurately translated as “And hereby the Lord declares to you...” Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, King and Messiah: The Civil and Sacral Legitimation of the Israelite Kings, ConBOT, no. 8 (Lund: Gleerup, 1976), 59, n. 29.


3 The form of the first section is a first-person address; the second takes a third-person form. See, Bruce K. Waltke, “The Phenomenon of Conditionality within
first include the promises of (1) a “great name” (v. 9; cf. 8:13), (2) a place for the people of Israel (v. 10; cf. the catalogue of David’s victories in chap. 8), (3) and rest (v. 11; cf. 1 Kgs 5:4). The second include an eternal house (perpetual dynasty, vv. 12, 16), and an eternal throne and kingdom (vv. 13, 16). The promises of the first section make possible the fulfillment of the eternal promises of the second section by creating the conditions necessary for the building of God’s temple and the creation of a dynasty (1 Kgs 5:3; 1 Chr 28). On the other hand, they are a continuation of the blessings God has already given to David (vv. 8-9): God has chosen David to be king over Israel (v. 8b), has been

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Unconditional Covenants,” in Israel’s Apostasy and Restoration, ed. Avraham Gileadi (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1988), 130. It has also been said that the first section introduces the promises of the covenant in general terms while the second does in specific ones. Arnold, 474.


2 Dumbrell, 148-9.

3 See Brueggemann, 254-5.
with him wherever he has gone (v. 9a), and cut off all his enemies (v. 9b). God’s promise to David implies, then, that God’s favor shown to David in the past is just a foreshadowing, or glimpse, of what he wants to do for him in the future.

Is the Davidic Covenant Unconditional?

What is striking about 2 Sam 7 is that God’s promise to David is unconditional. Referring to the promised son, God declares:

When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings. But I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever. (vv. 14b-16, emphasis mine)

According to this passage, God promises to David that his dynasty—house, kingdom, and throne—will be “for ever” and that not even his scion’s unfaithfulness can invalidate that promise. Hebrews—as well as other NT writings—bases its claims

1 Birch, 1257.
2 Surprisingly, 1 Chr 17:10b-14 does not include a parallel to the conditional clause of 2 Sam 7:14; yet, the promise is given “for ever” as well.

The expression יִתְנָא יְהוָה (2 Sam 7:13, 16; 1 Chr 17:12, 14) can mean “perpetually, for always” and is translated “forever” in many cases. Yet, it is clear that in other cases it does not carry this sense but should be understood in the more limited sense of “long time” or “enduring” (cf. 1 Sam 2:30). H. D. Preuss, “נַלֶּה,” Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. Douglas W. Stott, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 535. See the list of verses comparing both uses in Lyle Eslinger, House of God or House of David: The Rhetoric of 2 Samuel 7, JSOTSup, ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies, no. 164 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 46-48. The argument that the promise of David was not “eternal” but only for a “long time” does not solve the problem of the failure of the Davidic dynasty, however. The real puzzle is whether the promise was conditional or unconditional; whether human unfaithfulness could invalidate it or not.

It has been argued as well that this passage can be read in two ways. It could be
regarding Jesus’ kingship on the unconditional nature of this promise (Heb 1:5 quoting Ps 2:7 and 2 Sam 7:14; cf. Luke 1:31-33; Acts 2:29-36).

Nevertheless, later references to the Davidic covenant in the OT are ambivalent in this respect. Some passages seem to support the unconditional nature of the Davidic covenant (e.g., 2 Sam 23:1-7; Ps 89:19-37), while others seem to undermine it (e.g., Ps 132:11-12).¹ The conundrum is painfully clear in the fact that when God confirms the Davidic, eternal, and unconditional promises to Solomon, he makes clear that their fulfillment is conditional on his obedience (1 Kgs 3:14; 6:12-13; 9:3-9). In fact, both David (1 Kgs 2:1-4) and Solomon (1 Kgs 8:25) express clearly their understanding of the conditionality of the promises.

Most scholars solve the problem by positing a diachronic development of this passage in one of two ways: the original text conveyed an unconditional promise and conditional elements were inserted later, or the opposite.² This solution, however, is understood as applying only to David’s son, Solomon; that is, despite any wrongdoing on his part, God will not tear the kingdom out of his hands, though he may have to chastise him. Or, it could be understood to apply to all future Davidic kings, promising that a son of David would reign over the throne of Israel for ever. See Pomykala, 13, n. 3. Several passages in 1-2 Kgs, however, presuppose that the promise applies to Davidic kings beyond Solomon. For example, it is the rationale behind the fact that God did not tear the kingdom out completely from David’s descendants Rehoboam (1 Kgs 11:12-13, 32-36) and Abijam (15:4; cf. 2 Kgs 8:19), despite their—and Solomon’s—apostasy.

¹ See Eslinger, 90-94.

² Unconventionally, Lyle Eslinger does not take a source-critical approach, but analyzes the passage in its final form in a rhetorical-critical approach (95). On the other hand, both views regarding the conditional/unconditional nature of the Davidic covenant “need not be explained chronologically; they could just as easily be contemporary yet conflicting points of view.” J. J. M. Roberts, “Davidic Covenant,” Dictionary of the Old Testament Historical Books (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2005), 209.
unnecessary in my view. I agree with Bruce K. Waltke that when it comes to covenants “the terms unconditional and conditional may be misleading” (emphasis his).\(^1\) He explains how both notions are not contradictory but complement each other in biblical covenantal thinking.

A close parallel to the unconditional language of 2 Sam 7 found in a Hittite text may shed light on the matter. This is a treaty between Hattusili III of Hatti and Ulmi-Teshshup of Tarhuntassa:

I, My Majesty, will [not depose] your son. [I will accept] neither your brother nor anyone else. Later your son and grandson will hold [the land] which I have given [to you]. It may not be taken away from him. If any son or grandson of yours commits an offense, then the King of Hatti shall question him. And if an offense is proven against him, then the King of Hatti shall treat him as he pleases. If he is deserving of death, he shall perish, but his household and land shall not be taken from him and given to the progeny of another. Only someone of the progeny of Ulmi-Teshshup shall take them. Someone of the male line shall take them; those of the female line shall not take them. But if there is no male line of descent, and it is extinguished, then only someone of the female line of Ulmi-Teshshup shall be sought out. Even if he is in a foreign land, he shall be brought back from there and installed in authority in the land of Tarhuntassa [emphasis mine].\(^2\)

The promise to Ulmi-Theshshup that his descendants will rule the land of Tarhuntassa after him is unconditional; yet, the king of Hatti reserves the right to punish individual members of the dynasty, even unto death, if they rebel against him. Likewise, God’s

\(^1\) Waltke, 124.

promise to David is unconditional; yet, he reserves the right to punish individual members of his dynasty.¹

Therefore, it is possible to understand two dimensions in the Davidic covenant that explain the conditional elements in it: The Davidic covenant was unconditional when referring to David’s progeny in general; but conditional, when referring to individual Davidic rulers.² That is to say, unfaithfulness may prevent an individual Davidic ruler from participating in the Davidic promises but this will not invalidate God’s promises to David. God can choose another son of David to fulfill them. God’s judgment on King Coniah (Jehoiachin) is a good example. Coniah and his children were barred from the throne because of their unfaithfulness (Jer 22:24-30); instead, God would fulfill his promises to David through another son of David, a righteous Branch (23:5-6).³ Thus, there are conditional elements that belong in the unconditional Davidic covenant. This is important to correctly understand later references and allusions to the Davidic covenant in the Hebrew Bible which are apparently contradictory. This is so because they focus on one of these two aspects depending on the circumstances.

¹ See Weinfeld, 189-96. Note as well that an eternal dynasty is offered in the Temple Scroll to all kings, not necessarily Davidic kings, who are faithful in obeying the law of the covenant (11QTemple LIX, 13-21).

² “In general terms the line would not fail. Yet in particular terms, benefits might be withdrawn from individuals.” Dumbrell, 150.

³ See below section “Jeremiah.”
What Is the Relationship between the Davidic and the Mosaic Covenants?

What is the relationship between the Davidic and the Mosaic covenants?\(^1\) It is clear, at least, that the Mosaic covenant does not become obsolete with the establishment of the Davidic covenant because its requirements continue to apply.\(^2\) The king—and the people as well—continues to be bound by the regulations consecrated in the Mosaic legislation, especially regarding social justice (e.g., 1 Kgs 6:12-13). Though established with promises of eternal favor to the Davidic king, God explicitly preserves his right “to punish him with a rod” if the king forsakes his law (2 Sam 7:14; cf. Ps 89:30-32). Thus, the Mosaic covenant does not cease to exist; instead, God’s covenant with David has the purpose of engrafting the monarchy into the existing (Mosaic) covenantal relationship between God and the nation.\(^3\)

God grants his covenant to David and his house because of David’s exceptional

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\(^1\) Some scholars, especially those committed to the documentary hypothesis, usually distinguish between the Sinaitic (the covenant made at Sinai) and the Deuteronomic covenants (the covenant made at Moab and comprised in Deuteronomy). I will bring here both together under the name “Mosaic covenant.” See also, Waltke, 124.

\(^2\) See Eslinger, vi, 89.

\(^3\) Dumbrell, 127. Lyle Eslinger has argued that the Mosaic covenant was broken when Israel requested a king in order to be “like the other nations” (1 Sam 8:6): “The request of Yahweh’s people (‘am yhwh) to become like the nations (kekol-haggôyim) in political structure is, therefore, not only a rejection of theocracy and its judges, but even more it is a rejection of the covenant.” *Kingship of God in Crisis: A Close Reading of 1 Samuel 1-12*, Bible and Literature Series, no. 10 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 257, quoted in Eskola, 58. This does not seem to be the case, however. Deuteronomy 17:14-20 (cf. 28:36) allows the possibility of a king over Israel in the context of the Mosaic covenant. Also, Israel suffers no covenant curses as a result of the establishment of the monarchy.
covenant loyalty. David is a man according to God’s “own heart” and becomes the
template for the faithfulness of future kings (1 Sam 13:14; 16:7; 1 Kgs 3:6; 9:4; 14:8;
etc.). His piety is especially evident in his wish to build a “house” for the “ark of God” (2
Sam 7:1) that represents God’s covenant with the nation—mediated by Moses (1 Kgs
8:21; 2 Chr 6:11)—and enshrines its laws (1 Kgs 8:9; 2 Chr 5:10).

David’s plan to build a temple for the ark is as well an act of legitimation of his
rule and capital city by identifying them with the symbol of God’s (Mosaic) covenant
with Israel.¹ He wishes to establish a permanent relationship with and access to the God
of Israel. The plan is rejected, however. The initiative must be God’s not David’s (2 Sam
7:4-7). Nonetheless, God legitimates David’s rule and dynasty by letting his son build the
temple and choosing it as his resting place for ever (1 Kgs 8:12-13, 29; 9:3; 2 Chr 6:1-2,
20, 41-42; 7:12, 16). The temple, then, becomes the new symbol of God’s covenant with
the nation. The permanent “house” (as opposed to “tent”) symbolizes the permanence of
God’s presence (2 Sam 7:9, 14), the permanence of Israel in the land (v. 10), and the
permanence of the dynasty (v. 16).² All of these testify to the permanence of the (Mosaic)
laws enshrined in the temple. Therefore, God makes clear to Solomon after the dedication
of the temple that unfaithfulness to the Mosaic covenant will result in the temple’s
destruction (1 Kgs 9:6-9; 2 Chr 7:19-22).³ This is what finally happens. Because of the

¹ Regarding the building of the temple as an act of legitimation, see
Brueggemann, 254-61.


³ Note that in both cases unfaithfulness is defined as an abandonment of the
“LORD the God of their ancestors who brought them out of the land of Egypt” and gave
threat of Nebuchadnezzar, Zedekiah—the last Davidic king (597-586 B.C.E.)—made a covenant with the people in the temple to proclaim liberty to their slaves according to the requirements of the Mosaic law (Jer 34:8-10; Lev 25:39-41). The people obeyed and God promised Zedekiah he would “die in peace” (v. 5). Later on, however, they forsook the covenant and “took back the male and female slaves they had set free” (v. 11) in open rebellion to the Mosaic law. This act seals the fate of the king and Jerusalem who will now endure the covenant curses (vv. 17-22).  

Therefore, the Davidic king’s participation in the eternal promises made to David and the permanence of Jerusalem are contingent on the king’s obedience to the Mosaic laws.

The Davidic King as Covenant Mediator: He Renews the Mosaic Covenant under “Better Promises”

While it is true that Mosaic laws continue to apply, the Davidic covenant introduces a big change in the covenantal relationship between God and his people. The covenantal blessings are now contingent not on the nation’s faithfulness, but on the faithfulness of the Davidic king (1 Kgs 6:12-13; cf. 9:4-7; 2 Chr 7:17-22). The Davidic king has become the mediator of the covenant.

The concept of the Davidic king as mediator goes beyond the idea of a person who “mediates between parties at variance.” Instead, the Davidic king is designated

them Canaan as their land.


God’s “son” and “firstborn” (2 Sam 7:14; Pss 2:6-7; 89:27) embodying Israel, the
covenant people, which is also called “son” and “firstborn” (Exod 4:22-23; cf. Jer 3:19;
31:9). In this way God legitimizes the Davidic king as Israel’s proxy.\(^1\) Accordingly, God
confirms to him—as the embodiment of the nation—the promises previously given Israel
of a “place” where they would “rest” from their enemies (2 Sam 7:9-11a; cf. Deut 12:8-
10) and his permanent presence in their midst by accepting a “house” to be build for his
“name” (vv. 12a-16; Ps 132:11-14; cf. Exod 25:8; 33:12-23; Deut 12:5).\(^2\)

This modification in the relationship between God and Israel by the insertion of a
mediator makes possible the perpetuation of their covenantal relationship. The Mosaic
covenant required the faithfulness of all Israel to receive God’s protection. Joshua 7
registers a case in which the nation is imputed with the transgression of the covenant
because of the sin of one man: Achan (vv. 1, 11-13). When the offender was punished,
the covenantal relationship was restored (Josh 7:24-8:1).\(^3\) The Davidic covenant,

\(^{1}\) Avraham Gileadi, “The Davidic Covenant: A Theological Basis for Corporate
Protection,” in *Israel’s Apostasy and Restoration*, ed. Avraham Gileadi (Grand Rapids,

\(^{2}\) Second Samuel connects the fulfillment of the promise of rest of the Mosaic
covenant to God’s election of the place for his name to dwell (Deut 12:9-10) making
Joshua’s repartition of the land only a partial fulfillment of the promise (Josh 21:43-45;

\(^{3}\) Similarly, when the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh built an altar beside
the Jordan, the rest of the tribes considered that it was an act of rebellion against God and
feared that God would be “angry with the whole congregation of Israel” (Josh 21:10-34,
however, secures God’s covenantal blessings upon Israel through the faithfulness of one person, the king. Note the promise to David and its relation to the nation:

I will make for you [sg.] a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you [sg.] rest from all your [sg.] enemies. (2 Sam 7:9b-11a, emphasis mine; cf. 1 Chr 17:9-10b)

The connection between the faithfulness of the king and the perpetuation of God’s covenant with the nation is particularly evident in God’s confirmation of the covenant to Solomon:

Concerning this house that you are building, if you [sg.] will walk in my statutes, obey my ordinances, and keep all my commandments by walking in them, then I will establish my promise with you, which I made to your father David. I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake my people Israel. (1 Kgs 6:12-13, emphasis mine; cf. 9:4-9; 2 Chr 7:17-22)

God explicitly informs Solomon that if he is faithful, God’s covenantal relationship with the nation will remain. Avraham Gileadi’s conclusion is apt: “The Davidic covenant did away with the necessity that all Israel—to a man—maintain loyalty to YHWH in order to merit his protection.”

As suggested above, however, the opposite is not true. The unfaithfulness of the king does not imply the revocation of the covenant. The apostasy of the Davidic scion does not make void God’s promise to David of an eternal dynasty. It does disqualify, esp. v. 18). They in fact mentioned the case of Achan: “Did not Achan son of Zerah break faith in the matter of the devoted things, and wrath fell upon all the congregation of Israel? And he did not perish alone for his iniquity!” (v. 20; emphasis mine). A further example could be found in the apostasy concerning the Baal of Peor in Num 25.

1 Gileadi, 160.
however, the apostate king from participating in the promises of the Davidic covenant and annuls God’s covenantal protection over the people during his reign.\footnote{Note that because of David’s transgression regarding the census of Israel (2 Sam 24:1), God’s covenantal protection over Israel is annulled (v. 13). See ibid., 159.} God will punish him “with a rod” (2 Sam 7:14). None of his children will rule and God will choose another Davidic faithful heir to continue his promise.

For example, when the king Ahaz sent tribute monies to Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, requesting his protection from Israel and Aram and called himself his “servant” and “son” (2 Kgs 16:7-8), he rejected his covenantal relationship with God (Isa 7:1-12). God’s reaction is twofold. First, he announces the election of another “son”—Immanuel, “God with us” (v. 14). Second, he denies his protection to the apostate king and his people (v. 17). God punishes Ahaz through the king of Assyria whom he calls “the rod of my anger” (10:5).\footnote{Ibid., 161-2. I have mentioned above, as well, another example: God’s judgment of the Davidic king Coniah (Jer 22:24-30).} Finally, the failure of the Davidic kings provokes the exile and God’s decree regarding the Davidic dynasty: “Remove the turban, take off the crown; things shall not remain as they are. Exalt that which is low, abase that which is high. A ruin, a ruin—I will make it! (Such has never occurred.) Until he comes whose right it is; to him I will give it” (Ezek 21:26-27, emphasis mine).\footnote{LaRondelle, 49.} Note that this is not the end of the Davidic dynasty. The Davidic covenant makes possible the perpetuation of hope, as long as God may find or provide a faithful Davidic king to represent the nation.\footnote{In view of the evident human failure, Second Temple Judaism will debate the}
In summary, we could say that the Davidic covenant renews the Mosaic covenant—by confirming its laws and requirements—but under “better promises”—by providing a covenant mediator. Walter Brueggemann’s dictum is highly appropriate here: “With David, however, the ‘if’ has disappeared. . . . In this astonishing promise, Yahweh has signed a blank check to the David enterprise and has radically shifted the theological foundations of Israel.”

As covenant mediator, the king also has the related responsibility of guaranteeing the observance of the covenant by the nation. In fact, Gerald Eddie Gerbrandt has argued that this constituted the ultimate responsibility of the king according to the Deuteronomistic history: “Since Israel’s continued existence as a people on the land was dependent on her obedience to the covenant, and since the king’s ultimate responsibility was to insure this continued existence, the king’s role was then to make sure that the covenant was observed in Israel. Practically, he could be called the covenant administrator” (emphasis his). He notes in his survey of the records of good kings, fate of the Davidic covenant (see below section “The Davidic Covenant in Early Judaism”). The New Testament will argue, however, that God decided to provide Jesus as a faithful “Son” to be a righteous king over Israel “for ever” (Luke 1:30-33; Acts 2:29-36; Rom 1:3-5). See Robert D. Bergen, 1, 2 Samuel, NAC, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, no. 7 (Broadman & Holman, 1996), 340-41.

1 Brueggemann, 257.

2 Gerald Eddie Gerbrandt, Kingship according to the Deuteronomistic History, SBLDS, ed. J. J. M. Roberts and Charles H. Talbert, no. 87 (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1986), 99. Even the election of Saul as king and the institution of the monarchy by Samuel probably implicated the renewal of Israel’s covenant with God. Note that 1 Sam 10:16, 26; 11:15 probably refer to the kingship of God more than to the kingship of Saul. Dumbrell, 135.
especially Hezekiah and Josiah, that their enforcement of the covenant with God and their reforms to this end in the religious life of Israel were emphasized throughout this history. I believe this is true as well of the books of Chronicles (2 Chr 15:12; 23:16; 29:10; 34:30-32). Administrating the covenant included, then, calling people to repentance, when the covenant had been breached, and promoting faithfulness to it.

The Davidic King as Reformer of the Cult: He Reorganizes the Priesthood and the Service of the Temple

The institution of the Davidic covenant makes possible the realization of cultic changes that had been anticipated in the Mosaic legislation. The book of Deuteronomy instructed the nation that when they crossed “over the Jordan,” lived in the “land,” and God had given them “rest from . . . enemies all around” (12:10), God would choose “a place . . . out of all your tribes as his habitation to put his name there” (12:5, 11, 14, etc.). This election would implicate a change in the law of sacrifices, other offerings, and administration of justice, among others.¹

¹ One of the most conspicuous changes concerned the law of sacrifices. The reform consisted in the transition from the offering of sacrifices at multiple altars built “in every place where I cause my name to be remembered” (Exod 20:24) to one altar in the “place” chosen by God (Deut 12:6, 11): “You shall not act as we are acting here today, all of us according to our own desires” (Deut 12:8, emphasis mine). R. E. Averbeck, “Sacrifices and Offerings,” Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2003), 729-32; McCarter, 217. Additionally, the centralization of worship would make possible the non-sacrificial slaughter of domestic cattle for human consumption (Deut 12:15, 21; cf. Lev 17). See Duane L. Christensen, Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9, rev. ed., WBC, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker, no. 6A (Dallas, Tex.: Word, 2001), 257. Also modification to the laws of offerings and their consumption (Deut 12:18; 14:22-27; 26:12; cf. Num 18:25-32).
The conditions for this reform were not in place until David had finished his wars and built the empire (2 Sam 8, 10; 21:15-22; 1 Chr 18-20). Joshua introduced the nation into the land and achieved a measure of “rest from all their enemies around” (23:1; cf. Josh 11:23; 14:15; 22:4); however, it is clear from Judg 1-2 that this rest was partial because there were still enemies and land to be conquered after the death of Joshua.

Second Samuel 7:9b-11a has in mind Deut 11:24 which defines the “place” for Israel as going “from the wilderness to the Lebanon and from the River, the river Euphrates, to the Western Sea.”¹ David’s conquests achieved the rest anticipated in Deuteronomy, making it possible for Solomon to build the temple as the “place” for God to “put his name there” (2 Sam 7:1; 1 Kgs 5:4; 8:56; 1 Chr 23:25).² Thus, the inauguration of the temple, which

The “place” chosen by God would become, as well, a kind of superior court for criminal cases particularly difficult to solve (Deut 17:8-10). Christensen, 374-5.

The construction of the temple by Solomon, however, did not immediately centralize the cult. Time and again, the historian informs us that the people continued to worship in the high places (1 Kgs 14:23; 15:14; 22:43; 2 Kgs 12:3; 14:4; 15:4, etc.; 2 Chr 15:17; 2 Chr 20:33). These high places (ğıḇ'ar) do not necessarily refer to pagan shrines. For example, Samuel used to offer sacrifices in them (1 Sam 9:12-27; cf. 10:5). Solomon offered sacrifices to the Lord at Gibeon, which is called a high place, and receives a divine vision there (1 Kgs 3:3, 4; cf. 2 Kgs 18:22; 23:9; 1 Chr 16:39; 21:29). See also, A. Graeme Auld, Kings without Privilege: David and Moses in the Story of the Bible’s Kings (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 87. These high places are removed until the time of Hezekiah and Josiah (since Manasseh had rebuilt them; 2 Kgs 18:22; 23:5-9; 2 Chr 31:1; 32:12; 34:3) and signal the culmination of the reformation of the cult anticipated by Deuteronomy.

¹ Which is also the same territory God promises Abraham as the land for his descendants (Gen 15:18). The conquest of this territory would give David a “great name” which is also promised Abraham (12:2). See Dumbrell, 149.

² Ibid., 145-6; McCarter, 217-20. See also, Arnold, 474-5. Note that Solomon’s kingdom, built over David’s victories (1 Chr 18-20), includes the ideal limits established in Deut 11:24 (1 Kgs 4:21-24). Note as well that 1 Kgs 5:3 claims that David was not
confirms the Davidic covenant (1 Kgs 8:15-21, 66; 2 Chr 6:4-11), implicates not only the fulfillment of the promises in the Mosaic covenant, but also triggered a deep transformation of the “theological foundations of Israel” and a reform of the cult (see below section “What Is the Relationship between the Davidic and the Mosaic Covenants?”).

Scholars have noted that the book of Chronicles portrays David as a founder of the cult together with Moses.¹ The Chronicler is careful to point out that David and other righteous kings were careful to follow Moses’ legislation for the cult (e.g., 1 Chr 22:12-13).² He also describes David, however, as one who complements Moses’ legislation by able to build the temple because of his concern with conquests (cf. 1 Chr 22:8; 28:3).

¹ David holds a dominant role in the Chronicler’s account and is often mentioned in relation to the organization, provisions, or arrangements for the cult. David is mentioned 76 times apart from the genealogical material (1 Chr 2-3) and the narrative of his reign (chs. 11-29). William Riley, King and Cultus in Chronicles: Worship and the Reinterpretation of History, JSOTSup, ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies, no. 160 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 53. The following passages mention him in relation to the cult: 1 Chr 6:31; 9:22; 2 Chr 1:4; 2:7; 3:1; 5:1; 6:7, 42; 7:6; 23:9, 18; 29:25, 26, 27, 30; 33:7; 35:4, 15.

² Simon J. de Vries has argued that the Chronicler presents David as founder of the cult together with Moses in order to substantiate the Levites’ claim to “censorial oversight over the priests” in Judah’s post-exilic cult. “Moses and David as Cult Founders in Chronicles,” JBL 107 (1988): 619-39. William Riley followed his lead with a fuller study arguing that, in fact, the overriding purpose of the Chronicler’s work was to introduce David and his dynasty as institutors of the cult. Thus, David founded the cult but his work was realized by Solomon and later monarchs and finally culminated in the reign of Josiah (2 Chr 35:20). Riley considers that the reason for this description of the Davidic dynasty is the Chronicler’s wish to validate claims for the cult in his post-exilic community (202-4). Both Riley and de Vries reject the view that the Chronicler understands the Davidic covenant as unconditional or that he holds a hope for the restoration of the Davidic dynasty; instead, the purpose of the Davidic dynasty was exhausted in its cultic function.

² Also, 1 Chr 6:49; 15:15; 21:29; 2 Chr 1:3; 5:10; 2 Chr 8:13; 23:18; 24:6, 9; 25:4;
introducing new elements into the cult. David gives to Solomon the הָבְנִית (plan) for the temple to be built (1 Chr 28:11-19). This הָבְנִית (pattern, figure) is by no means limited to the architectural design of the temple, its furniture, and vessels; it also includes stipulations regarding the priestly and Levitical courses and the service for the temple (1 Chr 28:13). ¹ David’s reforms are authoritative, then, because he receives them through revelation just as Moses did (1 Chr 28:19; Exod 25:9, 40).

David’s הָבְנִית, however, does not replace the Mosaic legislation but complements it. This is clear in 2 Chr 8:12-15:

Then Solomon offered up burnt offerings to the LORD on the altar of the LORD that he had built in front of the vestibule, as the duty of each day required, offering according to the commandment of Moses for the sabbaths, the new moons, and the three annual festivals—the festival of unleavened bread, the festival of weeks, and the festival of booths. According to the ordinance of his father David, he appointed the divisions of the priests for their service, and the Levites for their offices of praise and ministry alongside the priests as the duty of each day required, and the gatekeepers in their divisions for the several gates; for so David the man of God had commanded. They did not turn away from what the king had commanded the priests and Levites regarding anything at all, or regarding the treasuries [emphasis mine].

This passage is programmatic for the later restorations of the cult by Joash (2 Chr 23:18), Hezekiah (chaps. 29-30), and Josiah (35:1-9).

¹ The phrase ילָקָלָיָליָאָלָאֵה יִבּוֹרָהָ בְּיִרְהָוָה “and all the work of the service in the house of the LORD” suggests that David’s הָבְנִית (pattern, figure) regulates the entire temple liturgy. Riley, 63, n. 3; Sara Japhet, I & II Chronicles: A Commentary, OTL (London: SCM, 1993), 495. The reorganization of the priestly and Levitical courses and their function are explained in 1 Chr 23-26 (cf. 2 Chr 35:4; Neh 12:45).
The Chronicler varies slightly from the account of the Davidic covenant in 2 Sam 7. This small variation, however, is significant because it highlights the special concern of the Chronicler for the temple, the cult, and the relationship of the king to them.¹ William M. Schniedewind has suggested that this modification attests to a trend in the post-exilic period towards bicephalic leadership which reached clear and full expression in the appointments of a king and priest “with peaceful understanding between the two of them” in Zech 6:12-14 (cf. 4:2-3, 11-14; Hag 1:12-14).²

This is most clear in a comparison of 1 Chr 17:14 to 2 Sam 7:16. See table 1. The Chronicler changes the pronominal suffixes of the promise from the second to the first person and excludes the phrase “before me.” These small modifications change the sense of the passage. Second Samuel 7:16 promised that David’s house [יְהוָה], Kingdom, Japhet, 334-5; Gary N. Knoppers, I Chronicles 10-29: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, AB, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, no. 12A (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 672-3. It has been said that these “two verses are Chronicles in a nutshell,” as referred to by J. A. Thompson, 1, 2 Chronicles, NAC, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and Kenneth A. Mathews, no. 9 ([Nashville, Tenn.]: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 147.

¹ Japhet, 334-5; Gary N. Knoppers, I Chronicles 10-29: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, AB, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, no. 12A (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 672-3. It has been said that these “two verses are Chronicles in a nutshell,” as referred to by J. A. Thompson, 1, 2 Chronicles, NAC, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and Kenneth A. Mathews, no. 9 ([Nashville, Tenn.]: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 147.

Table 1. King and House in 2 Samuel 7:16 and 1 Chronicles 17:14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2 Sam 7:16</th>
<th>1 Chr 17:14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>נפשו ישה כביתו ומלכותו ור衆לך להעניך</td>
<td>... but I will confirm him in my house and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>הכפא יוהו בנינו כר衆לך:</td>
<td>in my kingdom forever, and his throne shall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your house and your kingdom shall be</td>
<td>be established forever.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>made sure forever before me; your throne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shall be established forever.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and throne would be established “forever” “before God.” The focus, then, was on
David’s dynasty and rule. The Chronicler promises, instead, that David’s son will be
confirmed forever in God’s house [בֵּית] and kingdom.¹ The Chronicler focuses now on
the eternity of God’s temple and kingdom and promises the confirmation of David’s son
in relation to them. In the Chronicler’s view, God’s temple and kingdom are eternal. The
Davidic covenant constitutes the Davidic dynasty and temple as an earthly expression of
the eternal kingdom and house of God.² Brian E. Kelly concludes regarding the theology
behind the Chronicler’s account: “The closest links are . . . forged between the two

1 The Chronicler refers in some places to the temple as God’s house in connection
to the palace as the king’s house; e.g., 2 Chr 2:1, 12. See Schniedewind, “King and
Priest,” 73.

In what sense will David’s son be confirmed in “my house and my kingdom”? According to Gary N. Knoppers, this phrase indicates that David’s successor is to have an
official role in the temple following the pattern of Ancient Near East royal ideology (672-
3).

2 Brian E. Kelly, Retribution and Eschatology in Chronicles, JSOTSup, ed. David
J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies, no. 211 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 156.
‘houses’ of temple and dynasty, the twin foci of the Chronicler’s work, and it is emphasized that both are brought into existence through the Davidic covenant.”

This close link between the temple and the dynasty in Chronicles implicates the close relationship between the offices of the king and the high priest. This comes to the surface also in the account of Solomon’s anointing. According to 1 Kings, Zadok anointed Solomon as king at Gihon. The Chronicler’s account is different, however. First Chronicles 29:22 says that the assembly anointed both Solomon as king and Zadok as priest together. This dual anointing brings to mind God’s commission of Joshua (priest) and Branch (king) in Zech 6:9-13.

Notice, also, that several pairs of kings and priests beyond Solomon and Zadok are noteworthy in the story of Chronicles; for example, Jehoshaphat and Amariah (2 Chr 19:11), Joash and Jehoiada (chaps. 23-24), Uzziah and Azariah (26:16-21); Hezekiah and Azariah (31:13); Josiah and Hilkiah (chaps. 34-35). Some have suggested that the Chronicler’s account of their relationship reveals a tendency towards the views of the parity of offices, the predominance of the high priestly office, or even hierochracy that

1 Ibid., 158.

2 The case of King Uzziah is significant. It focuses on the authority of the high priest vis-à-vis that of the king. Uzziah had been instructed in his youth by the priest Zechariah (2 Chr 26:5). The Chronicler registers that he was faithful to God and prospered marvelously and became strong (v. 15). He became arrogant, however, and tried to usurp the office of the priest (26:16-21) but the priest Azariah and fellow priests confronted him with these words: “It is not for you, Uzziah, to make offering to the LORD, but for the priests the descendants of Aaron, who are consecrated to make offering. Go out of the sanctuary; for you have done wrong, and it will bring you no honor from the LORD God” (2 Chr 26:18). This event is not registered in the story of Uzziah (Azariah) in 2 Kings (15:1-7). Its inclusion here underscores the Chronicler’s concern for the relationship between these offices.
dominated Jewish politics in the Second Temple period.¹ A closer analysis shows, however, that as important as the high priest is for the cult, the Chronicler does not exalt the high priest over the Davidic king or treat him as his successor.² Only Jehoiada and Hilkiah, because of the special circumstances in the beginning of the rules of Joash and Josiah, foreshadow the roles of later hierocratic rulers.

Summary

The Davidic covenant makes possible the engrafting of the Davidic dynasty into the existing (Mosaic) covenant relationship between YHWH and Israel. Its institution causes, however, a deep transformation of the theological foundations of Israel. God’s relationship to the nation is now mediated through the Davidic king.

The Davidic covenant formalizes God’s adoption of the Davidic king and assigns him the titles of “son”—and “firstborn”—that previously belonged to the nation. Therefore, he becomes the proxy of the nation in her relationship to God. Accordingly, he inherits the covenantal promises of a “place,” and “rest from their enemies” given to Israel, making him the channel through which God’s blessings will flow.

The promise of a dynasty, kingdom, and throne to David is unconditional and eternal. God reserves, however, the right to punish individual kings for their unfaithfulness. It is clear that God continues to expect the Davidic king’s obedience to the Mosaic laws. His disobedience, however, does not invalidate the covenant. The

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¹ Schniedewind, “King and Priest,” 76-78.
² Kelly, 204.
eternal nature of the Davidic promise guarantees, then, the eternal validity of God’s promises to Israel that had only been conditional under the Mosaic covenant. Thus, it is correct to say that the Davidic confirms the Mosaic covenant, but under “better promises.”

The Davidic covenant implicates a deep transformation of God’s relationship to the nation and the reformation of the cult. For example, it provides the necessary elements for the implementation of the centralization of the cult that had been anticipated in Deuteronomy. Regarding the relationship between God and the nation, just as God’s election of the temple for his name to dwell centralizes Israel’s cult in Jerusalem, God’s election of the “son” of David centralizes his relationship with Israel in the person of the king.

I will proceed now to analyze how the Davidic covenant plays out in the history of monarchic Israel.

**Righteous Kings and the Davidic Covenant in Monarchic Israel**

The books 1 and 2 Kings consider that only five kings of Judah did what was “right in the sight of the Lord” as their “father David” had done. They are Solomon (1 Kgs 3:3 [though, see 11:4]), Asa (15:11), Joash (2 Kgs 12:2; cf. 14:3), Hezekiah (18:3), and Josiah (22:2).¹ The books of Chronicles refer only to Hezekiah and Josiah in these

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¹ There are other Davidic kings who received qualified praise. The biblical historians considered that Amaziah (2 Kgs 14:3; cf. 2 Chr 25:2), and Jotham (2 Kgs 15:34; 2 Chr 27:2) also did “what was right in the sight of the Lord” but there is no explicit mention that they followed the example of their “father David”; therefore, I have decided not to include an analysis of their rules.
terms (2 Chr 29:2; 34:2). The purpose of this section is to make a synoptic analysis of the rule of these kings that emulated the rule of David—the prototypical righteous king—and, thus, fulfilled more closely the ideal expressed in the Davidic covenant. This will help us determine the basic elements of the rule of the ideal Davidic king in the mind of the biblical historian.

Solomon

Solomon is a contradictory—yet foundational—figure of the Davidic monarchy.

The case of Jehosaphat is more complicated. The MT of 2 Chr 17:3 (cf. 21:12) affirms that Jehosaphat “followed the example of his father David’s earlier days” (NASB; see also NIV). The LXX and a few Hebrew manuscripts omit, however, the mention of David: “he walked in the earlier ways of his father” (NRSV). They compare, then, Jehoshaphat’s rule to that of Asa his immediate predecessor. I have decided not to include an analysis of Jehoshaphat’s reign because of two reasons. First, research suggests that the author of Hebrews depended on the LXX for his reading of the Hebrew Bible. See Martin Karrer, “The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Septuagint,” in Septuagint Research: Issues and Challenges in the Study of the Greek Jewish Scriptures, ed. Wolfgang Kraus and R. Glenn Wooden, SBLSCS, ed. Melvin K. H. Peters, no. 53 (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 335-54; Radu Gheorghita, The Role of the Septuagint in Hebrews: An Investigation of Its Influence with Special Consideration to the Use of Hab 2:3-4 in Heb 10:37-38, WUNT, 160 (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 2003). Second, it is probable that in this case the reading of the LXX is correct (e.g., NRSV). The books of Chronicles do not make a distinction between a good and an evil period in David’s reign (1 and 2 Kings do). They do make a distinction, however, between a good and evil period in Asa’s reign, who was the immediate predecessor of Jehoshaphat and most probably the object of comparison as in 1 Kgs 22:43. See Raymond B. Dillard, 2 Chronicles, WBC, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and John D. W. Watts, no. 15 (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1987), 132.

In any case, if I had decided to include Jehoshaphat among the Davidic righteous kings, a cursory review of his reign would tend to support the conclusions which I arrived at in this section. Jehoshaphat promoted covenant awareness and loyalty (2 Chr 17:9; 19:4), cleansed the land from idolatry (2 Chr 17:6; 19:3), dedicated votive offerings for the temple (2 Kgs 12:18), organized the Levites and priests (1 Chr 17:7-8; 19:8-10), promoted the reunification of Israel (2 Chr 19:4), had “rest” from his enemies (2 Chr 17:10; 20:1-30 [esp. v. 30]), and faithful priests emerged during his rule (2 Chr 19:11).
The evaluation of the first part of his rule is positive though not perfect: “Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David; only he sacrificed and burnt incense on the high places” (1 Kgs 3:3). His later years of rule are evaluated rather negatively: “When Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David” (11:4). I will focus here on his first years of reign when he better fulfilled the expectations of an ideal Davidic king. The main actions of later righteous Davidic kings are found in Solomon’s first years.

Solomon begins his rule by exterminating his enemies and, thus, securing the throne. (Only 1 Kings registers these actions.) He kills Adonijah (1 Kgs 2:13-25), Joab (vv. 28-35), and Shimei (vv. 36-46), and banishes Abiathar the priest, replacing him with Zadok (vv. 26-27). The book of Kings, however, does not negatively evaluate Solomon’s actions.¹ Instead, by presenting them in the context of David’s instruction to purge bloodguilt and curse from the house of David (2:1-9) and Solomon’s assertion that “the throne of David shall be established before the LORD forever” (2:45-46; cf. 2 Sam 7:16), 1 Kings considers these actions constitutive of the fulfillment of God’s promises to David.² In fact, 1 Kings attributes wisdom to Solomon in his dealings with his enemies


Therefore, from the perspective of the books of Kings, Solomon’s first actions are conceived as an act of cleansing, a purge of the royal house from evil that makes possible the fulfillment of God’s covenant for David and Israel.

Solomon’s banishment and substitution of Abiathar—the priest—with Zadok marks the beginning of a new order in the priesthood of the Israelite cult according to the prophecy of Samuel (1 Kgs 2:26-27; cf. 1 Sam 2:27-36). The promotion of Zadok as high priest is considered the fulfillment of a prophecy proclaimed against the unfaithful house of Eli. Zadok is the promised “faithful priest” who “shall go in and out before my anointed one forever” (1 Sam 2:35).

The raising of a new “faithful priest” over Israel marks, as well, the beginning of a reformation in the cult of Israel (cf. Jer 7:1-15; 26:1-9). Abiathar represented the cult centered around the tabernacle at Shiloh, the central sanctuary of the tribal confederacy (Josh 18:1), but the building of the temple by Solomon at Jerusalem represented the beginning of a new era for the Israelite cult. With the inauguration of the temple, Solomon implemented the major reorganization of the temple staff and duties that David had designed for the cult (2 Chr 7:6; cf. 8:14-15; 1 Chr 23-26).

John W. Wright has shown that David’s reorganization of the cult in 1 Chr 23-27 functions in the narrative of the Chronicler as the description of “David’s chief legacy.”

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1 Nelson, First and Second Kings, 26.


This cultic legacy will have a lasting influence on the history of monarchic Israel. The books of Chronicles will be especially interested in showing that righteous kings will be careful to implement David’s reorganization of the cult. Thus, the Chronicler promotes David as a cult founder alongside Moses. The Chronicler clearly recognizes that the Mosaic laws continue to regulate the ritual, but he points out as well, time and again, that David’s appointment of the Levites to their office has brought “the worship of Yahweh to its highest perfection and its true fulfillment.”  

1 de Vries, “Moses and David,” 619, 639. Similarly, “if the Ancestral era marks Israel’s birth as a people, the Sinaitic era marks the time in which Israel receives its national code of conduct, and the life of Joshua marks the time in which Israel receives and divides its land, the Davidic era marks the time in which the institutions associated with the Jerusalem Temple achieve standard definition.” Knoppers, 798.


is the place God chose for his name to dwell (1 Kgs 9:3, passim; 2 Chr 7:12, passim).

Theoretically, then, all the reforms anticipated in Deuteronomy should have been implemented with the inauguration of Solomon’s temple. In practice, however, the fullest implementation of this reform came during the reign of Josiah (2 Kgs 23:1-27; 2 Chr 34:1-7; 35:1-19). The dedication of the temple marks, however, the beginning of this transition in the Israelite cult.

The inauguration of the Temple is understood as well as the confirmation of the covenant between God and the people. In his prayer of dedication, Solomon recognizes that the building of the temple evidences God’s faithfulness to his covenant (1 Kgs 8:23-26). Though he refers explicitly to the Davidic covenant (1 Kgs 8:22-26), it is clear that he understands it in the context of the greater framework of the Mosaic covenant, which he mentions explicitly in 1 Kgs 8:56-58 (cf. vv. 9, 21, 51-53; 2 Chr 5:10; 6:14).¹ As a result, Solomon exhorts the people to be faithful to their covenantal obligations: “Devote yourselves completely to the Lord our God, walking in his statutes and keeping his commandments” (1 Kgs 8:61). The ceremony is culminated by God’s indwelling of the temple, as a sign of his acceptance of the temple, the king, and his people (1 Kgs 8:10-13; 2 Chr 7:1-4), and a dream to the king (1 Kgs 9:1-14; 2 Chr 7:12-22). The king, then, functions as a covenant mediator between God and the people.

In summary, Solomon’s first years of righteous rule over “all Israel” are characterized by his defeat of his enemies, the appointment of Zadok as faithful priest,

the building of the temple, the implementation of David’s reform of the cult, and the renewal of the covenant.

Asa

Like Solomon, Asa displays great confidence in and faithfulness to God in the first years of his rule. Toward the end, however, his confidence in God fails; yet, he is considered a righteous Davidic king (1 Kgs 15:11; 2 Chr 14:2). The expression “seeking the Lord” occurs nine times in the Chronicler’s account of Asa’s reign and sets the theme for the entire section (14:4, 7 [2x]; 15:2, 4, 12, 13, 17; 16:12).\(^1\)

The first recorded action of his rule is the cleansing of the land from male temple prostitutes and idols (1 Kgs 15:12-13), foreign altars, high places, pillars, and sacred poles (2 Chr 14:3, 5; 15:8). By doing this, Asa fulfills the instructions of Deut 7:5 and 12:2.\(^2\) Asa’s reform is quite comprehensive. He is considered by the Chronicler as the first reformer of the cult. Abijah, his father, had been presented in a positive light also (1 Chr 13); but his reign was probably too short to make possible any significant reform.\(^3\)

Only the Chronicler reports Azariah’s sermon and the resulting renewal of the


\(^2\) Note how the Chronicler uses the same language as Deuteronomy (see ibid.). The Chronicler does not explain what are “the abominations” (םִלְחָרֵשׁ) Asa purges from the land. This probably refers to the male cultic prostitutes referenced in 1 Kgs 15:12. It is important to note, though, that the same word is used of the pollutions of the sanctuary in Dan 9:27. William Johnstone, *2 Chronicles 10-36: Guilt and Atonement*, vol. 2, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, JSOTSup, ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies, no. 254 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 66.

\(^3\) Japhet, 707.
covenant (2 Chr 15:8-15). The king exhorted the people to make an oath to “seek the Lord . . . with all their heart and with all their soul” (v. 12; cf. 14:4); thus, he functions as a covenant mediator.\(^1\) The solemnity of this oath is remarkable because it included a penalty of death for those who broke the covenant (v. 13). In fact, Asa removed his own mother, Maacah, from being queen mother because “she had made an abominable image for Asherah” (2 Chr 15:16; cf. 1 Kgs 15:13). The penalty of death and the phrase “all their heart and soul” suggest that the covenant renewed is based on the tradition of the Sinai covenant (cf. Deut 6:5; 10:12; 13:6-10; 17:2-7).\(^2\)

The renewal of the covenant included repair of the temple as well. Asa repaired the altar (2 Chr 15:8) and brought votive gifts into the house of the Lord (1 Kgs 15:15; 2 Chr 15:18).\(^3\) In this respect, Asa follows David’s example who is the premier exemplar of


\(^2\) Hill, 472; Tuell, 171-2. Note that this renewal took place in the third month, the same month as the establishment of the covenant at Sinai (Exod 19:1) and probably on the date of the Feast of Weeks or Pentateuch (2 Chr 15:10). See also, Thompson, 271.

\(^3\) For a discussion regarding the identification of the altar Asa repaired, see Japhet, 722-3.

Sara Japhet observed that Azariah’s instruction to Asa in 2 Chr 15:7, “But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded” (2 Chr 15:7), recalls the language of Zech 8:9-13. Japhet, 721. This passage refers to God’s promise of peace as a result of the building of the temple. According to Steven S. Tuell, the use of this language evidences that “Asa is being encouraged to engage in temple-building and reform, an exhortation that he understands and follows” (170). It is not clear, however, that this is what the Chronicler intended to convey. Azariah’s prophecy is full of “citations and standard idioms” and may be not an allusion to Zech 8:9-13. Sara Japhet also notes, for example, that in the same passage (2 Chr 15:7) the phrase “Do not let your hands be weak” is a direct quotation of Zeph 3:16 and that the final clause “for your work shall be rewarded” is a citation of Jer 31:6. Japhet, 721.
giving votive offerings and cultic implements (1 Chr 18:11; 22:3, 14; 29:1-5).¹

Another important aspect of the theology of Chronicles is that the renewal of the covenant implies, as well, the reunification of “all” Israel.² Second Chronicles 15:9 reads: “He gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon who were residing as aliens with them, for great numbers had deserted to him from Israel when they saw that the LORD his God was with him.”

The renewal of the covenant has positive consequences for the nation. God rewards Asa’s faithfulness by providing him “rest” from his enemies (2 Chr 14:1, 6, 7; 15:15, 19). The Chronicler’s account includes Asa’s victory over Zerah, the Cushite, as a result of God’s direct intervention. Rest becomes a thematic element of Asa’s reign.³ Asa is, in fact, the first king after Solomon to enjoy rest or peace as a gift from God (2 Chr 14:1; cf. 1 Chr 22:9).⁴ Azariah’s prophecy describes the period before David as “a time when there was no shalom in the land” (2 Chr 15:3-7).⁵ This implies that God’s promise of “rest” to the nation (Deut 12:8-10) was not fulfilled until the time of David and Solomon and, now, Asa.⁶

¹ Dillard, 122.
² Hill, 472.
³ Ibid., 469-70; Japhet, 705. For the thematic use of rest in the Chronicler’s account of Asa’s reign, see especially Johnstone, 59-75.
⁴ Tuell, 166. Yet, in the actual description of Solomon’s reign there is no single reference to rest. Japhet, 705.
⁵ Tuell, 169.
⁶ Hill, 470; Japhet, 705.
Joash

The Hebrew Bible characterizes the rule of Joash by stark contrasts. Joash was a king of lights and shadows. Richard D. Nelson nimbly captures the essence of his record:

Joash was able to refurbish the temple, but in the end had to rob it. Rescued from death as a baby, he was struck down forty years later by his own servants. Heir to God’s gracious promise to David, he received the testimony of the law and was a partner in the covenant between God and the people. Yet he failed to live up to the precepts of that covenant. He did right, but not completely right. His accomplishments were ordinary enough, but still significant.

My interest here resides in those actions which caused him to be considered a righteous Davidic king (2 Kgs 12:2; cf. 14:3).

The ascension of Joash to the throne involves renewal of the covenant. This renewal involved three covenants that are referred to in the accounts of Kings and Chronicles.¹ The first is between Jehoiada and the captains of the Carites and of the guardians of the temple (2 Kgs 11:4; 2 Chr 23:1). Its purpose is to topple Athaliah from power and occurs before the enthronement of Joash.

The second covenant is between the Lord, the people, and the king (2 Kgs 11:17ab; 2 Chr 23:16). Its purpose is to renew Yahweh’s relationship with Judah so that they may be “the Lord’s people”; thus, it makes necessary the eradication of Baal worship, restoration of Yahweh’s temple, and the reorganization of the cult (2 Kgs 11:18; 2 Chr 23:16).

¹ First and Second Kings, 214.

² Both, 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, use consistently the term נַעֲרָם for the three of them (2 Kgs 11:4, 17; 2 Chr 23:1, 3, 16). For a comparison between the covenants in the accounts of Kings and Chronicles, see Japhet, 834-5.
2 Chr 23:17-19). This covenant is established during the enthronement ceremony.\(^1\) The covenant here referred to is the Mosaic covenant as renewed at Moab (Deuteronomy) which established how Israel became “the people of the Lord” (Deut 27:9; cf. 4:20; 9:29; 14:2; 26:18). It required of Israel, regarding foreign forms of worship, to “break down their altars, smash their pillars, hew down their sacred poles, and burn their idols with fire. For you are a people holy to the LORD your God” (Deut 7:5-6; cf. 12:1-3).\(^2\)

The third covenant is between the king and the people (2 Kgs 11:17c; 2 Chr 23:3). Its purpose is to reinstate Davidic kingship in Judah after the usurpation of Athaliah and is, also, a constitutive part of the enthronement ceremony of Joash (2 Kgs 11:19-20; 2 Chr 23:20-21). The covenant renewed here, then, refers to the Davidic covenant of 2 Sam 7:1-17 which promised David that “your throne shall be established forever” (v. 16).\(^3\)

The second and third covenants are intimately related.\(^4\) Since Davidic kingship was established under the authority of God’s rule over Israel (2 Sam 7:1-17), the renovation of Judah’s relationship with God makes the reinstallation of Davidic kingship necessary. Thus, “the relation between king and people [third covenant] is subordinate to the covenant between God and the people [second covenant].”\(^5\)

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\(^1\) For the purposes and differences between the second and third covenants, see ibid.


\(^3\) Dumbrell, 160.

\(^4\) They are, in fact, bundled together in 2 Kgs 11:17.

\(^5\) Johnstone, 134.
The covenant plays a central role in the enthronement ceremony itself. Among other insignias vested on the new king, Jehoiada gives him a “covenant” or “testimony” (כרות; 2 Kgs 11:12; 2 Chr 23:11). Scholars do not agree regarding the identity of this covenant. Some believe it was a copy of the arrangement between Joash and the whole assembly by which he became their king (2 Chr 23:3; cf. 2 Kgs 11:17c), or a copy of the decree of his divine adoption by God.¹ More likely, the covenant here refers to a copy of the law (Deuteronomy) as envisioned in Deut 17:18. (Note that the term כרות typically refers to the Ten Commandments [e.g., Exod 31:18; 34:29].)² In any case, the reference to Jehoiada as crowning, anointing, and proclaiming Joash as king and giving him the covenant underline his central role in the reform of Israel. Normally, it was the king who acted as covenant mediator between God and the people. As we have seen, Solomon and Asa exhorted the people to renew their allegiance to God. The same will be the case with Hezekiah and Josiah. Here, however, “Jehoiada seems to be a stand-in for the underage king as covenant mediator.”³

The renewal of the covenant makes necessary the renovation of the temple. This renovation has special importance for both writers, which is clear from the amount of

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² Tuell, 191.

space that both accounts devote to its description (2 Kgs 12:1-16; 2 Chr 24:4-14).\(^1\) A closer reading reveals that probably more than repair was meant. According to the Chronicler, “the children of Athaliah . . . had broken into the house of God, and had even used all the dedicated things of the house of the LORD for the Baals” (24:7). The defilement of all the sacred utensils most likely entailed discontinuation of the temple worship.\(^2\)

If Joash’s prohibition against making utensils for the cult from the money collected in the chest for repair of the temple (2 Kgs 11:13-14) was actually followed, the worship at the temple was resumed when the repair of the temple was finished (2 Chr 24:14). The end of v. 14 seems to confirm this view: It says that after the restoration was finished and new vessels provided, “They offered burnt offerings in the house of the LORD regularly all the days of Jehoiada.”

It is clear that the cult was in fact reorganized—whether right after the enthronement of the king or after the repairs had been made. The Chronicler is very clear that Jehoiada reestablished the order that David had conceived originally for the inauguration of the temple: “Jehoiada assigned the care of the house of the LORD to the levitical priests whom David had organized to be in charge of the house of the LORD, to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, as it is written in the law of Moses, with rejoicing and with singing, according to the order of David” (2 Chr 23:18).

It is possible, as well, that Joash’s rule also marked a major change in the way the

\(^1\) For an attempt of explaining the process of repair, see Hill, 539-40.

\(^2\) Japhet, 836.
money of the temple was handled. Accounts of the temple repairs show that the king exerted a growing power over the temple. For some reason the Levites were slow in following up the king’s plans for the renovation of the temple (2 Kgs 12:7; 2 Chr 24:5). As a result the king took control of the collection and handling of the money by delegating the task to the king’s secretary (2 Kgs 12:10; 24:11).¹

Finally, it is important to note that Jehoiada becomes a prototype of the post-exilic faithful priest who rules alongside a kingly figure.² For all practical purposes, Jehoiada is a king-priest during the first years of Joash (2 Kgs 12:2; 2 Chr 24:2).³ Like other Davidic kings, he is remembered because he led Israel in covenant faithfulness and renovation of the temple (2 Chr 24:16).⁴ He is buried “in the city of David among the kings” (2 Chr 24:16).⁵ Sara Japhet notes that “this is the only case of the Chronicler reporting the death and burial of someone other than a king, and in fact, the terms used here are those regularly employed for kings.”⁶

Hezekiah

After David and Solomon, no other king receives more attention in Chronicles

¹ House, 303.
² Hill, 540.
³ Dillard, 192.
⁴ Hill, 540.
⁵ Ironically Joash was not buried among the kings (v. 25).
⁶ Japhet, 847. See also Tuell, 195.
than Hezekiah.¹ Second Kings, though shorter in his account of Hezekiah, is lavish in his praise of him: “He trusted in the LORD the God of Israel; so that there was no one like him among all the kings of Judah after him, or among those who were before him” (2 Kgs 18:5). The Chronicler’s evaluation of his reign is almost entirely positive: “He did what was right in the sight of the LORD, just as his ancestor David had done” (2 Chr 29:2; 31:20-21; cf. 2 Kgs 18:3, 5).² “The Chronicler holds out hope for a united Israel under a Davidic king overseeing the true worship of God in the Jerusalem temple. For him Hezekiah and Josiah are the prototypes of such kingship.”³

**Covenant Renewal**

According to Chronicles, Hezekiah’s first project after assuming power was repair of the temple and restoration of the cult. This was necessary because Ahaz had shut the doors of the temple, thus discontinuing the regular service (28:24). Chapters 29 to 31 are a lengthy and self-contained narrative devoted to this topic.⁴

¹ Thompson, 342.

² The Chronicler’s only adverse report is that Hezekiah’s heart was proud after God gave him a sign in relation to his sickness (2 Chr 32:25)—referring to the visit of the embassy from King Merodach-baladan of Babylon (2 Kgs 20:12-19)—but notes immediately that Hezekiah repented (2 Chr 32:26). For a comparison of the accounts of Hezekiah’s rule in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, see Japhet, 912-4.

³ Hill, 579.

⁴ Japhet, 914.
Hezekiah opens the doors of the temple on the first month of the first year of his reign and exhorts the Levites to re-consecrate themselves and the temple (2 Chr 29:3-11). He clearly states that his purpose is to make a covenant with Yahweh and atone for the sins of Israel (v. 10). The context makes clear that he intends the renovation of the covenant mediated by Moses and later institutionalized by David since it is Moses’ cultic laws which are reinstated (cf. 30:16; chap. 31) and David’s temple and organization of the cult which are renewed (e.g., 29:25). Consequently, we must understand Hezekiah’s restoration of the cult in terms of a covenant renewal between God and the nation. The king acts as a covenant mediator. He is also an intercessor. Like Moses, he cleanses the nation from idolatry so that God’s “fierce anger may turn away from” the nation (2 Chr 29:10; Num 25:4).

The process of restoration of the cult is remarkable. It required a re-consecration of the temple and its ministers, an expiation for the sin of the nation, a re-inauguration of the cult, and a re-consecration of the people to God because the cult had ceased and the covenant with Yahweh had been broken—Ahaz had shut up the doors of the temple and built altars to foreign gods in every city (2 Chr 28:24-25; cf. 29:6-8). This task is

1 Johnstone, 191-2. Contra Tuell, 213; Japhet, 919, who see this call only as a renewed total commitment to the Lord.

2 Note the equivalent expressions:
   Num 25:4: יִפְשַׁב הַרְזוֹן אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁפַּט עֲמֵי אִּשֵּׁר וְסָמוּכָם
   “. . . in order that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel.”
   2 Chr 29:10: יִפְשַׁב הַרְזוֹן אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁפַּט עֲמֵי אִּשֵּׁר וְסָמוּכָם
   “. . . so that his fierce anger may turn away from us.”
   See also, Hill, 580.
performed in three phases clearly delimited in the text: (1) re-consecration of the temple and its ministers (2 Chr 29:12-19), (2) re-inauguration of the cult (vv. 20-30), and (3) re-consecration of the people to God (vv. 31-36).¹

**Re-Consecration of the Priests and Temple**

The process of re-consecrating the temple begins “on the first day of the first month” (29:17) in the same time of the year when Moses inaugurated the tabernacle (Exod 40:2, 17). It finishes 16 days later (2 Chr 29:17) and comprehends three different actions: the consecration (קדש) of the Levites, the cleansing (מוך) of the temple, and its consecration (קדש; cf. 18-19). It is important to note that this corresponds to Moses’ consecration of the sanctuary, which included the consecration of the priests (Exod 40:12-16; cf. 29:44; Lev 8-9; Num 7-8), but did not include the cleansing of the sanctuary.²

The text does not explain what the consecration of the Levites involves. (This should involve here the priests as well [see 2 Chr 29:16-19, 34; cf. 30:15].)³ From 2 Chr 30:15 it is clear that the sanctification involved burnt offerings, but their nature and

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¹ This account finishes with the assertion: “Thus the service of the house of the LORD was restored. And Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced because of what God had done for the people; for the thing had come about suddenly” (vv. 35-36).

² However, Moses’ consecration of the temple did include cleansing the altar of sacrifice prior to its consecration (Lev 8:15).

³ Japhet, 920. Note, however, that in the Pentateuch the consecration of the Priests (Lev 8) and the purification of the Levites (Num 8; the Levites were not consecrated) are separate events.
These sacrifices are most probably a part of a larger liturgical context for their consecration as priests (וָדַי; Exod 29; 40; Lev 8) which should have included as well, probably, a sin offering (Lev 8:14-17), a ram for consecration (vv. 22-29), in addition to the burnt offering (vv. 18-21).²

Hezekiah’s re-inauguration of the temple is analogous to Moses’ inauguration of the tabernacle with the difference that it included a ritual of purification.³ This ritual of purification was not necessary for Moses’ inauguration of the tabernacle because the tabernacle had not been previously defiled. In the case of Hezekiah, however, the temple had been polluted by Ahaz. This evil king not only “cut in pieces the utensils . . . [and] shut up the doors of the house of the LORD” (2 Chr 28:24-25; cf. 29:6-8), but also “made his sons pass through fire” as a burnt offering to Molech (2 Chr 28:3; cf. 33:6; 2 Kgs

³ I have noted (92, n. 2), though, that Moses’ inauguration of the Sanctuary did include the purification and consecration of the altar (Lev 8:15). For a discussion of the meaning of this text, see Gane, Cult and Character, 130-3, 140-42. We should be careful not to confuse Hezekiah’s purification (καθαρίσαι or ἁγνίζω) of the temple with its consecration (αἱρεῖν / ἁγνίζω). According to 2 Chr 29:18-19 they are discrete processes; see Japhet, 922.

² I proceed here on the basis that NT authors understand Levitcus to contain God’s messages to Moses (Luke 2:22 [referring to Lev 12]; Matt 8:4 [par. Mark 1:44; Luke 5:14; referring to Lev 13-14]; Mark 7:10 [referring to Lev 20:9]) which are, therefore, prior to Hezekiah’s reform (see also p. 53). See Gane, Leviticus, Numbers, 27-28.

Sarah Japhet (922) mentions the possibility that these burnt offerings might be part of a process of atonement for a specific sin (Lev 4:3-12), or purification after defilement because of the death of a relative (Ezek 44:27). But those suggestions are less likely because their purpose is “atonement” (טבש; Lev 4: 26, 31, 35) and not “consecration” (טָהֳרָה) as in our case.

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23:10). This last serious sin is especially significant. According to Lev 20:3, the sacrifice of an offspring to Molech defiles God’s sanctuary.¹ Thus, it was necessary to cleanse (ךֵּלָה) the temple before it could be consecrated (ךַּפֶּה).

I want to suggest that Hezekiah’s re-inauguration of the temple is analogous as well to the re-consecration of the altar on the Day of Atonement. Roy Gane’s research has shown that serious moral faults—such as Ahaz’s sacrifice of his sons to Molech—were cleansed from the sanctuary only on the Day of Atonement.² Thus, Hezekiah’s ritual of purification (ךֵּלָה) and consecration (ךַּפֶּה) of the temple from “all the unclean things” (ךֵּלָה; 2 Chr 29:15-16) is equivalent to the purification (ךֵּלָה) and consecration (ךַּפֶּה) of the altar from the “uncleanliness [ךֵּלָה] of the people of Israel” performed every year on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:19; Ezek 43:18-27; cf. Exod 39:36-37; Num 7:87-88).³ Jacob Milgrom argues in his commentary on this passage that the reason for the annual re-consecration of the altar resides in the fact that it was the means of

¹ For a discussion of serious moral faults that pollute the sanctuary, see Roy E. Gane, Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 144-51.

² Gane, Leviticus, Numbers, 277-83, esp. 281. For an in-depth analysis, see Roy E. Gane, Ritual Dynamic Structure, Gorgias Dissertations, no. 14, Religion, no. 2 (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, 2004); Gane, Cult and Character.

³ Japhet, 922; Tuell, 213-4. Jacob Milgrom suggests that the annual purification and consecration of the altar (which consisted in the discrete acts of daubing of blood on its horns and sprinkling of blood on it) is also equivalent to the daubing of blood on the right-ear lobes, right-hand thumbs, and right-foot big toes of the priests and the sprinkling of oil upon them on the day of their consecration (Lev 8:24-30). Milgrom, 1037. The difference is that priests were not re-consecrated every year.
atonement for the people.\(^1\) In the case of Hezekiah, it is the whole temple and not just the altar, which undergoes the same ritual of purification and re-consecration. The purpose is the same. As soon as the temple and its ministers are re-consecrated, Hezekiah commands that sacrifices be offered “to make atonement for all Israel” (2 Chr 29:20-24).

Hezekiah’s re-inauguration of the temple has an intriguing similarity to the purification and atonement (יָדָא) sacrifices to be offered on the first and seventh days of the first month, according to the law of the temple in Ezek 45:18-20.\(^2\) These sacrifices served a function related to the Day of Atonement in the ritual system of Ezekiel but did not supersede it. They were instead related to the celebration of the Passover (v. 21). Hezekiah’s cleansing and re-consecration of the temple also has a preparatory function for the Passover that was celebrated one month later.

**Re-Inauguration of the Service of the Temple**

As in the inauguration of the tabernacle (Lev 8-9), Hezekiah’s re-inauguration of the temple is followed by the inauguration of the system of sacrifices.

After the Mosaic tabernacle was inaugurated, Aaron and his sons offered sin and burnt offerings to atone for themselves and the people of Israel (Lev 9:7). In addition, they offered grain and well-being offerings (vv. 17-21). In total, these sacrifices included all the basic types of sacrifices except the reparation offering.\(^3\) The inauguration of the

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\(^1\) Milgrom, 1038.

\(^2\) Japhet, 922; Tuell, 214.

\(^3\) Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 180.
sanctuary service was in some sense, then, a demonstration of the full capability of the sanctuary, but it is not clear that specific sins—whether those of the priests or the people—were atoned for.¹

In the case of Hezekiah, however, the inauguration of the temple’s worship included sin and burnt offerings with the purpose of atoning for specific sins. This is indicated by the fact that the king and the people laid their hands on the sacrificial animals (2 Chr 29:23) that were to be offered “for the kingdom and for the sanctuary and for Judah” (v. 21) in order “to make atonement for all Israel” (v. 24).² What we have here is a national act of confession, repentance, and atonement with the purpose of averting God’s wrath upon Israel because of its apostasy during the rule of Ahaz (v. 10; cf. Lev 4:13-26).

The Chronicler is explicit when stating that the worship of the temple is renewed according to the reforms introduced by David.³ The Levites are organized and stationed according to the dispositions of David to play the instruments he had designed for the service and sing the songs of David and Asaph the seer (vv. 25-30).

**Re-Consecration of the Nation**

The final phase of the restoration of the cult is the most remarkable. Now, once

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¹ Jacob Milgrom suggests that הָנָא carries here a general meaning of reconciliation between the people and God. Milgrom, 578. See also, Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 180-82.

² The phrase “for the kingdom” may refer to the Davidic dynasty. Hill, 582.

³ There are four references to David in 29:25-30. This is “the most condensed distribution of Davidic references outside his own story.” Japhet, 928.
the temple has been re-consecrated and the cult re-inaugurated, Hezekiah invites the people to “come near, [and] bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the house of the Lord” (v. 31). The invitation itself is not extraordinary, but the terms in which the king refers to the people are. He refers to the general audience as those who have “consecrated” themselves to the Lord, using a technical term for consecration to the priesthood (אָלֵמָה, e.g., Exod 32:29; 29:9; Lev 8:33). Moreover, he considers them capacitated to “draw near” (מָנָח) to present their offerings, a verb used of priestly activity (Exod 19:22). This is the only event in which the Chronicler credits the people with “active participation in the contribution of sacrifices.” Does he mean that the congregation or nation has become a nation of priests (cf. Exod 19:5-6)? Most likely, the Chronicler is using this term (אָלֵמָה “consecrate,” lit. “fill the hand”) in a more general sense. The same phrase is used by David when he instructed Solomon to build the temple: He invited the people to bring offerings for the service of the temple so that they could “consecrate” themselves (הָעָבְרַת אֲלֵמָה) to the

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2 Johnstone, 197.

3 Japhet, 929.

4 According to 2 Chr 30:17 the “consecration” (הָעָבְרַת) of lay people is not necessary to officiate at the altar, but to slay the Passover lamb.
Lord (1 Chr 29:5). Likewise, the people responded to Hezekiah’s invitation by bringing abundant offerings so that “the service of the house of the Lord was established again” (2 Chr 29:35, NASB; emphasis original).

Celebration of Passover

After the covenant had been renewed and the cult restored, Hezekiah decided to celebrate the Passover (2 Chr 30). This event is very important because it makes evident additional aspects of Hezekiah’s leadership.

First, the king promotes the reunification of the twelve tribes of Israel through the cult. Hezekiah sent invitations for the Passover to “all Israel, from Beer-sheba to Dan” (v. 5). The specific invitation to the “remnant” of Israel is “return to the Lord” (v. 6) and “do not . . . be stiff-necked as your ancestors were, but yield yourselves to the LORD and come to his sanctuary” (v. 8). The invitation to come to the sanctuary in Jerusalem is important because it was the “prescribed” manner of keeping the Passover (cf. v. 5) according to the Chronicler’s interpretation of Deut 16:1-8. The temple at Jerusalem is the place God chose for the “dwelling of his name” (v. 6; cf. 2 Chr 30:8). Hezekiah, then, seeks to reunite Israel through proper worship.

The response is mixed. The heralds are laughed at and mocked, but “a few from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem” (v. 11; cf. v. 10).

1 Japhet, 929-30; Snijders, 205.
2 See Japhet, 940-41.
3 Hill, 585.
18). Like David, Hezekiah restores the unity of Israel under one cult.

Hezekiah is also, like Moses, an intercessor on behalf of the people. When the Passover was celebrated, “a multitude of people” participated in it without having first “cleansed themselves” (2 Chr 30:18). Leviticus 7:19-21 explicitly prohibits such participation. The king, then, intercedes on their behalf so that “the good LORD pardon all who set their hearts to seek God . . . even though not in accordance with the sanctuary’s rules of cleanness” (vv. 18-19). The Chronicler registers that God listened to Hezekiah and “healed the people” (v. 20). This reminds us of Solomon’s prayer that God would “forgive their [the people’s] sin and heal their land” if they “humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways” (7:14).  

The Chronicler also describes the king as the main provider for the cult. Hezekiah provided for the cult 1,000 bulls and 7,000 sheep on the occasion of the festival of unleavened bread (v. 24). Later on, the Chronicler relates that the king became a consistent provider of the cult: “The contribution of the king from his own possessions was for the burnt offerings: the burnt offerings of morning and evening, and the burnt offerings for the sabbaths, the new moons, and the appointed festivals, as it is written in the law of the LORD” (2 Chr 31:3). Hezekiah anticipates, then, the role of the king in Ezek 40-48. According to the law for the new temple in Ezekiel the king (called prince) will be the main provider for the cult (Ezek 45:17; cf. 45:22; 46:4).  

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1 Ibid., 587; Japhet, 952-3. Note, however, that in 1 Chr 7:14 what is healed is the “land,” not the people.

2 Solomon (2 Chr 8:13) and the Persian Darius (Ezra 6:6-12) contribute as well for the liturgy of the temple. Tuell, 222-3.
The restoration of the cult triggers several responses from the people. First, the Chronicler emphasizes that the people rejoiced greatly (2 Chr 29:36; 30: 21, 23, 25, 26). In fact, there was so much joy that the nation decided to continue the festival of unleavened bread for seven more days (30:21, 23), just as Solomon had also extended the ceremonies accompanying the dedication of the temple (7:8-10).

The second response is that the people follow up on Hezekiah’s reforms. They destroy pagan places of worship as well as the high places not only in Judah, but also in Ephraim and Manasseh (31:1). The high places here are probably not centers of idolatrous worship, but alternate centers of worship to YHWH. At least this is the way Sennacherib understands Hezekiah’s reforms according to the Chronicler: “Was it not this same Hezekiah who took away his high places and his altars and commanded Judah and Jerusalem, saying, ‘Before one altar you shall worship, and upon it you shall make your offerings’?” (2 Chr 32:12; cf. 2 Kgs 18:22). Thus, apparently, this destruction of high places intends the implementation of the centralization of the worship that had been anticipated in the Mosaic legislation (Deut 12:5, passim).

Finally, the Chronicler relates that the king organizes the work of the priests and

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1 The construction of the temple by Solomon did not immediately centralize the cult. Time and again, the historian informs us that the people continued to worship in the high places (1 Kgs 14:23; 15:14; 22:43; 2 Kgs 12:3; 14:4; 15:4, etc.; 2 Chr 15:17; 20:33).

These high places (יִדָּעַת) do not necessarily refer to pagan shrines. For example, Samuel used to offer sacrifices in them (1 Sam 9:12-27; cf. 10:5). Solomon offered sacrifices to the Lord at Gibeon, which is called a high place, and received a divine vision there (1 Kgs 3:3, 4; cf. 2 Kgs 18:22; 23:9; 1 Chr 16:39; 21:29). See also, Auld, 87. These high places are removed until the time of Hezekiah and Josiah (since Manasseh had rebuilt them; 2 Kgs 18:22; 23:5-9; 2 Chr 31:1; 32:12; 34:3) and signal the culmination of the reformation of the cult anticipated by Deuteronomy (see above in pp. 69-72).
Levites by appointing “everyone according to his service” (2 Chr 31:2; cf. 8:14-15; 23:18-19). The organization of the Levites and priests had been abolished when Ahaz closed the doors of the temple (28:24). After the king commanded the people to contribute for their support, the nation responded generously so that there was “plenty to spare” and store-chambers were necessary to be prepared to store the offerings of the nation (32:10-11).

Rest from Their Enemies

God responds favorably to Hezekiah’s reforms by delivering Israel from Sennacherib (2 Kgs 18-20; 2 Chr 32; Isa 36-38). Second Kings relates that after Hezekiah cleansed the land from idolatry (18:4), he “rebelled against the king of Assyria” (v. 7). Sennacherib’s attempt at reprisal creates a huge crisis for Hezekiah. But the Angel of the Lord saved him by killing 185,000 of Sennacherib’s army (19:35). The chronicler summarizes this deliverance in meaningful terms: “[The Lord] gave them rest on every side” (2 Chr 32:22).¹ Hezekiah, then, enjoys the fulfillment of the promises made to David: “I will give you rest from all your enemies” (2 Sam 7:11).

Josiah

Josiah is the last of the righteous kings of the Davidic dynasty. Both Chronicles and Kings report that “he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of his ancestor David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left” (2 Chr 34:2, emphasis mine; cf. 2 Kgs 22:2). Note that the last remark describes the ideal obedience to

¹ See Johnstone, 219.
the covenant according to Deuteronomy (5:32; 17:11, 20; 28:14). Moreover, Josiah is the only king who “turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses” (2 Kgs 23:25; cf. Deut 6:5).¹

**Cleansing of the Land**

Josiah “began to seek” the Lord in the eighth year of his reign (2 Chr 34:3), but it was on the twelfth year that he began a work of reform by purging the land from idolatry (vv. 3-7; 2 Kgs 23:4-20).² He was by then twenty years old, which is the age of majority in the Hebrew cult and the age when Levites began their service for God (Num 1:3; 1 Chr 23:24). This was probably the first year he did not reign under the authority of a regent.³ His work of reform begins in Judah and Jerusalem (2 Chr 34:3, 5), but he later extended it to the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, Simeon, and Naphtali; that is, “throughout all the

¹ See Tuell, 234.

² According to 2 Kings, Josiah’s reform occurs six years later, in the 18th year of his reign, just after the repair of the temple and the renewal of the covenant (22:3). Chronicles registers two reforms; one before the finding of the book of the Law in the 12th year (2 Chr 34:3-7) and another after it in the 18th year of his reign (34:33), which coincides with the reform of 2 Kgs 23:4-20. There is a growing consensus among scholars that there were in fact early and late reforms in the reign of Josiah, previous and subsequent to the finding of the book. Dillard, 276-7; Thompson, 373-5. The book was found in 622 B.C.E., the eighteenth year of Josiah’s reign (2 Chr 34:8; 2 Kgs 22:3). According to the Chronicler, Josiah’s earlier reforms began in the 12th year of his reign (2 Chr 34:3), around 628 B.C.E. The Assyrian empire was already disintegrating by this time. The death of Ashurbanipal in 627 B.C.E. accelerated the process. In 625 B.C.E., Nineveh itself was under siege by Ciaxares and the Medes. It is not difficult to believe that Josiah would take advantage of this opportunity to advance his political and religious agenda. Dillard, 278; Hill, 618-9; Tuell, 235-6.

³ Dillard, 278. Also, Hill, 618; Johnstone, 233; Tuell, 235. See, however, the precaution of Japhet, 1022.
land of Israel” (v. 7; emphasis mine). The latter expression is related only to the reigns of David, Solomon, and Hezekiah, when Israel reached its largest expansion. His reform intends, then, a unification of the northern and southern tribes into one cult.  

Josiah’s reform parallels in form and content the reforms of Hezekiah. His cleansing of the land and repair of the temple goes further, however, than previous reforms. Josiah not only destroyed idolatrous shrines, images, and altars; he broke them into dust, killed its pagan priests, and defiled the sites by “burning the bones of the priests on their altars” (v. 5).

**Repair of the Temple**

Six years later, on the eighteenth year of his reign, Josiah initiates repair of the temple (34:8-13; 2 Kgs 22:3-7). The Chronicler reports that the temple had been previously cleansed in connection with the cleansing of the land begun six years earlier (2 Chr 34:8; see above); thus, the Chronicler understands the repair of the temple as one step

1 Japhet, 1024.

2 Note as well that the offerings for the repair of the temple come from Judah, Benjamin, and “the rest of Israel” (2 Chr 34:8). The NRSV translates this expression as the “remnant” of Israel, but this has theological nuances. Sarah Japhet (1027) argues that the best translation is “the rest of Israel” as in the case of the enthronement of David in 1 Chr 12:38, the only other place in biblical prose where this expression is found. The emphasis is, then, not in the survival of a remnant but on the universality of support for the renovation of the temple.

3 Tuell, 234.

4 Japhet, 1021-2.
in a comprehensive reform movement.\(^1\) The king is, of course, the driving force behind the work of repair, especially in the Chronicler’s account.\(^2\) He has the initiative and appoints officials of his kingdom to hand in the money “to the workers who had the oversight of the house of the LORD” (2 Chr 34:10).\(^3\) The organization of the Levites to oversee repairs of the temple reflects the reforms of David to the service of the Levites, including those in charge of music (vv. 12-13; cf. 1 Chr 25-26).\(^4\)

**The Book of the Law Is Found**

During the repair of the temple, Hilkiah, the high priest, found “the book of the law of the Lord” (2 Chr 38:14-28; 2 Kgs 22:8-20). Though we are not sure of exactly what the book contained, it is clear that it exposed the gravity of Judah’s apostasy and the dreadful curses that hung upon them.\(^5\) The king consults the Lord through Huldah the prophetess who reveals that the calamity has been decreed and cannot be revoked, yet the king will “not see all the disaster that . . . [God] will bring on this place and its

\(^1\) In fact, toward the end of his reign, Manasseh had begun cleansing of the temple (2 Chr 33:15-16).

\(^2\) See Japhet, 1025-6.

\(^3\) The Chronicler’s account (34:8-13) is not necessarily different from 2 Kgs 22:3-7. It is possible to read in both cases that the king’s officials received the money from Hilkiah, the high priest, and handed it to those who were overseeing the work in the temple.

\(^4\) Hill, 620.

\(^5\) The general consensus favors the idea that the book found was a copy of Deuteronomy or an early version of it. For a summary of the reasons see Dillard, 280. If the book was a copy of Deuteronomy, the terrifying curses of Deut 28:15-68 may have prompted the king’s renewal of the covenant and extensive reform.
inhabitants” because he was “penitent” and “humbled” himself before the Lord (2 Chr 34:27-28).

Renewal of the Covenant

Josiah decides, then, to renew the covenant with God which has been broken (2 Chr 28:29-33; 2 Kgs 23:1-3). He convenes the elders of Judah and Jerusalem and reads to them the book just found. Then the king makes a covenant “before the Lord,” ostensibly with the assembly, to keep the “covenant of God” with “all his heart and all his soul” (2 Chr 34:31-32; 2 Kgs 23:3).

Both Kings and Chronicles emphasize the central role of the king in the making of this covenant. Not only did he convene the assembly and read the book, but “he made all who were present in Jerusalem and in Benjamin pledge themselves to it” (2 Chr 34:32). One wonders to what extent the nation was willing to enter into this covenant. Neither Chronicles nor Kings reports a joyous reaction to the making of the covenant. The Chronicler presents the king as taking not only the initiative but also assuming responsibility for the fidelity of the nation.

The following verse (v. 33) informs us that the king enforced the covenant upon the people. He literally “made them serve the Lord” (note the Hiphil stem of יָבַש; v. 33). It is not surprising, then, that Judah’s fidelity lasted only while the king lived (v. 33).

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1 “Humbling” (נַעֲלָה) is an important theological concept in the book of Chronicles. It is a prerequisite to forgiveness and deliverance by God (2 Chr 7:14; 12:6-7, 12; 28:19; 30:11; 33:12, 19; 34:27); see Thompson, 378.
Reorganization of the Cult

The climax of Josiah’s reform comes with the celebration of the Passover which both accounts consider unequaled since the time of the judges (2 Chr 35:18; 2 Kgs 23:22).¹ The focus is on the king as the organizer of the feast (2 Chr 35:1-10).

The celebration of the Passover after a long period of apostasy requires a major reorganization of the cult and its personnel. The preparations for the Passover are comprehensive and painstaking (2 Chr 35:1-10). The celebration of this Passover did not come “about suddenly” (2 Chr 29:36) and was not organized in a rush as in the case of Hezekiah. Instead, “Josiah works to establish a permanent institution, built on solid administrative and organizational foundations, with a clear division of roles and an undisputed legal basis.”²

The king organizes first the priests and Levites and appoints them to their offices according to the dispositions of David (2 Chr 35:4, 15). (Once again, the Chronicler emphasizes David and Solomon as founding figures of Israel’s cult.)³ Next, the king exhorts the Levites to be prepared and sanctified so that they can help the priests by slaughtering the Passover lamb. This instruction is interesting. It makes standard practice what had been an emergency measure in the time of Hezekiah so that there would not be

¹ Note that Josiah’s Passover doubles the size of Hezekiah’s. Compare the number of sacrifices offered by Josiah (1 Chr 35:7-9) with those offered by Hezekiah (30:24).

² Japhet, 1045.

³ Tuell, 239.
a shortage of Levites and priests to serve the worshipers (vv. 3-6).\(^1\) Apparently, the Levites continued to slaughter the sacrificial animals in post-exilic times as suggested in Ezra 6:20 (cf. Ezek 44:10-11).\(^2\) It seems, then, that Josiah becomes a reformer of the cult on a small scale.

The king and their officials also make a generous donation of sacrifices for the feast (2 Chr 35:7-9). The provisions of sacrifices and cultic personnel are plentiful so the nation may celebrate without delay. The Chronicler’s emphasis for the preparations, however, is that the temple, its offerings, and ministry be used correctly.

In the context of these preparations the king issues an enigmatic order to the Levites: “Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel built” (2 Chr 35:3). Had the ark been taken out of the temple during the reign of Manasseh? We don’t really know.\(^3\) If this was the case, its reinstallation amounts to a re-inauguration or re-dedication of the temple. Though the Chronicler does not explicitly

\(^1\) Dillard, 280.

\(^2\) See, Hill, 626; Tuell, 239. For a differing opinion, see Thompson, 382.

\(^3\) Sarah Japhet (1048) suggests that the text is corrupted in this passage (2 Chr 35:3). Her reconstructed text reads, “The holy ark was placed in the house which Solomon . . . built . . . you need no longer carry it.” She suggests, then, that the ark had not been taken out of the temple and there was no need to reinstall it. If she is right, Josiah refers here to the installation of the ark in Solomon’s temple as the reason for the reorganization or reassignment of the role of the Levites in the cult. The extant text implies, notwithstanding, that the ark had been taken out. Menaham Haran argues that Manasseh replaced the ark in the holy of holies with the “carved image of Asherah” (2 Kgs 21:3-8; 2 Chr 33:4-8). Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into the Character of Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 277-84. Also Thompson, 381-2. The evidence we have, however, is insufficient to reach hard conclusions regarding what happened to the ark previous to and during Josiah’s reform.
mention a service of re-inauguration of the temple, other elements associated with such liturgy appear. For example, the building or repair of the temple, the reorganization of the Levites, and the contributions of the king and the officials to the temple appear in those events organized by David and Solomon, and Hezekiah.

On the other hand, if the ark had not been taken out but Josiah required its reinstallation, then the command is highly symbolical. It would evidence the king’s desire that the Passover be understood as a re-inauguration of the cult; that is, “a rerun . . . of what was achieved under Solomon.”¹ Second Chronicles 35:16 seems to support this view because it describes the Passover as the moment of the re-establishment of the temple’s cult: “So all the service of the LORD was prepared [established; [אֲדֹנָי]] that day, to keep the Passover and to offer burnt offerings on the altar of the LORD, according to the command of King Josiah.”²

Summary

The study of the rule of those Davidic kings considered righteous—or of their loyal years—reveals a recurring pattern that culminates in the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah. Seven main elements—which often do not appear in the same order—comprise this pattern: (1) renewal of the covenant, (2) cleansing of the land from spurious forms of worship, (3) building or repair of the temple, (4) emergence of a faithful high priest

¹ Johnstone, 247.

² Ibid., 252. Note again that Ezek 45 ties the cleansing of the sanctuary to the first month in preparation for Passover. See above section “Celebration of Passover.”
alongside the Davidic king, (5) reform of the cult, which implied the change of ritual laws and/or the reorganization of the priests; (6) a movement toward the reunification of Israel, and (7) “rest” from or defeat of enemies. See table 2.

This pattern provides the basic elements of the ideal rule of the Davidic kings in the history of monarchical Israel according to the biblical record. The Hebrew Bible makes clear, however, that this ideal was not fully achieved—or at the best achieved only temporarily.

I would now like to analyze what the references to the Davidic covenant elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible tell us regarding how the biblical writers reacted to the failure of the Davidic kings in bringing the Davidic promises to fulfillment. I am especially interested in their interpretation of the future of the Davidic covenant.

**The Davidic Covenant in the Rest of the Hebrew Bible**

**The Psalms**

The Davidic covenant is referred to in the Psalms mainly as a request by the Davidic king, or in behalf of him, that God may fulfill his promises in his favor. Prominent among these are Pss 89 and 132.

**Psalm 89**

Psalm 89 claims the promises of the Davidic covenant (vv. 19-37) for the Davidic king who has fallen in disgrace: “Lord, where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to David?” (v. 49). The psalmist’s appeal to God’s “steadfast love” (vv. 1-8, 49-52) focuses on two promises of the Davidic covenant: God will defeat the enemies of the Davidic king (vv. 19-27; cf. 2 Sam 7:11) and one from David’s progeny will sit on the throne for ever (vv. 36-37; cf. 2 Sam 7:13).
Table 2. Pattern of Rule of Righteous Davidic Kings in Monarchic Israel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Solomon</th>
<th>Asa</th>
<th>Joash</th>
<th>Hezekiah</th>
<th>Josiah</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Renewal of the Covenant</td>
<td>1 Kgs 8:14-26, 56-58, 61; 2 Chr 5:7-10</td>
<td>2 Chr 15:10-14</td>
<td>2 Kgs 11:17ab; 2 Chr 23:16</td>
<td>2 Chr 29:10; 34:29-33; 2 Kgs 23:1-3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cleansing of the Land</td>
<td>1 Kgs 2 (from blood guilt)</td>
<td>1 Kgs 15:12-13; 2 Chr 14:3, 5; 15:8</td>
<td>2 Kgs 11:18; 2 Chr 23:17</td>
<td>2 Chr 31:1; 2 Chr 34:3-7; 2 Kgs 23:4-20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building or Repair of the Temple</td>
<td>1 Kgs 5-8; 2 Chr 2-7; cf. 1 Kgs 15:15; 2 Chr 15:18</td>
<td>2 Chr 15:8; 15:15; 2 Chr 24:4-14</td>
<td>2 Kgs 12:1-16; 2 Chr 24:2, 14, 16</td>
<td>2 Chr 29:3; cf. vv. 12-36; 2 Kgs 22:3-7</td>
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<tr>
<td>A Faithful High Priest</td>
<td>1 Chr 29:22 (cf. 1 Kgs 2:26-27)</td>
<td>2 Kgs 12:2; 2 Chr 24:4-14</td>
<td>2 Kgs 12:26-27</td>
<td>2 Kgs 22:4-7; 2 Chr 34:9-14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reform of the Cult</td>
<td>2 Chr 8:14-15</td>
<td>2 Chr 23:17-19</td>
<td>2 Chr 31:2</td>
<td>2 Chr 35:1-16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reunification of Israel</td>
<td>1 Kgs 4:1; 2 Chr 1:2-3 (rules over “all Israel”)</td>
<td>2 Chr 15:9</td>
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<td>2 Chr 34:5-7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rest from Enemies</td>
<td>1 Kgs 5:4; 8:56</td>
<td>2 Chr 14:1, 6, 7; 15:15, 19</td>
<td>2 Chr 32:22</td>
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</table>
The basis for the psalmist’s plea is that God’s promise to David was perpetual and unconditional (vv. 28-37): “as long as the heavens endure” (v. 29), as the moon’s “enduring witness in the skies” (v. 37).  

This psalm contains probably the most clear assertion of the eternal, unconditional nature of the Davidic covenant in the Hebrew Bible.

**Psalm 132**

Psalm 132 makes the same appeal to God—the throne for David’s descendants (vv. 11-12) and the defeat of their enemies (v. 18)—requesting him to “remember” his “oath” to David. This psalm emphasizes, however, the conditional dimension of the Davidic covenant: “The LORD swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: ‘One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne. If your sons keep my covenant and my decrees that I shall teach them, their sons also, forevermore, shall sit on your throne’” (vv. 11-12; emphasis mine).

As I have mentioned above, this passage does not necessarily contradict the unconditional nature of the Davidic covenant, but emphasizes the necessity of fidelity for the Davidic king so that his children may sit also on the throne. It is not the Davidic progeny who are in danger of forfeiting the throne; but that of the individual Davidic king (cf. יְסֵרָנִים מִשָּׁרָה יְשִׁירָה לִכְסָא לַפי, “their sons also, forevermore, shall sit on your throne”). His progeny may be excluded from the promises of the Davidic covenant if he

1 Older commentators tended to see the crisis referred to in vv. 39-45 as pointing out to Jerusalem’s fall in 586 B.C.E. More recent commentators consider that it probably refers to an earlier crisis. Pomykala, 15, n. 6.
is unfaithful to God who established the covenant (see above section “Is the Davidic Covenant Unconditional?”).

Other Psalms

Other psalms focus on specific aspects of the Davidic covenant without further reflection on its conditional or unconditional nature. God’s promise to David is prominent in the Psalms: “I will give you rest from all your enemies” (2 Sam 7:11) understood in terms of universal dominion granted to the king.

Psalm 2 emphasizes the filial relationship between the Davidic king and the Lord (v. 7; 2 Sam 7:14) and the promise of his rule over the nations (vv. 8-9; 2 Sam 7:10-11a).\(^1\) This is asserted in the context of the rebellion of the vassals against YHWH and his king (vv. 1-3).\(^2\) The king’s proclamation of his divine adoption is a claim on the Davidic promise that God will defeat his enemies. Psalm 18 stresses the triumph of the king over his enemies as an evidence of God’s steadfast love to David (v. 50). Psalm 72 focuses on the justice and peace that the just rule of the Davidic king should bring about. It also stresses the promise of his dominion over the nations (vv. 8-11, 17).

Psalm 110 is packed with exegetical difficulties that have probably elicited more


\(^2\) Psalm 2:1-3 is similar in form to vassal accusations in the Amarna letters. Scott R. A. Starbuck, *Court Oracles in the Psalms: The So-Called Royal Psalms in Their Ancient Near Eastern Context*, SBLDS, ed. Michael V. Fox and Mark Allan Powell, no. 172 (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 162.
discussions and hypotheses than any other Psalm. It is clear, however, that the psalm stresses the Davidic promise of God’s defeat of the enemies on behalf of the king (vv. 1-2, 5-6). The most intriguing element of this psalm is v. 4 where the king is given priestly status: “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” This passage is unique in the Hebrew Bible. Priesthood was not part of the promises granted to the king in the Davidic covenant. There is, however, as we will see, a tendency in the post-exilic prophets and Second Temple documents that express a hope for the restoration of Israel to closely associate the offices of the king and the high priest.

The Pre-exilic Prophets and the Davidic Covenant

Amos

Amos is probably the first prophet to refer to the Davidic covenant: “On that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen, and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old” (Amos 9:11). The meaning depends on the referent of the phrase “the booth of David.”

1 Ibid., 142. This discussion is probably incited, at least in part, by the frequent use of Ps 110 in the NT.

2 D. J. Dumbrell has noted that by assigning the king a priestly role, the person on the throne now embodies “the values which the Sinai covenant required of the nation as a whole” (152).

3 There are some indications, however, that David may have been considered in some sense a king-priest or to have exercised some priestly functions. Eugene H. Merrill, “Royal Priesthood: An Old Testament Messianic Motif,” BSac 150 (1993): 50-61.

4 Amos 1:1 establishes the reigns of “King Uzziah of Judah and . . . King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel”—that is, early 8th century—as the context for his ministry.
A number of scholars believe that the phrase refers to Jerusalem and, thus, the oracle concerns its restoration after its destruction in 586 B.C.E.\(^1\) The language in this passage is similar to that of the restoration of Jerusalem in other places (e.g., Isa 58:12). In addition, it is argued that the term הַמְשַׁרְשֵׁב “booth” is not used of a kingdom or dynasty, but is used of Jerusalem in Isa 1:8.\(^2\)

Most recent scholars, however, see here a reference to the Davidic dynasty.\(^3\) Vocabulary and expressions in Amos 9:11-12 parallel those of 2 Sam 7. For example, the expressions “I will raise up the fallen booth of David” (יהֵיוֹת; Amos 9:11a, emphasis

\(^1\) Consequently, they consider that Amos 9:11-15 is a postexilic insertion. Pomykala, 61; Gakuru, 161.

\(^2\) Kenneth E. Pomykala argues that the similar phrase “the tent (הַמְשַׁרְשֵׁב) of David” in Isa 16:5 refers not to the dynasty of David but to the place where the king sits; that is, Jerusalem (62). Yet, others consider that the image of a “booth in the field” is a military image referring to the king in campaign, e.g., Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, no. 24A (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 913-5; Thomas J. Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary, ed. Kenneth Barker (Chicago, Ill.: Moody, 1990), 323. Moreover, William M. Schniedewind suggests that the enigmatic expression “You shall take up Sakkuth your king” in 5:26—from the same root for booth (הַמְשַׁרְשֵׁב)—is a word play on the aspirations of the Davidic dynasty. *Promise to David*, 64.

mine) and “I will . . . rebuild [the booth of David]” (מִבֵּית דוֹנִי; Amos 9:11b, emphasis mine) remind us of the expressions “I will raise up your descendant after you” (יִשָּׁמְאֵה יִתְמְאֵה יִתְמְאֵה; emphasis mine) in 2 Sam 7:12b and “I will build you a house” (דָּבָק דָּבָק; emphasis mine) in 2 Sam 7:27.¹ In Amos, David’s dynasty is called a “booth” or “hut” and not a “house” because of its precarious condition.² God promises, however, to “rebuild it as in the days of old,” referring to the empires of David and Solomon. Note that the nations which are the object of God’s judgment have in common that they were once subjects of the Davidic empire (Amos 1:2-2:3; cf. 2 Sam 8).³

If this is the case, then, the passage refers to the restoration of the Davidic kingdom after the breakup of 940 B.C.E.⁴ This restoration implies the reunification of Israel (north) and Judah (south) under the rule of a Davidic king and the restoration of a place (the Davidic empire) in which the people of Israel will dwell in security and prosper, in this way fulfilling God’s plan for Israel. This interpretation will be later

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¹ Gakuru, 160.

² Billy K. Smith and Frank S. Page, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, NAC, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and Kenneth A. Mathews, no. 19B ([Nashville, Tenn.]: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 165; Schniedewind, Promise to David, 63-65. The term ruins ([ִּיִדְרוֹנָה]) in the phrase “I will . . . raise up its ruins [ִּיִדְרוֹנָה]” may refer to the ruins of the city or to “removal from authority” (Isa 22:19). If the latter, “the Lord promised to restore those who had repudiated the authority of the Davidic king.” Smith and Page, 166.

³ Dumbrell, 154.

⁴ Finley, 323-4; Paul, 290; Smith and Page, 165; Gary V. Smith, Hosea, Amos, Micah, NIV Application Commentary, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, Mich.:
attested among the Qumran documents: 4Q174 I, 1-13 (4QFlor) interprets Amos 9:11, in the context of 2 Sam 7:11-14, as predicting the coming of a deliverer. As we will see, the reunification of “all Israel” will be a main concern of the prophets and kings of this time.

**Hosea**

Hosea 3:4-5 predicts Israel’s return to God and David. This message has an eschatological character:¹

> For the Israelites shall remain many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim. Afterward the Israelites shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; they shall come in awe to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days. (Hos 3:4-5; emphasis mine)

The context makes clear that this return includes a reunification of Judah with the kingdom of the North (cf. 1:11). This will happen, however, in the “latter days” (v. 5); that is, after the “many days” (v. 4) the Israelites are without king or prince and without priest.² The perspective of this passage, then, reaches far into the future and has an “unmistakable . . . note of finality, not in a cessation of time, but in the achievement of a state of affairs after which no new decisive events will occur.”³

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1 Hosea claims to have delivered his message “in the days of Kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah, and in the days of King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel” (1:1); that is, in the second half of the 8th century B.C.E.

2 The cessation of sacrifices (Hos 3:4) implies that priesthood would cease together with the monarchy. Hosea does not make clear, however, if priesthood is restored with the Davidic dynasty as well.

This promise implies the currency of the Davidic covenant despite Israel’s unfaithfulness and is eschatological in character. It contains the elements that are part of the age of restoration: “return and blessing after deprivation; restoration of Davidic rule; reunification of North and South, etc.” (cf. Lev 26; Deut 4, 30; regarding Davidic rule, Jer 30:9; Ezek 34:23-24; 37:24-25).  

Micah

Micah 5:1-5 is a passage riddled with difficulties. Yet, it seems clear that vv. 2-5a predict the rise of a new David, alluding to the promises of the Davidic covenant.

is considered by many scholars a later interpolation; e.g., Gale A. Yee, “The Book of Hosea,” The New Interpreter’s Bible, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 7 (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1994), 7:232. For a brief argument for its originality, see Andersen and Freedman, Hosea, 307; Stuart, 67-68.

1 Stuart, 68.

2 Micah claims to have delivered his message “in the days of Kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah” (1:1); that is, in the second half of the 8th century B.C.E.

Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman summarize appropriately the difficulties of this passage: For the interpretation of “the whole unit, much depends on establishing the connotation of some familiar words. Does šāʾı̂r refer to the insignificance of Bethlehem or to the fact that David was youngest in the family (qāṭôn in 1 Samuel 16; cf. Ps 151)? Does yēšēʾ (verse 2bA) refer to birth or to a military expedition? And what is the meaning of the cognate môsāʾı̂th in the next colon? What is the meaning of ‘he will give them’ in v 2a? Who is the speaker, referred to by lî, ‘to (or for) me,’ in v 1aB? Yahweh? And, in general, are the verb forms future or past tense? The answers to all these questions are interdependent, but where to begin?” Micah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, AB, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, no. 24E (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 470-71.

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace. (Mic 5:2-5a; emphasis mine)

This passage promises a new ruler who will come from Bethlehem of Ephrathah, the city of Boaz, Jesse, and David of the tribe of Judah (Ruth 4:11; 1 Sam 16:1; 17:2). This probably refers to the fact that he comes from the Davidic line in fulfillment of God’s promise to David: “Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me” (2 Sam 7:16).¹

Other elements of the Davidic covenant are present in the context. The new David will “stand and feed his flock . . . in the majesty of the name of the Lord” (v. 4).²

¹ Andersen and Freedman, Micah, 467. I do not agree with Kenneth E. Pomykala’s claim: “What is clear, however, is that this new ruler will not emanate from the davidic line currently in power in Jerusalem. Consequently, some kind of genealogical break with the currently ruling royal line is envisioned, thus indicating a tradition here that is in opposition to the dynastic promise found in 2 Sam 7:11-16 and Psalm 89.” His argument is that this new ruler is promised in contrast to the present king now under siege (Mic 5:1). Thus, the promised ruler’s origin from Bethlehem Ephrathah is contrasted with the current Davidic line in Jerusalem. His argument is not convincing, however. Even if this passage intends a contrast between the current Davidic ruler from Jerusalem and a new ruler from Bethlehem, this does not necessarily mean the rejection of David’s progeny; in fact, the mention of Bethlehem suggests the new ruler’s identification with David’s ancestry. Moreover, the prominence of Davidic traditions in Israel’s monarchical thinking would require a clearer language for the rejection of the Davidic line than what we have in Mic 5:1-5. On the other hand, as we have seen above, the election of a new Davidic ruler from a different Davidic line than the one on the throne (which is what Pomykala seems to suggest) does not oppose the dynastic promises of 2 Sam 7 or Ps 89.

² This phrase is intriguing because it is an intensification of the formula “in the
expression implies a magnification of David’s deliverance. David delivered the people by defeating Goliath “in the name of the Lord” (1 Sam 17:45); but the new David “in the majesty of the name of the Lord” (emphasis mine).\(^1\) As a result “he shall be great to the ends of the earth” (Mic 5:4; cf. Isa 24:14). (Note that in the Psalms the Davidic king is often promised a dominion to the “ends of the earth” [e.g., Pss 2:8; 72:8].) This implies the fulfillment of God’s promise to David: “I will make you a great name” and “cut off all your enemies from before you” (2 Sam 7:9). Finally, as a result of the defeat of his enemies (vv. 5b-6), the new David will be “the one of peace” (Mic 5:5a).\(^2\) This is an allusion of God’s promise to David, “I will give you rest from all your enemies” (2 Sam 7:11) which results in peace for the nation.

**Isaiah**

The book of Isaiah includes several references to the Davidic covenant that focus on the idea of an era of justice and righteousness brought about by a new righteous king.\(^3\)

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\(^1\) Barker and Bailey, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 100.

\(^2\) Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman consider that this is “a play on the name ‘Solomon.’” They conclude that the “new king will combine the qualities and achievements of David and Solomon.” *Micah*, 476.

\(^3\) Isa 11:1-10; 16:5; 32:1-8; 55:3. Isaiah 33:17 probably refers to God as king, not the Davidic king. The Davidic covenant is implied in other passages (e.g., Isa 37:35; 38:5); however, these will not be analyzed. (Though not explicitly Davidic, the idea of a righteous ruler is expressed also in Isa 32:1-8.) Isaiah claims to have delivered his messages “in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah” (1:1); that is, in the second half of the 8th century B.C.E.
Isaiah 9:6-7

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. (Isa 9:6-7; emphasis mine)

There is a debate whether this passage refers to a future king or is a poem that celebrates the birth or an accession to the throne of a contemporary ruler.\(^1\) Whatever the case may be, the poem evidences the currency of Davidic traditions in the theological thinking of Isaiah’s time.

It is clear that God’s promise to David that he would establish his throne forever (2 Sam 7:13) is either requested or asserted in this passage. The names/titles given to this child/king—“Marvelous Counselor,” “God Warrior,” “Eternal Father,” and “Prince of

\(^1\) The passage is mostly considered a poem celebrating an actual historical event; e.g., Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, no. 19 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 247-51; John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, WBC, ed. John D. W. Watts, no. 24 (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1985), 135-7. Others consider that the titles given to this child-king are too divine to be applied to an earthly ruler; therefore, the child “is clearly an eschatological figure, the Messiah,” as referred to in the Targum. John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, NICOT, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), 245. Also Dumbrell, 158. The Targum paraphrases this passage: ‘Messiah in whose days peace will be great for us.’” Quoted in Blenkinsopp, 250. Yet, the passage seems to refer to a present event. Note that both the Hebrew (MT) and Greek forms (LXX) of Isa 9:6 refer to the past, not to the future. The position of Christopher R. Seitz seems more convincing to me. This “child . . . born for us” is Emmanuel who was promised in Isa 7:14. In this sense the poem is both historical and prophetic in nature. The birth of Emmanuel referred to in 9:6 is the fulfillment sign God announced to Ahaz in 7:10-14. Yet, this historical event has eschatological overtones. Christopher R. Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, IBC, ed. James L. Mays (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 1993), 84-87.

\(^2\) This is a better translation of the Hebrew יסוד than NRSV’s rendition “Mighty God”; see Blenkinsopp, 250.
Peace”—and the outcome of his government as “justice and . . . righteousness from this
time onwards and for evermore” imply the fulfillment of other elements of the Davidic
covenant: “I will make for you a great name” (1 Sam 9:7) and “I will appoint a place for
my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be
disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more” (v. 10; emphasis mine).

Both the names and the everlasting era of justice and righteousness suggest that
the fulfillment in view has eschatological overtones.¹

Isaiah 11:1-10

This passage focuses—again—on the idea of an era of Justice and righteousness
brought about by a promised righteous Davidic king:²

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of
his roots. The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and
understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of
the LORD. His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what
his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the
poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with
the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his
loins.

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf
and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and

¹ John N. Oswalt and Joseph Blenkinsopp argue that these names/titles do not
reflect the actual practice of giving throne names to the Israelite king following the
custom of the Egyptian ritual. Oswalt, 245-7; Blenkinsopp, 248-9. They disagree,
however, in what this reflects. Blenkinsopp argues that the “language imitates the
oratorical and declamatory style of the court and corresponds to aspiration rather than
political and military reality.” Ibid., 249. He does not give, however, further examples of
this practice.

the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious. (Isa 11:1-10)

This new era of righteousness is possible because of God’s empowerment of the promised ruler with his spirit (vv. 2-3). The gift of the Spirit involves three pairs of abilities: (1) “wisdom and understanding”—probably, practical wisdom and fairness in judicial and political matters, (2) “counsel and might”—authority and judgment in the diplomatic and military realms, and (3) “knowledge and fear of the Lord”—the ideal king’s piety. Thus, the Davidic king will be able to rule righteously by judging the poor and destroying the wicked, as described in vv. 3-5.

The context suggests, however, that the terms “poor” and the “wicked” refer beyond the internal life of Israel to its international circumstances. Verses 10-16 make clear that God intends to bring back the remnant of Israel from the Assyrian captivity (esp. v. 16), which implies the vindication of Israel in the international scene. The passage implies, as well, the restoration of the Davidic empire. Verse 13 refers to the reunification of Ephraim and Judah; arguably, under the rule of the son of David (v. 10).

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1 See Tucker, 6:141; Watts, 171-2. The promised king’s righteousness probably stands in contrast to the spiritual bankruptcy of contemporary rulers. Oswalt, 279-80.

2 Note that the idea of the end of violence had already been introduced in Isa 9:7.

Once restored, Israel will re-conquer the territory that once comprised the Davidic empire: Philistia, Edom, Moab, and Ammon (v. 14; cf. 2 Sam 8).

Finally, it is important not to miss the subtle parallel between vv. 3-5 and 6-9. In the latter, peace is understood as the absence of depredation in the relationships between the strong and the weak in the zoological realm: the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the kid, the calf and the lion, etc., will live in harmony (vv. 6-9). Scholars disagree regarding the meaning of these verses. Some see here a figurative expression of a world without harm and danger.¹ Christopher R. Seitz has suggested that these animals stand for nations and that this passage describes international peace.² Finally, others see here the promise of the fundamental transformation of the natural order. Probably the latter is meant because in the prophetic writings the “political order and the order of creation as a whole can be and sometimes are connected and interdependent.”³ This same idea appears in Hos 2:18; Ezek 34:23-31; and 37:26 where God makes a “covenant of peace” so that the “wild animals from the land” will not attack Israel anymore.⁴

Isaiah introduces in this passage a very important element: The righteous rule of the king results in the spread of the knowledge of the Lord so that the piety of the king will be replicated in the inhabitants of the land. Verse 9 affirms: “For the earth will be

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¹ E.g., Oswalt, 283-4.

² Seitz, 106-7.

³ Blenkinsopp, 263-5. Also, Watts, 175.

⁴ Though not in Davidic terms, the same expectation of righteousness is expressed in connection with the hope of fertility in the land in Ps 72 (esp. v. 16).
full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.” Thus, Isaiah includes in the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant the promise of the infusion of God’s spirit on all creation (cf. vv. 2, 9). In Jeremiah and Ezekiel, this promise constitutes the essence of the “new covenant” (Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:25-28). As I will show below, both Jeremiah and Ezekiel relate the new covenant with the eschatological fulfillment of the Davidic covenant.

Isaiah 55:3

This is a difficult and intriguing passage that will require both a longer treatment and my conclusions to remain tentative. Isaiah 55:3 is the only reference to David in chaps. 40-66.1


I have decided, however, to analyze this text in the context of the Davidic passages of Isaiah in the first section of the book because as far as we know this is the way in which early Jewish interpreters would have read it. I argued above (54, n. 2) that early Jewish interpreters viewed these writings as a “flat text”; that is, they viewed these writings as a unity and were either ignorant or oblivious of a redaction history. For example, Isaiah is cited by name about 20 times in the New Testament. These citations include references to both halves of Isaiah. John 12:38-41 is especially instructive in this regard. It cites Isa 6:10 and 53:1 in consecutive verses, identifying both as belonging to Isaiah. Acts 8:28 informs us also that the Ethiopian was reading in the book of Isaiah what we have now in 53:7-8. Sirach 48:24-25 (2nd century B.C.E.) assigns the second half of the book to Isaiah the prophet in the time of Hezekiah (8th B.C.E.). Finally, Qumran
Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. (Isa 55:3; emphasis mine)

This passage contains an invitation to the people of Israel to enter into a new covenant with God. He offers them the promises made to David. Like the Davidic, this covenant is both perpetual (2 Sam 23:5) and unconditional. The people are invited to buy something that is freely given, that is to say, it involves a transaction for something of value, but the price is free! (vv. 1-2). Thus, unlike the Mosaic covenant, this offer is not contingent on their moral performance. All this leads us to an important question: What is the relationship between the Davidic covenant and this new covenant Isa 55:3 proposes? Should they be linked, or is Isaiah’s new covenant intended to replace the Davidic promises?

Otto Eissfeldt has argued that Isa 55:3-4 reinterprets the Davidic covenant as a response to the calamity of 586 B.C.E. After suggesting a close relationship between Isa 55:3-4 and Ps 89, he argued that the former responded to the heartbreaking complaint of the latter (“You have renounced the covenant with your servant; you have defiled his


1 Note that in this passage the imperatives are plural as well as both pronouns “you.”

2 God’s offer to the people of his “steadfast [דָּוִד], sure love [יִדוּשׁ] for David” (Isa 55:3) recalls 2 Sam 7:15-16 where God offers David: “I will not take my steadfast love [יִדוּשׁ] from him” and “your kingdom shall be made sure [יִדוּשׁ] forever.” Schniedewind, Promise to David, 115.

3 Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 40-55, 369.
crown in the dust” [Ps 89:39]) by transferring the promises of the Davidic covenant from David’s descendants to the nation of Israel. In other words, “Second Isaiah announced that God’s plan had not been defeated by the ruin of the royal house of David but rather that the everlasting covenant was now to be expanded beyond the privileged elite to embrace the entire community of those obedient to God’s word.” As a result, “the promise is no longer tied to David and assigned to the past, but is renewed as a present, active reality [in the community of faith].” In a word, it is understood that “Second Isaiah [chaps. 40-55] has transformed the Davidic convenantal [sic] tradition.” This view is commonly referred to as the democratization of the Davidic covenant and is widely


2 Paul D. Hanson, Isaiah 40-66, IBC, ed. James L. Mays (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 1995), 179. He does not mean that Isa 55:3 should be understood in terms of an inclusion; namely, that the covenant had been “expanded . . . to embrace the entire community” in addition to David’s house. On the contrary, he means a transference of the Davidic promises from the Davidic house to the nation: “The vocation of being ‘a witness to the people’ assigned to David would now pass to the entire community of those faithful to God” (179, emphasis mine).


accepted among commentators of Isaiah.¹

The view that Isa 55:3-4 has reinterpreted the Davidic covenant is problematic, however.² First, we find no criticism of the royal house in this passage.³ Second, the reference to the Davidic covenant in God’s promise to the people in Isa 55:3 makes sense neither as a transference nor as an analogy. By definition, a covenant—much less an eternal one—is not transferable. The transference of the Davidic promises from David’s children to the entire community implies that the Davidic covenant has been invalidated. On the other hand, the reference to the Davidic covenant as an analogy would show itself inconsequent. God’s promise to the people “I will make with you an everlasting covenant, [just like] my steadfast, sure love for David” is difficult to understand if the author, the audience, or both were convinced that God’s covenant with David was, after all, neither “everlasting” nor “steadfast.”⁴

Finally, I believe that the view that Isa 55:3 transfers God’s “steadfast, sure love for David” to the nation misses the point that that promise was intended for the people

¹ See references in Pomykala, 39, n. 118.

² In fact, Eissfeldt’s suggestion is probably irrelevant for this study because it assumes an exilic date for Isaiah which—as I mentioned above—early Jewish readers didn’t contemplate as far as we know.


⁴ Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 40-55, 370. Moreover, a reinterpretation of the Davidic covenant was unnecessary. Other writings did not reinterpret the Davidic covenant in their reaction to the calamity of 586 B.C.E., but held fast to it as a source of hope; e.g., Jer 23:5-8; 33:14-26; 30:8-9; Ezek 34:23-24; 37:24-28; Amos 9:11-12; Hag 2:20-23; Zech 3:8; 6:12; Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 40-55, 370.
from the very beginning! God made clear in 2 Sam 7 that he intended to benefit the
nation through his promise to David:

Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep
to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and
have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name,
like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people
Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed
no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I
appointed judges over my people Israel. (vv. 8b-11a; emphasis mine)

Thus, if the original intention of the Davidic covenant was to benefit the people through
the promises made to David and Isa 55:3 offers the nation God’s “steadfast, sure love for
David,” is it not more logical to see here a reference to the fulfillment of the Davidic
covenant instead of its abrogation?

I agree, then, with those who see in this passage not the modification or
abrogation of the Davidic covenant, but its confirmation in behalf of the nation. Isaiah
55:3 seems to provide the answer to the theological dilemma that would result from the
nation’s violation of the Mosaic covenant and their banishment from the land.¹ John N.
Oswalt expresses this with clarity:

How was the nation to continue in covenant with God [after they had broken the
Mosaic covenant and gone into exile]? Through the life and work of the Davidic
Messiah. God had made irrevocable promises to David. As he kept those promises,
Israel could participate in the blessings. As David experienced God’s certain mercies
(utterly dependable acts of covenant love—hesed), so Israel could participate in them
as well.²

I believe this reading makes better sense of the context of the passage; especially, the

¹ Regarding Isa 55:3-5 as a response to this theological dilemma, see also
Schniedewind, Promise to David, 115-8.

² Oswalt, Isaiah 40-66, 438.
difficult issue of the change in number and tense in Isa 55:3-5.

God’s generous promise to the nation in vv. 1-3 will be accomplished through an individual—note the singular number in vv. 4-5.\(^1\) Verse 4 refers to the historical David—note the past tense in this passage—who was a “leader and commander of peoples.”\(^2\) Verse 5 refers to a future individual for whom David serves as a type. Just as David was “a leader and commander for the peoples” this future individual will “call nations . . . and nations . . . shall run” to him (v. 6). Who is he? Probably this individual is the servant of the Lord.\(^3\) He accomplishes what was announced of the promised Davidic king in chaps. 1-39. The basic function of the promised Davidic king was to bring justice to earth (Isa 9:7; 11:4-5, 10; 16:5) which is what the servant of the Lord accomplishes in Isa 40-55 (cf. 42:1-4; 49:1-13). The closest parallel to the language of vv. 4-5 is Isa 11:10: “On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.”\(^4\)

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1 Recent commentators consider that v. 5 refers to Israel, the nation. It is clear that vv. 1-3 refer to Israel because of the plural number in vv. 1-3. Verses 4 and 5, however, change to a singular number. I believe this change in the number indicates a change in the referent. Ibid., 439.

2 Note the past tense in v. 4. It is interesting that in this way David foreshadows the mission of the servant of the Lord who is to be a witness to the nations of the glory and power of God (Isa 43:10, 12; 44:8). See ibid., 439-40. Other disagree. For example, John D. Watts considers that vv. 4-5 refer to a person, specifically Darius (246).


4 Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 40-55, 370. Joseph Blenkinsopp, however, remains unsure about whether Isa 40-55 expect the restoration of the Davidic dynasty. Yet, he does not embrace O. Eissfeldt’s view that the Davidic covenant has been democratized either.
Thus, Isa 55:3 announces that, as impossible as that may seem, God still intends to fulfill his promise to David:

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. (Isa 55:10-11)

In summary, in Isa 55:3 God offers to renew his covenantal relationship with the nation after they broke the Mosaic covenant and were banished from the land. This renewal was in fact the fulfillment of God’s “steadfast, sure love for David.” God promises to raise an unidentified individual, similar to David, to be a “witness . . . , a leader and commander” to glorify the nation. Thus, this passage is a theological precursor to the promise of a new covenant in Jer 31:31-34 and Ezek 36:25-28.¹

¹ William M. Schniedewind interprets this passage (Isa 55:10-11) in the context of v. 3 as promising the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant of 2 Sam 7. (Though he holds the view that Isa 55:3 democratizes the Davidic covenant, something which I believe is not warranted in the text. Schniedewind, Promise to David, 115-6.)


² Note that the promise of forgiveness is also prominent in this passage (vv. 6-7) as in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Also, the promise of the spiritual reformation of the nation—essential to the promises of a new covenant in Jeremiah and Ezekiel as well—is made in the context of this passage: “All your children shall be taught by the Lord” (Isa 54:13). Isaiah stands close, also, to the thinking of Dan 9:25-27 where the covenant is confirmed.
Jeremiah’s references to the future of the Davidic dynasty present a challenge to the interpreter. Some passages seem to betray an anti-monarchical attitude and assume the end of the Davidic dynasty (e.g., chaps. 22, 40-41); yet others express the hope of its restoration (e.g., 23:5-8; 30:8-9). In view of these apparently contradictory statements, Kenneth E. Pomykala has concluded that, “on the whole . . . the book of Jeremiah points to a variety of viewpoints concerning the fate of the Davidic royal house prior to and after the fall of the [sic] Jerusalem in 586 BCE.”¹

I believe, however, that these statements are not as contradictory as they first seem, but should be understood as focusing on the conditional and unconditional dimensions of the Davidic covenant.

Jeremiah 22: Judgment on the Davidic kings

Jeremiah 22:1-9 contains an exhortation to the “king of Judah, sitting on the throne of David” (and his officials) to “administer justice and righteousness.”²

The Davidic covenant had the purpose of giving “rest” to the people and that “evildoers . . . afflict them no more” (2 Sam 7:10-11). The king, however, had not only failed to administer justice to the oppressed but had himself done “violence to the alien, for the many through the Messiah prince!  

¹ Pomykala, 34.  
² Note that the “you” in vv. 4-5 is plural referring to the officials in addition to the king.
the orphan, and the widow, . . . [and had] shed innocent blood” (Jer 22:3). God, therefore, exhorts the king to correct his ways. If the king repents, God promises: “Through the gates of this house shall enter kings who sit on the throne of David” (v. 4; cf. 17:25). (The house here refers more probably to the palace.) If he failed to reform his government, God’s ultimatum was clear: “I swear by myself, says the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation” (22:5).

This passage focuses clearly on the conditional dimension of the Davidic covenant. The participation of the king in the promises of the Davidic covenant was contingent on his faithfulness to God and his administration of justice to the people. Yet, God’s promise to David, “Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me,” were not conditioned on the faithfulness of the individual king (see 2 Sam 7:14-16). It is not David’s house (the dynasty) that God will make desolate, but the “house” of the king addressed (palace and dynasty).1 God will punish the king and his house. None of his children will sit anymore on the throne of David (Jer 22:4); yet, God will fulfill his promises through a different line. (This becomes clear in 23:1-8, which is

the end of the section entitled “To the house of the king of Judah.” See below.)

Similarly, Jer 22:24-30 registers God’s rejection of Coniah (=Jehoiachin), son of Jehoiakim, and his descendants to be rulers of Judah: “Thus says the LORD: Record this man as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days; for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David, and ruling again in Judah” (v. 30; cf. 36:30). This does not mean, however, the invalidation of the Davidic covenant but only the rejection of Coniah and his house (posterity) from the Davidic royal line. In fact, Jeremiah proceeds in 23:5-6 to predict the raising of a new Davidic king:

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: “The LORD is our righteousness.”

Evidently, the promised king will come from a different genealogical line, but still an offspring of David. Coniah’s (Jehoiachin) participation in the Davidic covenant

1 This section (21:11-23:8) contains oracles addressed to several kings (Johoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Jehoiachin (Coniah)). Patrick D. Miller, “The Book of Jeremiah,” The New Interpreter's Bible, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 6 (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2001), 6:739. Towards the end of the section, 23:1-4, Jeremiah refers “to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep.” This provides a collective summary of the indictments to the evil kings previously mentioned. Then the section closes with the promise that God “will raise up shepherds over them [Israel] who will shepherd them”; especially a “righteous Branch” for David who “shall execute justice and righteousness in the land” (vv. 5-8).

2 The name is probably a wordplay on Zedekiah (“Yahweh is righteousness”), the name of the last king of Judah. This name was given him by Nebuchadnezzar at the time of his appointment (2 Kgs 24:17). “The point would be, in effect, God is our righteous king, not Zedekiah.” Fretheim, 327; Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, 329; Holladay, 629. Others see here a positive reference to him, though. Carroll, Jeremiah, 446-7.

3 Miller, 6:744-5; Pomykala, 31.
promises is conditional. The Davidic covenant promises themselves, however, are not conditional.

Jeremiah 23: Hope for a new Davidic king

Other passages in Jeremiah confirm a hope for the restoration of the Davidic monarchy.

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: “The LORD is our righteousness” (Jer 23:5-6).

On that day, says the LORD of hosts, I will break the yoke from off his neck, and I will burst his bonds, and strangers shall no more make a servant of him. But they shall serve the LORD their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them (Jer 30:8-9).

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: “The LORD is our righteousness.” For thus says the LORD: David shall never lack a man to sit on the

Jeremiah 40-41 is another passage that seems to assume the end of the Davidic dynasty. It narrates the assassination of Gedaliah son of Ahikam—governor of the land appointed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. (2 Kgs 25:22; Jer 40:5)—by Ishmael son of Nethaniah. Of the latter it is said explicitly that he was “of the royal family” (41:1; cf. 2 Kgs 25:25) and his actions are presented “in the worst possible terms.” Pomykala, 33. The motivation of the murder seems clearly an attempt to reinstate Davidic leadership on the land; however, it ends in utter failure. (Presumably, Ishmael had sought to recover the royal princesses—who were entrusted to Gedaliah by Nebuzaradan [41:10]—as an assertion of his royal claim [cf. 2 Sam 16:21]. Robert Althann, “Gedaliah [Person],” Anchor Bible Dictionary, ed. David Noel Freedman, vol. 2 [New York: Doubleday, 1992], 2:924.) Ishmael is persecuted by Johanan son of Kareah and the people are “glad” to see the latter and abandon Ishmael immediately. Ishmael, though, is able to escape with eight men and takes refuge with the Ammonites. Nothing else is heard of him.

This account assumes God’s judgment and abandonment of the Davidic kings in 586 B.C. announced in chaps. 21-23; yet, it is not explicit regarding the revoking of the Davidic covenant promise.
throne of the house of Israel, and the levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to make grain offerings, and to make sacrifices for all time. (Jer 33:14-18)

The latter passage is most interesting. It promises the restoration of the Davidic dynasty on the basis of the perpetual nature of God’s promises to David.\(^1\) What makes this passage fascinating is the fact that the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant is intimately related to the fulfillments of two other covenants: the perpetual covenant of priesthood with the Levites (cf. vv. 19:22) and the “new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (Jer 31:31-34; cf. 32:38-41).\(^2\)

Jeremiah 33:14-26

Jeremiah 33:14-26 does not appear in the LXX version of Jeremiah.\(^3\) The

\(^1\) Jeremiah 33:14-26 belongs to Jeremiah’s “Book of Restoration” (chaps. 30-33); also known as “(Little) Book of Comfort” or “Book of Consolation.” It is possible that this book was once contained in a separate scroll (30:2). The first section of the book consists of chaps. 30-31 which was later expanded in a second section (chaps. 32-33). In its present form, it is a “book within a book.” For an introduction to its form and the current state of research, see J. Andrew Dearman, Jeremiah and Lamentations, NIV Application Commentary, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), 267-71; Jack R. Lundbom, Jeremiah 21-36: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, AB, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, no. 21B (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 368-78.

\(^2\) Note the parallels between 33:19-22 and 31:35-37.


Many scholars have concluded, mainly because of their omission in the LXX, that vv. 14-26 are a later insertion, probably introduced in the text at the beginning of the 3rd
complex textual transmission history of Jeremiah makes it difficult to reach hard conclusions regarding the originality, integrity, and relationship of Jer 33:14-26 to its context (30:1-33:26).\textsuperscript{1} The discovery of 4QJer\textsuperscript{c} makes clear, however, that Jer 33:14-26, century B.C.E. Lust, 31-48; Geoffrey H. Parke-Taylor, The Formation of the Book of Jeremiah: Doublets and Recurring Phrases, SBLMS, ed. Terence Fretheim, no. 51 (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 55-79. Cf. William McKane, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah: Commentary on Jeremiah XXVI-LII, vol. 2, ICC, ed. J. A. Emerton, C. E. B. Cranfield, and G. N. Stanton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 2:clxii-clxiv. They are also lacking in 4QJer\textsuperscript{b} and 4QJer\textsuperscript{d}. Schniedewind, Promise to David, 135. Additional arguments include (1) oddities in the Hebrew style, (2) repetition of material found earlier in the book (i.e., 23:5-6), and (3) insertion of ideas considered alien to Jeremiah (i.e., a covenant with the Davidic royal line and especially with the Levitical priesthood). Lust, 31-48. Also, Lundbom, 537-8; Parke-Taylor, 55-62.

Jack R. Lundbom disagrees, however. After evaluating the evidence, he concludes that the arguments are “less than conclusive.” According to him, arguments brought by William L. Holladay regarding the careless Hebrew style of this passage “will not stand scrutiny, . . . [Holladay’s examples] are unconvincing.” Doublets are found throughout the book. They “are no more indicative of a late date here than elsewhere.” Hopes regarding the restoration of the monarchy are present elsewhere (esp. 23:5-6, “which is widely taken to be Jeremianic”). The restoration of the priesthood is assumed in 31:14; “which can be dated originally to the reform years of Josiah.” Lundbom, 537-8. He points out that vv. 16-20 are extant in 4QJer\textsuperscript{c} and that Theodotion included this passage in his Version. He suggests that the “best explanation for the LXX omission of vv 14-26 . . . is that the verses were lost by (vertical) haplography.” Lundbom, 538. Sadly, this possibility is not explored either by Johan Lust (31-48) or Geoffrey H. Parke-Taylor (55-60).

\textsuperscript{1} The history of the transmission of the text of Jeremiah has been the object of scholarly research more than that of any other biblical book. The LXX differs from the MT in two major ways: (1) the LXX is substantially shorter—around one seventh of the MT is not represented in the LXX—and (2) has a different arrangement of the material. At least four theories have been advanced to explain the differences: (1) the “abbreviation” theory, (2) the “editorial” theory (Jeremiah himself produced two different edition of his writings), (3) the “expansion” theory, and (4) the “mediating” theory (it is not correct to generalize one text as preceding the other; instead, each passage must be evaluated on its own merits). Soderlund, 11-3; Lust, 34-5.

The Qumran discoveries, which produced some fragments from Jeremiah (esp. 4QJer\textsuperscript{b}), reopened the question. The research of J. Gerald Janzen, who supported the “expansion” theory, has dominated the field in recent years. Studies in the Text of Jeremiah, HSM, ed. Frank Moore Cross and others, no. 6 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973). See also, Lust, 31-48. According to this view, the LXX version
as it appears in the MT, follows closely a textual tradition attested in Second Temple Judaism.¹ I will refer here to the heart of this passage:

The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: Thus says the LORD: If any of you could break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night would not come at their appointed time, only then could my covenant with my servant David be broken, so that he would not have a son to reign on his throne, and my covenant with my ministers the Levites. Just as the host of heaven cannot be numbered and the sands of the sea cannot be measured, so I will increase the offspring of my servant David, and the Levites who minister to me. (Jer 33:19-22; emphasis mine)

God announces that he will restore Davidic rulership over Israel as well as the ministry of the Levitical priesthood. This is the first place in the Hebrew Bible where the restoration of Davidic kingship is related to the restoration of the priesthood. The promise is based on the eternal nature of both covenants.

Now, what is this covenant with “my ministers the Levites”? (cf. Neh 13:29; Mal 2:4, 8).² This is a covenant similar in nature to the Davidic. It refers to the grant of...

¹ 4QJer c has been dated to the latter part of the 1st century B.C.E., James C. VanderKam and Peter W. Flint, The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance for Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus, and Christianity (San Francisco, Calif.: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), 134. For the editio princeps of 4QJer c, see Emanuel Tov, “4QJer c (4Q72),” in Tradition of the Text: Studies Offered to Dominique Barthélemy in Celebration of His 70th Birthday, ed. Gerard J. Norton and Stephen Pisano, OBO, ed. Othmar Keel, no. 109 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 249-76.

priesthood as a “perpetual ordinance” to Aaron and his sons (cf. Sir 45:23-26).\(^1\) As a result of their faithfulness in the midst of Israel’s idolatry with the golden calf, God granted the priesthood to the Levites (Exod 32:26-29; Deut 10:8; 33:8-11), specifically to Aaron and his descendants (Exod 28-29). In Exod 29:9, 28-29 it is stated that “the priesthood shall be theirs [Aaron’s and his sons’] by a perpetual ordinance.”\(^2\) Though a covenant is not explicitly mentioned, it seems to be implied (cf. Neh 13:29; Mal 2:1-9).\(^3\) Soon after Aaron’s death and on occasion of the apostasy with the Baal of Peor, God granted the priesthood to Phinehas (Aaron’s grandson) as a “covenant of peace[,] . . . a covenant of perpetual priesthood” because of his zeal for the Lord (Num 25:11-13; emphasis mine).

This covenant with Phinehas seems to be a further delimitation of God’s “perpetual ordinance” of priesthood to the Levites indicating that “high priesthood will flow through his [i.e., Phinehas’] line of descendants.”\(^4\) Later on, however, the enthronement of Solomon would involve a change in the line of the high priesthood. Solomon replaced Abiathar with Zadok (1 Kgs 2:26-27, 35) in fulfillment of the curse

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1 The phrase יִנְרְבָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל, “the Levitical priests,” refers to the priesthood of Aaron and his descendants. The expression appears in Deut 17:9, 18:18:1; 24:8; 27:9; Josh 3:3; 8:33, as well as Ezek 43:19; 44:15. Fretheim, 478-9; Lundbom, 541.

2 This was in fact a reversal of the curse Jacob placed upon them to divide and scatter them among Israel (Gen 49:5-7; cf. Josh 19:9).

3 Taylor and Clendenen, 298-300. Note that Mal 2:1-9 (esp. v. 5) identifies the covenant of Levi with the “covenant of peace” of Phinehas; see Levine, 299.

upon Eli’s house (1 Sam 2:29-35). He was the “faithful priest” who would walk before the Lord’s anointed “for ever” (v. 35).¹ Accordingly, Ezekiel prophesied that Zadokite priests, who are characterized by their faithfulness (44:15; 48:11), will minister in the future temple (Ezek 40:46; 43:19). On the other hand, non-Zadokite priests will be demoted (44:5-16).

Malachi 2:1-9 is the last reference to God’s covenant of priesthood with Levi in the OT,² which Malachi identifies with God’s covenant with Phinehas by referring to it as a “covenant of life and well-being [peace]” (cf. Num 25:12).³ As I will show later, this covenant—and its relationship to the Davidic covenant—will continue to have importance in Second Temple Judaism (e.g., Sir 45:23-25).

¹ Dearman, 304, n. 31. This did not imply the failure of God’s covenant with Phinehas. Zadok was a descendant of Phinehas, too; see Ezra 7:1-7; cf. 1 Chr 24:1-5.
² Although not in the Hebrew Bible which ends with 2 Chronicles.
³ Contra David L. Petersen, Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi, OTL, ed. James L. Mays, Carol A. Newsom, and David L. Petersen (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 189-90. See, Levine, 299. He notes several allusions to God’s covenant with Phinehas in Mal 2. The most evident is the reference to the covenant with Levi as a covenant of peace (v. 5), a clear reference to Num 25:12.

Malachi’s reference to Phinehas’ covenant, however, comes as a warning to the priests that if they continue to fail in obeying God and honoring him, he will revoke his covenant with them. God declares: “If you will not listen, if you will not lay it to heart to give glory to my name . . . I will rebuke your offspring, and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and I will put you out of my presence” (vv. 2-3). This warning amounts to the revocation of the covenant with them and their descendants by making them unfit to carry out the priestly service and carrying them out as the dung of their sacrifices is carried out. See Andrew E. Hill, Malachi, AB, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, no. 25D (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 200-203; Petersen, 189; David W. Baker, Joel, Obadiah, Malachi, NIV Application Commentary, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006), 240-43. The purpose of the warning, however, was to make the covenant with Levi to stand (Mal 2:4). The decision about the future of the covenant, then, depends on the Levites.
There are also allusions to the Noahic and Abrahamic covenants in this passage. God asserts that the Davidic and Levitical covenants are as firm and enduring as God’s covenant with the day and night, and as sure as the fact that the “host of heaven cannot be numbered and the sands of the sea cannot be measured” (Jer 33:19-22). Psalm 89:36-37 compared the endurance of the Davidic covenant with the perpetuity of the sun and the moon; yet, this passage refers back to God’s covenant with Noah after the flood: “As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease” (Gen 8:22; emphasis mine). The comparison with the “host of heaven” and the “sands of the sea” is an allusion to the Abrahamic covenant. ¹ Thus, the passage (Jer 33:14-26) refers to the covenants with David and Phinehas and alludes to the covenants with Noah and Abraham. These four covenants have in common that they are unconditional and that they are a grant of God to an individual because of his exceptional loyalty. ²

The covenants with David and Phinehas play a special function in Jeremiah’s “Book of Restoration” (Jer 30-33). They explain how the restoration of the house of Israel and the promise of a new covenant is accomplished (cf. 31:31-34). The restoration includes the rebuilding of the palace (30:18; 33:4-6) and a new ruler (30:21). Jeremiah 33:14-26 explains that the ruler will be a Son of David (cf. 30:9). The restoration implies

¹ “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them” and “I will surely . . . make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted because of their number” (Gen 15:5; 32:12, respectively; cf. 22:17; 26:4); see Fretheim, 479; Lundbom, 544.

² See my discussion above (pp. 58-62) regarding the unconditional nature of the Davidic covenant.
the reconstruction of the temple (33:11; cf. 30:19; 31:4, 6-7, 14). Jeremiah 33:14-26 explains that Levitical priests will minister there.¹

I believe, however, that their most important function is theological. The covenants with David and Phinehas provide the theological basis upon which the promise of a new covenant with Israel is offered. They explain the why of the new covenant. Note the inter-textual relationship between Jer 31:31-37 and 33:14-26 as shown in table 3.

Note that the new covenant (31:31-34) is based on the fact that God maintains the created order: “Thus says the lord, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar” (v. 35). Accordingly, vv. 36-37 explain that the new covenant will be as permanent as the created order.

On the other hand, Jer 33:19-22 asserts that the covenants with David and Phinehas cannot be broken because the created order cannot be broken (“my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night,” v. 20). The implication is clear: He who maintains the created order guarantees as well the covenants with David and Phinehas. Neither can be invalidated. Thus, it is God’s faithfulness to his covenant with David and Phinehas (33:14-26) that makes possible—even necessary—the creation of a new covenant with the house of Israel (31:31-37) which comprises God’s plan for the fulfillment of his promise to David.

¹ Carroll, Jeremiah, 638-9; Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers, Jeremiah 26-52, WBC, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and John D. W. Watts, no. 27 (Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1995), 173.
Table 3. The New Covenant and the Covenants with David and Phinehas in Jeremiah

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<th>Jer 31:31-37</th>
<th>Jer 33:14-26</th>
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<td><strong>31-34:</strong> The new covenant is offered.</td>
<td><strong>14-18:</strong> The covenants with David and Phinehas are confirmed.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>35-37:</strong> “Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the LORD of hosts is his name: If this fixed order were ever to cease from my presence, says the LORD, then also the offspring of Israel would cease to be a nation before me forever. Thus says the LORD: If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below can be explored, then I will reject all the offspring of Israel because of all they have done, says the LORD.”</td>
<td><strong>19-22:</strong> “The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: Thus says the LORD: If any of you could break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night would not come at their appointed time, only then could my covenant with my servant David be broken, so that he would not have a son to reign on his throne, and my covenant with my ministers the Levites. Just as the host of heaven cannot be numbered and the sands of the sea cannot be measured, so I will increase the offspring of my servant David, and the Levites who minister to me.”</td>
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**Ezekiel**

Ezekiel also shows interest in the promise of a Davidic figure in the future:

My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes. They shall live in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, in which your ancestors lived; they and their children and their children's children shall live there forever; and my servant David shall be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary among them forevermore. My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations shall know that I the LORD sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary is among them forevermore. (37:24-28; emphasis mine)
This passage is an anthology of the restoration promises presented in chaps. 34-36 and brings them to a fitting conclusion. Nevertheless, more than a conclusion, this passage functions as a hinge on which Ezekiel’s message of hope turns.

Several ideas of chaps. 34-36 climax in these verses. God reunites Israel and Judah as one nation under “one shepherd,” and transforms them so that they may be faithful to his statutes, restores them to the land he had promised their ancestors, provides them a ruler for ever, renews the covenant with them for ever, and promises to set his sanctuary in their midst. Therefore, this passage closes the section (chaps. 34-37) with the prospect of a “renewed Israel’s living at peace within their own land” (37:26). This is also, on the other hand, the precondition to the final onslaught of the forces of evil in chaps. 38-39 and God’s decisive triumph over them which finally establishes the conditions necessary for the temple-building plans of chaps. 40-48. Therefore, the promise of an eschatological David in Ezek 37:24-28 concludes the message of restoration for the nation of Israel and sets the stage for God’s ultimate victory over his enemies and the building of his temple among his people.


3 Ibid., 437.

4 Likewise, the construction of the temple is possible only after God has given David (and Solomon) rest from his enemies (2 Sam 7; cf. Deut 12:10-11). Ibid.
What interests me is the reference to “My servant David” as a future ruler over Israel (Ezek 34:23-24; cf. Hos 3:5; Jer 30:9). The question that immediately comes to mind is this: Will this future “David” be from the line of David in fulfillment of the Davidic covenant or does “David” serve here only as a typological figure?

A few scholars have suggested a third possibility: This passage promises the resurrection of David to rule over Israel. They stress the apparently obvious meaning of the Hebrew expression יְהַלֵּךְ עָלָיוֹן “I will raise over them” (34:23; cf. LXX καὶ ἀναστήσω ἐπὶ αὐτοῦ “I will raise over them”). That this expression refers to the resurrection of David is unlikely, however, because the same expression is used “for the raising up of judges (Ju 2:16) ‘deliverers’ (Ju 3:9), prophets (Jer 29:15; cf. also Dtn 18:18) and kings (1 Kgs 14:14)” throughout the OT without referring to a resurrection from death.¹

Walther Eichrodt argues that the phrase “my servant David” (34:23; cf. 37:24) should be understood as “my servant of the family of David.” He understands this passage as promising a line of rulers established forever in the context of the Davidic covenant.² (Similarly, Jer 23:4 promises: יְהַלֵּךְ עָלָיוֹן “I will raise up shepherds over them” which clearly refers to a Davidic dynasty of rulers [cf. v. 5].)

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² Eichrodt, 476.
This agrees with Ezek 17:22-24 where the continuation of David’s line on the throne is promised. This passage is an appendix to the allegory of the eagles (vv. 1-21) which refers to the fortune of the last two kings of Judah: Jehoiachin and Zedekiah.¹ The allegory explains how Zedekiah will not escape punishment because of his breaking of the covenant with the king of Babylon who “planted” him as king instead of Jehoiachin: “As I live, I will surely return upon his head my oath that he despised, and my covenant that he broke” (v. 19). Yet, God announces in vv. 22-24 that he himself will take a new “sprig” and will “plant” it “on the mountain height of Israel,” referring to the restoration of kingship to David (vv. 22-23; cf. Isa 11:1; Jer 23:5; 33:15; Zech 3:8; 6:12).²

Further evidence is found in Ezek 37:25 where it is promised that “my servant David shall be their prince for ever [לֹּא יֵשֶׁת בּוֹ].” It is difficult to conceive that this means a king who will live for ever; rather, probably a king whose dynasty will rule for ever.³ Note that in the previous phrase (37:25) it is stated that “[the people] and their children


² “There is a deliberate insistence on the inconspicuousness of the shoot chosen by Yahweh so as to display the miracle by Yahweh.” Eichrodt, 228. Note that the shoot is described in v. 22 as a “tender one.” This is not, however, only a prediction of the restoration of the Davidic line but also a promise of its universal impact (v. 24). Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 367-8.

and their children's children shall live there [in the land] forever [יהוה].”

It seems logical to conclude, then, that just as the people will live forever in the land through their descendants, David, likewise, will “be their prince for ever” through his descendants, even though this is not explicitly stated. This is, in fact, what God promised to David in 2 Sam 7. Here, however, more is said than merely that the line of David will be re-established, though this is implied. What is emphasized is that, more than being a mere descendant of David, the “future king . . . will be the moral (and physical?) duplicate of the David idealized by late biblical writers.”

Other elements of the Davidic covenant can be discerned in the passage. The nation is restored to their “land” (Ezek 37:25; cf. 2 Sam 7:10) and God promises to set his “sanctuary” among them for ever (Ezek 37:26-27; cf. 2 Sam 7:13).

Yet, more important is the relationship between the restoration of Davidic rule and the promised covenant in Ezek 36:22-28. The relationship is clear. There (Ezek 36), God promises to restore the house of Israel to their land (vv. 22-24), cleanse them (v. 25), give them a “new heart” (v. 26), that is a “new spirit” (i.e., God’s spirit) within them so that they will “follow . . . [his] statutes [תפוח] and be careful to observe . . . [his] ordinances [משפטים]” (v. 27), and make a covenant with them (“you shall be my people, and I will be your God”; v. 28). The same elements are found in Ezek 37. Here God promises to restore Israel to the land (Joseph, who represents the northern tribes, and Judah; vv. 15-22, 25), cleanse them (v. 23), appoint “one shepherd” over them (v. 24ab),

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1 Greenberg, 760.
“make them follow . . . [God’s] ordinances [תּוֹחֵם] and be careful to observe [God’s] statutes [מִשְׁמַרְתֶּךָ]” (v. 24c), make an “everlasting covenant with them” (v. 26ab; “I will be their God, and they shall be my people,” v. 27), and “set . . . [his] sanctuary among them for evermore” (v. 26d; cf. “dwelling-place,” v. 27).

The parallels and relationship between chaps. 36 and 37 are obvious; the differences, however, are significant. Ezekiel 36 speaks of the restoration of Israel to the land; chap. 37 explains that it involves the reunification of Joseph (northern tribes) and Judah. Ezekiel 36 promises a new covenant; chap. 37 indicates it will be an “eternal covenant.” Ezekiel 36 pledges that God will put (‘אֲדוֹן) his “spirit within you [pl.]”; chap. 37 expresses it as God setting (‘אֲדוֹן) his “sanctuary among them.” These differences suggest, however, that the purpose of chap. 37 is to clarify the nature of the covenant promised in chap. 36 providing further information.

The key difference between these passages is the insertion of the Davidic figure in chap. 37.1 David is the unifying factor of the nation.2 God’s miraculous union of the “two sticks,” Joseph and Judah (vv. 15-23), climaxes in the provision of “one king” over them (vv. 24-28). Chapter 37 sets in relief the great difference between the new covenant God promises and the Mosaic covenant that the nation had broken (36:16-21). The Mosaic covenant was conditional on the obedience of the people (Lev 26, Deut 28). In the new covenant God will provide the “obedience” (“I will make you follow my statutes . . .”

1 Allen, 194.

2 Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, 276.
Ezekiel 37:25-28 mentions four things that God will provide that are “for ever”: (1) life in the land (v. 25ab), (2) a Davidic prince (v. 25c), (3) a covenant (v. 26), and (4) a sanctuary (vv. 26d-27). It is important to note that these four elements can be found in 2 Sam 7. Thus, the new covenant of chap. 36 is elucidated in Davidic categories in chap. 37. Or, probably more accurately, the promised covenant of chap. 36 is interpreted as the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant in chap. 37. I believe Leslie C. Allen is right when he suggests that the Davidic dynasty functions as the guarantor of the covenant in this passage.

A final note on the Davidic allusions in Ezekiel is important. Ezekiel 40-48 spells out the role of the “prince” in the program of restoration. There are no specific references in these chapters to the Davidic covenant, but readers in late Second Temple times more likely understood this “prince” as a Davidic figure since Ezek 37:25 refers to the promised Davidic ruler as “prince.” Certain privileges, obligations, and limitations are

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1 Ibid. יִרְאָה “for ever” appears 8 times in 2 Sam 7 (vv. 13, 16 [bis], 24, 25, 26, 29 [bis], Block, Ezekiel 25-48, 418.

2 Allen, 194. See also, Block, Ezekiel 25-48, 422-3. Walther Zimmerli concludes its analysis of this passage with a penetrating remark: “It is remarkable that in the case of the other prophet of the exile, with regard to the promise, in spite of all the differences in the details in Isa 55:3-5, one can make basically very similar observations.” Ezekiel 2, 279.

3 There are two positions. The first stresses the continuity between chaps. 1-37 and 40-48. They consider that the Davidic king of the messianic oracles of chaps. 1-37 is the same figure of chaps. 40-48, though his authority has been limited to prevent the abuses of the Judean monarchy. A second view stresses the discontinuity between chaps. 1-37 and 40-48. They consider that the authors of chaps. 40-48 broke with the Davidic
assigned to him.\(^1\) He enjoys special access to some temple areas (44:3; 46:2, 8, 10) and an allotment of personal lands (45:7; 48:21-22). The only obligation described for him, however, is to provide offerings for sacrifice (45:16-17, 22; 46:4, 12-15). Mainly, then, he is seen as patron of the cult.\(^2\)

The Post-Exilic Prophets and the Davidic Covenant

**Haggai**

Haggai 2:20-23 has no explicit reference to the Davidic covenant. Notwithstanding, it is possible that Zerubbabel is presented as foreshadowing the restoration of the Davidic line.\(^3\)

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\(^1\) E.g., it is explicitly stated that he cannot infringe on the land rights of others (45:8-9; 46:18).

\(^2\) Pomykala, 30.

\(^3\) Kenneth E. Pomykala rightly points out that “there is no explicit reference to a dynastic promise, to David, or to the davidic dynasty tradition generally in these verses or elsewhere in the book of Haggai” (49). He is also right in pointing out that neither Haggai, nor Zechariah, Ezra, or Nehemiah explicitly mention Zerubbabel’s Davidic descent (46). Only 1 Chr 3:16-19 refers to Zerubbabel as belonging to the line of David. Nevertheless, Pomykala considers that Zerubbabel was of non-Davidic lineage and was secondarily grafted by the Chronicler to David’s line. He points out as evidence that 1 Chr 3:19 mentions that Zerubbabel was son of Pedaiah, and not of Shealtiel as the rest of the biblical record holds (46).

Yet, the idea that Zerubbabel was secondarily grafted into David’s line is problematic. Why was he not inserted as son of Shealtiel, which was the easiest thing to do? Later tradition clearly understood Zerubbabel as belonging to the Davidic line (1 Esd 5:5; Matt 1:12-13; Luke 3:27). The NT evidence has its own problems, however. Luke considers that Zerubbabel comes through the line of Nathan (brother of Solomon; 3:27-
The word of the LORD came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month: Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth, and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms; I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, and overthrow the chariots and their riders; and the horses and their riders shall fall, every one by the sword of a comrade. On that day, says the LORD of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, son of Shealtiel, says the LORD, and make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you, says the LORD of hosts.

Two things call our attention: the allusion to Jeremiah’s prophecy against Jehoiachin and the eschatological framework of the oracle.

Jeremiah had prophesied against Jehoiachin (i.e., Jeconiah or Coniah), king of Judah, that none of the children who had gone with him into exile would rule in the future. God rejected him and his descendants as a “signet ring” that has been cast off (Jer 22:24-30). With his rejection and that of Zedekiah, the rule of the house of David came to an end. Yet, Haggai announces that God will take Zerubbabel, grandson of Jehoiachin (1 Chr 3:16-19), as a “signet ring” in this way reversing the prophecy of Jeremiah. ¹ If

³¹ and not through the line of Jehoiachin (i.e., Jeconiah or Coniah; Jer 17:24-30) and Solomon. Matthew, on the other hand, considers that Zerubbabel comes through the line of Jehoiachin and Solomon (1:7-13). Eugene H. Merrill has tried to reconcile these differences, conjecturing that Zerubbabel is a descendant of Jehoiachin through one of his daughters who married Neri, a descendant of David through the line of Nathan. An Exegetical Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi (Chicago, Ill.: Moody, 1994), 325. In any case, Zerubbabel’s Davidic descent remains problematic. (For the different solutions that have been given to this problem, see Gary N. Knoppers, ¹ Chronicles 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, AB, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, no. 12 [New York: Doubleday, 2003], 328.) I believe, however, that Kenneth E. Pomykala has overstated his case. He fails when he discounts the Davidic implications of Haggai’s reference to Zerubbabel as a “signet ring” (2:23), which is an allusion to Jer 22:24-30 (49). While it is true that the image of the “signet ring” can be applied to non-Davidics, the intention of the image in Hag 2:23 is a reversal of the prophecy against Jeoiachin (i.e., Jeconiah or Coniah; Jer 17:24-30). Thus, a restoration of the Davidic line seems to be in mind.

¹ Pieter A. Verhoef, The Books of Haggai and Malachi, NICOT, ed. R. K.
Zerubbabel is a grandson of Jehoiachin, as 2 Chr 3:19 and later tradition understood him to be (Matt 1:12-13; Luke 3:27; 1 Esd 5:5), this oracle implies the restoration of the Davidic line.\(^1\) The interesting fact, and yet puzzling, is that Zerubbabel himself is not the fulfillment of the restoration of the Davidic line to the throne. The oracle has a future reference. It will be fulfilled “on that day” (v. 23), when God shakes “the heavens and the earth” and overthrows kingdoms and armies (vv. 21-23). For now, Zerubbabel is the governor of Judah (2:21), “a small political player in the bureaucracy of the Persian empire.”\(^2\) Zerubbabel is here, instead, an eschatological symbol in a similar fashion to the


2 Boda, 164.
reference to David in Hos 3:5; Jer 30:9; Ezek 34:23-24; 37:24-25.¹

Zechariah
Zechariah 6:9-15

Probable allusions to the Davidic promises can be found in Zechariah 6:9-15.

The word of the LORD came to me: Collect silver and gold from the exiles — from Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah — who have arrived from Babylon; and go the same day to the house of Josiah son of Zephaniah. Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest Joshua son of Jehozadak; say to him: Thus says the LORD of hosts: Here is a man whose name is Branch: for he shall branch out in his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD. It is he that shall build the temple of the LORD; he shall bear royal honor, and shall sit upon his throne and rule. There shall be a priest by his throne, with peaceful understanding between the two of them. And the crown shall be in the care of Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah, and Josiah son of Zephaniah, as a memorial in the temple of the LORD. Those who are far off shall come and help to build the temple of the LORD; and you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. This will happen if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God. (Zech 6:9-15)

This is a very difficult passage, the meaning of which depends on the answer we give to a number of questions for which we have little information.² The questions that concern me here, however, are the following: Who is the “Branch”? Is the “Branch” a


² For example: Who were the men who came from Babylon? Were there four or more of them? Why did they go into Josiah’s house? Were there two crowns or one? Who is “Branch”? Why is Zerubbabel not mentioned? How many thrones will there be? See Ralph L. Smith, Micah-Malachi, WBC, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and John D. W. Watts, no. 32 (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1984), 217-8.
Davidic figure? When did the prophet expect the messiah to bring about the new age?

Regarding the first question, the NRSV translation (quoted above) privileges the view that Joshua, the high priest, is identified here as the Branch. This would seem likely because a crown is placed on Joshua’s head and the oracle predicts that “[Branch] shall bear royal honor, and shall sit upon his throne and rule” (v. 13). I believe, however, that this is not the correct reading of the passage. The function assigned to Branch in this passage is that he will build the temple. Zechariah 4:6b-10a, on the other hand, makes clear that it is Zerubbabel—not Joshua—who will build the temple. Moreover, the expression “Behold a man” is not used for direct address, but normally refers to a third party (1 Sam 9:6, 17; 2 Sam 18:26). It is possible, then, that Branch denotes here not Joshua but a third person who is probably not present.

Zechariah 3:6-10 is a parallel oracle that throws light on our text. This passage contains the following revelation—which is given to Joshua the high priest after he has

1 Boda, 339.

2 Ben C. Ollenburger, “Zechariah,” The New Interpreter’s Bible, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 7 (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1996), 787. Mark J. Boda suggests that Branch belongs to those whom God will bring from “far off” to build the temple (342-3). Others think that he was there and addressed but his name is not mentioned, e.g., Smith, Micah-Malachi, 218.

If Branch is not Joshua but a third party that God will bring, it probably does not refer to Zerubbabel either. “According to the dates in Ezra 3:8 and Zech 1:7, Joshua and Zerubbabel would have come to Judah two years earlier.” Ollenburger, 787. By the time the oracle was given, according to the extant literary structure of Zechariah, the temple “was already well on the way to completion.” Smith, Micah-Malachi, 219. If this is the case, Zerubbabel is not Branch but acts as a type of an eschatological figure who will build an eschatological temple (cf. Zech 4:8-10; 6:12-13). Note that in Haggai Zerubbabel plays a similar function. He is the sign of a future fulfillment (see above section “Haggai”).
been crowned with a “clean turban” in a vision (v. 5):¹ “If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access. . . . I am going to bring my servant the Branch, . . . and I will remove the guilt of this land in a single day.” Note that four things are promised to Joshua: future rule, right of access, a third person whom God will bring (probably Zerubbabel who will build the temple; cf. 4:6-10), and atonement for Israel.

The parallels are evident. Both passages contain a symbolical act of crowning (3:5; 6:11).² Zechariah 6 contains promises that had been given to Joshua in Zech 3, though in reverse order: God will bring Branch (vv. 12-13b; cf. v. 15) and rule is promised to Joshua (v. 13). Note that in both cases these promises are contingent on the faithfulness of Joshua and fellow priests to God (3:7): “This will happen if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God” (6:15c).³

In Zech 3:6-10 it is clear, however, that Joshua is not Branch but a third person God will bring, though the promise is given to Joshua as it was in Zech 6.⁴ I believe, then,

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¹ For the royal connotations of the turban, see Meyers and Meyers, 369-70.

² That the crowning of Joshua in 6:9-15 is symbolic is clear from the instruction given that the crowns be kept in the temple “as a memorial” (v. 14).

³ For the fact that the individuals referred to in Zech 6:10, 14 are priests, see Boda, 336.

⁴ In his analysis of this text, James C. VanderKam concludes: “Joshua is invested with his splendid garments as a sign that a new age is dawning. That new age is characterized by two facts: a Davidic heir is coming, but more importantly in this context the temple cult will once more serve its function of removing guilt and atoning for sin. Zechariah 3 reminds one of Exod 40:12-13. . . . Harmony and security are not associated with the physical laying of the temple foundation but with resumption of the cult. Investiture of the high priest means the divine remembrance of his people and his regular
based on the parallel with Zech 3:6-10, that in Zech 6 Joshua is not Branch but a third person God will bring.

Is the Branch a Davidic figure? The majority of scholars believe he is.¹ The oracle announces that Branch will build God’s temple. This work was assigned in the Davidic covenant to the scion of David (2 Sam 7:13). Accordingly, in Zech 4:6-10 the building of the temple is assigned to Zerubbabel who belongs, most likely, to the line of David.² Zechariah 6:12 probably alludes to Jer 33:15: “In those days and at that time I will cause communication with them.” James C. VanderKam, “Joshua the High Priest,” in From Revelation to Canon: Studies in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Literature, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, ed. John J. Collins, no. 62 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 175-6.

¹ E.g., Elizabeth Achtemeier, Nahum-Malachi, IBC, ed. James L. Mays and Patrick D. Miller, Jr. (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox, 1986), 131; Merrill, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, 197-8; Meyers and Meyers, 369; Boda, 338.

Kenneth E. Pomykala rejects the idea that “Branch” here is a Davidic figure. He notes that “there is nowhere an appeal to the Davidic dynastic promise.” In addition, he argues that Zerubbabel was probably not a descendant of David and that יְהֹוָה— is probably not an allusion to Jer 23:5 and 33:15 but a pun on Zerubbabel’s name. Zerubbabel means “Seed of Babylon” and יְהֹוָה— may be a pun referring to the “growth” the Lord will bring (cf. Isa 4:2). He observes, also, that in Jer 23:5 and 33:15 the יְהֹוָה— springs up “for David,” but that explanation is absent in Zechariah. Pomykala, 53-60. On the other hand, I have argued above that his argument for the secondary development of Zerubbabel’s Davidic ancestry in 1 Chr 3:19 is unconvincing. Later tradition understood Zerubbabel as a scion of David (Matt 1:12-13; Luke 3:27; 1 Esd 5:5).

Pomykala concedes, however, that allusions to such traditions are possible. He concludes that if “Branch” were to be understood as a Davidic figure, the passage would imply a transformation of the Davidic promise. His function is to “build the temple” and he would rule alongside a priestly figure (60). I do not agree that this is a transformation of the Davidic traditions, because the building of the temple was something expected from the son of David according to 2 Sam 7:13. It is, instead, a change of emphasis on his role in view of the events of 586 B.C.E.

² Regarding the Davidic ancestry of Zerubbabel, see p. 149, n. 3.
a righteous Branch to spring up [.Root: לְכָנָה] for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land” (cf. 23:5).¹

It is intriguing, however, that Branch is expected to rule alongside a priestly figure (Zech 6:12-13). Zechariah 6 refers to the coronation of two individuals: Joshua the priest and Branch (vv. 11, 14).² They will both sit on their thrones and there will be a “peaceful understanding between them” (v. 13). This is in fact a development in the interpretation of the Davidic covenant which did not foresee a diarchic rule (2 Sam 7:16). The idea of diarchic rule had been suggested already by Jeremiah (see above section “Jeremiah”). In fact, just as Branch in Zech 6:9-15 is probably an allusion to Jer 33:15, the prediction of the diarchic rule of a Davidic and a Levitical (Zadokic) figure is probably an allusion to Jer 33:17-18: “For thus says the LORD: David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, and the levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to make grain offerings, and to make

¹ Cf. “Here is a man whose name is Branch: for he shall branch out [.Root: לְכָנָה] in his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord” (Zech 6:12).

² לְכָנָה is plural (“crowns”; cf. the LXX στέφανος “crowns”); therefore, two different persons are meant. This coincides with the idea of “two anointed ones” in 4:14. E.g., Julia M. O’Brien, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2004), 205; Smith, Micah-Malachi, 218; Merrill, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, 195; Meyers and Meyers, 349-54; Boda, 335.

Others observe, however, that in Job 31:36 לְכָנָה refers to one crown and that the singular verb לְכָנָה in v. 14 implicates that only one crown is meant. Pomykala, 58. Also, Achtemeier, 132.
sacrifices for all time.” Thus, Zech 6 probably points to the restoration of the Levitical and Davidic lines that Jer 33:17-18 had predicted.

When did Zechariah expect the messiah to bring about the new age? The crowning of Joshua in 6:9-5 is an “acted out” oracle that conveys a message to the people. (Similarly, Joshua and his colleagues in Zech 3 “are an omen of things to come” [v. 8].) They were an acted out parable of what God intended to do in the future. The question is: What is the meaning of this sign-act? Should it be interpreted in the sense that Joshua’s and Zerubbabel’s leadership and the temple they are constructing prefigure the diarchic rule of a kingly and priestly figure and the construction of a more glorious temple in the future? Or, did Zechariah understand the rise of Joshua and Zerubbabel as

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1 Boda, 335. “It is significant that Josiah [Zech 6:10] is associated with Zephaniah, the name of the deputy priest to Seraiah (2 Kgs 25:18), and that Joshua is associated with Jehozadak, who was Seraiah’s son (1 Chr 5:39-40 [6:13-14]). Both Zephaniah and Seraiah were executed by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kgs 25:18-21). Here their descendants collaborate with Zechariah in Joshua’s coronation. Afterwards, Zechariah delivers an oracle to Joshua (v. 12).” Ollenburger, 787. If this is so, the case for the restoration of the Levitical and Davidic lines is stronger. For some caveats regarding the priestly identity of these figures, see Merrill, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, 194-5. For a more comprehensive analysis of the identity of these individuals, see Meyers and Meyers, 340-45.

2 Ralph L. Smith identifies the central issue in similar terms: “The real issue is: Did Zechariah identify Zerubbabel as the messianic king and expect the new age to begin in his lifetime? Or did he say that the time is coming when the branch or shoot of David (the Messiah) will come and be both king and priest?” Micah-Malachi, 218.

3 Similar sign-acts can be found in Isa 20:2-4; Jer 27:2-7; Ezek 12:1-12. See, Ibid., 216-7. “Sign-acts usually comprise three segments: exhortation, execution, and explanation. This passage contains an exhortation (vv. 10-14) and explanation (v. 15) but omits the middle segment.” Boda, 335.

4 E.g., Achtemeier, 131; Smith, Micah-Malachi, 219; Merrill, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, 200; Meyers and Meyers, 356-7.
leaders in Judah to be a fulfillment of the Davidic promises (confirmed by Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel) and the beginning of a new age for Israel? I am not sure. I tentatively suggest that both views are not mutually exclusive. The consecration of Joshua as high priest marks the renewal of the Levitical priesthood and evidences that the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s prophecies had been set in motion (Jer 33:19-22; Ezek 44:15; 48:11). Yet, it is not clear whether Zechariah himself believed that Joshua, Zerubbabel, and the temple they were building exhausted the prophecies that had been made for the restoration of Israel. Most likely, later readers believed that they did not

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1 O’Brien, 206; Boda, 336-43.

2 For example, it is not entirely clear whether two crowns (Joshua’s and Branch’s) are stored in the temple as “a memorial” or only Branch’s crown (Zech 6:14). If both are, a future reference beyond Joshua and Zerubbabel is meant. The Hebrew construction is awkward. The noun translated as “crown” is plural in the MT (דריוד, “and the crowns”) but the verb is singular (ליר, “it will be”). The LXX translates both in the singular, δε στέφανος εσται, “and the crown will be.” Joseph Ziegler, ed., Duodecim prophetae, Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum, no. 12 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1943), 303.

3 Meyers and Meyers, 374.

4 Elizabeth Achtemier makes the same point regarding sign-acts oracles, which she calls prophetic symbolic actions: “That which is spoken or symbolized [in these prophetic symbolic actions] is at the same time set in motion, and it works its effects in Israel’s history until it is fully fulfilled” (130).

5 The present literary structure of Zechariah suggests that Zechariah himself considered Joshua and Zerubbabel and their temple symbols of the future. Ben C. Ollenburger claims that “according to the dates in Ezra 3:8 and Zech 1:7, Joshua and Zerubbabel would have come to Judah two years earlier” (787). By the time the oracle was given, according to the extant literary structure of Zechariah, the temple “was already well on the way to completion.” Smith, Micah-Malachi, 219. If this is the case, the idea is given that another more glorious temple and rule is meant by these sign-oracles.
exhaust them and, therefore, a future fulfillment was still due.¹

Zechariah 12:2-13:1

An explicit reference to the “house of David” is found in Zech 12:2-13:1. This passage describes a battle for Jerusalem in which God obtains the victory over the enemies (12:2-9). As a result of this victory, the inhabitants of Jerusalem are exalted, but especially the house of David (v. 8). After this, God “pours out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that, when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one weeps over a firstborn” (v. 10). Though all Jerusalem experiences this conversion, four families (בְּנֵי־דָוִד) are especially mentioned: the families of David, Nathan, Levi, and Shimei (12:10-14). Finally, the passage closes with God’s purification of “the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem” from their “sin and impurity” by opening a fountain for them (13:1; cf. vv. 2-6).²

It is clear from this passage that the house of David has a leading role in future Jerusalem. Zechariah 12:8 says that David’s house will be exalted above the rest of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The house of David is also singularized as recipient of God’s “spirit of compassion and supplication” (12:10) and cleansing (13:1). As a result, many

¹ It is interesting that neither Joshua nor Zerubbabel is mentioned in Ezra’s report of the Temple’s completion, but only the “elders of the Jews” (Ezra 6:14-15). Ollenburger, 788. The silence regarding Zerubbabel in later Jewish writings is very telling in this respect as well. Qumran literature witnesses to the fact that at least that sector of Israel continued to expect the messiah from Levi and David, and the construction of a legitimate temple. See below, section “Dead Sea Scrolls.”

² Note the similarity with Ezek 36:25.
interpreters see behind this passage the assumption of a promise of rule given to David’s dynasty for ever (2 Sam 7). The mention of the houses of David, Nathan, Levi, and Shimei is understood as a reference to royal and priestly lines which undergo a process of conversion and purification as it is made evident in their mourning (cf. 13:2-6).

Kenneth E. Pomykala disagrees. He argues that the phrase “[house of David] must be understood within the social structures of post-exilic Judah.” Whereas this phrase denoted in pre-exilic Judah the rule, king, court, or dynasty of the Davidic family, he considers that its meaning changed in post-exilic Judah. “House of David” denotes now one of several social units or clans. The houses of Nathan, Levi, and Shimei mentioned in vv. 12-14 would be other examples of such social units. In addition, he notes that no reference is made to the terminology and imagery associated with the Davidic dynasty


2 Achtemeier, 162; Boda, 488-9; Merrill, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, 325-6; Meyers and Meyers, Zechariah 9-14, 359-60; O’Brien, 265; Petersen, 122-3; Smith, Micah-Malachi, 277. Others see here royal, prophetic, priestly, and wisdom lines.


4 Pomykala, 117-8, nn. 204-7. Rule: 1 Sam 20:16; 2 Sam 3:1, 6; 1 Kgs 12:19, 20, 26; 14:8. King or court: Isa 7:2, 13; Jer 7:2. Dynasty: 1 Kgs 13:2; 1 Chr 17:24; 2 Chr 21:7; 2 Sam 7:11b. He also notes that in a couple of cases it denotes a building: 1 Sam 19:11; Isa 22:22.

5 Ibid., 118-20.
tradition and that royal ideology is absent in this passage.¹ He concludes: “There is no
evidence that messianic or royalist hopes were fixed upon the house of David. No
individual figure is in view—whether royal or messianic.”² Therefore, though it is clear
that the “house of David . . . will retain its prominence in the ideal future when all of
Jerusalem is glorified” (12:8), this does not imply a “divine, royal, or messianic status”
because it is not focused on an individual, but on “a clan consisting of hundreds or
thousands of members.”³

Pomykala’s view depends on the new understanding of the term “house of David”
as a clan and not as a line of rulers. Many scholars remain unconvinced, however, of the
existence of such clans and prefer to see in the mention of the four houses in 12:12-14 a
reference to the total leadership of Jerusalem.⁴ If “house of David” continues to refer to
the royal line, as it did in pre-exilic Judah; then, Zech 12:2-13:1 confirms a leadership
role for it and presupposes the promises given to David in 2 Sam 7.⁵

¹ Ibid., 123.
² Ibid., 124.
³ Ibid., 120. Also, Petersen, 116-8.
⁴ For example, Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers consider these four families
⁵ This leadership role, however, is shared now with priestly lines as in Zech 6:9-15.
Conclusion

The Davidic covenant is a recurring theme in the Hebrew Bible beyond the books of Kings and Chronicles. Reference to the Davidic covenant in the Psalms most often accompanies the request that God may give the king victory over his enemies or expresses the hope that he will exercise universal dominion (Pss 2, 18, 89, 110, 132). This petition is made on the basis that the Davidic covenant is eternal and in some cases its conditional/unconditional dimensions are also mentioned (Pss 89, 110).

Among the prophets, the Davidic covenant was a common concern too. Their oracles focused mostly on the need of the contemporary king to rule righteously and the people’s need to return to God. The prophets warned that their unfaithfulness was pushing the fulfillment of God’s promises into the future and drawing near the execution of God’s judgment.¹ As apostasy increased, however, the hope expressed in these oracles acquired eschatological overtones. The nation would be disciplined for her unfaithfulness but after the punishment God would raise a new righteous Davidic ruler. Not surprisingly, his main attribute would be righteousness and fear of the Lord (Isa 9:7; 11:2; Jer 33:15-16)

I noted above that seven main elements comprised the pattern of the rule of righteous Davidic kings.² These elements appear in the oracles of the prophets

1 See Limburg, 188.

2 (1) renewal of the covenant, (2) cleansing of the land from spurious forms of worship, (3) building or repair of the temple, (4) emergence of a faithful high priest alongside the Davidic king, (5) reform of the cult, which implicated the change of the ritual laws and/or the reorganization of the priests; (6) a movement toward the
concerning the Davidic ruler God will raise in the future. In Isaiah, the exilic, and post-exilic prophets, however, these elements are elevated to an eschatological dimension.

Thus, righteous kings attempted to reunite Israel by means of the cult; the eschatological king, however, will “gather the dispersed of Judah [and Ephraim] from the four corners of the earth” (Isa 11:10-13; cf. Amos 9:11-12; Hos 3:5; Ezek 37:16-22; Mic 5:3). Righteous kings promoted the renewal of the nation’s covenant with God; the eschatological king will mediate a new “covenant of peace . . . an everlasting covenant” between God and the nation (Ezek 37:26-27; Isa 55:3). Righteous kings cleansed the land from idolatry; the eschatological king “will save them from all the apostasies into which they have fallen, and will cleanse them” and forgive them (Ezek 37:23; cf. Isa 55:7). Righteous kings reformed the cult by modifying the laws of the sacrifices and reorganizing the priesthood; the eschatological fulfillment implicates the writing of the law in the heart of the nation so that “the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD” (Isa 11:9; Ezek 37:24; cf. Hos 3:5; Zech 12:10; also related are Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:26-27). God defended the righteous king from his enemies and provided rest for the land; the eschatological king “shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth” and even the natural order will be transformed so that no one will “hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain” (Isa 11:3-9; cf. Isa 9:5-7; Mic 5:4-5). Righteous kings repaired the temple; the eschatological king “shall build the temple of the LORD” (Zech 6:13; cf. Ezek 37:26, 28). Finally, alongside the righteous king often appeared the figure of a faithful priest; alongside the eschatological king “there shall be a priest by his throne, 

reunification of Israel, and (7) “rest” from or defeat of enemies (see p. 108-9).
with peaceful understanding between the two of them” (Zech 6:13; cf. Jer 33:16-26; Hos 3:4-5).

In summary, according to the prophets, the failure of the Davidic dynasty in making possible the fulfillment of the Davidic promises caused their fulfillment to be projected into the future. God will remain faithful to his promise to David even though their fulfillment may require an act from him. David, the prototypical righteous king, served as the model that later righteous kings would emulate. In the prophets, David and his rule are a type as well of the person and rule of the coming redeemer.

I will now turn to an analysis of the fate of the Davidic covenant in the writings of Early Judaism.

The Davidic Covenant in Early Judaism

Early Judaism is characterized by the fragmentation of its beliefs and points of view. Its views regarding a royal messiah are also pluralistic. In this chapter I will study those documents that refer explicitly to the Davidic covenant or a Davidic messiah.

1 See Nickelsburg and Kraft, 1-30, esp. 20-21.

2 See for example, Jacob Neusner, William Scott Green, and Ernest S. Frerichs, eds., Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

3 I will not deal here with passages about a royal messiah that are not explicitly Davidic. For example, the ideal king described in the section “Statutes of the King” of the Temple Scroll (11QTemple LVI, 12-LIX, 21) which is not a Davidic figure (see Pomykala, 232-7; Martin Hengel, James H. Charlesworth, and D. Mendels, “The Polemical Character of ‘On Kingship’ in the Temple Scroll: An Attempt at Dating 11QTemple,” JJS 37 [1986]: 28-38; cf. Jacob Milgrom, “New Temple Festivals in the Temple Scroll,” in The Temple in Antiquity: Ancient Readers and Modern Perspectives, ed. Truman G. Madsen, RSMS, no. 9 [Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center Brigham
Wisdom of Ben Sira

The Wisdom of Ben Sira (Sirach) refers explicitly to the Davidic covenant in several places (e.g., 45:25; 47:11, 22; 49:4-5), mostly in the Hymn in Praise of the Fathers (44:1-50:24). ¹

Young University, 1984], 132) or the six references in Qumran texts to the Messiah of Israel (CD XII, 23-XII,1; XIV, 18; XIX, 10-11; XIX, 20-XX,1; 1QS IX, 9b-11; 1QSα [1Q28a] II, 11b-22). (Lincoln D. Hurst has challenged the view that Qumran expected two Messiahs. “Did Qumran Expect Two Messiahs?” BBR 9 [1999]: 157-80.)

The future king of the tribe of Judah in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs will not be treated as well. The references are T. Reu. 6:7; T. Sim. 7:1-2; T. Levi 8:14 (cf. T. Levi 18); and T. Jud. 24. This royal figure from Judah is sometimes assumed to be Davidic; for example, Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., “The Promises to David in Early Judaism,” BSac 150 (1993): 290-3. His Davidic nature, however, is not explicit in the text. Moreover, the history of its composition is uncertain. The text in its present state incorporates Christian interpolations and is dated to the latter half of the 2nd century C.E. M. de Jonge, “The Future of Israel in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,” JSJ 17 (1986): 210-11. Finally, recent research agrees that “Christian elements in the Testaments cannot be removed by textual criticism . . . [and] in the end the Testaments can be used much more confidently in the study of second-century Christianity than of pre-Christian Judaism.” John J. Collins, “The Testamentary Literature in Recent Scholarship,” in Early Judaism and Its Modern Interpreters, ed. Robert A. Kraft and George W. E. Nickelsburg, SBLBMI, ed. Douglas A. Knight, no. 2 (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1986), 276.

Other references to royal non-Davidic messianic figures that will not be analyzed include Sib. Or. 3.652-656, Ant. 17.271-274; 17.278-281; J. W. 2.434; 4.507-508; 7.29.

¹ A majority of commentators consider that Sirach was written between 198-175 B.C.E. during the high-priesthood of Onias III (196-175 B.C.E.), or more precisely between 185 and 180. James L. Crenshaw, “Sirach,” The New Interpreter’s Bible, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 5 (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1997), 610-11; Milward Douglas Nelson, The Syriac Version of the Wisdom of Ben Sira Compared to the Greek and Hebrew Materials, SBLDS, ed. J. J. M. Roberts and Charles H. Talbert, no. 107 (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1988), 1-2; Skehan and Di Lella, 9-10. The tone of Sirach’s reference to Simon, the high priest, suggests that he had died (ca. 190 B.C.E.; cf. Sir 50). On the other hand, there is no mention of the events that transpired during the rule of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.E.).

Regarding the Greek translation, its prologue mentions that it was prepared after the thirty-eighth year of the reign of king “Euergetes” (132 B.C.E.). It was published, however, after 117 B.C.E. Skehan and Di Lella, 8-9; Crenshaw, 610.
The most important text of Sirach regarding the Davidic covenant is 45:25. This passage presents the interpreter with several challenges, the first of which is the establishment of its text. For the purposes of this study I will follow the critical edition of the LXX by Joseph Ziegler; which is, in fact, very close to the reconstruction of the Hebrew text by F. V. Reiterer.\(^1\)

\begin{verbatim}
καὶ διαθήκην τῷ Δαυίδ
υἱῷ Ισσαὶ ἐκ φυλῆς Ιουδὰ
κληρονομία βασιλέως υἱοῦ ἐξ υἱοῦ μόνου·
κληρονομία Ααρων καὶ τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ.
\end{verbatim}

Just as a covenant was established with David

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\(^1\) Joseph Ziegler, ed., *Sapientia Iesu Filii Sirach*, Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum, no. 12/2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), 340. Joseph Ziegler’s edition of the LXX has been highly praised and is considered the best critical text available of Sirach. Skehan and Di Lella, 62. Though it is clear that Sirach was written originally in Hebrew, the Hebrew text of this book began to disappear after the rabbis denied it a place in the Hebrew canon. For centuries it was only known through quotations in the Talmudic and rabbinic literature. Because of several discoveries at the end of the 19th and throughout the 20th centuries, about 68 percent of the book is now extant in Hebrew. These discoveries include fragments found in the Cairo Synagogue Geniza, the Adler Geniza collection, Qumran caves 2 and 11, and in the ruins of Massada. Two things, among many others, make it difficult to work with the Hebrew text: no extant witness gives us the whole Hebrew text (the most ancient and reliable witnesses are the Massada fragments that contain only 39:27-44:17) and no reliable critical edition of these texts exists. Skehan and Di Lella, 60-61.


This is the Hebrew text as reconstructed by F. V. Reiterer:

\begin{verbatim}
וֹם בְּרֵי הַמֶּרֶשֶׁר זֶה /
נַחַלָּה אָבֶרֶךְ לֹא יָרֵה / נַחַלָּה מֶלֶךְ לֹא יָרֵה / בָּךָ יִשְׂרֵאֵל יִרְוַיָּה.
\end{verbatim}

And his covenant with David / son of Jesse of the tribe of Judah / an inheritance of a king is to his son alone / an inheritance of Aaron is to his seed. See also, Pomykala, 132-9.
son of Jesse of the tribe of Judah,
that the king’s heritage passes only from son to son,
so the heritage of Aaron is for his descendants alone. (NRSV)

Sirach’s mention of the Davidic covenant occurs in the context of his description
of Phinehas’ courageous actions of faithfulness to the Lord and of God’s covenant with
him for an eternal high-priesthood (45:23-26; cf. Num 25:10-13; Ps 106:28-31). Sirach
uses it as an example of the legitimate method of succession for the high-priesthood on
the basis of the similarity between the Davidic covenant and God’s covenant with
Phinehas.¹ Just as the Davidic covenant extends from son to son only, also the high-
priestly covenant applies through a direct line of descendants of Aaron only, not to all
Aaronic priests.²

There were probably good reasons for this. Sirach was written during the time
Onias III was high priest (190-175 B.C.E.). Onias III became high priest at the peak of the
influence of this office but was also the last legitimate priest through hereditary
succession (cf. 2 Macc 4:7).³ He engaged in a fierce controversy with Simon, of the
priestly order of Bilga, who had also the office of captain of the temple (προστάτης τοῦ

¹ Pomykala, 140. Also, Burton L. Mack, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic: Ben Sira’s
Hymn in Praise of the Fathers*, CSJH, ed. Jacob Neusner (Chicago, Ill.: University of

² Pomykala, 141. Against others who understand this passage as a contrast
between the Davidic Covenant and Phinehas’ covenant in the sense that the Davidic
applied only to one son (i.e., Solomon) but Phinehas’ covenant applied to all his
descendants; e.g., Skehan and Di Lella, 514.

Joshua to Caiaphas: High Priests after the Exile* (Minneapolis, Minn., and Assen, the
Netherlands: Fortress and Van Gorcum, 2004), 188.
Simon was brother of Lysimachus and Menelaus and possibly the second in rank after the high priest. Since Menelaus became high priest later through bribery, it is not difficult to conceive that there existed during his time a dispute regarding what constituted a legitimate succession for the high-priesthood. The Davidic covenant here, then, serves to explain God’s covenant with Phinehas “as if to settle the dispute over priestly lineage once and for all.”

Sirach’s interest in the Davidic covenant goes beyond the proper method of succession for the office of the high priest. Burton L. Mack’s analysis suggests that Sirach considered the high priest the climax and fulfillment of all the offices and covenants of Israel’s history. The first seven figures of the Hymn in Praise of the Fathers have in common the theme of the covenant and may be considered a literary unit (Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Israel, Moses, Aaron, Phinehas; Sir 44-45). Sirach is also interested in

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1 VanderKam, *From Joshua to Caiaphas*, 191.


There had been, in fact, a struggle for the control of the priesthood between the Oniads and the Tobiads a little before; that is, very early in the 2nd century B.C.E. “The Oniads were related to Aaron on the paternal side, but the Tobiads laid claim to Aaronite ancestry through the maternal side. The latter group sought to wrest the priesthood from the Oniads in the early 2nd century BCE.” Crenshaw, 843.

3 Crenshaw, 843.


5 Mack, 39. The mention of the Davidic covenant (45:25) and the prayer of blessing upon Phinehas (45:26) close this unit. The Davidic covenant, however, is not a central concern of the author, but is brought in to explain the appropriate form of
the offices of the fathers (Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), the priests (Aaron, Phinehas, Samuel, Simon), the prophets (e.g., Elijah, Jeremiah) and the kings (e.g., David, Solomon, Hezekiah). Many of these figures have, in fact, multiple offices (e.g., Moses, Phinehas, Samuel, Simon).

According to Burton L. Mack, all these figures climax in the multiple-office figure of the high priest Simon in Sir 50. This becomes clear, for example, in Sirach’s description of the function of the high priest in 50:1-4.

While describing kings, Sirach considered that their primary function was to build and defend the civil and religious institutions (David, 47:1-11; Solomon, 47:12-22; and Hezekiah, 48:17-25). This is the function, however, for which Sirach praises Simon, the high priest, in 50:1-4. Pomykala notes also that Sirach assigns a royal symbol to the high priest. Sirach adds upon the turban (תַּנְכּוֹנָה) and flowered plate (נַיֶּר צֶדָּק) of the Pentateuch’s description of Aaron’s headdress (45:12), a crown of gold (תֶּרֶם). This crown of gold, of course, has royal connotations (cf. 2 Sam 12:30; Jer 13:18; Ezek 21:31; Ps 21:4). Note that a crown of gold (תֶּרֶם) is used to describe the headdress of the Davidic king in Ps 21:4.

succession for the high-priesthood. Note that the Davidic covenant is the only element out of chronological sequence and does not become the occasion for David’s description and praise (cf. 47:2-11). Mack, 39.

1 Mack, 26-36.

2 Ibid., 29.

3 Pomykala, 143.

The high priest’s inheritance of the roles and functions of the Davidic king in Sirach is significant. It is a powerful witness that the Davidic covenant had not fallen into oblivion.¹ Yet, Sirach does not express hope for a future ruler from the house of David in fulfillment of an eternal Davidic covenant. He does not comment on the eternal nature of the Davidic covenant.

A further mention of the Davidic covenant is found in 47:11:²

κύριος ἀφέιλεν τὰς ἁμαρτίας αὐτοῦ
καὶ ἀνύψωσεν εἰς αἰώνα τὸ κέρας αὐτοῦ
καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ διαθήκην βασιλείων
καὶ θρόνον δόξης ἐν τῷ Ἰσραήλ.

The Lord took away his sins,
and exalted his power [horn] forever;
he gave him a covenant of kingship
and a glorious throne in Israel. (NRSV)

The covenant with David is mentioned in positive terms. The passage mentions that God exalted “David’s horn” for ever. Horn is used here in the metaphorical sense of power and prestige (note the parallelism between κέρας and δόξα in 49:5; cf. 47:5, 7).³ The idea is confirmed in the second part of the verse where it is said that David is given “a glorious throne [θρόνον δόξης] in Israel.” (Note, again, the parallel between κέρας and δόξα.) Thus, it is his fame or glory that has been exalted forever. His rule will be

1 Pomykala, 144.

2 For the text of the LXX, Ziegler, ed., Sapientia Iesu Filii Sirach, 347.

3 The image of horn appears often in Davidic texts, Pss 89:18, 25; 132:17; Luke 1:69; see Skehan and Di Lella, 524.
commemorated in Israel through the ages. But nothing is said of an eternal dynasty.¹

The promise of an eternal dynasty to David is referred to, however, in the following section which is devoted to Solomon (vv. 12-22). Verse 22 reads:

ο δὲ κύριος οὐ μὴ ἐγκαταλίπῃ τὸ ἔλεος αὐτοῦ
kai οὐ μὴ διαφθείρῃ ἀπὸ τῶν λόγων αὐτοῦ
οὐδὲ μὴ ἐξαλείψῃ ἐκλεκτοῦ αὐτοῦ ἐκγονα
καὶ σπέρμα τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντος αὐτὸν οὐ μὴ ἔξαρῃ
καὶ τῷ Ἰακώβ ἐδώκεν κατάλειμμα
καὶ τῷ Δαυὶδ ἔξ αὐτοῦ ρίζαν.

But the Lord will never give up his mercy,
or cause any of his works [words] to perish;
he will never blot out the descendants of his chosen one,
or destroy the family line of him who loved him.
So he gave a remnant to Jacob,
and to David a root from his own family. (NRSV)²

After praising Solomon for his building of the temple and wisdom (vv. 12-18b), Sirach describes Solomon’s sins, but notes that he reigned in security (vv. 18c-21).³ He explains the reason: “The Lord will never give up his mercy, or cause any of his works [words; τῶν λόγων αὐτοῦ] to perish.” The “words” that do not “perish” are those of 2 Sam 7:14-16.⁴ The implication is clear: Solomon lived in security because of God’s covenant with

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² LXX text, Ziegler, ed., Sapientia Iesu Filii Sirach, 349.

³ Skehan and Di Lella, 527-8.

⁴ Ibid., 528. Note the parallels: Τὸ δὲ ἔλεος μου οὐκ ἀποστήσω ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ (2 Sam 7:15a); But my mercy I will not take from him (translation mine). And then, ὁ δὲ κύριος οὐ μὴ καταλίπῃ τὸ ἔλεος αὐτοῦ (Sir 47:22a); But the Lord will never abandon his mercy (translation mine).
David. Just as at the beginning of the section Sirach points out how David’s victories provided Solomon an “ample space” to live (47:12), he explains at the end of the same section that the Davidic covenant secured a descendant for Solomon upon the throne (47:22e-23). This passage, then, emphasizes God’s faithfulness to the Davidic covenant despite Solomon’s unfaithfulness. It is because God “[will never] destroy the family line of him who loved him” that Rehoboam succeeds Solomon upon the throne, despite the fact that he was “broad in folly and lacking in sense” (v. 23).1 Sirach uses οὐ μή with the aorist subjunctive to indicate that God “will never give up his mercy . . . [or] blot out the descendants of his chosen one . . . or destroy the family line of him who loved him” (emphasis mine). This “is the most definite form of negation regarding the future” (BDF §365).2 Thus, Sirach betrays in this passage an understanding of the Davidic covenant as unconditional—possibly eternal—as the reason for the existence of a Davidic line of kings in Israel’s history.3 There is no indication, however, that Sirach expects a son of David to rise in the future based on the promises made to David.4

1 The original says “the people’s (λαοῦ) folly and lacking in sense” (λαοῦ ἀφροσύνην καὶ ἔλασσομενον συνέσει). This was a play on Rehoboam’s name. The line begins in Hebrew with בַּר (broad) and finishes with בֶּן (people), forming in this way the name בֶּן בָּר (Rehoboam). Lévi, ed., 66; Skehan and Di Lella, 530.


3 Skehan and Di Lella, 528.

4 Pomykala, 146. The rule of Rehoboam, the fool of the nation, is understood by Sirach as both the evidence of God’s mercy (47:22) as well as the cause for the eventual exile and divine punishment (47:25). Jones, 124.
This unconditional—possibly eternal—understanding of the Davidic covenant seems to be contradicted in a later passage, Sir 49:4-5, which refers to the end of the Davidic line.

Except for David and Hezekiah and Josiah, all of them were great sinners, for they abandoned the law of the Most High; the kings of Judah came to an end. They gave their power to others, and their glory to a foreign nation. (NRSV)

Sirach asserts that because of their unfaithfulness “the kings of Judah came to an end.” Mack notes that, in the Hymn in Praise of the Fathers (chaps. 44-50), Sirach mentions 7 kings with a collective reference at the end (49:4-5) suggesting that this phase of Israelite history has come to an end. Again, Sirach does not suggest any hope for a future Davidic ruler as a result of the Davidic covenant. The book does not explain the apparent contradiction of the end of the dynasty and the assertion made before that “[God] will never blot out the descendants of his chosen one, or destroy the family line of him who loved him” (47:22). The LXX suggests a possible explanation in its assertion that it was “they,” the Davidic kings, who gave their own powers to others. In other

1 Ziegler, ed., Sapientia Iesu Filii Sirach, 354-5.
2 Mack, 62.
3 In the Hebrew text, however, it is God [he] who gave away their powers. Lévi,
words, the failure of the Davidic covenant did not evidence the unfaithfulness of God to his promises, but the rejection by David’s line of God’s promise to David.\textsuperscript{1} In the LXX’s view, the Davidic covenant has not been forfeited but repudiated.

Sirach, then, considers the Davidic covenant as having come to an end with the end of the Davidic line in the exile. The Davidic covenant is not claimed as a source of hope for a messianic figure in the future as in the prophets. Sirach does not conceive explicitly a diarchic rule for Israel either. Instead, Sirach is interested in the present. For him, the high priest is in reality a high-priest-king, though he is never called so.\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{1} Sir 49:11-12 mentions Zerubbabel, but there is no clear indication that Sirach considered him a renewal of the Davidic line. There is as well a reference to Hag 2:23 but no clear messianic implications. Pomykala, 148.

\textsuperscript{2} Mack, 35. It is probable that the political realities of the time prevented him from doing it. See also, Crenshaw, 843; Skehan and Di Lella, 514; Jones, 123.

The Hebrew version of Sirach contains a further mention of the Davidic covenant in a Psalm found between vv. 12 and 13 of chap. 51 of the LXX. Lines 8 and 9 of this Psalm interest me (text from Lévi, 74):

\begin{quote}
Give thanks to him who makes a horn to sprout for the house of David, for his mercy endures for ever; / Give thanks to him who has chosen the sons of Zadok to be priests, for his mercy endures for ever; (NRSV).
\end{quote}

The authenticity of this Psalm has been seriously questioned because of its absence in the LXX and Syriac versions; moreover, the Psalm does not fit the context. (For a survey of scholarly opinions and bibliography, see Alexander A. Di Lella, \textit{The Hebrew Text of Sirach: A Text-Critical and Historical Study}, Studies in Classical Literature, no. 1 [The Hague: Moulton, 1966], 101-5.)

The mention of David in line 8 comes from Ps 132:17 (cf. Ezek 29:21). It is difficult to know, however, what the author meant without having a clear historical context for this Psalm. Alexander A. Di Lella concedes that this Psalm in Sirach was not written by Ben Sira but suggests that it dates from “the time when the Zadokites were still high priests (as is clear from 51:12 ix), i.e., before 152 B.C.E.” Skehan and Di Lella, 569-70. If this were the case (though see the critique of Di Lella’s suggestion in Pomykala,
First Maccabees

First Maccabees 2:57 refers to the Davidic covenant:

Δαυιδ ἐν τῷ ἐλέει αὐτοῦ ἐκληρονόμησε θρόνον βασιλείας εἰς αἰώνας.¹

David, because he was merciful, inherited the throne of the kingdom forever. (NRSV)

This is an explicit reference to God’s promise to David that he would “establish his throne for ever” (2 Sam 7:13, 16). Now the question is, How does 1 Maccabees understand this promise? Is there an expectation for the restoration of Israel’s throne to the line of David?

There is no clear evidence of such expectation in 1 Maccabees, as Pomykala argues.² He notes correctly that the expression εἰς αἰῶνας in the putative

149-50), it is not clear whether the writer considered that God had made “a horn to sprout for the house of David” or he expected a future fulfillment of this promise.

Whatever the case, it is worth noting that this Psalm envisions the horn for David and the Sons of Zadok as parallel figures in the line of the message of the Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and other OT prophets.


² Some have found in 1 Macc 14:41 evidence that there was hope for the miraculous restoration of the throne to the Davidic line. This passage relates how perpetual high-priesthood and leadership were granted to Simon “for ever” but with the proviso “until a trustworthy prophet should arise” (cf. vss 41-49). Some have argued that the reason for this proviso was the expectation of the restoration of throne to the Davidic line in the future; e.g., Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel: From Its
original Hebrew) can mean either “long time” or “unlimited time” and concludes that the context of 1 Macc 2:57 privileges the understanding of εἰς αἰώνας in its limited sense of “long time.”

Maccabees expresses little concern for the future. George W. E. Nickelsburg succinctly summarizes what is widely believed to be the purpose of 1 Maccabees’ author:

He has recorded the history of the founding, the succession, and the establishment of the Hasmonean house, and he has documented its legitimacy by royal decree, popular acclaim, and the attestation of the God who has worked the divine purposes through the Hasmonean family and its early heroes. He has told the story of “the family of those men through whom deliverance was given to Israel” (5:62). Thereby he has proclaimed the gospel according to the Hasmoneans.

The author is not interested in what God will do in the future; instead, he describes the Hasmoneans as the fulfillment of God’s purpose for Israel in the present.

Second, the immediate literary context of 1 Macc 2:57 does not suggest an

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1 BDAG, 32; Pomykala, 154-5, cf. 95; Preuss, 10, 531. The same would be true for the textual variants εἰς [τὸν] αἰώνα or αἰώνίου noted by Kappler, 61. First Maccabees 14:41 uses, for example, the phrase in the limited sense: Simon is appointed “leader and high priest forever [εἰς τὸν αἰώνα]”; but a time limit is added, “until a trustworthy prophet should arise.” Thus, the NAB translates: “Simon shall be their permanent leader and high priest until a true prophet arises.”

2 George W. E. Nickelsburg, Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah: A Historical and Literary Introduction, 2d ed. (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2005), 106.
eschatological dimension for the Davidic covenant. The reference to David is part of a long list of heroes that Mattathias presents to his sons on his deathbed as examples of piety and action so as to spur them to perform similar deeds and reap corresponding rewards (1 Macc 2:49-68). Throughout the rest of the book the author of 1 Maccabees echoes the language of the biblical stories of these heroes (as they appear in Judges, 1-2 Samuel, and 1-2 Kings) to suggest that the achievements of the Hasmoneans equaled those of the heroes mentioned by Mattathias.¹

Harold W. Attridge concludes that by comparing the Hasmoneans’ actions and rewards with those of Abraham, Joseph, Phinehas, Joshua, Caleb, David, Elijah, and the companions of Daniel, the author provides “an implicit defense of the legitimacy of the irregular, charismatic leadership exercised [sic] by the Hasmoneans.”² Moreover, Jonathan A. Goldstein suggests that 1 Macc 5:62 asserts “for the Hasmoneans the prerogatives reserved for David’s line in earlier Jewish tradition.” There, the Hasmoneans are referred to as “the family of those men through whom deliverance was given to Israel” (ἐκ τοῦ σπέρματος τῶν ἄνδρῶν ἐκείνων οἰς ἐδόθη σωτηρία Ἰσραήλ διὰ χειρὸς αὐτῶν). He suggests that “the strange syntax [of this phrase] can have come only from 2 Sam 3:18, ‘. . . the Lord hath spoken of David saying, “Deliverance of [hōshīa]”


My people of Israel is through the agency of David My servant.” In conclusion, David and the promises made to him are not a source of hope for the future in 1 Maccabees, but a model the Hasmoneans have emulated.

Psalms of Solomon 17

The most extensive description of an expected Davidic king and his kingdom in Early Judaism is found in Pss. Sol. 17. Verse 4 reads:

σὺ, κύριε, ἤρετίσω τὸν Δαυιδ βασιλέα ἐπὶ Ισραήλ, καὶ σὺ ἀμοσάς αὐτῷ περὶ τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ μὴ ἐκλείπειν ἀπέναιτι σου βασίλειον αὐτοῦ.

Lord, you chose David to be king over Israel, and swore to him about his descendants forever, that his kingdom should not fail before you.


1 Goldstein, “‘Messianic’ Promises,” 80. The Greek reads: κύριος ἐλάλησεν περὶ Δαυιδ λέγων ἐν χειρὶ τοῦ δούλου μου Δαυιδ σώσω τὸν Ισραήλ ἐκ χειρὸς ἄλλοφύλων καὶ ἐκ χειρὸς πάντων τῶν ἐχθρῶν αὐτῶν (2 Sam 3:18).

2 David plays also a prototypical role in 1 Macc 4:30; 14:4-15, 41-49. Cf. Pomykala, 156-8.


4 Translation by Wright, “Psalms of Solomon,” 665-9. The Greek text is taken from Rahlfs, ed., 2:486-8. A majority of scholars agree that the Psalms of Solomon were written in Hebrew. There are, however, no Hebrew manuscripts extant; only late Greek and Syriac ones (10th-16th century C.E.). R. B. Wright, “Psalms of Solomon: A New Translation and Introduction,” in Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, ed. James H.
This recollection of God’s promise to David is made in the general context of the psalm as a communal lament or complaint.¹ The author evokes God’s promise to David in the context of his conviction that God rules with justice and mercy over the affairs of humankind and especially of Israel (vv. 1-4). This is why God has expelled and punished by means of alien hands those who usurped the throne of David (vv. 5-10).² In the process, however, the land and people have been devastated (vv. 11-15), the righteous scattered (16-18a), and the remnant of Israel is in an utterly sinful condition (18b-20).³ It is in this context that the author makes a plea for the restoration of Israel (vv. 26-42).

First, he appeals to God’s promises to David requesting a legitimate king (v. 21):

εἰδε, κύριε, καὶ ἀνάστησον αὐτοῖς τὸν βασιλέα αὐτῶν νῦν Δαυίδ εἰς τὸν καίρον, ὅν εἶλον σὺ, ὁ θεός, τοῦ βασιλεύσαι ἐπὶ Ἰσραήλ παιδὰ σου.

See, Lord, and raise up for them their king,


¹ Davenport, 71. These verses explicitly reflect the language of the Davidic promise as expressed in 2 Sam 7:11-16; Ps 89:3-4, 19-37; and Jer 33:17. There is also a similarity in theme between Pss. Sol. 17 and Ps 89.


³ The usurpers are described as “those to whom you did not (make the) promise. . . . With pomp they set up a monarchy because of their arrogance” (vv. 5-6).

³ This sinful state of rulers and inhabitants has affected nature as well. There is no more rain and the springs have stopped (vv. 19-20). Davenport, 71.
the son of David, to rule over your servant Israel
in the time known to you, O God.

This king is expected to be the means by which God will purge Israel from Jewish sinners and gentile enemies (22-25).¹

Second, a vision of restored Israel is articulated in the remainder of the plea (26-42). The restoration amounts to the inauguration of a new age for Israel and includes the ingathering of the Jews to their land and the wise, righteous, and universal rule of the Davidic king.²

It is clear that the author considered God’s promises made to David as eternal in nature; thus, a source of hope for Israel in his time.³ He uses those promises as “a frontal assault on the legitimacy of the Hasmonean rule.”⁴ Some scholars believe that this psalm is evidence that there had been a continuing belief in the restoration of the Davidic rule in early Judaism which was disappointed when the Hasmoneans claimed royal status.⁵ Kenneth E. Pomykala differs, arguing that it was the opposition to the Hasmonean rule that led the author of the psalm and his community to interpret the Davidic promises as

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¹ Arguably, a reference to Hyrcanus II, his associates, and Roman enemies. Pomykala, 163.

² Davenport, 78-79.

³ Ibid., 72.

⁴ Pomykala, 166.

eternal and, thus, promising the restoration of Davidic kingship for Israel.\(^1\) The current state of scholarship on early Jewish messianism tends to support Pomykala’s position. It should be noted that *Pss. Sol.* 17 provides evidence only for the beliefs of a sector of Judaism.\(^2\) A study of the few references to the Messiah in the Pseudepigrapha reveals that the idea that first-century Jews “held a recognizable and definable, if not common, messianic belief” is wrong.\(^3\)

The description of the hoped-for Davidic king in *Pss. Sol.* 17 is interesting. First, the priest and the temple are notoriously absent; instead, holiness for Israel is achieved under the rule of the expected Davidic king (esp. vv. 26-30).\(^4\) The king is described in terms that exalt his *justice, power, mercy, and wisdom.* He is appointed by God (vv. 21-25) and taught by him (v. 32). Accordingly, he is a righteous king (vv. 32, 40, passim), free from sin (v. 36), who does not tolerate sin among his people (v. 27). He is powerful

\(^1\) Pomykala, 166-7.

\(^2\) Three groups of people are the focus of these psalms: the gentiles, the sinners, and the devout. The psalms, of course, present the point of view of the devout. Some have identified the devout with the Pharisaic or Essene communities. The fact is, however, that we do not know enough to make the attribution certain or probable. Wright, “Psalms of Solomon,” 642.

\(^3\) Charlesworth, “From Jewish Messianology,” 225. “First-century Palestinian Jews held many different, often mutually exclusive, ideas and beliefs regarding the Messiah.” Ibid. Kenneth E. Pomykala considers *Pss. Sol.* 17 “the first evidence for the expression of hope for a davidic Messiah in early Jewish literature” (169). For the opposite case, see Davenport, 67-68.

\(^4\) This echoes Zech 3:8-9 where the guilt of the land is removed by Branch; a kingly figure. See above section “Zechariah.”
as well to cleanse Jerusalem from sin “(and make it) holy” (v. 30).¹ He will destroy the unrighteous rulers, expel gentiles from Jerusalem, and condemn the sinners (vv. 22-25, 36 passim).² As a result he rules over a holy people (vv. 26, 32, 41, 43). He is also compassionate (v. 34b). Finally, he is wise. He trusts tenaciously in God and has been endowed with the Holy Spirit (v. 37). He destroys his enemies, not with the power of arms, but “with the word of his mouth” which are as pure “as the words of the holy ones” (vv. 24, 43; cf. 33, 35). In summary, he “rules with all the ancient virtues heightened to superlatives”; almost a supernatural being.³ In his description of the Davidic king, the author of Pss. Sol. 17 has been influenced by Ps 2:9, Jer 23:5, and Isa 11:2 which speak of a righteous king who is endowed with power and a spirit of wisdom.⁴

The righteousness and faithfulness of the Davidic king to God is also important for a second reason: it becomes “the means by which God is faithful to the larger covenant with Israel as a whole.”⁵ In v. 15 the Israelites are referred to as “children of the

¹ Nickelsburg, Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah: A Historical and Literary Introduction, 243. Gene L. Davenport suggests that according to v. 32 the Davidic king will purify the whole world from sin. He considers that “they” refers to the nations of v. 31 (76).

² Davenport, 74-75.

³ Wright, “Psalms of Solomon,” 643. “Although the messianic king will be a human being, the author attributes to him semidivine characteristics that are typical of the older (esp. Isaianic) oracles. As God’s vicar and agent on earth the king shares in, or embodies, divine qualities.” Nickelsburg, Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah: A Historical and Literary Introduction, 242.

⁴ Davenport, 72; Pomykala, 168-9.

⁵ Davenport, 76-77.
covenant.” They had broken their covenant with God by their sinful behavior (v. 5).

Verse 20 says: “From their leader to the commonest of the people, (they were) in every kind of sin: The king was a criminal and the judge disobedient; (and) the people sinners.” According to the author, it was the usurpation of the throne by those to whom it was not promised (arguably Hasmoneans) that led the nation to its present state of sinfulness. In response, God, “faithful in all his judgments” (v. 9), has “rewarded them . . . according to their sins” (v. 8). The banishment of the rulers and the destruction and scattering of the nation are considered, then, God’s punishment for their covenantal unfaithfulness. The restoration of the nation follows an opposite course of action. A righteous king will cleanse the nation from sin. Because of his unwavering trust in and faithfulness to God (vv. 32-34, 36), God will fulfill in him the covenantal promises made to David so he will rule “with an iron rod” (Pss. Sol. 23-24; Ps 2:9; cf. 2 Sam 7:9-10) and restore the land for and to the people of Israel (Pss. Sol. 17:28; Ezek 45:8; 47:13, 21; cf. 2 Sam 7:10). This means then that the Davidic ruler is himself “the very means by which God’s own holiness and strength are mediated to [Israel and] all the nations.”¹ In summary, the king becomes the mediator of God’s covenantal blessings for his people.

Dead Sea Scrolls

Five documents of the Dead Sea Scrolls contain references to the Davidic dynastic tradition.

¹ Ibid., 85.
Words of the Luminaries\textsuperscript{a} (4Q504)

The first reference is found in Words of the Luminaries\textsuperscript{a} (4Q504 1-2 IV, 5-8 or 4QDibHam\textsuperscript{a} 1-2 IV, 5-8).

וַתִּבְהֶרֶךְ בְּשֵׁם יְהוָהָ֥ו יִרְשָׁעְתָהּ֥ הקִמּוֹתָ֖ה לַרְוִי לָתַ֣י לִקְרֵ֑י נֶדֶ֥ל עֵמֶ֥בֶת יְשֵֽׁבּוּ

And you chose the tribe of Judah, and established your covenant with David so that he would be like a shepherd, a prince over your people, and would sit in front of you on the throne of Israel for ever [lit. all the days].\textsuperscript{1}

This translation suggests the presence of hope for the restoration of Davidic rule over Israel. A number of scholars consider this passage to be evidence of the expectation of a Davidic messiah in the Qumran sect.\textsuperscript{2}

There are, however, two variables that make three interpretations of the text possible. First, the text could refer to David alone or to David as a corporate person which includes his descendants.\textsuperscript{3} Second, וּיְשֵׁב could be a continuation of the purpose

\textsuperscript{1} Text and translation from Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, eds., The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1997-1998), 2:1014-5. For the original publication and plaques, Maurice Baillet, Qumran grotte 4: III (4Q482-4Q520), Discoveries in the Judaean Desert, no. 7 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), 143-4, pl. xlix-liii. These texts have been dated on the basis of paleography between the middle of the 2nd century B.C.E. and the middle of the 1st century C.E. For an introduction to this document, see Daniel K. Falk, Daily, Sabbath, and Festival Prayers in the Dead Sea Scrolls, STDJ, ed. Florentino García Martínez and A. S. van der Woude, no. 27 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 59-94.

\textsuperscript{2} E.g., Collins, “Messianism,” 105.

\textsuperscript{3} A similar or analogous idea would be the new David of Hos 3:5; Jer 30:9; Ezek 34:23-24; 37:24-25.
clause introduced by לֵאָה or it could introduce an independent clause. This passage allows, then, three different meanings which are all grammatically possible:1

1. And you chose the tribe of Judah, and established your covenant with David so that he would be like a shepherd, a prince over your people; and he sat in front of you on the throne of Israel all the days [i.e., of his life] [emphasis mine].

2. And you chose the tribe of Judah, and established your covenant with David so that he [i.e., David and his descendants] would be like a shepherd, a prince over your people; and he [i.e., David and his descendants] sat in front of you on the throne of Israel all the days [i.e., of their dynasty] [emphasis mine].

3. And you chose the tribe of Judah, and established your covenant with David so that he [i.e., David and his descendants] would be like a shepherd, a prince over your people, and would sit in front of you on the throne of Israel all the days [i.e., for ever] [emphasis mine].

Readings one and two look to the past. The first focuses on King David and his 40 years of rule. The second focuses on the Davidic dynasty which came to an end in 586 B.C.E. The third reading looks to the future. It focuses on God’s promise of an eternal dynasty to David. It is the literary context that decides what was meant by the author. Sadly, only a small portion of that context is extant.2

It has been pointed out that 4Q504 belongs to a genre of prayer common in biblical and early Jewish sources known as Taḥanunim.3 These prayers have a basic

1 See Pomykala, 176.

2 Our text comprises lines 6-8 of a fragment that contains 21 lines. Lines 1 and 15-21 are not readable, though. Thus the only context we have is 4 lines that precede our text and 6 that follow it. García Martínez and Tischelaar, eds., 2:1014-5.

pattern that combines three elements: (1) supplication for God’s help, (2) remembrance of God’s saving actions in the past, (3) repentance and prayer for forgiveness.\footnote{1} Kenneth E. Pomykala notes the similarity between 4Q504 and Neh 9:6-37. After reviewing God’s abundant blessings for Israel throughout its history (vv. 6-24), Neh 9:25 summarizes God’s mercies in the following phrase: “So they ate, and were filled and became fat, and delighted themselves in your great goodness.” Afterwards, it recounts how Israel rebelled and God punished them (vv. 26-30). Likewise, col. IV of 4Q504 is part of the remembrance of God’s merciful acts in favor of Israel. The reference to David and his throne for “all the days” (col. IV, lines 5-6) is part of this section which, intriguingly, finishes in line 14 with the following assertion: “and they a[t]e, were replete, and became fat […].”\footnote{2} Afterwards, col. V refers to God’s punishment of the people because of their rebellion. Kenneth E. Pomykala concludes from this that our passage is “a historical reminiscence referring to the time of David” and the most probable interpretation is number 1 above in which the Davidic covenant refers only to David’s rule without implications for his descendants.\footnote{3}

\footnote{1} Flusser, 570-71.

\footnote{2} García Martínez and Tigchelaar, eds., 2:1015.

\footnote{3} Pomykala, 179. He adds that immediately after the reference to David in lines 6-
Pomykala’s conclusion, though possible, is not necessarily correct, however. Beyond the fact that there are lacunae in the text, Daniel K. Falk has more recently downplayed the relationship between 4Q504 and the Taḥanūnim. He adds that “the common themes and most of the terminological similarities between *Word of the Luminaries* and the Taḥanūnim are also shared by the penitential supplications for fast days and the Day of Atonement.”¹

The major problem of Pomykala’s argument, however, is the assumption that a reference to the Davidic covenant in the section of remembrances implies that this covenant was understood as applying to David only; that is, only a historical reminiscence of his rule. Bilhah Nitzan studies the remembrances of 4Q504 and finds that they invoke events that are among the fundamentals of Jewish faith; for example, “the creation, the covenant with the patriarchs, the exodus from Egypt, the giving of the Torah, the relations of election and covenant between God and His people over the course of the generations, all given in apparently chronological order.”² She concludes that this act of remembrance had the purpose of creating “a link between the worshippers and the generations of their ancestors, and . . . [to] arouse perpetual hope.”³ The references to the Sinaitic covenant and the covenant with the patriarchs as part of God’s

7, lines 8-12 probably refer to the reign of Solomon. Ibid.

¹ Falk, 75. He notes, also, thematic and terminological parallels with the Amidah or Eighteen Benedictions (Shemoneh Esreh), that is an ancient Jewish daily prayer.

² Nitzan, 98.

³ Ibid., 92.
mercy to the nation in the past do not imply that they were matters of the past, or applied only to the past. For example, in the following column (4Q504 1-2 V, 5-14) the Sinaitic covenant is invoked for the restoration of Israel. Thus, a reference in this passage to an eternal covenant with David remains possible, in spite of its inclusion in the remembrances section of this prayer.

**Commentary on Genesis A (4Q252)**

A second reference is found in *Commentary on Genesis A (4Q252 or 4QCommGen A)* col. V, lines 1-7. This passage is a commentary on Gen 49:10:

1. \[לא\] ולא \[יושב\] לארץ \[ויראה\] נפשו ויראה \[לישראל\] ומושל
2. \[לא\] ולא \[יושב\] לארץ \[ויראה\] נפשו \[בדרית\] מלכד
3. \[ואר\] אל \[יושב\] לארץ \[ויראה\] \[מדים\]
4. \[והיה\] \[לארץ\] \[ויראה\] \[מדים\]
5. \[והיה\] \[לאילו\] \[לארץ\] \[ויראה\] \[מדים\]
6. \[והיה\] \[לאילו\] \[לארץ\] \[ויראה\] \[מדים\]
7. \[והיה\] \[לאילו\] \[לארץ\] \[ויראה\] \[מדים\]

1. **Gen 49:10** The scepter shall [no]t depart from the tribe of Judah. While Israel has the dominion,
2. [will not] be cut off someone who sits on the throne of David. For «the staff» is the covenant of royalty,
3. and the thou[sands] of Israel are «the standards». **Blank** Until the messiah of righteousness comes, the branch
4. of David. For to him and to his descendants has been given the covenant of the kingship of his people for everlasting generations, which
5. he observed […] the Law with the men of the Community, for
6. […] it is the assembly of the men of […]
7. […] He gives\(^1\)

\(^1\) Text and translation from García Martínez and Tijchelaar, eds., 1:504-5. See also George J. Brooke, “4Q252 as Early Jewish Commentary,” *RevQ* 17 (1996): 185-208, pl. xii-xiii For a discussion regarding what kind of work 4Q252 is, see Brooke, “4Q252 as Early Jewish Commentary,” 385-402; Pomykala, 180-83.
This passage expresses a clear hope that “while Israel has dominion” (line 1) a Davidic king will reign perpetually (line 2). The basis for this belief is the “covenant of the kingship” that has been granted to David “for everlasting generations” (line 4), a clear reference to 2 Sam 7:11-16; 23:5 and Ps 89:4-5; 20-38. The clause “while [or when] Israel has dominion” is probably included to explain why a Davidic king was not ruling over Israel at the time.\footnote{1}

We should note that the only characteristic given of the future Davidic king is that he will be a “righteous messiah.” This document interprets, then, the Davidic covenant similarly to Jer 23:5-6 and 33:15-17 that promise “I will raise up a righteous Branch.”

\textit{Florilegium (4Q174)}

A third reference is found in \textit{Florilegium} (4Q174 or 4QFlor).\footnote{2} This document offers a commentary on several passages with the purpose of illuminating the

\footnote{1} Pomykala, 184-5. \textit{דוע} in line 3 would be better translated as “when” and not “until.” Evidently, the coming of “the messiah of righteousness . . . , the branch,” does not mark the end limit of the Davidic line on the throne; instead, his coming secures the throne for the Davidic line. Ibid., 186-7.

\footnote{2} H. Stegemann identified the script of this document as Herodian yielding a date between 30 B.C.E. and 70 C.E. “Weitere Stücke von 4QPsalm 37, 4QPatriarchal Blessings, und Hinweis auf eine unedierte Handschrift aus Höhle 4Q mit Exzerpten aus dem Deuteronomium,” [More Fragments from 4QPsalm 37, 4QPatriarchal Blessings, and reference to an Unpublished Manuscript from Cave 4Q with Excerpts from Deuteronomy.] \textit{RevQ} 6 (1967-1969): 193-227; as cited by Pomykala, 180-81. Pomykala suggests that the Davidic covenant is used polemically to challenge the legitimacy of a reigning king; probably against Herodian or Roman kings (188-91).

\footnote{3} This document has been dated on the basis of paleography to the end of the 1st century B.C.E. and the 1st century C.E. Jonathan G. Campbell, \textit{The Exegetical Texts}, Companion to the Qumran Scrolls, no. 4 (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 35; Pomykala, 192. For an introduction, see Campbell, 33-44.
circumstances in the last days.\footnote{The phrase אחורית ימיים (the last days) occurs repeatedly in the text (col. I, lines 2, 12, 15, 19).} Lines 1-13 in col. I are a commentary on 2 Sam 7:10-14.

Lines 10-13 express in clear terms a hope for the restoration of Davidic rule in the last days:

10 [And] YHWH declares to you that 2 Sam 7:12-14 «he will build you a house. I will raise up your seed after you and establish the throne of his kingdom
11 [for ev]er. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to me.» This (refers to the)
12 «branch of David», who will arise with the Interpreter of the law who
13 David which has fall[en], w]ho will arise to save Israel.
14 Midrash of Ps 1:1 «Blessed [the] man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked ». The interpretation of this wor[d: they are] those who turn aside from the
path of [the wicked,]
15 as it is written in the book of Isaiah, the prophet, for [the] last days: Isa 8:11 « And it happened that with a strong [hand he turned me aside from walking on the path of]
16 this people ». And (this refers to) those about whom it is written in the book of Ezekiel, the prophet, that Ez 44:10 « [they should] no[t defile themselves any more with all]
17 their [i]d[o]ls ». This (refers to) the sons of Zadok and (to) the m[e]n of [the]ir council, those who see[k jus]tice eagerly, who have come after them to the council of the community.
18 Ps 2:1 [« Why ar]e the nations [in turmoil] and hatch the peoples [idle plots? The kings of the earth t]ake up [their posts and the ru]lers conspire together against yhwh and against
19 [his anointed one ». Inter]pretation of the saying: [the kings of the na]tions [are in turmoil] and ha[tch idle plots against] the elect ones of Israel in the last days.¹

It is important to note that the hope for the restoration of the throne to the Davidic line is one of several aspects of the events of the “last days.” The others are the building of the sanctuary of the Lord (I, 1-6), the provision of rest from the sons of Belial (I, 7-9), and the restoration of a righteous priesthood from the line of Zadok (I, 14-19; quoting Ezek 44:10 in line 16).

The building of the sanctuary of the Lord and the provision of rest from enemies are elements clearly included in the Davidic covenant of 2 Sam 7.² The expectation of a righteous priesthood through the line of Zadok shows, however, that this document has followed the interpretation of the post-exilic prophets who expected the rule of the scion of David alongside a priestly figure. This is clear. The mention of the line of Zadok (lines


16-17) quotes Ezek 44:10, something that helps to explain the figure of the “Interpreter of the law” in lines 11-12 as being a priest. The identification of the seed of David as Branch of David (דֶּרֶךְ דוֹרֵד) is an allusion to Jer 23:5; 33:15. Finally, it is the quotation of Amos 9:11 in line 12 which establishes the promise of the restoration of the throne to David’s line in the future.

Commentary on Isaiah (4Q161)

A fourth reference is found in 4Q161 (or 4QpIsa) which contains a commentary on Isa 10:21-11:5. The manuscript consist of 10 fragments arranged in 3 columns. The commentary of Isa 11:1-5 is found in frags. 8-10, col. III, 11-25. After citing Isa 11:1-5 (lines 11-17); lines 18-25 interpret the text in the following way:

18 [משר הזבר על צמה] דוד הנוֹמֶר вам[ר ית הים אשת]
19 [ברוח שפתי ימיה אנים ואל יסומנו ב الفلسطيني] [רוה גבורה [...]]
20 [כמם בכר נור כ[דוש [וּבְנֵר דְּרֵקֶמוֹת]...
21 [בידי בוכל הג[ואים משמא עתון]
22 [כהל ה皴ים והם תמשוח והרב והיש אשרerness אל]
23 [למחרת עדני ישפוע [ולא למשמט אותר נעית מזר חאר]
24 [וכאשר ירוחם כנشفוע על פיהם] [...]

1 Schniedewind, “King and Priest,” 75-6; Pomykala, 195.
2 Regarding the problem of ordering the fragments, see Maurya P. Horgan, Pesharim: Qumran Interpretations of Biblical Books, CBQMS, ed. Bruce Vawter, no. 8 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1979), 70-73. This text has been dated between 30 B.C.E. and 20 C.E. on the basis of paleography. Pomykala, 198.
3 Text and translation are from García Martínez and Tigchelaar, eds., 1:316-7. For the editio princeps, Allegro and Anderson, 11-15, pl. iv-v.
18 [The interpretation of the word concerns the shoot] of David which will sprout in the fi[nal days, since]
19 [with the breath of his lips he will execute] his [ene]my and God will support him with [the spirit of c]ourage […]
20 […] throne of glory, h[oly] crown and multi-colour[ed] vestments
21 […] in his hand. He will rule over all the peo[ple]s and Magog
22 […] his sword will judge [al]l the peoples. And as for what he says: «He will not
23 [judge by appearances] or give verdicts on hearsay», its interpretation: which
24 […] and according to what they teach him, he will judge, and upon their authority
25 […] with him will go out one of the priests of renown, holding in his hand clothes (of)

Three elements of this interpretation are relevant for us. First, the “shoot . . . from
the stump of Jesse” of Isa 11:1 is identified by 4Q161 as a Davidic figure that will take
office in the “last days” (line 18). According to most reconstructions of the text, 4Q161
refers to this Davidic figure not as נַעַלֶּה (shoot) but as נַעַלֶּה (Branch) of David which is a
common messianic designation in other Qumran manuscripts (e.g., 4Q285 5, 3 [Sefer
Hamilhama]; 4Q174 1-2, 21 1, 11 [4QFlor]).¹

Second, the context makes clear that the scion of David is a military figure that
will take part in a battle against the Kittim in the final days and utterly defeat them (cols.
I-II). The fragmentary nature of the text hinders us from knowing with certainty what the
relationship between the Prince of the Congregation (נֵדָד), who was mentioned
earlier (2-6 II, 15), and the scion of David is. It is possible that they were originally

¹ Horgan, 85. Note that this is how the scion of David is referred to in Jer 23:5;
33:15; and Zech 3:8; 6:12.

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identified as one.\(^1\) 4Q161 comments little on the spiritual attributes of David’s scion mentioned in Isa 11:1-5. It only says that God will support him with “the spirit of courage,” something very appropriate for a warrior. This small amount of interest in his spiritual attributes is also noted in the interpretation of the “rod of his mouth” and the “breath of his lips” which refer in Isa 11 to the wisdom of David’s scion (see above section “Isaiah”). 4Q161 considers this rod, instead, a “sword [with which he] will judge all the peoples” (line 22).

Finally, though a royal figure, David’s scion will share the rule with another figure.\(^2\) Line 24 says that he will judge “according to what they teach him . . . and upon their authority [על כותבים].” Thus, he will rule under the supervision of “instructors.” The explicit identity of who these “instructors” are is lost. Most probably, this document interprets the Davidic covenant along the lines set by Jer 33:15 and Zech 3:8; 6:12 where the “Branch of David” rules alongside a priest. The phrase umpם ניל is often used in connection with the Sons of Zadok, the priests (1QS V, 2 passim [Rule of the Community]; 1Q28a I, 2 [Rule of the Congregation]). In fact, line 25 may refer to this figure: “with him will go out one of the priests of renown.”

**Sefer Hamilhama (4Q285)**

Finally, 4Q285 (Sefer Hamilhama) has a further reference to a Davidic messiah.

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\(^1\) Pomykala, 201.

\(^2\) Line 20 talks about a “throne of glory, [a] holy crown and multi-coloured vestments.”
This document comprises 10 fragments which probably represent the remains of six successive columns. Fragment 7 reads:

1 [As it is written in the book of ]Isaiah the prophet: ‘Cut down shall be the thickets of the forest with an axe, and Lebanon by a majestic one shall fall. And there shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and out of his roots a sapling will grow’ … the Branch of David, and they will enter into judgment with the Prince of the Congregation, the Branch of David, shall put him to death by strokes and wounds. And a priest of renown will command the slain of the Kittim.[…] […] In the first half of the 1990s there was a highly publicized debate over whether the Davidic messiah pierces someone or is himself killed in the war with the Kittim (lines 4-5). The debate focused on the vocalization of the word in line 4. The two suggested readings, יָמִיהָ (“and he will kill him”) and יָמִיהָ (“and they will kill”), are grammatically possible. The context, however, strongly suggests—at least in my view—


2 Ibid., 238-9. Cf. frg. 5 in García Martínez and Tigchelaar, eds., 2:642-3. This manuscript has been dated towards the end of the 1st century B.C.E. Pfann and others, 232.

3 For references see Pomykala, 203, n. 132.
the former reading in which it is Branch who kills another person. This document suggests a triumphant Messiah and, as we saw above, 4Q252 mentions that Israel’s victory in the eschatological battle marks the beginning of the restoration of dominion to Israel and the time when the Davidic kingship will not be cut off.¹

The fragment contains an isolated commentary on Isa 10:34 and 11:1. The context is a battle between Israel and the Kittim.² Lebanon and the forest, which are cut down, symbolize enemy nations (the Kittim) and the kings who are slain (lines 2, 6).³ The reference to the Davidic figure in lines 2-4 is important for several reasons. First, this document explicitly identifies the figure promised in Isa 11:1 with the Branch of David, a title taken from Jer 23:5; 33:15; Zech 3:8; 6:12. This suggests the influence of the post-exilic prophets Jeremiah (and Zechariah?) in Qumran’s expectation of a messianic figure. Second, line 4 also indicates that the figure designated by the title Branch of David is for the first time definitely identified with the נְסֵאָה הָנוּרָה (Prince of the Congregation).⁴ Finally, the נְסֵאָה הָנוּרָה rules alongside a priestly figure. It is, in fact, the priest who orders the execution of the Kittim (line 5). The נְסֵאָה הָנוּרָה follows the commands and is

² For details, see Abegg, 82.
³ In fact, 4Q161 identifies the cedars of Lebanon as the Kittim in its interpretation of Isa 10:34 (see pp. 192-4).
⁴ This is important because the activities of the נְסֵאָה הָנוּרָה elsewhere in the document can be attributed to the Branch of David.
supervised in his judgments by the priestly figure. This view is also attested in 4Q161 8-10, III, 24 “and according to what they teach him, he will judge” (see above section “Commentary on Isaiah [4Q161]

**Apocryphon of Daniel or “Son of God” Document (4Q246)**

This is a fragmentary text that has produced widely divergent interpretations. It consists of two columns, the first of which has suffered a vertical tear resulting in the loss of about a third to half of each line.

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Col. I
1 [...] settled [up] on him and he fell before the throne
2 [...] k]ing for ever. You are angry, and have changed you
3 [...] ... your vision, and everything that shall come for ever.
4 [...] m]ighty ones, oppression will come upon the earth
5 [...] and great slaughter in the provinces
6 [...] king of Assyria [and E]gypt
7 [...] and he will be great over the earth
8 [...] they [will d]o, and all will serve
9 [...] gr]eat will he be called and he will be designated by his name.

Col. II
1 He will be called son of God, and they will call him son of the Most High. Like the sparks
2 that you saw, so will their kingdom be; they will rule several year[s] over
3 the earth and crush everything; a people will crush another people, and a province another provi[n]ce.
4 Blank Until the people of God arises and makes everyone rest from the sword. Blank
5 His kingdom will be an eternal kingdom, and all his paths in truth. He will jud[ge]
6 the earth in truth and all will make peace. The sword will cease from the earth,
7 and all the provinces will pay him homage. The great God is his strength, 8 he will wage war for him; he will place the peoples in his hand and 9 cast them all away before him. His rule will be an eternal rule, and all the abysses.

The principal question that divides scholars in their interpretation of this text is whether the personage designated “son of God” is a positive or negative figure. A slight majority of scholars favor a positive view of this figure and consider him a Davidic eschatological redeemer who will overthrow God’s enemies and establish the eternal kingdom of God. The basis of this interpretation is the title “son of God” which is considered a Davidic title (2 Sam 7:14; Pss 2:7-8; 89:26-27). Furthermore, the notion in

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1 I am quoting here García Martínez and Tigchelaar, eds., 1:492-5. They follow Puech, “4QApocryphe,” 165-84.


lines 8-9 that God “will place the peoples in his hand” reminds us as well of Ps 2:8 where God promises his “messiah,” “I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.” Similarly, lines 4-6 refer to his kingdom as being eternal and establishing “rest” or “peace” upon the earth. These were also part of the Davidic promises in 2 Sam 7:11, 13, 16.¹

Summary
Those Qumran sectarian writings that refer to the Davidic covenant interpret its fulfillment in eschatological terms. In the last days, the Branch of David will arise and take office. They identify the Branch of David with the Prince of the Congregation. His main function is military. He will lead the war against the enemy (the Kittim). At the time of the victory, Davidic rule is restored never to be cut off. His role, however, is subordinated to the authority of the priests. His main role, then, is to lead in the war against the eschatological enemies.² Note as well that 4Q174 I, 6-13 contains the intriguing remark that the Branch of David will build a “temple of man.”

4 Ezra
Fourth Ezra refers to the Davidic dynasty in the interpretation of its fifth vision.³

² See Pomykala, 212-4.
³ This work has been dated to ca. 100 C.E. (cf. 4 Ezra 3:1). Bruce M. Metzger,
This vision (4 Ezra 11:1-12:3) describes an eagle with 3 heads and 12 wings that reigns over the earth. Its rule is oppressive. Next, a lion rises from the forest and pronounces the judgment of The Most High against the eagle. As a result, the eagle loses its heads and wings and its body is burned. The eagle is interpreted as referring to Rome, “the fourth kingdom which appeared in a vision to your brother Daniel” (12:11; cf. Dan 7:7). Finally the figure of the lion is interpreted in 12:31-34:

And as for the lion that you saw rousing up out of the forest and roaring and speaking to the eagle and reproving him for his unrighteousness, and as for all his words that you have heard, this is the Messiah whom the Most High has kept until the end of days, who will arise from the posterity of David, and will come and speak to them; he will denounce them for their ungodliness and for their wickedness, and will cast up before them their contemptuous dealings. For first he will set them living before his judgment seat, and when he has reproved them, then he will destroy them. But he will deliver in mercy the remnant of my people, those who have been saved throughout my borders, and he will make them joyful until the end comes, the day of judgment, of which I spoke to you at the beginning.

The interpretation of the image of the lion interests us here. First, the image probably derived from Gen 49:9-10 and applied to the Davidic figure. Second, it is called the “posterity [seed] of David” and specifically named the Messiah. Finally, he was “kept until the end of days.”¹ The author clearly expects, then, a Davidic figure to arise in the

¹ Michael E. Stone believes that on the basis of this and similar assertions regarding the Messiah in the rest of the book, the scion of the David is considered to be a
end of time. Some aspects of 4 Ezra’s expectation of a Davidic Messiah are peculiar, though. Its main function is to pronounce judgment against the eagle and probably to execute it as well (11:36-12:3). This is not strange. Isaiah 11:1-5 considers judgment and its execution the main function of the “shoot of David.” What is notable is the absence of monarchical and militaristic terminology in the description of his functions. He is never spoken of in terms of kingship.¹ The Davidic Messiah will not rule over Israel, but he “will make them [i.e., Israel’s remnant] joyful.” Even if we consider this to refer to his rule over Israel, this rule would not be forever, but only “until the end.” It is interesting that 4 Ezra 7:28-29 says that the Messiah will live 400 years and then he will die. Thus, the arrival of the Davidic messiah and his kingdom are not seen as the inauguration of a new ideal age for Israel but only a stage on the way to those events.² The Davidic covenant is no longer the focus of the author’s hope but only a part—and not the central one—of God’s design for the future.

Josephus

There are several references to the Davidic dynasty in The Jewish Antiquities.³

preexistent figure (212).

¹ Pomykala, 218; Stone, 209, 212-3.

² Stone, 213.

None of them states or implies a hope for its restoration. The first reference is located in its account of the story of Ruth: “Of Obed was born Jesse, and of him David, who became king and bequeathed his dominion to his posterity for one and twenty generations” (Ant. 5.336 [Thackeray, LCL]). This reference to the Davidic dynasty does not allude to the promise of an eternal throne; instead, it refers to it as enduring for a long time but not eternally.

This is clearer in the narrative of the end of the kingdom of Judah: “Thus, then, did the kings of David’s line end their lives; there were twenty-one of them including the last king, and they reigned altogether for five hundred and fourteen years, six months and ten days” (Ant. 10.143 [Thackeray, LCL]). Again, Josephus refers here to the end of the Davidic dynasty without any reference to a hope for its restoration.

For Josephus, the monarchy was one of the different phases in the government of Israel. These phases included the rule of the judges and the leadership of the Hasmonean high priests:

For the high priests were at the head of affairs until the descendants of the Asamonean family came to rule as kings. Before the captivity and deportation they were ruled by kings, beginning first with Saul and David, for five hundred and thirty-two years, six months and ten days; and before these kings the rulers who governed them were the men called judges and monarchs, and under this form of government they lived for more than five hundred years after the death of Moses and the commander Joshua. (Ant. 11.112 [Thackeray, LCL])

Thus, Josephus considered the Davidic monarchy a stage in the history of the Jewish people, a stage that was glorious but had finished.

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As far as I know, there is no work devoted to the interpretation of Davidic traditions in Josephus. I will follow here mostly the work of Pomykala, 222-9.
Josephus’s account of the Davidic promise itself does not refer to its unconditional and/or perpetual nature. He interprets God’s promise to David as clearly conditional. We first find an allusion in Josephus’s account of David’s anointing by Samuel:

He also exhorted him to be righteous and obedient to His commandments, for so would the kingship long continue to be his, and his house would become splendid and renowned; he would subdue the Philistines and, victorious and triumphant over all nations with whom he might wage war, he would in his lifetime attain glorious fame and bequeath it to his posterity. (Ant. 6.165 [Thackeray, LCL])

Josephus refers here to several elements that would later become part of God’s promises to David—for example, victory over enemies, a great name, and posterity—but they are clearly conditional and apparently not eternal. The account of the promise itself is, likewise, conditional and not eternal:

He [God] said, after David’s death at an advanced age and at the end of a long life, the temple should be brought into being by his son and successor to the kingdom, whose name would be Solomon, and whom He promised to watch over and care for as a father for his son, and to preserve the kingdom for his children’s children and transmit it to them, but He would punish him, if he sinned, with sickness and barrenness of the soil. (Ant. 7.93-95 [Thackeray, LCL])

A comparison of Josephus’s account of David’s exhortation to Solomon with the biblical text (1 Chr 22:1) shows clearly that Josephus avoids the Chronicler’s reference to an eternal dynasty:

See, a son shall be born to you; he shall be a man of peace. I will give him peace from all his enemies on every side; for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days. He shall build a house for my name. He shall build a house for my name. He shall be a son to me, and I will be a father to him, and I will establish his royal throne in Israel forever. (1 Chr 22:10, emphasis mine)

He had also foretold that his youngest son Solomon would build Him a temple, and should be called by this name, and promised to watch over him like a father, and bring prosperity to the country of the Hebrews in his reign, with, among other things, the greatest of all blessings, namely peace and freedom from war and civil dissension. (Ant. 7.337 [Thackeray, LCL], emphasis mine)
The conditional nature of the dynastic promise to David is repeated, as well, in Josephus’s account of David’s last words to Solomon (Ant. 7.384-385; par. 1 Kgs 2:1-4).

Finally, the noneternal nature of the promise becomes clear in the account of God’s confirmation of the Davidic promise to Solomon in a dream (1 Kgs 9:4-9):

As for the king himself, God said that if he abided by his father’s counsels, He would first raise him to a height and greatness of happiness beyond measure, and that those of his own line should for ever rule the country and the tribe of Judah. If, however, he should be faithless to his task and forget it and turn to the worship of foreign gods, He would cut him off root and branch and would not suffer any of their line to survive. (Ant. 8.126-127 [Thackeray, LCL], emphasis mine)

The condition is clear: If Solomon is not faithful, God will “cut off” (ἐκκόπτω) his line of descendants.

In summary, the several references to the Davidic covenant in The Jewish Antiquities make it clear that Josephus considered the Davidic dynasty a glorious period in the history of Israel that had come to an end because of its unfaithfulness.

This agrees with Josephus’s general theological interpretation of Jewish history. Josephus replaces covenantal language with benefactor/alliance terminology. God intervenes in history to reward the righteous and punish the wicked.¹ Thus, there is no such thing as an unconditional eternal promise of a Davidic dynasty. In fact, “there is not a trace of Davidic messianism in the Antiquities.”²

Summary

There is a diverse reaction to the failure of the Davidic dynasty in early Judaism.

² Pomykala, 228.
The Davidic promises are not ignored but the political realities of the time color their interpretation.

For Sirach, the Davidic covenant was God’s unconditional promise to David of an eternal dynasty which made the rule of Solomon, Rehoboam, and other kings possible despite their sin and folly (47:12-22). Yet, the Davidic dynasty came to an end. It is not that they forfeited the promise because of their great sins, but, in fact, repudiated it (49:4-5). Sirach presents, instead, the office of the high priest as the heir and climax of the Davidic office. This becomes clear in the eulogy of Simon the high priest in Sir 50 (esp. vv. 1-4). In fact, the contemporary relevance of the Davidic covenant for Sirach is that it helps to explain the appropriate method of succession for the office of the high priest (45:25).

First Maccabees 2:57 refers to the Davidic dynasty. David and the promises made to him are part of the glorious past that the Hasmonean rulers have emulated (1 Macc 2:49-68, esp. 57). First Maccabees does not express a hope for the future.

On the other hand, *Psalms of Solomon* 17 is probably a direct assault on the legitimacy of the Hasmonean monarchy. The author blames the sorry condition of the nation on the usurpation of the throne by those it didn’t belong to (vv. 5-10), arguably the Hasmoneans. The author claims that the Davidic promises are eternal and expresses hope for the restoration of the Davidic dynasty. The author expects that the hoped-for Davidic king—almost a divine figure—will mediate the renewal of the covenant, gather the Jews from the land of their exile, cleanse the nation from sin, and bring righteousness and holiness to the nation. Expectations regarding the priests and temple are notoriously absent, however.
The Qumran covenanters expect the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant in the last
days. The Branch of David is an eschatological figure who will lead the forces of the
Sons of Light to victory against their eschatological enemies (the Kittim). This figure,
however, has a subordinate role to the priests who oversee his activities.

In 4 Ezra, the Davidic king is an eschatological figure whose main (only?)
function is to pronounce judgment against the eagle (Rome) and probably execute it as
well. His function is of limited time, however. He rules until “the end.” Thus, he fulfills a
function preliminary to the end of time.

Finally, for Josephus the Davidic dynasty is a stage in the history of the Israelite
nation that ended because of its sinfulness. His references to the Davidic promise
consistently avoid language regarding its perpetual or unconditional nature. He does not
entertain any hope for Israel based on the Davidic covenant.

The Early Judaism period attests to the diversification of the messianic hope in
general and the Davidic hope in particular. Some have renounced a Davidic hope
(Josephus). For others, the Davidic covenant is part of a glorious past that continues to
live in the heroics of present rulers (1 Macc 2:57), or consider that its functions have been
taken over by the present priesthood (Sirach). Finally, a third group still clings to the
Davidic covenant as a source of eschatological hope that promises a holy and righteous
ruler who restores Israel (Pss. Sol. 17), or a military figure who leads in the war against
eschatological enemies (Qumran), or a figure who pronounces judgment but whose
function is only temporary (4 Ezra). This state of affairs reflects the fragmentary nature
of early Judaism.
Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a conceptual map of the expectations regarding the rule of the ideal Davidic king in the Early Judaism period. The range of these expectations is determined by the different interpretations of the Davidic covenant upon which the Davidic dynasty was established. Therefore, I examined two groups of writings—the Hebrew Bible and Early Jewish writings—in four stages: (1) the institution of the Davidic covenant, (2) the history of righteous kings and the Davidic covenant in monarchical Israel, (3) the Davidic covenant in the psalms and the prophets, and (4), the Davidic covenant in early Jewish writings. These are the results.

The Davidic covenant consists of God’s promise to establish the “house” of David—dynasty, throne, rule—for ever and let David’s son build a “house” for God—temple (2 Sam 7; 1 Chr 17). The purpose of the Davidic covenant is to engraft the Davidic monarchy into the existing covenant relationship between God and the nation established at Sinai. This, however, implicates a deep transformation of the theological foundations of Israel in two ways.

First, God’s relationship to the nation is now mediated through the Davidic king. By means of his divine adoption the Davidic king becomes Israel’s proxy. Accordingly, God’s promises to the nation—land and rest from enemies—are assigned to him so that he becomes the channel through which the covenantal blessings will flow. The Davidic mediation makes possible, as well, the eternal validity of God’s promises to Israel that were only conditional in the past (Mosaic covenant). This is so because the Davidic promises are eternal and unconditional. Though God reserves the right to punish individual kings for their sins, this does not invalidate God’s promises to David. Thus,
the Davidic covenant renews the Mosaic covenant “under better promises.”

Second, the building of the temple implies changes in the cult. God’s choosing of this temple as a dwelling place for his “name” makes necessary the centralization of the cult that had been anticipated in Deuteronomy. This includes, for example, changes to the law of sacrifices and modifications to the cultic function of the priests and Levites.

In summary, the most important function the Davidic covenant assigns to the Davidic king is to be the mediator of the covenantal blessings. His rule should apply this ideal.

The analysis of the rule of righteous Davidic kings in biblical history showed a pattern of their actions that reached its most complete expression in the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah. Seven main elements—not always in the same order—comprise this pattern. After ascending the throne, the king would (1) renew the covenant between God and the nation, (2) cleanse the land from spurious forms of worship, (3) build or repair the temple, (4) modify the cult by ordinances that secured a better service for the worshipers and reorganize or reestablish the cultic function of the priests and Levites, (5) promote the reunification of Israel, and (6) achieve “rest” by defeating enemies, and, in several cases, the rise to power of the Davidic king coincides with (7) the emergence of a faithful priest.

Notwithstanding, the catastrophic failure of the Davidic dynasty (586 B.C.E.) made a reinterpretation of the Davidic covenant necessary. The prophets projected the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant to the future. The seven elements that comprised the actions of righteous Davidic kings in Jewish history appear as well in their description of the rule of the future scion of David, but now they are elevated to eschatological
proportions. The renewal of the covenant becomes a new covenant, the cleansing of the land becomes a cleansing of the spiritual life of the nation, an eschatological temple is built, the law is implanted in the heart of the nation, Israel is brought from the “four corners of the earth,” and the rest includes the transformation of the natural order so that war and violence will not arise again. There is also the expectation that a faithful priest will arise alongside the Davidic king. According to Zechariah the eschatological king and priests will co-rule in harmony.

Reaction to the failure of the Davidic dynasty is diverse in early Judaism. Some renounce or reject any contemporary or future significance for the Davidic covenant (Josephus). Others limit its significance to the past. Either they consider David’s rule one of many historical examples that current rulers should emulate (1 Maccabees), or suggest that its purposes are being fulfilled by contemporary non-Davidic rulers (Sirach). A third group continues to support the validity of the Davidic covenant for their time. They differ in their interpretations, though. The Davidic covenant may be the source of an eschatological hope that promises a holy and righteous ruler who restores the nation (Pss. Sol. 17), a military figure who leads in the war against eschatological enemies (Qumran), or a figure who pronounces judgment but whose function is only temporal (4 Ezra).

What are the implications of this study? This chapter has shown that expectations for the rule of the ideal Davidic king in the Hebrew Bible include seven elements/actions. These seek to fulfill the purposes of the Davidic covenant in the reign of these kings. These elements appear as well in those writings that continue to hold the validity of the Davidic promises (esp. Psalm of Solomon 17 and Qumran’s sectarian writings).

I want to suggest that these elements provide the necessary subtext to understand
Jesus’ rule in heaven in the Letter to the Hebrews. Thus, Jesus is the “son” enthroned at the right hand of God (1:3, 5-6). He has defeated “death,” the enemy (2:14-16), built the “house of God” (3:1-6; 8:1-5), and provided “rest” to his people (4:1-10). His ascension to the throne also implies a change in the cult. The new ministry for the temple implies the emergence of a new faithful priest from the order of Melchizedek (chaps. 5-7) and a change to the law of sacrifices (9:9-10). The new king cleanses his people (9:11-14), mediates a new covenant (9:15-23), and reforms the cult by establishing one sacrifice that is effective “once for all” (9:24-10:18) and multiple spiritual sacrifices (13:10-16), all of which conclude in a joyous celebration at Mount Zion (12:22-29).

I turn now to analysis of these elements of the Davidic hope in the Letter to the Hebrews.
CHAPTER 3

ASCENSION AND INAUGURATION OF THE RULE OF THE “SON” IN THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

This chapter has a simple structure. I will analyze, in order, the six passages in which the ascension of Jesus is explicitly referred to in the Letter to the Hebrews. These passages are Heb 1:6; 4:14-16; 6:19-20; 9:11-14; 9:24; 10:19-25.¹ This analysis will include two steps.

The first step concerns the imagery of the passage and its logic. In other words, we want to understand “how” the ascension is described in each passage and what that implies. Study of the imagery implies two questions: (1) “where” has Jesus entered? and (2) “what for”? Thus, for example, the study of the imagery of Heb 6:19-20 implies analysis of the image “entrance within the veil,” and whether this identifies Jesus’ ascension as part of a heavenly Day of Atonement.

The second step analyzes the rhetorical function of the ascension in the argument of the section of Hebrews to which that passage belongs. In other words, we want to

¹ Multiple passages in which Jesus’ ascension is assumed but not directly referred to will not be studied (e.g., 8:1, etc.). In the end, this is not helpful because the argument of the Letter as a whole assumes Jesus’ ascension.
know “why” the author of Hebrews decided to refer explicitly to the ascension in that particular place.

At the end of this chapter, I will also analyze Heb 12:18-29, which refers to the “ascension” of believers to Mount Zion. My decision to include this passage may seem strange at first because it does not refer explicitly to Jesus’ ascension (only assumes it). I will argue, however, that this passage articulates the varying descriptions of Jesus’ ascension as a single, multifaceted, yet harmonious event and its place in the general argument of Hebrews. This passage is key to understanding the Davidic traditions as essential to the exposition of the ascension in Hebrews. It also explains the relationship of the Davidic traditions to the argument of the Letter as a whole.

“...When He Brings the Firstborn into the World” (Heb 1:6):
Ascension and the Enthronement of the Son

οταν δε πάλιν εισαγάγῃ τὸν πρωτότοκον εἰς τὴν οἰκουμένην, λέγει· καὶ προσκυνησάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες ἄγγελοι θεοῦ

and again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, “Let all God’s angels worship him” [emphasis mine].

The event referred to in this passage has been and continues to be a matter of debate among the interpreters of Hebrews. Three events have been suggested as being referred to in this passage: the Parousia, the incarnation, and the exaltation of Jesus in heaven. It is necessary, then, before I embark on an analysis of the ascension in this passage, to explain why I consider this passage to be, in the first place, a reference to the ascension in Hebrews.
Does This Passage Refer to the Ascension of Jesus?

The Case for the Incarnation

In his Homily on Heb 1:6-8, John Chrysostom (b. ca. 349, d. 407 C.E.)

understood this passage as referring to the incarnation:

Our Lord Jesus Christ calls His coming in the flesh an exodus [or going out]: as when He saith, “The sower went out to sow.” (Matt. xiii. 3.) And again, “I went out from the Father, and am come,” (John xvi. 28.) And in many places one may see this. But Paul calls it an [eisodus or] coming in, saying, “And when again He bringeth in the First-Begotten into the world,” meaning by this Bringing in, His taking on Him flesh. (On the Epistle to the Hebrews 3.1 [NPNF II 14:375])

This interpretation has remained popular among current scholars of Hebrews.

They argue, correctly, that οἰκουμένη—where Jesus is brought into—normally denotes “the earth as inhabited area, exclusive of the heavens above and nether regions” (BDAG,


and, therefore, they conclude that this passage cannot refer to Jesus’ ascension to heaven but only to his coming to earth. Harold W. Attridge suggests, then, that Heb 1:6 is part of a “three-stage” Christology, implied in the exordium, that includes Jesus’ pre-existence, incarnation, and exaltation.¹ In addition, Otto Michel and Ceslas Spicq note that the phrase “introduce into the world” (בְּֽלָאָליִּי) is a common Hebrew idiom for giving birth.² Finally, there are, as well, possible parallel traditions to this view in early


² Michel, 113, n. 1; Spicq, 2:17. James Moffatt (10) provides some examples of the use of εἰσόδημο for birth in Greek literature (e.g., Diatr. 4.1.104). Hugh Montefiore suggested that here Hebrews alludes to the angels’ worship in Luke 2:13. Harold W. Attridge is correct when he argues that “there is no need to posit any allusion to Luke 2:13, where, in any case, the angels do not worship the Son.” The Epistle to the Hebrews, 56, n. 67.
Judaism. According to *Life of Adam and Eve* 13-16, when God created Adam in his own image, Michael ordered the angels to worship him but Satan refused.\(^1\)

Several scholars find it difficult to believe, however, that Hebrews refers here to God’s command to worship the Son at the incarnation. They usually note that, according to Hebrews, Jesus’ incarnation entailed his humiliation of being made “lower than the angels” (2:7, 9).\(^2\) If he is made lower than the angels, how is it that God orders angels to worship him at this point?

**The Case for the Parousia**

 Gregory of Nyssa (335/340-394 C.E.), on the other hand, understood this passage as referring to the second coming of Jesus.\(^3\) His exegesis was based on the use of πάλιν (again) which he understood to modify the verb εἰσαγάγει (he brings); therefore, the introduction of the “firstborn into the world” was, in fact, a reintroduction, a second coming to the world:

> The addition of “again” shows, by the force of this word, that this event happens


This is probably a rabbinic tradition also referred to in Sanh. 59b and 2 En. 31:2, Bruce, 57, n. 77.


not for the first time: for we use this word of the repetition of things which have once happened. He signifies, therefore, by the phrase, the dread appearing of the Judge at the end of the ages, when He is seen no more in the form of a servant, but seated in glory upon the throne of His kingdom, and worshipped by all the angels that are around Him. (Against Eunomius 4.3 [NPNF² 5:157])

More recently, this position has been advocated mostly—but not exclusively—by German authors on the same basis.² The strength of this position is that St. Gregory of Nyssa’s reading of πάλιν is common elsewhere in Hebrews; that is, πάλιν often has a temporal function and modifies the verb (e.g., 4:7; 5:12; 6:1, 6).³ Scholars also note—together with those who see here a reference to the incarnation—that the firstborn is introduced not to heaven, but to the “world” (οἰκουμένη); therefore, they argue, it cannot refer to the former.⁴

Against this position, it is noted that in the sentence immediately before (v. 5) πάλιν does not modify the verb (temporal function) but introduces a quotation from

1 For the Greek text, see PG 45.634-5.


3 Note that Erich Gräßer argues instead that πάλιν does have a temporal function and refers to Jesus’ second entrance or re-entrance into the heavenly place of rulership, but this refers to his ascension or enthronement (1:78).

4 See previous section.
Scripture (connective function; cf. 1:5; 2:13a, 13b; 4:5; 10:30). Since Heb 1:6 also quotes Scripture, it is not difficult to believe that here too πάλιν introduces a citation and, therefore, does not refer to a second introduction of the firstborn into the world.¹

Brooke F. Westcott provides a third argument for a future understanding of the introduction of the Son to the world. He contends that the construction of ὅταν with the aorist subjunctive (εἰσαγάγῃ) “must look forward to an event (or events) in the future regarded as fulfilled at a time (or times) as yet undetermined.”² Westcott is right in that this is normally the case.³ Thus, even if πάλιν referred not to a second coming to the

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¹ The connective function of πάλιν seems to be suggested by the fact that both passages (Heb 1:5-6) form part of a catena of passages from Scripture (vv. 5-14). This was also the way it was interpreted in the Old Latin and Syriac versions. Lane, Hebrews I-8, 26. Cf. Westcott, 21-22. On the other hand, Herbert Braun has cited examples from Philo [Drunkenness 207, 208, 210] and others where πάλιν is used more than once performing different functions, including temporal and connective ones in the same passage (36). This makes possible, then, that this passage refers to the second coming. I am convinced, however, by Kenneth Schenck’s suggestion that πάλιν is used twice to link two passages from Scripture (2 Sam 7:14 [Heb 1:5b] and Deut 32:43 [Heb 1:6]) to Ps 2:7 (Heb 1:5a) so as to bear in its interpretation. Understanding, 49. Also Girdwood and Verkruysse, 49.

² It is debated exactly what passage—and in what form—is cited in Heb 1:6. The passages suggested are: Deut 32:43b, Deut 32:43d, Ps 97:7 (LXX 96:7); Odes Sol. 2:43b; 4QDeut. I tend to agree with Paul Ellingworth that the text cited is Deut 32:43b though “in a form not now directly attested, but to which 4QDeuteronomy gives indirect support.” The Epistle to the Hebrews, 119.

world, the syntactical structure of the sentence would denote that this coming is still future. The problem with Westcott’s case is that in this case ὁταν . . . εἰσαγάγη refers to a quotation; therefore, whose future is it—that of the author of Hebrews, or of the author of the OT quotation?¹ For example, Ceslas Spicq notes that the same syntactical structure is found in 1 Cor 15:27 (ὁταν . . . εἴπη), also referring to an OT quotation. There, this syntactical structure denotes not the future, but the past.² Also, it must be noted that, if πάλιν is not connected with εἰσαγάγη, the main verb of the sentence (λέγει) would imply that the temporal aspect of εἰσαγάγη refers to the present too, however general this may be.³

Finally, damaging to this position is the fact that this section shows little interest in the Parousia. Actually, there is no reference to it, but only possible inferences from 1:13 and 2:8.⁴

**The Case for the Exaltation**

A slight majority of contemporary scholars hold that Heb 1:6 refers to Jesus’

¹ Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 119.

² Spicq, 2:17. Also, Moffatt, 10-11.

³ The present form of the verb (λέγει) suggests the permanent validity of the word of God (as in vv. 7, 3:7; 5:6; 8:8). Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 117. Also, Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 26.

⁴ Koester, *Hebrews*, 192. Regarding allusions to the Parousia, see Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 117; Bruce, 56-58.
exaltation after his resurrection. They argue that the immediate context of Heb 1:6 is Jesus’ session at the right hand of God. In Heb 1:1-4, the exaltation of the Son as heir (v. 2b) is connected with his enthronement and superiority over the angels (vv. 3d-4). Since vv. 5-14 describe the adoption of the Son (v. 5) and his enthronement (vv. 8, 9, 13), it is natural to understand God’s command to the angels to worship the Son (v. 6) as part of his enthronement ceremony. Moreover, the title “firstborn” itself (v. 6) is probably a Davidic title which evokes the promise regarding the Davidic kings: “I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth” (Ps 89:27).


2 See Schenck, Understanding, 49. “Hier wird der davidische König als πρωτότοκος [υἱὸς] bezeichnet, und zwar als derjenige, dem die Weltherrschaft verheißen ist,” (Here the Davidic king is called πρωτότοκος [υἱὸς], to be precise the person to whom the rule of the world is promised) Weiβ, 163. Martin Karrer’s insight in this context is important: “Durch die Auswahl des Zitats kombiniert der Hebr damit einen weiteren, nicht minder bedeutsamen Akzent: Die Engel, die vor dem Sohn niederfallen, stehen im Moselied über den Völkern. Sie stecken daher den universalen Horizont ab, in dem sich die Leserinnen und Lesser des Hebr aus den Völkern vorfind, und bekunden indirekt die Unterwerfung der Völker unter den Sohn” (Through the selection of the citation, Hebrews combines with it a wider, not less significant, accent: the angels, who prostrate themselves before the Son, stand above the nations in the Song of Moses. They define the universal horizon in which the readers of Hebrews find themselves coming out of the nations, and express indirectly the subjugation of the nations under the Son)
The view that Jesus was worshipped by the angels when he was exalted in Heaven is well attested in early Christian literature. The “begetting” of the Son—referred to in Heb 1:5 (quoting Ps 2:7 and 2 Sam 7:14; par. 1 Chr 17:13)—is applied to the resurrection of Jesus in Rom 1:3-4. Likewise, according to Phil 2:9-10, God gave Jesus “the name that is above every name” after his death on the cross “so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (cf. Eph 1:20-22; 4:8-10; 1 Pet 3:22). Finally, the apocalyptic document Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah (ca. 2nd century C.E.) in a section of Christian origin, is more explicit:

Karrer, Der Brief an die Hebräer, 135.

It is also possible, though less likely, that an allusion is made to Deut 6:10; 11:29 which refer to Israel’s entrance into Canaan: ὅταν εἰσαχάγη σε . . . εἰς τὴν γῆν. Hebrews would replace, in this case, σε with πρῶτοτοκόν. (Note that according to Exod 4:22, Israel is the firstborn of God.) In this sense, Jesus, as the firstborn of God, is introduced into the promised land, just as Israel was introduced into Canaan. Paul C. B. Andriessen, “La Teneur Judéo-Chrétienne de HE I 6 et II 14B-III 2,” NovT 18 (1976): 395-400. In Exod 16:35, the οἰκουμένη refers to the promised land into which God introduces Israel. Note that Heb 4:1-11 reinterprets the promised land as the future world. Koester, Hebrews, 193.

1 Probably also Acts 13:33, though there are some doubts regarding whether the begetting of the Son is connected with the resurrection or the incarnation in this passage. See below p. 261, n. 2.

2 A similar view seems to be behind 1 Tim 3:16: “He [Jesus] was . . . seen by angels.” See also Vanhoye, Situation du Christ, 140-42; Weiß, 162.

3 This is a composite work of which chaps. 6-11 are of Christian origin and known as “the Vision of Isaiah.” This section probably originated in the 2nd century C.E. The first section (chaps. 1-5), known as the “Martyrdom of Isaiah,” includes a good deal of Jewish material and originated earlier, around 1st century C.E. M. A. Knibb, “Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah: A New Translation and Introduction,” in Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, ed. James H. Charlesworth, vol. 2, ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 149-50.
And I saw when he ascended into the sixth heaven, that they worshiped him and praised him; but in all the heavens the praise grew louder. And I saw how he [Jesus] ascended into the seventh heaven, and all the righteous and all the angels praised him. And then I saw that he [Jesus] sat down at the right hand of that Great Glory, whose glory I told you I could not behold. (11:22-33; cf. 10:7-16 [Knibb, OTP 2:176])

This view receives two important critiques, however. First—as mentioned above—this understanding has the inconvenience that it requires the term οἰκουμένη not to carry its normal meaning in Heb 1:6. Οἰκουμένη would not denote here the world, but heaven. Proponents of this view argue, however, that this is exactly what Heb 2:5—the only other place where the term οἰκουμένη is used in the epistle—tries to explain. It is noted here that the world (οἰκουμένη) which he is talking about—i.e., the one that has been subjected to the Son—is the “coming world” (τὴν οἰκουμένην τὴν μέλλουσαν), not the present one. Besides, whenever Hebrews refers to the present world, it uses a different term, κόσμος (4:3; 9:26; 10:5; 11:7, 38). Οἰκουμένη denotes, then, in Heb 1:6

1 E.g., Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 56.

2 Harold W. Attridge counters that οἰκουμένη in Heb 2:5 has an eschatological qualifier to distinguish it from 1:6. Ibid. Likewise, William R. G. Loader has argued that if the author of Hebrews wanted to refer to “the coming world,” he would have added an explaining adjective as in 2:5. Sohn und Hoherpriester, 24. Attridge’s and Loader’s critique could be answered, however, with the claim in 2:5 that the “coming world” is the one “about which we are speaking.” There is no other mention of the world in this section, except 1:6. deSilva, 97.

3 Albert Vanhoye argues that the OT also uses the term οἰκουμένη to denote the world to come as Hebrews does; for example, Isa 62:4 and Pss 96:9-11 [95:9-11 LXX]; 93:1 [92:1 LXX]. This οἰκουμένη is the authentic world that is established by the just work of God. Vanhoye, Situation du Christ, 154-7; idem, “L’οἰκουμένη dans l’épître aux Hébreux,” Bib 45 (1964): 248-53. I do not agree, however, with his suggestion that οἰκουμένη is a technical term in the OT for the eschatological kingdom of God. Harold W. Attridge correctly critiques this view, noting that in those passages οἰκουμένη simply
the sphere over which the Son reigns; that is, the world to come.¹ This use of ὠικομένη is similar, in fact, to the use of the term in the imperial rhetoric of the time. In those cases ὠικομένη denoted not the inhabited world itself but the Roman Empire, the sphere over which the emperor ruled (e.g., Luke 2:1).² Thus, the introduction of the “firstborn into the world” (1:6) denotes his introduction into his dominion—represented by the heavenly court—as ruler; which is what fulfills his appointment by God as “heir of all things” (1:2).

Hebrews’ use of ὠικομένη, then, is ironic. It implies that the true kingdom—the unshakable one (12:28)—and the true world—the homeland of believers (11:13-15; 13:14)—are not on this earth but in heaven.³ This is a strategy the author will use later in the epistle when he refers to the true rest for the people of God not as the one given by Joshua (4:8), and the true tabernacle as the one in heaven (8:1-2, 5). Note that in both cases, the terms κατάπαυσις and τὰ ἅγια designate without any qualifications an

contrasts with ἔρεμος but is not a technical term for God’s eschatological kingdom. The Epistle to the Hebrews, 56, n. 66. Nevertheless, this does not prevent the author of Hebrews from using this term to denote the eschatological realm of God’s rule. deSilva, 97.


³ Schenck, “Celebration,” 478; idem, Understanding, 49. Also, Gräßer, 1:79.
eschatological reality. It is the context that makes clear their eschatological or heavenly sense.

Hebrews 1:6 refers, then, to God’s introduction of Jesus to the heavenly court. The author refers here to the ascension as an act of God in which God has brought Jesus into the heavenly realm.

It is necessary, now, to answer the following two questions. First, in terms of the imagery of the passage, how is the ascension described? Or, what is the event of which the ascension is a part? Second, in terms of the argument of Hebrews, why is the ascension referred to here?

I will address these two issues in order in the following two sections.

The Enthronement of the Firstborn over the World to Come

The Catena Describes the Enthronement Ceremony of the Son

Hebrews 1:6 is the third link in a catena of seven OT quotations (vv. 5-14). The

1 Similar series of OT passages can be found in Rom 3:10-18; 1 Cor 6:16-18. Outside the NT, Tatian’s Testimonia is a similar collection (3rd century C.E.) which was, in fact, an enlargement of a previous document. Montefiore, 43-44. Other Jewish sects also produced similar chains of OT passages; for example, 4QTestimonia (4Q175) (without commentary) and 4QFlorilegium (4Q174) (with commentary).

It has been suggested that the author of Hebrews borrowed the passages for this catena from an existing collection of Christian proof-text passages: “The author has not got the Scriptures in front of him at all. What he has in front of him is a catena of passages, a Testimony Book which may be used to persuade Jews that their Scriptures tell of Jesus the Christ. It is not he who has assembled the passages; that work has been done by predecessors, Hebrews expounds them as they stand in the Testimony Book, not as they stand in the Bible” (Synge, 54, cf. 3-6).

While F. C. Synge believes this is the case of all the OT quotations in Hebrews, others apply this notion only to 1:5-14, e.g., Hay, 38-9; Käsemann, 168-72; Montefiore,
nature of the catena itself and its relationship to the rest of the argument of Hebrews has been a matter of debate, however.¹

Some argue that the sole purpose of the catena is to provide the scriptural grounds for the affirmation made in 2:1-4 that Christ is an agent of revelation superior to the angels (cf. 1:1-2). The corollary is that the readers should pay greater attention to what God has said through the Son than to what God said through the angels in the inauguration of the Mosaic covenant (2:1-4; cf. 1:1-4; 12:25-29). The superiority of the Son to the angels is part, then, of the author’s contrast between the old and new covenant developed throughout the document.² In this sense, the catena is an argument whose

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¹ For a list of the different suggestions and introductory bibliography, see Loren T. Stuckenbruck, Angel Veneration and Christology: A Study in Early Judaism and in the Christology of the Apocalypse of John, WUNT, ed. Martin Hengel and Otfried Hofius, no. 70 (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1995), 124-5.

purpose is to prove that Jesus is superior to the angels. But, why would this be necessary?¹

Some have suggested that the author is combating here some kind of worship of angels (e.g., Col 2:18).² This is unlikely, however, because there is no explicit reference to this practice in Hebrews.³ Furthermore, the angels seem to be not that important for the author or audience because they are mentioned again only in the concluding section of the argument (12:22; 13:2).⁴ The similar view that the author was combating some kind of angel Christology—which would assimilate Jesus to the angels or other heavenly figures who carried salvific and/or intermediating roles according to beliefs in different first-century Jewish circles—lacks any explicit polemic elsewhere in Hebrews as well. Thus, this thesis is rendered unlikely too.⁵ Finally, David A. deSilva has correctly

¹ The author does not endeavor, for example, to prove Jesus’ superiority over the prophets—mentioned in Heb 1:1.


³ In fact, the thesis that angel worship is addressed elsewhere (e.g., Col 2:18) is also problematic. Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 51. See also, deSilva, 95; Guthrie, Hebrews, 72.

⁴ See Koester, Hebrews, 83-86.

observed that for the author of Hebrews to begin a polemic here would be bad rhetoric. He would “run the risk of alienating the hearers by ‘correcting’ them too quickly (before trust has been fully established within the speech).”¹

Others consider that the catena describes the scene of the enthronement of the Son at the right hand of God.² The seven quotations of the catena are grammatically arranged in three sentences.³ It is argued that each sentence introduces a stage of the enthronement


¹ deSilva, 95. See also, Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 109-10.


³ Each of the sentences is provided with an introductory phrase:

Heb 1:5: Τίνι γὰρ ἐπέν ποτὲ τῶν ἁγγέλων . . . (For to which of the angels did He ever say . . .)

Heb 1:6: ὅταν δὲ πάλιν εἰσαγάγῃ τὸν πρωτότοκον εἰς τὴν οἰκουμένην, λέγει . . . (And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says . . .)

Heb 1:13: πρὸς τίνα δὲ τῶν ἁγγέλων εἶρηκέν ποτὲ . . . (But to which of the angels has he ever said . . .)

Note, as well, the similarity of the introduction to sentences 1 and 3. Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 108.

The sources of the seven quotations are the following: Heb 1:5 quotes Ps 2:7 and 2 Sam 7:14 (par. 1 Chr 17:13). Hebrews 1:6-12 quotes (a form not directly attested to)
ceremony: (1) the declaration that the king has been adopted by God as Son (v. 5), (2) the presentation of the Son to his people, the bestowal of royal symbols, and his proclamation as king (vv. 6-12), and (3) the enthronement proper, which is the actual conferral of power (v. 13). In this reading, the angels have the literary function of a “scenic background” to Jesus’ enthronement. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that Heb 2:5 summarizes the catena as the “subjection of the coming world” to Jesus.

The three-stage substructure of the catena corresponds to the coronation liturgies evidenced in ancient Near Eastern texts—especially from Egypt—and the Hebrew Bible. Joachim Jeremias also argues that the same three-stage substructure of exaltation, Deut 32:43b LXX, Pss 104:4 (103:4 LXX), 45:6-7 (44:6-7 LXX), and 102:25-27 (101:26-28 LXX). (We cannot be certain of the source of the quotation of Heb 1:6. Beyond Deut 32:43b LXX, other possibilities are Ps 96:7 LXX, Odes Sol. 2:43b, and 4QDeut 32:43. Odes Sol. 2:43b is the closest text, but MS evidence suggests that this reading is not older than the 5th century C.E. and that it is the result of Christian editing. For an analysis of the different solutions to the problem, see Schröger, 53.) Hebrews 1:13 quotes Ps 110:1 (109:1 LXX).

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2 Schierse, 6. Also, McKnight and Church, 43-45.

presentation, and enthronement is found in 1 Tim 3:16, Phil 2:9-11, Matt 28:18-20, and Rev 5:5-14.¹

This view has received the critique that it is not possible to reconstruct with any degree of certainty the overall process of the enthronement liturgies of Israel or other ancient Near East nations (e.g., Egypt), and that even if this were possible it is not clear that such ancient ceremonies were current in the Judaism of the period.²

It is true that extant sources regarding ancient Near Eastern enthronement ceremonies are fragmentary in nature and do not allow a complete reconstruction of the ritual.³ For example, the OT contains two considerable descriptions of royal coronations: 1 Kgs 1:33-53 and 2 Kgs 11:4-21 (par. 2 Chr 23:8-21); yet, both of them describe coronations in extraordinary circumstances.⁴ The critique is only correct, however, in the sense that we cannot be certain that Heb 1:5-14 reproduces exactly the enthronement ritual practiced in monarchical Israel, early Judaism, or the ancient Near East. We can safely say, however, that the three stages of the coronation ritual identified in Heb 1:5-14 formed part of ancient Near Eastern coronation rituals, although they probably did not exhaust them. There is, indeed, enough evidence for this.

¹ Jeremias, 28.

² For example, Lala K. K. Dey asserts that “the evidence given does not support the view that the schema of such an ancient ceremony was current in the Judaism of the period” (147). See also Rissi, 49.

³ Keel, 256. For references regarding the several reconstructions of these rituals in Egypt, see Keel, 257, n. 28.

⁴ Rad, 222.
First, similar to Egypt and other nations of the ancient Near East, the Davidic king was considered God’s son.\textsuperscript{1} Second Samuel 7:14 registers God’s promise to David regarding the heir of his throne: “I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me” (par. 1 Chr 17:13). Later kings claimed this promise on their behalf. For example, Ps 2:7 says: “I will tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to me, ‘You are my son; today I have begotten you.’” Likewise, LXX Ps 109:3 (110:3) reads: “The authority to rule is with you in the day of your power [and] in the splendors of [your] saints: \textit{I begot you from the womb before the morning}” (translation and emphasis mine, see also, Pss 89:20-30).\textsuperscript{2} Gerhard von Rad has suggested that the decree of the divine adoption of the king


It should be noted, however, that although there are real similarities between the Jewish and Egyptian royal theologies, there are also fundamental divergences. For example, Gerald Cook notes: “The Egyptian tradition of the physical begetting of Pharaoh by a god is absent; the Hebrew materials remain consistent in their treatment of the king’s divine sonship in terms of adoption” (214).

\textsuperscript{2} Μετὰ σοῦ ἡ ἀρχή ἐν ἡμέρᾳ τῆς δυνάμεως σου ἐν ταῖς λαμπρότησιν τῶν ἄγιων ἐκ γαστρὸς πρὸ ἑωσφόρου ἐξεγέννησά σε. The Greek text is from the critical edition by Alfred Rahlfs, \textit{Psalmi cum Odis}, Septuaginta: Societatis Scientiarum Gottingensis, no. 10 (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1931). In his analysis of this passage, Gerald Cook argues that this is the original intent of the Hebrew text as well, which he translates: “In holy array from the womb of the dawn go forth; as the dew I have begotten you.” This reading is supported by the LXX, Syriac, and several MSS, and does not require a change to the consonantal text of the MT. Cook, 222.

Contemporary scholars often consider that Pss 2 and 110 were composed for the enthronement of Israelite kings. For example, Leslie C. Allen, \textit{Psalms 101-50: Revised},
was part of the Hebrew royal ritual referred to in 2 Kgs 11:12. He argues that the
“testimony” (מַרְצֻּרְיוֹן) given to Joash as he was proclaimed king was in fact a copy of the decree of his divine adoption (cf. Ps 2:7). This is improbable, however. More likely, the “testimony” refers here to a copy of the law (Deut 17:18). Notwithstanding, what remains certain is that the divine adoption of the king was an important element of Hebrew royal ideology.

The concept of the divine adoption of the ruler was also common in the Greco-


Similarly, it is possible that a new name was given to the Israelite king at his enthronement. The only two clear examples of this in the OT (2 Kgs 23:34; 24:17) may involve a sign of vassalage and not a native enthronement custom of Israel; however, the existence of two names for David (Elhanan, 2 Sam 21:19), Solomon (2 Sam 12:24-25), and other kings may point to this. See Vaux, 1:165-167; Nicolas Wyatt, “‘Jedidiah’ and Cognate Forms as a Title of Royal Legitimation,” *Bib* 66 (1985): 112-25. Perhaps this custom is behind the expression “I will make you a great name” (2 Sam 7:9; 1 Chr 17:8). Notice that Hebrews emphasizes the conferral of a “name . . . more excellent than theirs [i.e., the angels]” (Heb 1:4).

2 See above section “Joash.”
Roman world. Greece took over kingship ideology from the east. The turning point was when Alexander the Great was called the “Son of Ammon” by an oracle in the desert of Lybia in 331 B.C.E. This was understood by the Greeks as Alexander being son of Zeus whom Alexander addressed thereafter as “my father” (Plutarch, *Alex.* 27-28; cf. Arrian, *Anab.* 7.8.3). Later on, Ptolemaic rulers adopted such titles as “son of God,” “son of Helios,” “son of Zeus.” Similarly, in imperial Rome, the title *Divi filius,* given to Augustus and his successors, was translated θεοῦ υἱός—son of God.

Second, the introduction of the king to the assembly as part of the coronation solemnities is also attested. In the case of Joash, Jehoiada brought him into the assembly to make him king (2 Kgs 11:12). At this time the symbols of royal office are vested on

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2 Fossum, 6:133; Petr Pokorný, *Der Gottessohn: Literarische Übersicht und Fragestellung,* ThSt, no. 109 (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1917), 15.

3 Martitz, 8:336.


5 In the case of Solomon, this introduction was carried out by having him ride on the king’s own mule (1 Kgs 1:33, 38). Later he is introduced to the court itself (vv. 46-48). Cf. Esth 6:7-11; Zech 9:9; Judg 5:10; 10:4; 12:14.
him: “Then he brought out the king’s son, put the crown on him, and gave him the covenant; they proclaimed him king, and anointed him; they clapped their hands and shouted, ‘Long live the king!’” (2 Kgs 11:12). Likewise, the scene of Jesus’ introduction to the assembly in Heb 1:6-12 includes the vesting of royal symbols on him. The following are mentioned: the throne (v. 8b), the scepter (v. 8c), and the anointing (v. 9). All this is followed by the acclamation of his eternal rule (vv. 10-12).¹

¹ Regarding the anointing, see 1 Kgs 1:32-40; 2 Kgs 11:12; also, Judg 9:8; 1 Sam 9:16; 16:1, 12; 1 Kgs 19:15, 16. The anointing symbolized the conferring of grace by the Spirit of God (1 Sam 10:10; 16:13) so that the king became the Lord’s anointed (e.g., 1 Sam 24:6; 26:9). In the case of Solomon, the anointing in Gihon probably implied a baptism or royal washing (1 Kgs 1:32-40). This royal washing was part of the coronation rites of Pharaoh. Fossum, 6:133; Keel, 258-9.

Regarding the acclamation, it was signaled in the Hebrew royal ritual by the trumpet sounding and expressed in the shout: “Long live the king” (1 Kgs 1:25, 34, 39; 2 Kgs 11:12; also, 1 Sam 10:24; 2 Sam 16:16). This shout, however, is not a wish, but an acquiescence which showed that the people accepted the king. Vaux, 1:163-4; Baruch Halpern, The Constitution of the Monarchy in Israel, HSM, ed. Frank Moore Cross, no. 25 (Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1981), 134. (In the case of Solomon, the obeisance by the officials to the king is also described [1 Kgs 1:47].) The quotation of Ps 101:26-28 LXX (102:25-27) in Heb 1:10-12 fits in this context. Its purpose is manifold. First, it compares the eternal nature of Jesus with the transient nature of the angels (cf. Heb 1:7). Second, it contrasts the “son” as the creator of all things and the angels as part of God’s creation (note, “he makes [ὁ ποιων] his angels winds . . .” [Heb 1:7]). Third, it complements the notion of the divinity of the Son (v. 8) with the notion that he is creator (v. 10). Most important, however, it emphasizes the eternal nature of the rule of the son whose “years will never end” (v. 12d); therefore, it has a function equivalent to the shout “Long live the king” (see above).

The reference to Jesus as the creator of the cosmos in the context of his enthronement is appropriate. In Egypt and Mesopotamia, the enthronement of the king was considered a recreation of the world, the conquering of chaos. The king also maintained order in creation. Frankfort, 148-61, 307-12. Israelite kingship theology had similar views. Those Psalms that celebrate the kingship of Yahweh, usually referred to as “enthronement Psalms” (Pss 96-99, often linked to 47, 93 and 95; for discussion, see Marvin E. Tate, Psalms 51-100, WBC, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and John D. W. Watts, no. 20 [Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1990], 504-505), commonly refer to God as creator (Pss 96:5b; 98:1b; 93:1c; 96:10b; 99:4b; 99:4c). See Allen Eugene Combs,
Third, the enthronement proper of the king as the culmination of the ritual is self-explanatory (Heb 1:13). This marked the moment of his assumption of power and authority and the beginning of his rule (e.g., 1 Kgs 1:35, 46-47; 2 Kgs 11:19).

Finally, it is necessary to note that the author of Hebrews does not adopt his views regarding the kingship and enthronement of Christ in heaven directly from the Jewish or Greco-Roman first-century-C.E. context, but through a mediated process.¹ These

¹ This is important to note in view of the critique of Dey above (p. 232, n. 2). For the suggestion, for example, that Egyptian traditions of the divine sonship of the king were mediated to the Lukan Christology, see J. Kügler, *Pharao und Christus? Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zur Frage einer Verbindung zwischen altägyptischer Königstheologie und neutestamentlicher Christologie im Lukasevangelium*, BBB, ed. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Helmut Merklein, no. 113 (Bodenheim: Philo, 1997). See also, Cook, 202-25; Keel, 247, n. 8. For a study of the effect of the Egyptian and broader ancient Near Eastern traditions of the king as representing God on earth on Roman politics during the Republic and early empire, see J. Rufus Fears, *Princeps a diis electus: The Divine Election of the Emperor as a Political...*
enthronement traditions had undergone a process of reinterpretation in at least three stages. First, foreign liturgies of enthronement were adapted to Israelite views of God and kingship. Second, these views were idealized in pre-Christian Messianic expectations. Finally, Christians found the concretization of these expectations in the coming and exaltation of Jesus.¹

It seems to me persuasive in general, then, that the catena describes the enthronement of the Son “at the right hand of the majesty on high” (Heb 1:3).²

The Enthronement of the Son Culminates His Victory over Death

Hebrews 2:9 asserts that Jesus was crowned “with glory and honor because of the suffering of death” (emphasis mine; cf. Phil 2:6-11).³ We find a similar assertion in 12:2:


² This reading of the catena, however, raises two questions that I need to answer. First, if “Son” is a royal title that Jesus received at his enthronement (1:5), why are there passages that refer to him as Son already on earth (e.g., 5:7-8); that is, before his enthronement? Second, why is the description of the enthronement of the Son important for the argument of the letter? I will deal with both questions below.

³ Luke Timothy Johnson observes that the phrase διὰ τὸ πάθημα τοῦ θανάτου (“because of the suffering of death”) could explain either how the Son was lowered beneath the angels or why he was enthroned. Hebrews, 92. A great majority of scholars prefer the latter: Jesus was enthroned because of his suffering death, e.g., Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 73, n. 35; deSilva, 110-2; Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 155; Gräßer, 1:121; Guthrie, Hebrews, 100; Koester, Hebrews, 217; Karrer, Der Brief an die Hebräer, 172; Pfitzner, 62. The position of the phrase διὰ τὸ πάθημα τοῦ θανάτου right next to δόξη καὶ τιμὴ ἐστεφανωμένων—but separated by the subject and the verb from τὸν βραχὺ τι παρ’ ἄγγελος ἠλαττωμένον—suggests that death
“looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy [ἀντὶ τῆς . . . χαρᾶς] that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God” (emphasis mine).¹ It seems to be important for the hortatory argument of Hebrews that just as Jesus’ enthronement was achieved through suffering, the readers need to be patient under their trials so that they may also “receive what was promised” (Heb 10:35-36; cf. 2:17; 12:1-3, 10-11; 13:13-14).

I am only interested at this moment, however, with the description of Jesus’ death as a victory over the devil and its relationship with Jesus’ enthronement in the argument of Hebrews.

Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy [καταργέω] the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. (Heb 2:14-16)

Commentators have suggested points of contact between Hebrews’ description of Jesus’ victory over the devil, the one “who has the power of death,” and several different traditions.²

explains why Jesus was enthroned and not how he was lowered below the angels.

¹ The logic is that Jesus endured the cross in order to obtain “the joy that was set before him.” Philippians 2:6-11 has the same logic: “. . . he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore [ὅτι] God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name . . .”

² Harold W. Attridge offers a brief but helpful introduction to the different traditions that have been suggested to stand behind this text. Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 79-82. His perspective, however, is wider than the one I have adopted here. He explores the models that have been used to explain a Christology that includes the incarnation, death, and exaltation. This is the result of his view that the Christology of
Legends about Hercules (=Heracles) are one of these traditions. Cynic and Stoic philosophers considered Hercules’ sufferings a way to glorification. For example: “Never does glorious valour pass / to the Stygian shades. / Live, all, with courage, / and the cruel fates will then not haul you / over Lethe River. / No: when the final hour is imposed / at the end of your days, / glory will open a path to heaven (Seneca Herc. Ot. 1982-8 [Fitch, LCL]; see also, 1434-40, 1557-59, 1940-88). These philosophers also considered his tragic end a victory that liberates others from the fear of death. For example: “He crossed the waters of Tartarus, / pacified the underworld, and returned. / Now no fear remains: nothing lies beyond the underworld” (Seneca Herc. Fur. 889-92 [Fitch, LCL]).

David E. Heb 1 reproduces all these elements, while I believe that Hebrews focuses instead on Christ’s exaltation or enthronement.

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1 See David E. Aune, “Heracles and Christ: Heracles Imagery in the Christology of Early Christianity,” in Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham Malherbe, ed. D. L. Balch, Everett Ferguson, and W. A. Meeks (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1990), 13-19. Also Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 80, nn. 20-21; Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 61. For the bold proposition that the life of Christ was shaped by the author of an “Urevangelium” (a putative source for the Synoptic gospels) “in enger Abhängigkeit” (in narrow dependence) to a cynic-stoic type of biography of Hercules, see Friedrich Pfister, “Herakles und Christus,” AR 34 (1937): 59-60. For a critique, Herbert Jennings Rose, “Herakles and the Gospels,” HTR 31 (1938): 113-42; Aune, 11-12.

Fathers of the church recognized as early as the middle of the 2nd century C.E. the parallels between gods and heroes of Greek mythology and Jesus, which they dismissed as imitations; e.g., Justin, 1 Apol. 21.1; Dial. 69.3; Origen, Cels. 3.22, 42. See also Aune, 3-4. Hercules was the single most popular hero in the ancient Greco-Roman world and was considered by the Stoics an embodiment of the ideal king. See Aune, 6, 9.

2 See Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 80, nn. 20-21; Aune, 7. David E. Aune notes other parallels to traditions about Hercules in Hebrews. Aune, 13-19. For example, like the Son who “sustains all things by his powerful word” (Heb 1:3), Hercules is “the Logos permeating everything, giving nature its force and cohesion” (Cornutus, Thelogiae Graecae compendium, 31). Hercules undergoes a process
Aune concludes in his analysis, however, that these are phenomenological parallels that should not be explained by literary dependence or as a Christian conceptualization of Jesus in terms of the Hercules myth, but “are rather to be attributed to the more general tendency of traditions about great personalities to conform to the morphology of Greco-Roman heroes through the folkloristic process of the communal re-creation of tradition.”

Others find in Hebrews’ description of Jesus’ victory over the devil allusions to the idea of the Messiah’s victory over demonic forces prevalent in Jewish apocalyptic tradition and early Christianity. Gustaf Aulén has identified Jesus’ victory over the devil as constitutive of the early Christian view of the atonement, which he calls “the classic idea of atonement” and traces throughout the NT (Rom 8:38-39; 1 Cor 15:24; Gal 1:4; Eph 4:8-10; Phil 2:10; Col 2:15; 1 Pet 3:18-22). In many cases, NT writers explained the of education that includes suffering like Jesus (Heb 5:8-9). See Dio Chrysostom Or. 4 (4 Regn.) 29-32; Epictetus 3.22.56-57. The term ἀρχή is applied to Hercules (e.g., Dio Chrysostom Or. 33 [1 Tars.] 47) as well as Jesus (2:10; 12:2). He was also a provider of help in the struggles of life (e.g., Pindar, Nem. 7.94-97), like Jesus (Heb 4:14-16).

1 Aune, 19.

2 As. Mos. 10.1; T. Lev. 18.1-2; T. Jud. 25.3; T. Dan. 5.10; Sib. Or. 3.63-74; I Enoch 10.13; 4 Ezra 13.1; 1QM I, 11, 13, 15; Matt 12:25-30; Luke 10:18; John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 1 John 3:8; Rev 12:7-10. See Adela Yarbro Collins, The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation, HDR, no. 9 (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1976), 57-206; Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 92, nn. 153-5; Johnson, Hebrews, 100.


John McRay suggests unconvincingly that “Hebrews was written to a Jewish audience which was so well acquainted with the main tenets of apocalyptic Judaism that the author could set the classical view of atonement [i.e., Aulen’s] against that background and argue it as the Jewish Christian understanding of Jesus’s high priestly
gospel as Jesus’ victory over death; for example, 2 Tim 1:10: “the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished [καταργήω] death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (see also, Rom 8:38-39; 1 Cor 15:26, 55; Rev 21:4; cf. Odes Sol. 15.9; 29.4; Barn. 5.6; 14:5).

Still others consider that Jesus’ victory is conceptualized in light of OT motifs. An intriguing suggestion is that this passage contains an exodus typology. In this sense Jesus is compared with Moses who liberates the Israelites from the “house of slavery” (Exod 13:3; 20:2; Deut 5:6; passim). Thus, Moses was not ashamed of calling the slaves his brethren (Exod 2:11; 4:18; Heb 11:24-26), declared the name of God to others (Exod 3:13-14; cf. Heb 2:12), trusted God (Exod 14:13-14; cf. Heb 2:13), and delivered the people by destroying Pharaoh’s army (Exod 14:21-31; cf. Heb 2:14b-15). Finally, Heb 3:7-4:13 refers explicitly to Israel’s journey through the wilderness.


1 In addition to what is considered below, George Wesley Buchanan has suggested the liberation from debt during the Sabbatical year as the OT background to Heb 2:14-16. Buchanan, 34-35. However, there is no reference to liberation from “the fear of death” in connection with the Sabbatical year.

2 Andriessen, 304-13; Koester, Hebrews, 240.

3 According to Paul C. B. Andriessen, this typology is part of an extended comparison between Jesus and Moses which becomes explicit in Heb 3:1-6, but had already been introduced in Heb 1:6 where Israel’s entrance into Canaan provides the OT background to Jesus’ ascension to heaven (293-304, 312-3).

4 Koester, Hebrews, 240.
provides a closer background to this text. The OT describes God on several occasions as a champion who engages in individual combat on behalf of his people:

The LORD goes forth like a soldier, like a warrior he stirs up his fury; he cries out, he shouts aloud, he shows himself mighty against his foes. (Isa 42:13; cf. 49:24-26; 59:15b-20)

In fact, Jesus described himself as a champion who overpowers Satan and “divides his plunder” to explain his exorcisms (Luke 11:21-22; cf. Matt 12:29; Mark 3:27). Probably the most similar passage in this tradition is Isa 49:24-26:

Can the prey be taken from the mighty, or the captives of a tyrant be rescued? But thus says the LORD: Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the tyrant be rescued; for I will contend with those who contend with you, and I will save your children. I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh, and they shall be drunk with their own blood as with wine. Then all flesh shall know that I am the LORD your Savior, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

William L. Lane argues that the fact that the description of Jesus as champion (2:14-16)

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2 See Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, “Put on the Armour of God”: The Divine Warrior from Isaiah to Ephesians, JSNTSup, no. 140 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997). This idea also appears in apocalyptic writings of the Second Temple period; for example: “And thereafter the Lord himself will arise upon you, the light of righteousness with healing and compassion in his wings. He will liberate every captive of the sons of men from Beliar, and every spirit of error will be trampled down” (T. Zeb. 9:8 [OTP 1:807]; cf. T. Lev. 18:10-12; T. Mos.10.1-10; 11Q13 [11QMelch] II, 13).
is developed in cultic terms (2:17-18) is not a problem. Hebrews 2:17-18 introduces Jesus as the merciful high priest whose death and ascension are interpreted in terms of a sacrifice for sins and entrance into the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 5-10:18). Lane notes that these two apparently very different imageries are integrated in the T. Lev. 18:10-12 where an eschatological priest, like a champion of Israel, will bind Beliar and “grant to his children the authority to trample on wicked spirits” (OTP 1:795).²

We have to acknowledge, however, that the diversity of possibilities suggests that none of them is entirely satisfactory. Hebrews bears resemblance in this or that aspect to all of them but does not seem to clearly privilege any of them. I want to suggest that the reason for this is that Hebrews draws upon a motif that is basic to all of these models. All of them are, in fact, reinterpretations of the “divine warfare” motif that was widespread in the ANE and the Greco-Roman world of the 1st century C.E.³

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¹ Cf. Phineas, the priest, in Num 25 and 31, using a spear and going into battle.

² See also the comparison that Hans Windisch makes between T. Lev. 18:2-12 and the catena of Heb 1:5-14 (p. 15).


In ANE mythology, a war between deities typically followed a narrative pattern, usually called by contemporary scholars the Divine Warrior motif or Combat Myth. In brief terms, this motif consists of a war between deities in which the eventual victor is enthroned as king above the gods. Then a temple or palace is built in his honor where he celebrates his victory with those loyal to him. The main elements of the pattern are, then, (1) warfare, (2) victory, (3) kingship/enthronement, (4) building of the palace/temple, and (5) celebration.¹

The Divine Warrior motif was widespread in the ANE and the Mediterranean world.² In Ugarit, this narrative structure was used in two cycles to explain Baal’s supremacy over the gods because of his victories over the gods Yamm (sea/chaos) and Mot (death).³ Likewise, the Babylonian Epic of Creation or Enuma Elish uses this narrative structure to explain Marduk’s rise to cosmic supremacy. Marduk attains this supremacy because of his victory over Tiamat, the god of sea. In the Greek world, the Divine Warrior motif is present in several succession narratives; for example, the battles


² For study of this motif throughout the ancient world, see Fontenrose; Forsyth, 44-66.

³ Fontenrose, 129-38.
between Ouranos and Kronos, Zeus and Kronos, Zeus and the Titans, and Zeus and the Giants (the Gigantomacy).¹ Regarding the consistency of this widespread narrative pattern in the ancient world, David E. Aune commented: “While the names of the combatants, as well as their roles, change from culture to culture, many of the constituent folklore motifs of the Combat Myth or legend either remain constant or are subject to a limited range of variation.”²

It is important to note that nations used the imagery and conceptual framework of this motif to interpret their political and religious situations. Usually a claim of the superiority of a god was explained in terms of his victory over other gods and creation.³ This, of course, had important political implications. For example, king Eumenes II (2nd century B.C.E.) built the Great Altar of Pergamon in which the outer frieze included the Combat Myth describing the battle between the gods and the Giants. The purpose of this frieze was to celebrate the victory of the Attalid kings over the Gauls.

¹ Aune, Revelation 6-16, 667. For a full study, see Fontenrose.


³ Gombis, 405.
of the frieze, however, did not remain static. The frieze was later interpreted in terms of the victories of the Romans.¹

The Combat Myth is also present in early Jewish literature and the New Testament, carrying both religious and political implications. In the Hebrew Bible it is especially common in references to God as creator and king in Israelite poetry.² The prophets, however, used this narrative structure to describe God’s victory over Israel’s historical enemies.³ One of the most commonly cited examples is the so-called “Song of the Sea” in Exod 15. In a majority of cases, the prophets used this motif to interpret Israel’s current political situation and to express their hope in God’s future defeat over their enemies.

The Divine Warrior motif is also present in Jewish apocalyptic literature. In this literature the motif is not used as metaphorical language; instead, God battles against a cosmic adversary—Satan and his angelic forces—to whom suffering and evil are attributed. For example, in 1 En. 6-11 God defeats Semihazeh and Azazel, leaders of rebel angelic forces (the watchers), and confines them under the earth until the Day of


² E.g., Pss 74:12-17; 89:10-15; Job 26. For further examples, Aune, Revelation 6-16, 667-8; Forsyth, 90-146; Hanson, The Dawn of Apocalyptic, 300-324; Longman III and Reid, God Is a Warrior, 85-87. For deeper study of this motif, Ballard; Rebecca S. Watson, Chaos Uncreated: A Reassessment of the Theme of “Chaos” in the Hebrew Bible, BZAW, ed. John Barton and others, no. 341 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005).

Apocalyptic literature uses this motif to explain the origin of evil in the world and to express the hope that the final judgment of God’s cosmic enemy will bring about a period of righteousness and peace.²

In the New Testament, the motif is prominent in Revelation, especially in the narrative of the “great red dragon” in chap. 12.³ Further examples, however, can be found in Jesus’ rebuke of the sea in the Gospels (e.g., Mark 4:35-41) and Jesus’ victory over the powers in Pauline literature (e.g., Rom 8:38-39; 1 Cor 15:24; Eph 1:20-2:22; 4:8-10; Phil 2:10; Col 2:15; 1 Pet 3:18-22).⁴ In fact, Marie Huie-Jolly has suggested that “a version of the divine warrior myth based on early Christian exegesis of Scripture was foundational for death-and-resurrection speech patterns. It undergirds the form of early Christian

¹ Cf. God’s defeat of Matsema (an alias of Satan) and his angelic forces who are confined under the earth until the day of judgment in Jub. 5:6-11. On the Combat Myth in early Judaism, see Clifford, “Roots of Apocalypticism,” 3-38; Hanson, The Dawn of Apocalyptic; K. William Whitney, Two Strange Beasts: Leviathan and Behemoth in Second Temple and Early Rabbinic Judaism, HSM, ed. Peter Machinist, no. 63 (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006). Also, Aune, Revelation 6-16, 668-9; Forsyth, 147-212.

² Aune, Revelation 6-16, 669.

³ See Adela Yarbro Collins, Combat Myth; idem, “Pergamon,” 163-84.

speech that juxtaposes images of threats to the life of Jesus with speech exalting him as son.”¹ As I have noted, Gustaf Aulén argues that the image of the Divine Warrior is essential to what he calls the classic idea of the atonement.²

Neil Forsyth’s comment summarizes well, in my view, the significance of the Combat Myth for the ANE: “The combat paradigm, in fact, seems to have generated the central myth that supported and justified the kingship in many different societies of the ancient world.”³

This motif was central to the theology of YHWH’s and Davidic kingship in the Old Testament and the kingship of Jesus in the New Testament.⁴ It is not strange, then, that it is also essential to Hebrews’ understanding of Jesus’ death and enthronement as the royal Son. It is clear that Hebrews shares with other New Testament documents the idea that Jesus’ victory over death is constitutive of his kingship over the cosmos.⁵

It is possible, as well, that the Combat Myth provides a narrative substructure to chaps. 1-4. I described the main elements of the pattern of the Combat Myth as consisting


¹ Huie-Jolly, 200, 208-11. She finds this pattern in John 5 (211-17). See also McCurley, 58-71; Sherlock, 243-380.

² Aulén, 79.

³ Forsyth, 45.

⁴ Guinan, 69-70. Note that Ps 89:9-14 presents God’s victory over the sea as the basis for his kingship. In v. 26, the Davidic king shares in this victory of God. Also Whitelam, 43-45.

⁵ For victory over Death in Apocalyptic literature, see Johnson, *Hebrews*, 100.
of (1) warfare, (2) victory, (3) kingship/enthronement, (4) building of the palace/temple, and (5) celebration. Note that Heb 2:14-16 refers to Jesus’ warfare with the devil.

Hebrews 1:5-14 refers to Jesus’ enthronement “at the right hand of the majesty on high” as a result of this victory (cf. 2:9). Hebrews 3:3 refers to Jesus as the builder of the house of God, which suggests the possibility that this refers to the construction of an eschatological temple by Jesus. Finally, Jesus invites his faithful ones to enter into “the rest” (3:7-4:11), which suggests the possibility that we should understand this “rest” as an eschatological celebration of God’s victory (cf. 12:22-24).

Let me summarize the findings thus far. Hebrews 1:6 describes God’s introduction of Jesus to the heavenly court as part of an enthronement ceremony described in the catena of 1:5-14. Jesus’ enthronement in heaven follows his victory over the devil “who has the power of death” (2:14-16; cf. 2:9). Thus, the Combat Myth is essential to the understanding of the ascension of Jesus referred to in Heb 1:6, and both justifies and supports his kingship over the cosmos.

If Hebrews is not combating here the worship of angels or an angelomorphic

1 I will argue below that Heb 8:2, 5; 9:23 refer to the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary.

2 The invitation to enter into “the rest” could be understood as an invitation to enjoy the results of God’s victory and kingship. God’s description of the “rest” as “my rest,” however, also makes possible an allusion to the heavenly sanctuary (cf. Isa 66:1). Note that this section ends with an invitation to “approach the throne of Grace [the heavenly holy of holies?] with boldness” (4:16).

The rest in 3:7-4:11 is described by God as “my rest.” An allusion is also possible to the rest as participation in God’s victory and kingship as the celebration of God’s heavenly sanctuary. I will not explore this possibility here, as it will take me beyond the purpose of this section.
Christology, as I have argued above, why is the description of the enthronement of Jesus above the angels important for the argument of Hebrews? In other words, what is the rhetorical function of the ascension and enthronement of Jesus in Heb 1:5-14 for the argument of Heb 1-2?

Enthronement as the Basis for Exhortation: The Son’s Exaltation Prefigures and Makes Possible the Glorification of the Sons

Why does the author of Hebrews open his “word of exhortation” with a description of the Son’s enthronement in heaven? What did he try to accomplish by this?¹

In order to understand what the role of the ascension and enthronement of the Son in the Letter is, it is first necessary to understand the meaning of the title “Son” in the Letter. Both are inextricably connected.²

Jesus as “Son” in Hebrews

The Christology of the Letter to the Hebrews is one of the most developed in the

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¹ A similar question is, why does he refer so often to Jesus’ royal worthiness throughout the letter (1:3, 5-14; 2:5-9; 5:5; 7:28; 8:1-2; 10:12-13; 12:1-3; 13:20)?

² The analysis of this question will permit me to address a question I left pending above: If “Son” is a royal title that Jesus received at his exaltation, why are there passages that refer to him as Son already on earth (e.g., 5:7-8)?

I have argued above that “Son” is a royal Davidic title in Heb 1:5-14. According to Hebrews, Jesus’ received this title when he was enthroned at the right hand of God (Heb 1:4), Hebrews applies to Jesus the promises made to the Son of David in 2 Sam 7:14 and Ps 2:7 (Heb 1:5), and uses in the catena (1:5-14) psalms originally related to the Davidic dynasty to describe his enthronement. Though Ps 102:25-27 is not a royal Davidic psalm, some think that this psalm received a messianic interpretation in the translation of the LXX. (See above section “The Catena Describes the Enthronement Ceremony of the Son.”)
Hebrews speaks of Jesus in unusually varied ways to emphasize two aspects of his function in God’s plan: He is both the one who brings salvation to humanity from God and the first human being in whom God’s original purpose for humanity is finally realized. My interest here lies in Hebrews’ designation of Jesus as “Son” and what aspect of Jesus’ mission it emphasizes in the argument of the Letter.


2 Hebrews’ use of the name “Jesus” underscores the author’s interest in the humanity of Jesus (2:9-11, passim; cf. 2:11, 17; 4:15; 5:7-10). On the other hand, Hebrews also emphasizes the divinity of Jesus. He is addressed as “Lord” (1:10; 2:3; 7:14; 13:20), “God” (Heb 1:8), and “Son of God” (Heb 4:14, passim; see next footnote). Hebrews does not seem to be interested in reconciling both assertions; see J. W. Drane, “Son of God,” *Dictionary of Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997), 1112-3; Johnson, *Hebrews*, 50-56, esp. 55. Instead, the symbiosis of both emphases is intimately related to the two-aspect mission of Jesus.

As the one who “brings salvation to humanity from God,” Jesus is the “apostle” (3:1), the “Christ” (3:6, passim), the “cause of salvation” (5:9), the “sancifier” (2:11), the “great shepherd of the sheep” (13:20), the “minister” (8:2), the “builder of God’s house” (3:3), the “guarantor” (7:22). As the “human being who reaches first what all seek,” Jesus is “heir” (1:2), “the firstborn” (1:6), “the pioneer” (or “captain” [ἄρχων], 2:10; 12:2), the “perfecter” (12:2), the “forerunner” (6:20). Finally, the designation of Jesus as “mediator” (8:6; 12:24) embraces both functions in a single title. See, Johnson, *Hebrews*, 48-49.

3 Jesus is referred to in Hebrews either as “Son” (Heb 1:2; 1:5 [x2]; 1:8; 3:6; 5:5; 5:8; 7:28) or “Son of God” (Heb 4:14; 6:6; 7:3; 10:29).

The concept “Son of God” was widely used in ancient culture. In early Judaism, the term was applied to Israel itself (Exod 4:22; Jer 31:9; Hos 11:1; Wis 9:7; 18:13; *Jub. 1:24-25; Pss. Sol. 17:27*), angels and other heavenly beings (MT Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6 [cf. Deut 32:8]; 38:7; Pss 29:1; 89:6; Dan 3:25), the Davidic king (2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chr 17:13; 22:10; 28:6; Pss 2:7; 89:26-27; 4Q174 I, 10-12; 4Q246 II, 1-3), the messiah (*4 Ezra* 7:28; 13:32, 37, 52; 14:9 [though these may be later Christian interpolations]; 4Q174 I, 10-13), and later to individual rabbis (*b. Taan*. 24b). See Drane, 1112; Fossum, 128-32.
Donald A. Hagner opines that “[Son] is clearly the central christological designation of Hebrews.” It is clear from the beginning of the Letter that the title “son” plays a fundamental role in its argument. In the introduction to his work (Heb 1:1-4), the author of Hebrews divides salvation history into two ages: (1) the “long ago” in which God revealed himself “in many and various ways by the prophets” and (2) “these last days” in which he “has spoken to us by a Son” (Heb 1:1-2). Thus, the present age, in which the readers of Hebrews find themselves, is characterized by the revelation in a “Son.” In the rest of the Letter, this title is prominent in both, the expositional and hortatory sections of the work. In the first, it is used to express Jesus’ superiority over the angels (Heb 1:4, cf. vv. 5-14), Moses (3:1-6), and Aaron (5:4-6; 7:28). As I will show

In the Greco-Roman world, men of extraordinary gifts and acts, heroes, and rulers could be considered or referred to as “son[s] of God.” For example, Pompey and Apollonius of Tyana, the heroes Dionysus and Heracles, and the Ptolemaic rulers and the Caesars, could all be considered “Son of God.” See Fossum, 132-3; Martitz, 336-40. For a study of the divine election of the chief magistrate in the Roman republic, or later in the empire, and its political implications, see Fears, 85-188.


1 Hagner, “The Son of God,” 249.

2 Regarding the title Son as expressing superiority over the angels, I understand that the “name” referred to in Heb 1:4 that Jesus inherited at his ascension and expresses his superiority over the angels is “Son.” McKnight and Church, 36; Koester, *Hebrews*, 181; Dmitri Royster, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary* (Crestwook, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 21; Kenneth L. Schenck, “Keeping His Appointment: Creation and Enthronement in Hebrews,” *JSNT* 66 (1997): 93. Others consider that the name referred to in Heb 1:4 is “Lord” (cf. Phil 2:9-11), or the three names “Son, God, and Lord.” Johnson, *Hebrews*, 73; Rissi, 52. Or, a broad range of meanings including
below, Jesus’ sonship is not only the basis of his superiority over Aaron, but also essential for his appointment as high priest of the heavenly sanctuary (5:5, 8; 7:3, 28; cf. 4:14; see section “A Hope that Enters the Inner Shrine behind the Curtain” (Heb 6:19-20): Ascension and the Appointment of a Faithful Priest”). In the hortatory sections, the importance of this title is evidenced in the fact that rejection of the “Son” is considered the ultimate sin and the readers are warned sternly against “spurning the Son of God” (10:29; cf. 6:6).

Now, what is the meaning of the Christological title “Son” or “Son of God” in Hebrews? More specifically, does this title emphasize Jesus’ divine nature as co-eternal and co-creator with God (ontology) or his role as the eschatological “son of David” whose rule brings salvation to Israel (function)? Though expressed in different terms, the following question is essentially the same: Did Jesus became the “Son” when he was enthroned “at the right hand” of God (Son denoting a royal function), or was he always the “Son” (Son denoting filial identity)?

“status,” “rank,” “reputation,” etc. Guthrie, Hebrews, 50. These positions are not mutually exclusive, however. The early church believed that as the “Son of David” who has been enthroned “at the right hand” of God, Jesus is “Lord” (Acts 2:31-36; see Ps 110:1; Matt 22:41-45; par. Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44).

It is clear, however, that Son is the primary title in the catena (Heb 1:2, 5, 8). Note that it is the Son (1:8) who is addressed as “God” (vv. 8-9) and “Lord” (vv. 10-11). Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 110.

Regarding the relationship between the titles Son and high priest in Hebrews, Marie E. Isaacs concludes: “Thus we can see that for the author of Hebrews, Jesus’ primary status is not that of Melchizedekian high priest but son of God. . . . In many ways Jesus’ work may be compared with that of his biblical predecessors, namely Moses and the high priest, but in each case it is his sonship which is used to highlight the contrast between his status and theirs.” Sacred Space, 178.
“Son” as a royal title

In his article “Son by Appointment,” George Bradford Caird has made the case that Hebrews’ Christology is basically functional and not ontological. In other words, he considers that Hebrews does not go further than describing a human being—Jesus—who became the Son by virtue of an appointment from God. In this sense, Son is a title that refers to the function Jesus assumed at his exaltation and not to the essence of his personal nature as co-eternal and co-pre-existent with God. Thus, he suggests that Jesus’ perfection, preeminence, and even eternity—as far as the argument of Hebrews goes—are attributes that the human Jesus attained at his exaltation.¹

Caird’s argument is built upon the appointment language that is present in the Letter. He argues that Heb 1:1-4 refers to the human Jesus whom God “appointed [ἐξονόμησε] heir of all things” (cf. 3:2). He points out that Heb 1:5 explains that this appointment refers to the royal status of “Son” and that Heb 5:5 adds that this appointment includes the further office of priest in perpetuity (cf. 6:20; 7:28).² The royal nature of Jesus’ sonship is emphasized throughout the letter. Jesus, as promised to the Son of David, was appointed “heir of all things” (1:2; cf. Ps 2:8), sat “at the right hand of

¹ He makes clear, however, that we should not confuse Hebrews’ functional Christology with a low Christology. He concludes that Jesus holds “the highest place that heaven affords . . . by right.” In his view, however, this does not include or require the idea of Jesus’ preexistence as an ontological concept. Jesus preexisted only in the “eternal purpose of God.” “Son by Appointment,” in The New Testament Age, ed. William C. Weinrich, vol. 1 (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1984), 81.

² Ibid., 75.
royal insignias are vested on him (throne and scepter in 1:8, anointment in 1:9, and crowning in 2:9), and designated shepherd of God’s people (13:20; cf. Ps 78:71; Ezek 34:23; 37:24; Matt 2:6; 26:31 [par. Mark 14:27]; John 10:11-16).  

In fact, according to Caird, the promises of the Davidic covenant are explicitly applied to him (Heb 1:5-6; quoting Ps 2:7 and 2 Sam 7:14, par. 1 Chr 17:13). In this sense, then, Jesus was not inherently superior to the angels but became superior to the angels when he inherited a “more excellent [name] than theirs,” that is, the royal name of “Son.” All the glory and dignity ascribed to the Son is not his because of some “preincarnate status” but because he “qualified for it by his earthly career.”

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Ancient Jewish interpretation of the Psalm is varied, however. Some scholars have detected allusions to Ps 110 in the description of the enthronement of the Son of Man in 1 Enoch (45:1, 3; 51:3; 52:1-7; 55:4; 61:8; this section has been dated to 105-64 B.C.E.). Testament of Job 33:3 (1st century B.C.E. or C.E.) applied Ps 110 to Job, who is described as king of a heavenly kingdom. 11QMelchizedek (second half of 1st cent. B.C.E. or first half of 1st cent. C.E.) does not refer clearly to Ps 110. It describes Melchizedek, however, as a heavenly eschatological warrior and savior. It is difficult to think that any Jew acquainted with both passages would fail to make the connection. It is probable that 1 Mace 14:41 alludes to Ps 110:4 and applies it to Hasmonean rulers.

A messianic interpretation of Ps 110 appears frequently in rabbinic writings after ca. 250 C.E. See Hay, 19-33.

2 For a discussion of the royal connotations in the description of Jesus as the great shepherd of the Sheep, see Hagner, “The Son of God,” 263-5.

3 Caird, “Son by Appointment,” 76. Jesus was “crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death” (2:9). Likewise, he was perfected, which means that he obtained access to God (7:19) through suffering and the learning of obedience (2:10; 5:8-9).
We might ask Caird: How is it, then, that Hebrews asserts that the Son “founded the earth, and the heavens” “in the beginning” (1:10; cf. v. 2) if he became Son only later at the exaltation? First, he argues that in the redaction of Hebrews the attribution of creation to Jesus presupposes his exaltation or enthronement. The attribution of creation to Jesus in v. 10 presupposes the anointment of v. 9, which refers to the exaltation. Likewise, the ascription of creation in v. 2 presupposes his appointment as “heir of all things” (v. 3). Second, he explains that it is possible for Hebrews to ascribe the creation to Jesus at the exaltation because “he is the man in whom the divine Wisdom has been appointed to dwell.”\(^1\) He does not develop this idea, but it seems clear that he understands that Hebrews discloses a wisdom Christology in the sense that, by virtue of his exaltation, Jesus embodies or incarnates Wisdom and thus can be rightfully ascribed the work of creation.\(^2\)

A majority of commentators believe that Hebrews’ knowledge and use of early Jewish wisdom speculation is evident in its allusion to Wis 7:26 in Heb 1:3. Note the similarity between both passages:

He [the Son] is the reflection [\(\alpha\nu\pi\alpha\varepsilon\gamma\alpha\sigma\mu\alpha\)] of God’s glory and the exact imprint [\(\chi\rho\alpha\omega\kappa\tau\epsilon\rho\)] of God’s very being [\(\upsilon\rho\sigma\tau\alpha\sigma\iota\zeta\)], and he sustains all things by his powerful word. (Heb 1:3)

For she [wisdom] is a reflection [\(\alpha\nu\pi\alpha\varepsilon\gamma\alpha\sigma\mu\alpha\)] of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image [\(\epsilon\iota\kappa\omega\nu\)] of his goodness [\(\alpha\gamma\alpha\theta\tau\eta\tau\zeta\zeta\)]. (Wis 7:26)

\(^1\) Ibid.

\(^2\) For a discussion of wisdom Christology, see Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 163-212; Ben Witherington, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1994).
Both Wisdom and Jesus are described as the reflection [ἀπαύγασμα] of God’s glory or light. (It is striking that the Greek term ἀπαύγασμα does not appear elsewhere in the LXX or the NT.) There are further similarities between both texts. The expression “the exact imprint of God’s very being” in Heb 1:3 resembles the expression “an image of his goodness” in Wis 7:26. More remarkable still, in Wis 9:1-4, pseudo-Solomon requests from God the wisdom “that sits by your throne” and by whom God has made “all things” and “formed humankind” (cf. Prov 8:27-31).¹ This clearly parallels the Son, who “sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high” (Heb 1:3) and “through whom he [God] also created the worlds” (v. 2).

There are differences as well, however. In Wis 7:26, Wisdom is a personification of an attribute of God, not a separate entity. It is a capacity God grants to the king. Note that this passage (Wis 7-9) draws on the story of 1 Kgs 3:1-15 where Solomon requests God “an understanding mind.” In Heb 1:3, on the other hand, the Son is a historical person, Jesus (Heb 2:9).

Wisdom was a conceptual parallel to the word of God (λόγος) in Hellenist Jewish speculation.² In the writings of Philo (ca. 20 B.C.E. – 50 C.E.)—where this concept

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² In Wis 9:1-4, for example, wisdom is equivalent to the word of God: “O God of my ancestors and Lord of mercy, who have made all things by your word, and by your wisdom have formed humankind to have dominion over the creatures you have made, . . . give me the wisdom that sits by your throne, and do not reject me from among your servants [emphasis mine].”
reached its climax\(^1\)—the Logos of God is clearly personalized but is not conceived as a separate entity from God, namely, the Logos does not acquire a real personal existence.\(^2\)

That is why Philo may use the Logos of God to describe angels as a personification of God’s guidance (e.g., *Conf. Ling.* 28, *Migr. Abr.* 173-75); the Law as God’s reason and purpose within the creation (e.g., *Migr. Abr.* 130, where the righteous person *performs* the word); the man of God (the incorporeal Adam), who represents the reason God has given humanity in resemblance to his own (*Conf. Ling.* 41, 62-63); and perhaps even Moses as an embodiment of God’s wisdom for his people (*Rer. Div. Her.* 205-207).\(^3\)

Thus, like wisdom, in Philo and Hellenistic Jewish speculation, the word of God is “a metaphor for divine action and reason,”\(^4\) or “the mind of God expressed in the

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\(^2\) The word is referred to in Philo as the First-Begotten Son (*Confusion* 146, *Dreams* 1:215), the High Priest of the Cosmos (*Flight* 108), a suppliant on behalf of the mortal race as well as an ambassador from God (*Heir* 205), the Man of God (*Confusion* 41), etc.

\(^3\) Schenck, “Keeping His Appointment,” 110.

\(^4\) Ibid., 109. He uses as an example *Alleg. Interp.* 3.96: “The shadow of God is his word, by which he was making the world, having used it as an instrument. But this shadow and, as it were, representation, *is an archetype of other things*, for just as God is the model of the image, which he has now called “shadow,” so the image becomes a
created order . . . the face which God shows to the world.”¹

From the use of language identified with Wisdom speculation to describe Jesus in Heb 1:2-3, Caird and others infer that Jesus—like Solomon—is described as the bearer of Wisdom. Therefore, since Wisdom—who “created the worlds [and] is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being”—“dwells” in the Son, it is inferred that it can be said of the Son appropriately that he created the worlds and is the reflection of God’s glory, but this does not mean that the Son personally pre-existed.²

They conclude, then, that these passages do not require the personal pre-existence of Christ. Instead, Jesus only pre-existed in the eternal purpose of God.³

Lincoln D. Hurst has picked up the argument of Caird and extended it in two ways. First, he emphasizes that all the assertions in Heb 1:3-14 are appropriate of an “idealized royal figure,” if we understand their original intent. The quotations of the catena are mostly royal Psalms and should be understood in their original context as addressed to a human king.⁴ He argues that even LXX Ps 101:25-27 (quoted in Heb 1:10-

model of other things” (Colson, LCL; emphasis mine; cf. Heir 230-231).

¹ Isaacs, Sacred Space, 197. Similarly, Dunn, Christology in the Making, 228.

² See, Hurst, “Christology,” 156.

³ Caird, “Son by Appointment,” 77.

⁴ Thus, Ps 110:1—quoted in Heb 1:3c and 1:13—was originally addressed to a Davidic king on the day of his enthronement. Hurst, “Christology,” 156. Likewise, the quotations of 2 Sam 7:14 and Ps 2:7 in Heb 1:5 refer again to the enthronement of a Davidic king. Hurst, “Christology,” 157. The “firstborn” of Heb 1:6 is a royal title in Ps 89:28, which may also encompass the reference to Israel as God’s “firstborn” (Exod 4:22). He argues that the reference to Jesus as the “son of man” in Heb 2:6-10 makes him the representative of humanity; thus, we have here the image of a king who embodies the
12), though not originally a royal Psalm, is a messianic interpretation of the Hebrew original. The LXX implies in vv. 24b-29 that two persons are speaking. It is suggested that God “was addressing an appeal by the Messiah to shorten the appointed days.”

Second, he builds on Caird’s argument that these assertions about the Son as “idealized royal figure” in chap. 1 are necessary for the argument of chap. 2. The purpose of chap. 2 is to point out that Jesus, as representative of humanity, proleptically fulfills God’s original purpose for the creation of humankind. This original purpose was expressed in Ps 8 where it is said of human beings: “You have crowned them with glory and honor subjecting all things under their feet” (Heb 2:7-8, quoting Ps 8:5-6). The purpose of the catena is to prove, then, that this purpose was proleptically fulfilled in the human being Jesus who was crowned with “glory and honor” when he was enthroned “at the right hand of the majesty on high.” In virtue of this fact, Jesus has become the “pioneer of . . . salvation,” who leads other “sons” (υἱοί) “to glory” (2:10). Thus, he concludes, Jesus’ nation.

In this sense, Heb 1:6 might have the two passages in mind. Hurst, “Christology,” 157-9. Finally, Ps 45:6-7 (quoted in Heb 1:8-9) was originally addressed to the king apparently on the occasion of a royal wedding (it is described in the title as a love song, see v. 1).


2 Hurst, “Christology,” 151-64.

3 The expression “son of Man” is to be understood as a generic term for humanity and not as a Christological title. Ibid., 153.
sonship is functional, not ontological.

The value of this position resides in the fact that it calls our attention to the appointment language of the Letter. There is language in Hebrews that refers explicitly to the fact that Jesus was appointed to or inherited new functions so that he became something he was not before.\(^1\) This language of “becoming” concerns the offices of king and priest. In both cases, what qualifies Jesus for these offices is not attributes of divine

\(^1\) Passages that refer to Jesus as being appointed to an office or becoming something include:

- “. . . whom he appointed [ἐθηκεν] heir of all things” (1:3).
- “. . . having become [γενόμενος] as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited [κεκληρονόμηκεν] is more excellent than theirs” (1:4).
- “You are my Son; today I have begotten [γεγένηκα] you” (1:5; 5:5).
- “. . . now crowned [ἐστεφανώμενον] with glory and honor because of the suffering of death” (2:9).
- “. . . should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect [τελειώσαι] through sufferings” (2:10).
- “. . . was faithful to the one who appointed [ποιήσαντι] him” (3:2).
- “So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming [γενόμενοι] a high priest” (5:5).
- “. . . and having been made perfect [τελειωθείς], he became [ἐγένετο] the source of eternal salvation” (5:9).
- “. . . having been designated [προσφηγορεύθεις] by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek” (5:10).
- “. . . having become [γενόμενος] a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (6:20).
- “. . . one who has become [γέγονεν] a priest . . . through the power of an indestructible life” (7:16).
- “This one became a priest with an oath” (7:21).
- “Jesus has also become [γέγονεν] the guarantee of a better covenant” (7:22).
- “. . . but the word of the oath . . . appoints [καθήστησον] a Son who has been made perfect forever” (7:28).
- “Jesus has now obtained [τετυχεῖν] a more excellent ministry” (8:6).
pre-existence but his suffering and death on earth.¹ A second strength is that its reading of the Psalms in the catena is straightforward in terms of their original intention: They are addressed to a Davidic king.

Moreover, the idea that Jesus became the Son at the ascension is not foreign to other NT documents. Paul in Rom 1:3b-4 makes the same point:

The gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared [ὁρισθενείς] to be Son of God with [ἐν] power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead.

According to this passage Jesus became “Son of God with power” in virtue of two things: his Davidic descent and his resurrection. These qualifications related to his earthly life—and not preexistence or eternity—entitled him to become the Son of God. Thus, “Son of God with power” here refers to a function Jesus assumes after his resurrection; that is, at the exaltation.² James D. G. Dunn concludes in his analysis of this passage that “it remains significant that . . . Paul saw in the resurrection of Jesus a ‘becoming’ of Jesus in status and role, not simply a ratification of a status and role already enjoyed on earth or from the beginning of time.”³ It is significant that this passage is commonly believed to be a pre-Pauline confession formula; that is, Paul is not introducing here a new concept

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¹ His appointment as king (mainly chaps. 1-2) presupposes his suffering of death: “but we do see Jesus . . . now crowned with glory and honor because of [διά . . .] the suffering of death” (2:9, emphasis mine; cf. 1:3; 2:10, 14-16). Likewise, he has been appointed as high priest (mainly chaps. 3-7) after he was perfected, that is, after having “learned obedience through what he suffered” (5:8-9; cf. 2:18; 3:6; 4:15; 7:26-28).

² It is possible that a similar view is behind 1 Thess 1:9-10.

but emphasizing what he and his readers held in common. It would be quite strange that Paul would begin his epistle—that has the purpose of introducing him to new readers with the hope that they would support his ministry (cf. 1:13; 15:24)—with a point of contention regarding Christ.

A similar functional understanding of Jesus’ sonship can be found throughout the New Testament. For example, Acts 9:20-22 reports that Paul’s preaching from the beginning consisted in demonstrating that Jesus was the “Son of God,” which is explained as demonstrating that Jesus was the Messiah (cf. Acts 17:3-4; 18:5; 24:24).

1 For the confessional nature of Rom 1:3b-4, see ibid., 5; J. N. D. Kelly, Early Christian Creeds, 3d ed. (New York: David McKay, 1972), 17.

2 A similar assertion could be found in Acts 13:32-34: “And we bring you the good news that what God promised to our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you.’ As to his raising him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, ‘I will give you [ûμîν] the holy promises made to David’” (emphasis mine; cf. Acts 2:22-36).

It is not clear, however, if the phrase “raising Jesus” in v. 33 refers to Jesus’ resurrection (which is clearly referred to in v. 34; see Dunn, Christology in the Making, 36) or to the fact that God brought Jesus onto the stage of history (e.g., Luke 1:69; Acts 3:22, 26; see Barrett, Acts of the Apostles, 1:645-6). In any case, it is clear that “by raising Jesus” God has fulfilled the Davidic promises. “Son of God” is here a royal title, a function that Jesus assumed by virtue of events that happened in relation to his life on earth. C. K. Barrett concludes: “Jesus is both Son of David (cf. Rom. 1.3) and Son of God; these are complementary, not contradictory propositions.” Acts of the Apostles, 1:646. Finally, note that 1 Cor 15:24-28 also connects Davidic traditions, the resurrection, and Jesus’ sonship.


“Son” as a filial title

There are tensions, however, in Hebrews’ use of sonship language for Jesus.

Some passages refer to Jesus as Son before the exaltation.¹ For example,

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. (Heb 5:7-8, emphasis mine)

There are also passages that do not refer to Jesus as Son to denote his royal status but to denote his filial relationship to God. For example,

For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying, “I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.” And again, “I will put my trust in him.” And again, “Here am I and the children whom God has given me.” (Heb 2:11-13, emphasis mine; cf. 3:6)

How should we deal, then, with these apparently contradictory understandings of Jesus’ sonship?

Some scholars believe that Hebrews incorporates two different sonship traditions

¹ Commentators have suggested several moments in which Jesus became Son. See Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 54, nn. 47-49: (1) The creation or another primeval event. Eugène Ménégoz, La théologie de L’Epître aux Hébreux (Paris: Fischbacher, 1894), 82; Montefiore, 44-45; Michel, Hebräer, 110. For further references among the church fathers, see Spicq, 2:16. (2) The incarnation, Riggenbach, 18-19; Windisch, 14-15; Spicq, 2:16. Also, most church fathers, see Heen and Krey, eds., 20-25 passim. (3) The baptism. Hermann Strathmann, Der Brief an die Hebräer, 9th ed., NTD, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, no. 9 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), 79.
without any attempt at reconciliation; therefore, we should not try to reconcile them either.\textsuperscript{1} They note that both early Jewish and Christian writings independently combined traditions about exaltation and pre-existence that seem contradictory. For example, the identification of pseudo-Enoch as the Son of Man in the Similitudes of Enoch (105-64 B.C.E.) is apparently contradictory. In \textit{1 En.} 48:2 the Son of Man, the Chosen One, is named in the presence of God \textit{before} the creation of the cosmos. At the end of the section, however, in 71:14-17, pseudo-Enoch is exalted and apparently identified as the Son of Man.\textsuperscript{2} Similarly, Luke saw no difficulty in including assertions that seem to set the decisive moment of Jesus’ divine sonship at three different moments: conception or birth (Luke 1:32, 35; cf. 2:49), baptism (Luke 3:22; cf. 3:23-28), and resurrection (Acts 13:33).\textsuperscript{3} Paul, likewise, may refer to Jesus becoming the Son of God at the exaltation in Rom 1:3 and to Jesus’ pre-existence in 1 Cor 8:6. Apparently, these contradictions didn’t bother early Jewish or Christian writers. For example, Thomas H. Tobin shows how Philo uses different and sometimes contradictory exegetical traditions regarding the creation of Man without any attempt to reconcile them.\textsuperscript{4} The fact, however, that the author of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{1} E.g., Dunn, \textit{Christology in the Making}, 53; Loader, \textit{Sohn und Hoherpriester}, 140. Harold W. Attridge seems to favor this option as well. Attridge, \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews}, 54-55.
  \item \textsuperscript{2} See Attridge, \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews}, 55, n. 58. This identification is problematic, though, because different Ethiopic terms are used for “Son of Man” in these passages. See note in \textit{OTP} 1:50.
  \item \textsuperscript{3} Dunn, \textit{Christology in the Making}, 50-51. It is not clear, however, whether Acts 13:33 refers to the incarnation or to the exaltation; see p. 261, n. 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{4} Thomas H. Tobin, \textit{The Creation of Man: Philo and the History of Interpretation},
\end{itemize}
Hebrews refers in Heb 5:7-8 to Jesus as Son on earth right after referring to his exaltation and royal adoption as Son (Heb 5:5-6) suggests that for him there is no contradiction between these views but they somehow complement each other.¹

Others have suggested that Hebrews applies the title Son to Jesus before the exaltation in proleptic fashion. In other words, Hebrews calls Jesus Son while on earth in anticipation of his exaltation when he will truly become the Son.² Hebrews 5:8, however, does not seem to allow for this view. This passage reads, “Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered” (5:8). This argument requires that Jesus was in some sense a son while he was on earth, not that he was going to be. “The point of 5.8 is that even though Christ was a son, and thus might be thought exempt from suffering, he still suffered and, even further, learned obedience from his suffering.”³

Therefore, if this passage says that Jesus was already a Son on earth (5:8), right after referring to the fact that he became the Son at the ascension (5:5), then there is a progression in the meaning of the term “son” from 5:5 to 5:8. The first use of the term “son” has *royal* connotations. It harks back to the enthronement of Jesus following his ascension to heaven as described in chap. 1. In v. 8, however, the term son has *filial*

¹ The participle λαλήσας in Heb 5:5 refers back to Heb 1:5-6 to the moment of Jesus’ enthronement. This is the moment in which, for the author of Hebrews, Jesus is appointed high priest according to the order of Melchizedek (5:1-10).

² E.g., Käsemann, 99; Thompson, *Beginnings*, 131.

³ Schenck, “Keeping His Appointment,” 97.
connotations. It focuses on the process of learning in the context of the relationship between a father and his son, which is common to humanity. Jesus, as son of God, submits to his father’s discipline (5:7) and fulfills his will (10:5-10). In this sense he has learned obedience (5:8). This is why God has appointed him “heir of all things” (Heb 1:2).

This progression in the meaning of the term “son” suggests a solution to our dilemma. The author of Hebrews uses the term “son” in two different ways. Obviously he does not see a contradiction in asserting that Jesus became the “Son” at the exaltation (chap. 1; 5:5) and asserting that he was already Son while on earth (5:8; cf. 2:11-13; 3:6). The first refers to his assumption of a *royal office*; the latter to his *filial identity*. While Jesus *became* the Son at the ascension in terms of royal power, he *was already* Son in terms of his identity.\(^1\) Luke T. Johnson suggests that these two concepts are complementary: “The Son’s capacity to inherit ‘all things’ from God is, in turn, connected to his role in fashioning ‘all things’ in the universe. He is to inherit what he himself participated in bringing into being.”\(^2\) The Son, in his filial identity, participates with the Father in the creation of the universe (Heb 1:2); but in his royal identity, he assumes the rulership of the universe (cf. Ps 2:8). Thus, “the protological function of the Son points to his eschatological victory.”\(^3\)

\(^1\) Here I am following the argument of Schenck, “Keeping His Appointment,” 91-117.
\(^3\) Ibid.
Paul probably held a similar view. I have already mentioned Paul’s assertion that Jesus “was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead” (Rom 1:4). It is commonly accepted that the qualification “with power” should be taken with the noun (υἱὸν θεοῦ) in the sense that the role Jesus assumed after the resurrection was “Son of God with power.” This suggests that in Paul’s view Jesus did not become Son of God at the resurrection but that he acquired royal or executive power at the resurrection. James D. G. Dunn clearly expresses this view:

“In power” was presumably important to Paul. It indicated that Jesus’ divine sonship (v. 3) had been “upgraded” or “enhanced” by the resurrection, so that he shared more fully in the very power of God, not simply in status (at God’s right hand . . .), but in “executive authority,” able to act on and through people in the way Paul implies elsewhere (e.g., [Rom] 8:10; 1 Cor 15:45; Gal 2:20; Col 2:6-7).

Finally, this progression in the meaning of the term “Son” is not an isolated phenomenon in the Book of Hebrews. For example, the author of Hebrews moves back and forth between the temporal and spatial meanings of the adjective πρώτος in Heb 9:1-10. In fact, as I will show below, the author will develop a parable to illustrate the inauguration of the new age from these two uses of the adjective πρώτος. I will suggest below that there is also a rhetorical intention in the progression of the meaning of the term “Son” in the overall argument of the letter.

See references in Dunn, Romans 1-8, 14.

Ibid.
The Son and the Sons in the Argument of Hebrews

I suggest that this ambiguity in the use of the term son in Hebrews plays a decisive role in the hortatory argument of the Letter. On the one hand, Hebrews’ reference to the royal worthiness of the Son and his enthronement in heaven is the basis for the call to show allegiance to the new king. The author suggests that this allegiance should be shown by their “holding fast to the confession” (Heb 2:17-3:1; 4:14-16; 10:19-23; 13:12-15). He also issues a stern warning of judgment against those who decide to “spurn” the Son of God (Heb 6:4-8; 10:26-31; 12:25, 29). On the other hand, Hebrews’ reference to the Son’s sufferings and his total identification with human beings are the basis for the call to believers to endure and go forward to the reception of the promises (e.g., Heb 4:11, 16; 19:22, 35-39; 12:1-3).

The second aspect, however, constitutes the core of the argument of chaps. 1 and 2. The exhortation to the believers to endure suffering and press forward to the inheritance of the promises is based on the Letter’s interpretation of Ps 8:4-6 quoted in Heb 2:6-8. Interestingly enough, the force of the exhortation resides in the ambivalence in the use of the term Son.

The purpose of the author’s long description of Jesus’ enthronement in heaven in the catena (1:5-14) becomes clear with the interpretation of Ps 8:4-6 in Heb 2:5-9.¹ In

¹ The insight that the interpretation of Ps 8 in Heb 2 controls the argument of the preceding chapter (esp. the catena of 1:5-14) was introduced by George Bradford Caird, “The Exegetical Method of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” CJT 5 (1959): 44-51. Others have built on this insight; e.g., Hurst, “Christology,” 151-64; Craig R. Koester,
Heb 2:5, the author picks up the topic left at 1:14 and advances the argument of the catena towards its culmination. The author wants to show that the enthronement of Jesus in heaven and his rule over the world to come is of decisive importance for human beings.

Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. But someone has testified somewhere, “What are human beings [ἀνθρώποι] that you are mindful of them, or mortals [νεκροί ἄνθρωποι], that you care for them? You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honor, subjecting all things under their feet.” Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see


1 The conjunction γάρ is better translated here by “now” in the sense of denoting the resumption of the argument left at 1:14. E.g., NRSV; Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 69-70; Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 144-5; Koester, *Hebrews*, 213; Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 44. Contra, NASB; Johnson, *Hebrews*, 89. There are several reasons for this. The phrase οὐ γάρ ἄγγελοις . . . (2:5) is equivalent to the rhetorical questions τίνι . . . τῶν ἄγγελων (“to which of the angels . . . ?,” 1:5) and πρὸς τίνα . . . τῶν ἄγγελων (“to which of the angels . . . ?,” 1:13). Hebrews 2:5, then, resumes the comparison between Christ and the angels of 1:5-14 with the exception that it introduces a new element in the contrast: human beings. Note that this comparison is of a different nature to the comparison between angels and Christ in 2:1-4. In 1:5-14 and 2:5-9 the angels play a negative role vis-à-vis Christ. In 2:1-4, however, the angels play a more positive role as the lesser component in an a fortiori comparison. Moreover, the negative assertion that “God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels” repeats in different terms the assertion of 1:13, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” The explanatory phrase “about which we are speaking” suggests that this negative statement functions as a summary of what has been shown in 1:5-14. Hebrews 2:5 also marks a change in genre from exhortation (2:1-4) to exposition (2:5-18). There is, as well, a change in the subject and references of the passage. As in 1:5-14, “God” and the “Son” are the main referents, and God is the subject in 1:5-14 and 2:5-9. In 2:1-4, “we” is the subject and the “believers” are the main referents. See Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 144-5; George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis*, NovTSup, ed. A. J. Malherbe and D. P. Moessner, no. 73 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 63-64. Finally, it is worth noting that Ps 8 is tied with Ps 110—the last OT quotation of the catena (1:13)—in several Christological passages in the NT (1 Cor 15:26-27; Eph 1:20-22). Michel, *Hebräer*, 138.
everything in subjection to them, but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. (Heb 2:5-9)

This quotation of Ps 8:4-6 can be read at two levels. On the first level, this psalm refers to God’s broad intentions regarding human beings.\(^1\) His purpose is to crown them with “honor and glory” and subject “all things under their feet.” God has subjected the world to come to them! This reading is anticipated by the author’s affirmation, twice mentioned, that human beings are destined for salvation (1:13; 2:3). The author makes an objection, however: “As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them” (v. 8). This is painfully clear for the audience of the Letter. They have experienced persecution in the past (10:32-34) and continue to suffer verbal harassment (13:13). Some of them are still in prison (13:3) and the rest are experiencing a crisis of faith (5:11; 6:12; cf. 2:1).

The author responds to this disparity between promise and fulfillment by suggesting an interpretation of the Psalm at a second level. This Psalm refers to the death and exaltation of Jesus Christ. The author explains that he “was made lower than the angels” in order that “he might taste death for everyone.” This was only for “a little while” but now he has been “crowned with glory and honor.”\(^2\) Thus the psalm refers to

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\(^1\) Most commentators take \(\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\omicron\omicron\)—repeated three times in most manuscripts (except \(\text{\textit{p}}\)\(^{46}\) B d v vg\(\text{\textit{ms}}\)\(\text{\textit{ss}}\) bo\(\text{\textit{ms}}\))—to refer to humankind, not Christ. See, Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 150-52. Contra, Braun; Windisch.

\(^2\) This implies a reinterpretation of Ps 8. In Ps 8 the phrases “lower than the angels” and “crowned with glory and honor” are parallel and, therefore, could be understood as being synonymous. Hebrews, however, interprets them as being contradictory. See James Swetnam, Jesus and Isaac: A Study of the Epistle to the Hebrews in the Light of the Aqedah, AnBib, no. 94 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), 139; Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 48.
the majesty of the Son of God, whom God appointed “heir of all things” (1:2) and promised “I [will] make your enemies a footstool for your feet” (1:13). The author assumes the audience’s knowledge and acceptance of what he described in the catena (1:5-14); namely, that Jesus has ascended to heaven and has been enthroned “at the right hand of the majesty on high.”

Thus, “when applied to the exalted Christ, the psalm describes his present glory; when applied to the beleaguered people of God, the psalm promises future glory (1:14; 2:10).”

The reality of Jesus’ enthronement is of fundamental importance to believers. It proves that God’s purpose for human beings—as expressed in Ps 8—is for real. Jesus is the royal Son of God in whom God accomplished his purposes for human beings when he enthroned him Lord of the “coming world” (2:5; cf. 1:5-14). But this is not the end of the story. Jesus is the Son of God in a filial sense too. “For a little while” Jesus was made “lower than the angels . . . so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” (2:9, emphasis mine). In other words, he identified fully with human beings in order to bring “many sons [υἱοί] to glory” (2:10, NASB). God has fulfilled his purpose for humanity in Christ in such a way that it anticipates and brings about fulfillment for the rest of humankind.

Hebrews 2:10-18 concentrates, then, on how the Son makes the

1 The author does not try to prove in the catena by means of Scripture Jesus’ ascension and enthronement over the cosmos. The catena describes, rather than argues for, Jesus’ heavenly glorification. Most likely, this belief was already part of their confession (cf. 3:1; 4:14; 10:23; 13:15).


3 See, e.g., Swetnam, Jesus and Isaac, 137-41; Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 48.
fulfillment of God’s purpose possible for “many sons.” The author builds his argument on the filial sense of the term Son. Instead of emphasizing Jesus’ royal worthiness, it focuses on his total identification with human beings.¹

There are seven instances of familial terminology in this passage: “many sons” (πολλοίς γίνοις; v. 2:10), “brothers and sisters” (ἀδελφοί; v. 11), “my brothers and sisters” (τοίς ἀδελφοίς μου; v. 12), “the children” (τὰ παιδία; v. 13), “the children” (τὰ παιδία; v. 14); “his brothers and sisters” (τοίς ἀδελφοίς), and “of the people” (τοῦ λαοῦ; v. 17).² The passage emphasizes, then, that Jesus belongs to the human family.

The passage also implies, however, that Jesus is Son in a unique way. As Son, he is the brother of human beings because he has identified with them.³ In fact, the language of identification is even more pervasive: “that . . . he might taste death for everyone” (2:9), “the pioneer of their salvation” (v. 10), “the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father” (v. 11), “he himself likewise shared the same things [flesh and blood]; so that . . . he might destroy . . . the devil” (v. 14), “He gives help to the


² See Mackie, “Confession of the Son of God,” 119.

³ That Jesus “was made lower than the angels” implies that he preexisted. Regarding the debate about the mode of Jesus’ preexistence in Hebrews, see Isaacs, Sacred Space, 198-204.

descendants of Abraham” (v. 16, NASB), “he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest” (v. 17), and “Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested” (v. 18).¹

Jesus’ full identification with humanity has a saving purpose. Jesus partakes of “flesh and blood” (2:14) and suffers death “so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God” and be “able to help” them, that is, to lead them to glory. That is why the “sons” are given to him (2:13). Jesus’ death and filial obedience have made their “adoption” possible (2:9, 14). Thus, the believers’ sonship is mediated through the sufferings of the Son. The “sons” achieve “glory” only through him. Jesus’ sonship, instead, is genuine and unmediated. He “is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being” (1:3).²

Craig R. Koester suggests, then, that Hebrews’ two-level interpretation of Ps 8:4-6 in 2:5-9 should be considered the proposition (propositio), that is, the section “which identifies the principal issue to be addressed in the speech.”³ The author interprets Ps 8 to say two things. First, this Psalm expresses God’s glorious purpose for human beings. Second, this glorious purpose has been accomplished in Jesus on account of (διὰ τῶν...). his suffering of death “for everyone” (v. 9).

¹ Mackie, “Confession of the Son of God,” 119.


This interpretation sets the course for the rest of the document. It gives origin to three series of arguments. The first series (chaps. 1-7) focuses on the crowning of Jesus “with glory and honor” in the sense that he has been enthroned as Son (king; esp. 1:5-14) and appointed as priest (esp. 5:1-10). In both cases, his sufferings (i.e., death) qualify him for his office (2:9, 17-18; 5:7-10). The second series (chaps. 8-10) focuses on Jesus’ death as a sacrifice “for everyone” that makes possible a new covenant in which his purpose for human beings can be attained. Finally, the third series (chaps. 11-13) focuses on what readers should do. It acknowledges the dilemma regarding their situation. The readers “do not yet see” all things subjected to them as God intended. He shows them, on the one hand, that they need faith and that faith concerns those things that are unseen (10:38-11:40). On the other hand, he exhorts them “to see” Jesus (12:1-3; cf. 2:9) who has been “crowned with honor and glory because of the suffering of death” (2:9) and endure the necessary trials (12:5-11) as they journey towards the consummation of their hope (12:12-13; cf. vv. 22-29).¹

Summary

I have argued that Heb 1:6 refers to the ascension of Jesus into heaven as an act of God in which he introduces the Son to the heavenly court as their ruler. In the ANE, the motif of divine warfare or Combat Myth was commonly used to support and justify kingship claims. Similarly, Hebrews describes Jesus’ warfare with and victory over the devil (Heb 2:14-16) as part of a narrative substructure that justifies and supports Jesus’

¹ Ibid., 112.
kingship over the world and, therefore, a strong reason for encouragement.

I have also argued that Heb 1:6 is part of a catena of OT passages that describes the enthronement of Jesus at the right hand of God. This description of the enthronement of Jesus fulfills an important function in the argument of chaps. 1-2. It provides the basis to interpret Ps 8 (in Heb 2:6-10) on two levels. On the first level, Hebrews understands that Ps 8 refers to God’s glorious purpose for humanity—that they should rule over creation—and recognizes that this purpose has not been fulfilled yet. On the second level, Hebrews asserts that God has fulfilled this purpose in the person of Jesus who has received “honor and glory” and has been given dominion over all things. This is not the end of the story, however. The enthronement of the Son “because of the suffering of death” makes it possible that Jesus may lead “many sons” to glory. Thus, the readers of Hebrews should see in the enthronement of Jesus a prefiguration and foretaste of their own enthronement over all things (cf. 12:28). This powerful fact is the basis of the exhortation of Hebrews. The “today” of the enthronement of the Son is not the time to “drift away” and “disobey” but to “pay greater attention” to the Son (2:1-4). This hortatory argument will be developed in new ways in the following sections of Hebrews.

“... A Great High Priest Who Has Passed through the Heavens” (Heb 4:14-16): Ascension and Entrance into God’s Rest

Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb 4:14-16, emphasis mine)

This is the second passage in the letter that refers to Jesus’ ascension to heaven. It
is significant for several reasons. First, it is a simple and straightforward affirmation of the ascension.\(^1\) Second, it connects Jesus’ ascension to important themes of the letter; for example, the important Christological titles “Son of God” and “high priest,” and the exhortations “hold fast to the confession” and “approach” God “with boldness.”\(^2\) Finally, it is commonly recognized that this passage is one of the pivotal points in the argument of the Letter.\(^3\)

I will deal, first, with the image of a high priest ascending to heaven. Second, I will explore the role the ascension plays in the immediate argument.

High Priesthood and Ascension “through the Heavens”

In terms of imagery, there are two components in the description of the ascension in this passage. First, Jesus is described as a high priest. Second, the ascension is described as a passage “through the heavens.”

\(^1\) Similarly Heb 9:24. The remaining ascension passages use more elaborate royal (1:6) or cultic imagery (6:19-20 [7:19]; 9:12 [26, 28]; 10:19-22).

\(^2\) Regarding the call to “hold fast to the confession,” see Heb 3:6; 10:23; cf. 2:1; 6:18; 10:35; 12:3; 13:15.

The image of a high priest ascending “through the heavens” into the presence of
God was not strange in early Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature. Martha
Himmelfarb has argued that *1 Enoch* and later early Jewish and Christian apocalypses
that involved ascent to heaven conceived heaven as a temple; thus, the ascension implied
in many cases the investiture of the visionary as a heavenly priest.¹ For example, the
Testament of Levi refers to two visions in which Levi is consecrated to serve as priest. In
the first, he ascends to heaven (chaps. 2-5) where God himself charges him with the work

¹ *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York: Oxford
apocalypses (the Book of the Watchers [*1 En. 1-36*], the Testament of Levi, 2 Enoch, the
Similitudes of Enoch [*1 En. 37-71*], the Apocalypse of Zephaniah, the Apocalypse of
Abraham, the Ascension of Isaiah, and 3 Baruch) spanning 400-500 years (from 3rd
century B.C.E. to 2nd century C.E.). She suggests that this view is the result of the
influence the Book of the Watchers exerts on later apocalypses. This book describes the
“house” of God as a three-chambered structure (a wall, and first and second houses),
following the pattern of the First and Second Temples (*1 En. 14.9, 10-14, 15-17*).

(Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1987), 210-17; idem, *Ascent to Heaven*, 14-16.

Regarding heavenly ascent in early Judaism and early Christianity, see J. M.
Background*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity,
2000), 447-52; Zwiep, 36-79; Collins, “A Throne in the Heavens,” 43-58; Tabor,
“Ascent,” 3:91-94; idem, *Things Unutterable*, 57-112; Dean-Otting; Segal, 1352-76;
Lohfink, 51-73. See also above, p. 50, n. 1.

The conception of heaven as a temple is in itself not extraordinary. The OT
already refers to God’s dwelling as a temple in heaven. Commonly agreed references in
the OT include Gen 28:11-22; Exod 25:8-9, 40; 2 Sam 22:7=Ps 18:6; Pss 29:9; 150:1; Isa
6:1-8; Zech 2:17; 3:1-10. Elias Brasil de Souza suggests that there are a total of 43
Bible: Function and Relationship to the Earthly Counterparts” (Ph.D. diss., Andrews
University, 2005). See also Beale, 31-44; R. J. McKelvey, *The New Temple: The Church
of priesthood (5:2). The second vision (chap. 8) describes two angels who come and consecrate him as priest.

In other documents the priestly function is only implicit. For example, in the case of the Book of the Watchers, Enoch himself is not called priest, but “scribe of righteousness” (1 En. 12.4; 15.1). However, he fulfills such priestly functions as intercession and has access to the heavenly temple (1 En. 14.9-15.2). (Note, however, that in Jub. 4.25 Enoch is considered a priest.) Also, very often the ascension of a visionary implied his transformation into an angel, who were often understood to fulfill priestly roles in the heavenly sanctuary. This was indicated in a variety of ways; for example, participation in the heavenly liturgy or the investiture of the visionary with a special “robe” (e.g., 1 En. 62:15-16; 2 En. 22.8-10 [OTP 1:138]; 3 En. 4; Apoc. Zeph. 8:3-4 [OTP 1:514]; Ascen. Isa. 6-9, esp. 9:1-2; Apoc. Ab. 13:14).¹

James C. Vanderkam warns, however, that Martha Himmelfarb may have overemphasized the point. Some of the roles that she has taken as priestly, such as mediator, are also eminently prophetic.² In any case, it seems that in general her point is well taken. Since God’s dwelling in heaven was considered a temple, the ascension of the visionary into God’s presence implied the assumption of priestly privileges and roles too.

¹ Himmelfarb, “Apocalyptic Ascent,” 212-5; idem, Ascent to Heaven, 29-70. It is interesting that in 3 En. 4, Enoch is transformed into the angel Metatron, God’s second in command. A similar transformation is the one of Enoch into the Son of Man in 1 En. 71. See Himmelfarb, Ascent to Heaven, 44-45.

The apocalypses also developed the idea of a plurality of heavens—mostly 7.\(^1\)

The highest heaven, where God’s throne was, represented by implication the holy of holies of the heavenly sanctuary. (In fact, the seventh heaven is explicitly identified as the holy of holies of the heavenly sanctuary in \(T.\ Lev.\ 3.4\).) A similar fusion of royal and priestly imagery is found in Hebrews’ expression “throne of mercy” (4:16) which refers to God’s throne in heaven from which mercy was given (Heb 8:1; 12:2; cf. Jer 17:12-14) and was represented by the ἱερά τήρημα in Heb 9:5 (the lid of the ark, from the Hebrew הַניְסְפִּים, mistakenly translated “mercy seat” in several English translations, e.g., NASB, NRSV, etc.), the place of atonement in the holy of holies, God’s throne on earth (Exod 25:22; 2 Kgs 19:15; Pss 80:1; 99:1; Isa 6:1).\(^2\)

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\(^1\) Documents referring to 1 heaven include: \(1\ En.\ 14.\) Documents referring to 3 heavens include: earlier recension of the Greek version of \(T.\ Lev.\ 2-3;\) \(2\ Cor\ 12:2-4;\) and probably \(1\ En.\ 71.1-5.\) Documents referring to 7 heavens include: later recension of the Greek version of \(T.\ Lev.\ 2-3;\) \(L.A.E.\ 35.2;\) \(Apoc.\ Ab.\ 10.8; 19.4;\) \(2\ En.\ 3-22;\) \(Mart.\ Ascen.\ Isa.\ 6-11;\) and probably \(3\ Bar.\ 11-17.\) See also, the description of the heavenly temple in the \(Shirot \text{ ‘}Olat Hashabbat\) (ShirShabb; Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice) as composed of seven sanctuaries (Carol Newsom, \(Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical Edition,\) HSS, ed. Frank Moore Cross, no. 27 [Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1985], 48-58) and the description of multiple heavens in the non-canonical Christian writings \(Apoc.\ Pet.\) and \(Apoc.\ Paul.\) See Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Seven Heavens in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses,” in \(Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys,\) ed. John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1995), 57-92.

Carol Newsom considers that the use of multiple sanctuaries/heavens in the “Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice” is “an attempt to communicate something of the elusive transcendence of heavenly reality” (49). Note, in this connection, that the 7 heavens are referred to in the singular in \(T.\ Lev.\ 5.1;\) cf. \(2.5-3.4.\) See Himmelfarb, \(Ascent to Heaven,\) 32-33.

\(^2\) This passage probably refers to God’s throne and not to Christ’s (1:3; 8, 13; 10:12) because elsewhere in the Letter the readers are invited to approach God (7:25; 11:6).

For the intersection of priestly, royal, and other imagery regarding Christ’s
Jesus’ ascent to heaven is simply described as a passage “through the heavens.”

There is no place in Hebrews for the detailed and fantastic descriptions of heavenly tours that appear in early Jewish and Christian apocalypses.1 Its interest lies, instead, in the result of the process (i.e., that Jesus has been exalted), rather than in the process itself (cf. 7:26).2 The simple image, however, of Jesus as a high priest ascending “through the heavens” (4:14; cf. 7:26) presages the more developed image of Jesus as a high priest entering the heavenly sanctuary, which is so important later in the argument (6:19-20; 8:1-2; 9:11-12; 10:19-20).3 Both representations merge in 9:24: “For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf” (emphasis mine).

The assertion that Christ “has passed through the heavens” presents a problem to the interpreter as well. This passage implies a three-part universe: earth, the heavens, and exaltation and the throne of God, see Eskola, 338-74.

1 See Himmelfarb, Ascent to Heaven.

2 Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 139. The ascension is not mystical, either. Jesus’ ascension implies the early Christian doctrine of Jesus’ death, resurrection, and exaltation at the “right hand” of God (Heb 13:20; cf. 2:14-16; 12:2). See Johnson, Hebrews, 139.

3 I am not convinced, however, that the “heavens” may stand for several rooms of the heavenly sanctuary as in the multiple heavenly temples of the Jewish apocalypses. I will argue below that the view of Jesus passing through the heavens as the high priest passed through the outer room into the inner room of the heavenly sanctuary (e.g., Koester, Hebrews, 282) is problematic. See section “The Greater and Perfect Tent” Denotes the Sanctuary of the New Covenant” below. For Hebrews’ view of the universe, see Ellingworth, “Jesus and the Universe,” 337-50.
above the heavens. Other passages, instead, imply only a two-part universe. For example, “For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf” (Heb 9:24). We have in this case only earth and heaven.

César Augusto Franco Martínez has argued that there is no contradiction between the cosmological presuppositions of 4:14 and 9:24. He suggests that the apparent differences between both views may be explained by understanding the Semitic substructure of 4:14 and that this passage should read: “Teniendo, pues, un gran sumo sacerdote que entró en los cielos (o en el cielo) mantengámonos adheridos a la confesión.”

First, the plural οὗρανοί could be understood as an assimilation to the Hebrew word יערים, which is plural in form but not in meaning. In this sense, the plural οὗρανοί

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1 Paul Ellingworth suggests that also Heb 2:9 and 7:26 imply a three-part view of the universe (e.g., Eph 4:10). “Jesus and the Universe,” 340-41. It is not clear that something beyond status is meant in 2:9 and 7:26 (e.g., see Franco Martínez, 285; Otfried Hofius, Der Vorhang vor dem Thron Gottes: Eine exegetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Hebräer 6,19 und 10,19 f., WUNT, ed. Joachim Jeremias and Otto Michel, no. 14 [Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1972], 68-69).

2 This is the case in other passages that use imagery from the heavenly sanctuary (6:19; 8:1-2; 9:11-14; 10:19-21). Hebrews emphasizes Jesus’ entrance into τὰ ἅγια and does not to refer to an outer room or division in the heavenly sanctuary. See Ellingworth, “Jesus and the Universe,” 342-8. This is a complicated issue, however, and deserves a fuller treatment. See my analysis of the imagery of each passage below.

3 (Since we have a great high priest that entered in the heavens [or in heaven] let us hold fast to our confession.) Franco Martínez, 308.

4 Bruce, 115; Hughes, Hebrews, 170, n. 2. Note that in many cases יערים is translated with the singular in the LXX; e.g., Gen 1:1; 2:1; passim.
in 4:14 is equivalent to the singular οὐρανός in 9:24. This shifting between plural and singular forms of οὐρανός in a single document is not strange in the NT. For example, note that 1 Thess 1:10 refers to Jesus’ coming “from heaven” (ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν) using the plural, but 1 Thess 4:16 refers to the same event with “from heaven” (ἀπ’ οὐρανοῦ) in the singular. In fact, this equivalency helps us to understand the shift from the plural to the singular of οὐρανός in contiguous verses in Heb 9:23-24 and 12:25-26. Franco Martínez is right, then, that we should not read too much into the plural “heavens” of 4:14.

His second point, however, is not convincing. He argues that the term διέρχομαι in 4:14 does not carry here the sense “go through” but “to enter.” He notes that in the LXX διέρχομαι may translate the verbs ἐξελθεῖν or ἔρχεται and that both verbs may refer either to “go through” or just “go, arrive at, enter.” None of the examples he presents from the LXX, however, show clearly that διέρχομαι should be understood as “entering” instead


2 BDAG, 738.

3 Note, as well, the shift from the plural in Col 1:5, 16, 20 to the singular in 1:23; 4:1; likewise, from the plural in 1 Pet 1:4 to the singular in 1:12 and 3:22.

4 Sometimes διέρχομαι plus the accusative may refer to movement within an area; e.g., Acts 13:6; 18:23, Ellingworth, “Jesus and the Universe,” 341. This does not fit the argument of Hebrews, however, where the expression διεληλυθότα τούς οὐρανούς explains why Jesus is a “great high priest.” The greatness of this priest resides in that he transcended the earthly and even the heavenly realms (cf. 7:26). The suggestion of César A. Franco Martínez is different, however. He suggests, instead, that the sense of διέρχομαι here is one of entering to stay, not a movement through an area and beyond.
of “going through.” His examples from the NT are similarly not convincing. The problem remains, then: The author of Hebrews juxtaposes two different views of the universe in his Letter.

Paul Ellingworth, after analyzing eight passages that combine cosmological presuppositions with a description of the work of Christ, concludes that the author of Hebrews “works with two types of spatial language.” One is vertical and is concerned with the exaltation of Jesus Christ (Heb 2:9; 4:14; 7:26). This language presupposes an intermediate sphere populated with angels which he does not describe in detail over which Jesus exerts authority. The second is horizontal, typological in nature, and concerned with Jesus’ sacrifice (6:19-20; 8:1-2; 9:1-14; 9:24; 10:19-21). This language presupposes a simple contrast between heaven and earth—without any reference to an intermediate sphere—and its purpose is to present the first covenant institutions as prefiguring Jesus’ achievements in the heavenly sanctuary. He suggests that both types

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1 For example: Deut 29:11 and 2 Chr 15:12, “enter [δείχνωμαι] into a covenant”; Nah 2:1 and Joel 4:17, the wicked will never again “invade” (δείχνωμαι) you; etc. See Franco Martínez, 294-303. See also, J. Lust, E. Eynikel, and K. Hauspie, comps., A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1992-96), 1:114; T. Muraoka, A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint: Twelve Prophets (Louvain: Peeters, 1993), 53.


4 Attempts to equate both types of spatial language by, for example, arguing that the veil represents the middle sphere populated by angels or that there are two rooms in the heavenly sanctuary are problematic. See ibid., 344-9.
of language complement each other. They are used in close proximity (e.g., 7:26; 8:1-2) and both describe the full access to the immediate presence of God that Jesus enjoys as high priest, first for himself and then for believers.¹

Jesus Leads Believers into the Rest

Now, what is the function of the ascension in the argument of this passage? The answer to this question on a first level is simple. The participial phrase “who has passed through the heavens” modifies the expression “a great high priest.” It has the purpose of explaining the idea that Jesus is “a great high priest.”² In this sense, Jesus is “a great high priest.”

¹ Ibid., 350. I have not addressed here the important debate regarding Hebrews’ worldview. The suggestion that Hebrews holds a Platonic/Philonic understanding of the universe that is based on a metaphysical dualism probably reached its clearest expression in Thompson, Beginnings. This view continues to be held, at least to some extent, by some recent commentaries, e.g., Johnson, Hebrews, 15-30. A second suggestion is that Hebrews holds an apocalyptic worldview that posits a dualism between two ages. This has probably reached its clearest expression in Hurst, The Epistle to the Hebrews.

For the most recent evaluation of the cosmology of Hebrews, of which I am aware, see Adams, “The Cosmology of Hebrews.” After interacting with the work of James W. Thompson throughout the paper, he concludes: “Rather than displaying a radical cosmological dualism that negates creation and the material world, the letter is decidedly pro-creational. The understanding of God as creator and the world as his (good) creation underpins other aspects and emphases of the author’s theology. Although the world, as it presently is, is not destined to last but will be brought to an end when God intervenes at the coming judgment, God’s positive purposes for creation will be achieved (2:6-8). Final salvation in the ‘coming world’ will fully embrace ‘created existence and its environment’” (Adams, 16, emphasis original).


² Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 139; Ellingworth, “Jesus and the Universe,” 341. The expression ἄρχων ἐρείπα μέγαν (great high priest) appears redundant at first sight. The argument of the Letter will make clear, however, that Jesus is superior to all the high priests in the history of Israel. Jesus’ high priesthood belongs in an altogether different category. This expression is similar to τὸν ποιμένα τῶν προβάτων τὸν μέγαν
priest” because he “has passed through the heavens”; that is, he has gone through and beyond the heavens (4:14). Similarly, the implicit reference to the ascension in Heb 7:26 has the same purpose of explaining what a great high priest believers have (it also has a parallel structure): “For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens” (emphasis mine).

This leads us to a second question, however: Why has the author chosen the ascension together with Jesus’ sinlessness to characterize Jesus as “a great high priest”? In order to answer this question we need to explore the relationship between this passage and its co-text.

**Hebrews 4:14-16 in the Argument of the Letter**

Hebrews 4:14-16 introduces the exposition of Hebrews 5-10

Most commentators agree that this passage has impressive literary connections to (the great shepherd of the sheep) which also emphasizes that Jesus is superior to any king in the history of Israel. See Hagner, “The Son of God,” 263-5.

1 “Έχοντες οὖν ἁρξιερέα μέγαν διεληλυθότα τοὺς οὐρανοὺς, Ἡσαῦν τὸν νἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, κρατῶμεν τῆς ὁμολογίας (“Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession”) (4:14, emphasis mine).

2 Note that in both passages, the ascension is only one of the qualifications that makes Jesus a great high priest. These passages also mention a second qualification, Jesus is sinless or, in other words, a faithful high priest.

3 Τοιοῦτος γὰρ ἠμῖν καὶ ἔπρεπεν ἁρξιερεύς, ὅσιος ἅκακος ἁμίαντος, κεχωρισμένος ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτωλῶν καὶ ὑψηλότερος τῶν οὐρανῶν γενόμενος.
Heb 10:19-23. In fact, George H. Guthrie considers this connection “the most striking use of *inclusio* in the book of Hebrews.” Notice the connections in table 4.

This relationship is important for the overall structure of the letter. These passages frame the major central section of the exposition of Hebrews (5:1-10:18). The first phrase of 4:14-16—“Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens”—seems to enclose the two overall arguments of the central section of Hebrews (5:1-10:18). The author explains in the first half (Heb 5:1-7:28) the appointment of the Son as high priest (“we have a great high priest”). In the second half (Heb 8:1-10:18), he

1 Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*, 79-82. Also Nauck, 203-6; Long Westfall, 137. Cf. deSilva, 179; Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 265. All of them recognize the importance of the connection between these passages. Both George H. Guthrie and Wolfgang Nauck develop their understanding of the structure of Hebrews on the basis of this connection and Cynthia Long Westfall considers the two passages “clear peaks in the discourse.” Long Westfall, 137, 299-301. However, the inclusion of 4:11-13 by Long Westfall and 10:24-31 by Nauck appears to me unwarranted.

It is puzzling that Albert Vanhoye failed to consider the connection between these passages but recognized a less clear *inclusio* formed by 3:1 and 4:14 (see p. 287, n. 1). In any case, the connection between 4:14-16 and 10:19-23 does not fit the chiastic structure he suggests for Hebrews. This significantly weakens his overall approach to the structure of Hebrews, even though his analysis of Hebrews’ techniques of composition remains valuable. For an evaluation of Albert Vanhoye’s views, see Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*, 33-35; Long Westfall, 7-11.

2 Here I am following the argument of Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*, 79-82, 102-4, 144. Albert Vanhoye differs regarding the extension of this central section. He identifies 5:11-10:39 as the central section of the argument of Hebrews. He discerns, however, a similar progression in the argument that begins with the appointment of Jesus as high priest and continues to the exposition of his sacrifice. *La structure littéraire de l’“Épître aux Hébreux,”* 2d ed. (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1976), 40a-40b.

3 Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*, 103. Note, however, that the train of thought is interrupted by the hortatory section that goes from 5:11-6:20.
Table 4. Literary Relationship between Hebrews 4:14-16 and 10:19-23

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4:14-16</th>
<th>10:19-23</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need [emphasis mine].</td>
<td>Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful [emphasis mine].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Έχοντες οὖν . . . (since we have)</td>
<td>&quot;Έχοντες οὖν . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἀρχιερεῖα μέγαν (a great high priest)</td>
<td>ἱερεῖα μέγαν</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>διελθοῦσα τοὺς οὐρανοὺς (who has passed through the heavens)</td>
<td>. . . διὰ τοῦ καταπετάσματος (through the curtain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ησοῦ (Jesus)</td>
<td>Ησοῦ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ (the Son of God)</td>
<td>τὸν οίκον τοῦ θεοῦ (the house of God)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>κρατῶμεν τῆς ὁμολογίας (let us hold fast to the confession)</td>
<td>κατέχωμεν τὴν ὁμολογίαν⁸</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>προσερχώμεθα . . . μετὰ (let us approach with . . .)</td>
<td>προσερχώμεθα μετὰ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>παρησίας (boldness)</td>
<td>Παρησίαν (confidence)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

discusses Jesus’ superior offering in heaven as constituting the inauguration of a new covenant ("who has passed through the heavens"). Note that Heb 7:11-12 makes explicit the logic of the progression of the argument of this central section by pointing out that the change of priesthood (5:1-7:28) makes necessary a change in the law (8:1-10:18).

In this sense, then, the reference to the ascension in Heb 4:14 functions as a harbinger of Hebrews’ discussion of Jesus’ sacrifice and entrance into heaven in 8:1-10:18.

Hebrews 4:14-16 concludes the exhortation of Hebrews 3-4

This passage, however, also has a clear relationship with its preceding argument. Albert Vanhoye has correctly noted that 4:14 closes an inclusio opened at 3:1. The author crafts this inclusio around four verbal elements common to both passages: θεοῦ (Jesus), ἁγιασμός (high priest), ἐπουράνιος/οὐρανός (heavenly/heaven), and ὁμολογία (confession). See table 5.

1 La structure littéraire, 54, 104; idem, Structure and Message, 26; Guthrie, The Structure of Hebrews, 78. Albert Vanhoye, however, mistakenly separates 4:14 from 4:15-16. Structure and Message, 26. Likewise, Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 110-11. It seems better to me to consider vv. 14-16 a unit that both concludes the preceding argument and introduces a new stage in it. The parallels between 4:14-16 and 10:19-23 suggest that the author considered the former to have an inherent unity. Furthermore, the progression of three hortatory subjunctives introduced by οὖν (4:11, 14, 16) with a close semantic relationship between them ("all three are behavioural [sic] processes that are physiological, involving the body" [Long Westfall, 135]) makes it unlikely that there is a break between vv. 14 and 15. Similar progressions of hortatory subjunctives are found in 10:19-25, which is clearly a unit. See Long Westfall, 133-7.
Table 5. Literary Relationship between Hebrews 3:1 and 4:14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heb 3:1</th>
<th>Heb 4:14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Therefore, brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling,</td>
<td>Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consider that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession.</td>
<td>heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(emphasis mine)</td>
<td>(emphasis mine)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I believe, however, that the correspondence between 3:1 and 4:14 goes beyond these four elements if we broaden the comparison to include thematic elements and a comparison between the wider passages 3:1-6 and 4:14-16. The latter describes Jesus as the “Son of God,” a concept that plays a very important function in the argument of the first where Jesus’ faithfulness is superior to that of Moses because Jesus is a Son while Moses was a servant (3:5-6). Also, 4:15 presents Jesus as “one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin”; again, a concept that resides at the core of the argument of Heb 3:1-6 which presents Jesus as the one who “was faithful [πιστός] to the one who appointed him” (v. 2). Finally, and more important, 3:1-6 opens a hortatory argument of the Letter that it is not interrupted until it concludes in 4:14-16.¹

Thus, these two passages also frame Hebrews’ exhortation contained in 3:7-4:13. In this sense, 4:14-16 functions more as a hinge or pivot on which the overall argument

¹ Contra Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*; Vanhoye, *La structure littéraire*. They argue that Hebrews begins a new expository section in 4:15. For the unity of Heb 4:14-16, see p. 287, n. 1.
of Hebrews turns. It functions both as an introduction to the following exposition and a
conclusion to the foregoing exhortation. This raises a question. If Heb 4:14-16 concludes
the hortatory argument of the unit (3:1-4:16), what is the function of the ascension and
Jesus’ priesthood in it?

The Exalted High Priest Helps the People
to Enter the Rest

In this section (Heb 3-4) the author uses the language and events of Ps 95 and
Num 14 to call the attention of the readers to the danger of disregarding the word of
God. The author describes the readers as in the same situation that the wilderness
generation of Num 14 was: the moment of the fulfillment of the promise or, in other
words, the moment to enter “the rest.” According to the argument of Hebrews, the
repetition of the promise by David in Ps 95 (94 LXX) shows that the promise had not
been fulfilled in the time of Joshua (Heb 4:8). The Psalm’s exhortation “Today, if you


1 Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 138; deSilva, 179; Guthrie, *The Structure
   of Hebrews*, 78, 102-4.

2 The author introduces this section with the warning: “Today, if you hear his
   voice, do not harden your hearts” (3:7-8). This is a warning he repeats two other times in
   the section (cf. 3:15; 4:7).

3 See John Dunnill, *Covenant and Sacrifice in the Letter to the Hebrews*,
   SNTSMS, ed. Margaret E. Thrall, no. 75 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
   1992), 141-3.

Psalm 95 refers to Meribah and Masah (Exod 17:7; Num 20:13). Hebrews reads
Ps 95 in relation to Num 14 (Heb 3:17), where the “rest” implied is the land of Canaan
(Deut 3:20; 12:9, 10; 25:19; Josh 1:13, 15; 21:44; 22:4). Rabbi Aqiba made also the same
Vorstellung vom endzeitlichen Ruheort im Hebräerbrie*, WUNT, ed. Joachim
Jeremias and Otto Michel, no. 11 (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1970), 41-47; Attridge,*
The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 125, n. 33.
hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (94:7-8 LXX, as quoted in Heb 3:7-8; cf. 3:15; 4:7) implies that the reason for the failure of the wilderness generation was disobedience (ἀπειθεια) resulting from lack of faith (ἀπιστία; Heb 3:18-19).\(^1\)

The author, then, exhorts the readers to obey the voice of God by entering “the rest.”\(^2\)

The author closes the unit with three exhortations—all of them expressed with an hortatory subjunctive and introduced by οὖν: “Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest” (4:11), “Let us hold fast to our confession” (4:14), and “Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness” (4:16).\(^3\) These three exhortations are supported by two explicit arguments: one negative and one positive. The readers may reject the voice of God and face the “word of God” as their Judge (4:12-13) or believe the voice of God and accept Jesus as their “helper along the way” (4:14-16).\(^4\)

First, the author exhorts them to obey the “voice of God” and enter the “rest”

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\(^1\) The Psalmist’s exhortation refers to God’s incrimination in Num 14:22 “[They] have tested me these ten times and have not obeyed my voice” (emphasis mine).

\(^2\) Scholars continue to debate the meaning of “rest” in Heb 3-4. The debated issues include whether rest is a place or a state, a present reality or a promise about the future, the heavenly temple or a Christian Sabbath. For an evaluation of the several views, see Laansma, 276-332. In addition, different views regarding the religio-historical origin of the concept of “rest” have produced different solutions, for example: entry into the gnostic pleroma, liberation from foreign oppression (Buchanan, 9, 63-65, 71), entry into the eschatological temple (Hofius, Katapausis, 53-54), entry into the heavenly spiritual world (Thompson, Beginnings, 99).

\(^3\) See Long Westfall, 133-7. The first exhortation summarizes the preceding argument (3:7-4:11). The last two perform a double duty. They provide the transition to the next section but also culminate the argument of the hortatory unit (3:7-4:11).

\(^4\) deSilva, 184.
(4:11). If they choose to disobey, however, they will have the “Word of God” as judge and executioner who will exclude them from receiving the promise (Heb 4:12-13).¹ These verses “are crafted to arouse fear.”² The “Word of God” is a formidable Judge with the power to penetrate “the thoughts and intentions of the heart” like a “two-edged” sword, that is, to expose hidden things, and overpower his subjects.³ Readers might as well have remembered that those Israelites in the desert who challenged God’s oath died by the sword (μάχαιρα) of the Amalekites and the Canaanites (Num 14:43-45).⁴ Thus, readers may avoid the judgment of the Word of God by obeying the voice of God, which is the same as accepting the exhortation, “Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest.”

The second and third exhortations—“Let us hold fast to our confession” and “Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness” (4:14, 16)—do not seem to fit the context at first sight. The implicit argument of Heb 3-4 is that Jesus is a greater ἀρχιγγέλος than Joshua was because he is leading the believers into the true rest.⁵ Thus,

¹ Ibid. The word of God is here a personification of God or the Son of God; probably the first. Johnson, Hebrews, 132.

² deSilva, 184.

³ The part. τετραχλισμένα comes from τραχλίζω which may have the connotation of pinning down “an opponent in wrestling by seizing the neck (Plutarch, Anthony 33).” Johnson, Hebrews, 135-6.

⁴ Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 102.

⁵ Num 13:1-16 explicitly identifies Joshua and the other spies sent ahead of the people into the land of Canaan as ἀρχιγγέλοι.
when he says, “For if Joshua [Ἰησοῦς] had given them rest, God would not speak later about another day” (4:8), he implies that “today” Jesus [Ἰησοῦς] is leading believers into the rest.¹ The identity of the names of both leaders suggests a typological comparison.² This, however, is not developed; instead, this implicit comparison between Joshua (4:8) and Jesus in 4:1-11 seems to be excluded in 4:14-16. Jesus is not referred to as a leader (ἀρχηγός) into the rest, but as a high priest before the throne of God in the heavenly sanctuary!

It is considered, then, that this passage creates “an abrupt shift in tone and imagery.”³ We should note, however, that while the imagery changes abruptly, the content of the exhortation remains stable. Let me explain this.

The exhortation “let us hold fast to our confession” (4:14) culminates the call to

¹ Scholars dispute if Ἰησοῦς in 4:8 refers to Joshua, Jesus, or both. Some see here a reference to Joshua who led Israel into the land (Josh 21:44; 22:4). Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 252-3; Koester, Hebrews, 271-2, 278; Riggenbach. Others see a reference to Jesus here, in the sense that Jesus did not give rest to the Israelites in the time of Joshua. For example, Paul and the author of Hebrews associate Jesus with the time of Moses (1 Cor 10:4; Heb 11:26 KJV); Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, Jesus Christ in the Old Testament (London: SPCK, 1965), 61. I agree with those who see here suggested a typological relationship between Joshua and Jesus. Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 130; Héring; Johnson, Hebrews, 128; Loader, Sohn und Hoherpriester, 122; Windisch, 97. This typology was explicitly developed in later Christian writings (Barn. 12:8 and Justin, Dial. 75).

² For an analysis of the role of Joshua in Hebrews, see Dunnill, 170-72. He notes that the promise “I will never leave you or forsake you”—registered in Deut 31:8, 6 and quoted in Heb 13:5—was originally made to Joshua (Josh 1:5; cf. Gen 28:15). He suggests that Joshua might be considered in this epistle to occupy the role of covenant mediator also fulfilled by Moses, Abel, Abraham, and Jesus.

³ Koester, Hebrews, 291.
obedience and faith in 3:7-4:11. The author emphasized here that the danger that the
believers are facing—in the context of God’s exhortation to enter the rest—is
“disobedience” (ἀπεισεῖςω) because of unbelief (ἀπεισείςω; 4:11; cf. 3:18-19, passim). This
was the “sin” of the wilderness generation that prevented them from entering God’s rest
(3:17). “Disobedience” in this section translates the verb ἀπεισεῖςω or the noun ἀπεἰσεῖςω,
which carry in the NT the “connotation of disbelief in the Christian gospel” (emphasis
original). Thus, the author explains that it is the rejection of the “good news” that may
prevent readers of today from entering the rest, as it did for the wilderness generation:

Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest is still open, let us take care that
none of you should seem to have failed to reach it. For indeed the good news came to
us just as to them; but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were
not united by faith with those who listened. For we who have believed enter that rest.
(Heb 4:1-3, emphasis mine; cf. v. 6)

In this passage, the author identifies the announcement by Caleb and Joshua
regarding the goodness of the land and God’s command to the wilderness generation to
enter Canaan as the “good news” that they disobeyed because of their unbelief (Num
13:30; 14:7-9). Based on this negative example, the author of Hebrews exhorts readers

1 BDAG, 99. The noun ἀπεἰσεῖςω appears in Heb 4:6, 11. In Rom 11:30, 32, this
term denotes the rejection of the gospel by Israel. The verb ἀπεἰσείςω appears in Heb 3:18
(cf. 11:31). Likewise, it is related in the NT to the rejection of the gospel; see Acts 14:2,
9; Rom 11:30-31; 15:31; 1 Pet 2:8; 3:1; 4:17.

2 Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 241; Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 98. God’s
order to enter Canaan was the realization of his promise—made through Moses to the
Israelites in Egypt—that he would liberate them and give them the land of the
Canaanites, etc. (Exod 3:16-17). The Israelites, however, vacillated between belief (4:2)
and unbelief (6:1-10), when they first received this message of “good news” in Egypt. At
the border of Canaan, however, they finally rejected the “good news” and named a new
captain (ἀρχηγός) to lead them back to Egypt (Num 14:4). Only Joshua and Caleb
to not commit the same mistake but to do the opposite. They should, instead, demonstrate their faith by holding fast to their “confession” (4:14).\(^1\)

This exhortation is central to the purpose of Heb 3-4. At the beginning of the exhortation (3:1) the author noted that the believers are “holy partners [with Jesus] in a heavenly calling” (3:1).\(^2\) At the beginning of this section the author repeats the notion introduced in Heb 2:5-18 that believers are destined to “glory” just as Jesus was.\(^3\) The remained as faithful ἀρχηγοί (Num 14:1-10). See also Koester, *Hebrews*, 269.

\(^1\) Note that Hebrews refers to “the confession” using the definite article which indicates that it had a content “that could be identified and grasped.” Koester, *Hebrews*, 126. This confession may not have included all the teaching known to the listeners (cf. 6:1-2) but most likely it stated the core beliefs of the community. James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster, 1977), 58-59; Laub, *Bekenntnis und Auslegung*, 12. In this sense, to hold fast to the confession was equivalent to being faithful to the gospel, the good news (Heb 4:2, 6). In 4:14, the confession is referred to in relation to Jesus as high priest and Son of God. We cannot know if the confession referred to these two titles, but very probably it referred at least to Jesus as Son of God. The confession of Jesus as Son of God was common in the NT (Acts 9:20; Rom 1:4; 1 Cor 1:9; 2 Cor 1:19; 1 Thess 1:9-10; 1 John 4:15; 5:5). For a study of common elements in NT creeds, see Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, 33-59; Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 1-29.

\(^2\) The people of God are the object of God’s call for salvation in the OT (Isa 41:9; 42:6) as well as in the NT (Rom 11:29; 1 Cor 1:26; Eph 1:18; Phil 3:14; 2 Pet 1:10).

\(^3\) The adjective “heavenly” refers here both to the origin of the call and its destination. Harold W. Attridge, “‘Let Us Strive to Enter That Rest’: The Logic of Heb 4:1-11,” *HTR* 73 (1980); Braun; Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 198; Gräßer; Spicq. For “heavenly” as implying only origin, see the Peshitta, Spicq, 2:77. For “heavenly” as implying only destination, see Montefiore; Windisch. According to Heb 1-2, God is speaking to the believers in Jesus (1:1-4) and has confirmed the message delivered through his messengers (2:4). Therefore, it seems clear on the one hand that the call originates from God in heaven. On the other hand, it refers, as well, to the destination of the call. The author has made clear that human beings are destined to “glory” which is considered their “salvation” (2:10; cf. 1:14). Later on, Hebrews will refer to this call as an invitation to enter the heavenly sanctuary (8:5; 9:23; cf. 10:19) and the heavenly city...
author, however, carries the argument a step further. He makes clear that the believers are partners of Jesus only if they “hold firm [κατάσχωμεν] the confidence and pride that belong to hope” (3:6). This is confirmed in 3:14: “For we have become partners of Christ, if only [εἰςπερ] we hold [κατάσχωμεν] our first confidence firm to the end” (emphasis mine).¹ What the author is trying to do in chaps. 3-4 is to emphasize that if the believers want to realize God’s purpose for them and achieve “glory”—which was explained in Heb 1-2, esp. 2:5-10—they need to “hold fast” (κρατῶμεν) to their confession (4:14).² Thus, the flow of the argument in the macrostructure of Heb 1-4 follows this pattern.


For a study of the different senses in which heavenly language is used in Hebrews (cosmological, axiological, eschatological), see Cody, 77-85.

¹ The believers are partners (μετοχοί) of Jesus’ heavenly call, in the first place, only because Jesus “shared” (μετέχαρι) the human nature (flesh and blood, 2:14) and sufferings (πάθημα, 2:9-10; cf. 10:32) with human beings and became like them “in every respect” (2:17). See Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 198. The author explains that Jesus identified himself with humans in order that through his death he might lead them to “glory” (2:5-18). On the difficulties involved in the translation of 3:14, see Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 225-8.

I understand that “become partners of Christ” (3:14) means here to be partakers in the heavenly destiny of Christ (3:1)—which is associated in this section with entering God’s “rest”—and not only in a more general sense of fellowship with Christ (cf. Heb 1:9); see e.g., Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 117-8; Bruce, 149-52; Gräßer; Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 87-88; Moffatt; Spicq, 2:76-77; August Strobel, Der Brief an die Hebräer, NTD, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, no. 9 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), 113-4. Contra Braun; Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 226-7; Hughes, Hebrews, 149-50; Westcott, 84-85. It is difficult, however, to distinguish between both, because fellowship with Christ suggests partaking in the benefit of his achievements; see Hughes, Hebrews, 150; Westcott, 85.

² The verbs κατέχω (3:6, 14) and κρατέω (4:14) may express the idea of “holding fast” to something. BDAG 532-3, 564-5. They are used as synonyms in Hebrews as shown, e.g., in the expressions κρατώμεν τῆς ὁμολογίας (4:14) and κατέχωμεν τὴν ὁμολογίαν (10:23). Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 139 n. 35.
Hebrews 1-2 consists of an exposition (with the exception of 2:1-4) where the author presents the enthronement of Jesus in heaven (1:5-14) and the fact that believers are called to share Jesus’ glory (2:5-18). Hebrews 3-4 consists of an exhortation where the author calls his readers to “consider that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, was faithful to the one who appointed him” (3:1-6) and, therefore, they need to be faithful as well if they want to share his glory (3:7-4:11).

Therefore, the expression, “Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God” is a summary of the main points of the exposition of chaps. 1-2.\(^1\) Jesus is the Son of God (1:1-4) who “passed through the heavens” when he was enthroned “at the right hand of the majesty on high “ (1:3; cf. 1:5-14, 2:5-9) but became our high priest when he shared our human nature in order to lead us to “glory” (2:10-18). The call, “let us hold fast to our confession,” summarizes the exhortation in 3:7-4:11 to faithfulness by “holding fast” to our “hope” (3:6; 3:14) in order that they may share in Jesus’ glorious destiny.\(^2\) Thus, Heb 4:14 contains in a nutshell the argument of the Letter to the Hebrews so far.

The author closes the section with a call to “approach the throne of grace with boldness” (4:16). This exhortation is based on the fact that believers have in Jesus a high

\[^1\] See Johnson, *Hebrews*, 139.

\[^2\] Note that the enthronement of a new emperor in imperial Rome called for expressions of allegiance throughout the empire. These expressions of allegiance were repeated every year on the anniversary of the ascension of the emperor. See p. 462, n. 1.
priest speaking on their behalf before the throne of God. Jesus is a merciful high priest because he has been tempted “in every respect” as the believers are, “yet without sin” (4:15). The author invites readers to accept Jesus as a “helper along the way.”

Jesus is an ideal helper because he can understand the temptations and sufferings that the believers are experiencing. On his way to heavenly glory, Jesus passed through a day of testing (πειρασθεὶς, 2:17) just as the believers are passing through now (2:17-18; 4:15; cf. 10:32-34). Hebrews emphasizes that Jesus chose to identify with human beings in their sufferings and temptations with the purpose of being “able to help” those who were being tempted (2:9-18, esp. 18; 5:8-9; cf. 10:5-10).

We find similar concepts throughout the NT. Ephesians 3:12 mentions that in Jesus we have “access to God in boldness [παρθενία]” (cf. Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18). Acts 3:20 relates the “times of refreshing [ἀναξία]” with the parousia of the Messiah “appointed for you.” See Laansma, 347.

The “throne of grace” could refer here to where Jesus is seated “at the right hand of God” (1:3, 8, 13; 10:12). More likely, this phrase refers here to the throne of God (8:1; 12:2): First, because in my view this passage emphasizes Jesus’ mediation instead of his majesty and, second, because elsewhere in the Letter the invitation to “approach” is issued with respect to God (7:25; 11:6; cf. 10:1, 22). Koester, Hebrews, 284. Contra Johnson, Hebrews, 141.

Regarding the “testing” of Jesus, see Dunnill, 188-226. Note that Heb 3:9 (quoting Ps 95:9 [94 LXX]) describes the day in the wilderness when the invitation to enter the rest came as a day of testing. The original sense refers to the testing of God by the Israelites in the desert. Here Hebrews may intend a double entendre because it clearly sees the believers as going through a day of testing (4:15; cf. 2:18; 10:32-34). Abraham, one of the examples of faith, also passed through a day of testing (11:17).

Note that Hebrews emphasizes Jesus’ death as a suffering (πάθημα) on our behalf, 2:9; cf. 2:10, 18; 5:8-9; 9:26; 13:12. Also, that Jesus chose to suffer on our behalf (10:5-10; cf. 2:13a).

Regarding mercy and priesthood, see William Horbury, “Aaronic Priesthood in
The description of Jesus as “one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin” is important (4:15, emphasis mine). While his sufferings enable him to be merciful toward human beings, his faithfulness (sinlessness) qualifies him to be an effective mediator before God. “Jesus . . . is perfectly suited as broker between humans, for whom he has complete sympathy (and hence greater willingness and eagerness to help), and God, with whom he remains in an unblemished relationship at all times.”

Note as well that Jesus’ faithfulness is an important concept in this hortatory section and the Letter in general (2:18; 4:15; 7:26; 9:14). The author introduced this hortatory section by presenting Jesus as an example of faithfulness to the believers:

“Therefore, brothers and sisters . . . consider [κατανοεῖτε] that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, was faithful [πιστός] to the one who appointed him” (Heb 3:1-2). The author refers again to this in 7:26 and 10:5-10. Finally, toward the end of the document he refers to Jesus as “the pioneer [ἀρχηγός] and perfecter of our faith” (12:2). He is the “pioneer” in the sense that, being the only faithful person to have reached the goal of faith (cf. 11:39-40), he runs ahead of believers, and guarantees that the prize is for

1 deSilva, 182.

2 The sinlessness of Christ is affirmed throughout the NT as well; cf. John 7:18; 8:46; 2 Cor 5:21, 1 Pet 1:19; 2:22; 3:18; 1 John 3:5-7.

3 Something that reminds us of the assertion in 2:9: “but we see Jesus.” Similarly, Heb 12:1-3 presents Jesus as an example to believers and invites them to “consider” (ἀναλόγισοθε) him. See Johnson, Hebrews.
real (cf. 2:5-10). In this sense he is the basis for our faith. On the other hand, he is the “perfecter of our faith” because he models the correct form to run. He reached the goal despite the “hostility against himself from sinners” (12:2-3). Thus, he is “the one who has displayed trust or faith in its complete and perfect form.”

This attractive picture of Jesus as a merciful high priest able to help those who are being tested is completely opposite, then, to the stern description of the “Word of God” as Judge of those who decide to disobey (4:12-13). This reference to the polarity of alternatives the readers have is an important rhetorical strategy in the author’s playbook. He frequently appeals to emotions of fear and confidence and discusses the dreadful results of apostasy and the favorable outcome of holding on to the confession.

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2 deSilva, 432. It is appropriate, then, that he has been placed at the very end of the list of examples (Heb 11). Regarding the meaning of the extremely rare term τελειωτής, see N. Clayton Croy, “A Note on Hebrews 12:2,” JBL 114 (1995): 117-9. After studying the only other place where this term appears (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, On Dinarchus), N. Clayton Croy concludes: “A τελειωτής is one who perfects, refines, or brings to full flower that which is (in this case) the original work of others” (118). He notes that “perfecters” were compared with “inventors” (εὐρετής). Jesus seems to be both, however, because he is the “pioneer” (ἄρχηγός, a near synonym of εὐρετής) and “perfecter” (τελειωτής) of faith.


3 E.g., Heb 6:4-12; 10:19-31; 12:18-24; deSilva, 184, n. 11. See also, Koester, Hebrews, 330-31.
Summary

The ascension in Heb 4:14 has the purpose of explaining why Jesus is “a great high priest.” It appears in a section that fulfills a double purpose. Hebrews 4:14-16 introduces the new expository section 5:1-10:18. It also concludes the hortatory argument that began in 3:1. Accordingly, this reference to Jesus’ ascension fulfills a double purpose as well. It anticipates, on the one hand, the discussion of Jesus’ sacrifice and entrance into the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf in 8:1-10:18. On the other hand it recapitulates—together with references to Jesus’ sonship and high priesthood—the exposition of Jesus’ becoming “below the angels” on our behalf and subsequent enthronement at the right hand of God. This is especially appropriate for the argument of Hebrews. The description of Jesus’ passage “through the heavens” and his “tested” faithfulness make him an exceptional “helper” for those who are exhorted to enter into God’s rest.

“A Hope That Enters the Inner Shrine behind the Curtain”
(Heb 6:19-20): Ascension and the Appointment of a Faithful Priest

Ascension as Entering behind the Curtain

We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. (Heb 6:19-20)

This passage is the first to use cultic imagery in denoting Jesus’ ascension to heaven.\(^1\) The expression ἐσώτερον τοῦ καταπετάσματος (“behind the curtain”), which

\(^1\) The idea of ascension as an entrance into a heavenly sanctuary is insinuated in 4:14-16 by the fact that Jesus is described as a high priest and in fact anticipates the use
designates the place where Jesus has entered “on our behalf,” identified in the LXX the holy of holies of the Israelite sanctuary (Exod 26:33; Lev 16:2, 12, 15). In this way, the

of cultic imagery in 6:19-20; 9:11-14, 24; 10:19-21. Jesus’ ascension in 4:14, however, is not explicitly cultic but described as a passage “through the heavens.” Accordingly, Jesus’ high priesthood is not understood in terms of expiation, but of mediation (cf. 4:15-16; 2:17-18).

On the other hand, the term καταπέτασμα itself in 6:19-20 may be exclusively cultic in nature. It has been found to date only in cultic contexts. Daniel M. Gurtner, “Καταπέτασμα: Lexicographical and Etymological Considerations on the Biblical ‘Veil’,” AUSS 42 (2004): 107-8.

Regarding 6:19-20, ascension to heaven is clearly assumed in the context. The reference to the high priest Jesus as our πρόδρομος (“forerunner”) into the holy of holies clearly assumes 4:14 where it is said that “we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens.” The term πρόδρομος has a similar function to ἀρχηγός (“pioneer”) in 2:10 and ἀπόστολος (“one who is sent”) in 3:1. Thus, Jesus is our “forerunner” into the heavenly holy of holies just as he is the “pioneer” who leads “many children to glory” (2:10).

Ἀρχηγός and ἀπόστολος are terms connected in the account of Israel’s failure in the wilderness to enter God’s rest (Num 13, cf. Heb 3-4). Numbers 13:2 says: “Send out [ἀποστείλων] for yourself men so that they may spy out the land of Canaan, which I am going to give to the sons of Israel; you shall send a man from each of their fathers’ tribes, every one a leader [ἀρχηγῶν] among them” (cf. LXX Judg 5:15 and Neh 2:9). Koester, Hebrews, 243. Ἀπόστολος refers in 3:1 to a “messenger” or “envoy” (BDAG, 122) and does not denote an ecclesiastical title (e.g., 15:2, 6). (There is no intention here to counteract any tendencies toward ecclesiastical hierarchy as suggested by Theissen, 107; Braun. In fact, Hebrews has a positive view of church leaders [cf. 13:7, 17].) Though the application of the title “apostle” to Jesus is intriguing—this is the only place in the NT where it is applied to Jesus but appears later in Justin 1 Apol. 12.9; 63.5 (Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 107, n. 34; Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 199; Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 75)—it is likely, however, that this title continues the idea expressed in 2:10 of Jesus as the ἀρχηγός of the believers (Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 200; Koester, Hebrews, 243) and, thus, equivalent to πρόδρομος in 6:20. For different interpretations of the title “apostle,” see Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 199-200; Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 75-76; Michel, Hebräer, 171-5.

George E. Rice correctly pointed out that in the LXX the term καταπέτασμα may refer to the screen of the court (e.g., Exod 38:18 [37:16 LXX]), the screen at the entrance of the outer room of the sanctuary (e.g., Exod 36:37 [37:5 LXX]; 26:37 [= LXX]), or the inner veil that separated the outer room from the inner room, the holy of

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holies (e.g., Exod 26:31, 33, 34, 35; Rice, 65-71). The phrase ἐσώτερον τοῦ καταπετάσματος, however, appears 4 times in the LXX and consistently denotes the holy of holies (Exod 26:33; Lev 16:2, 12, 15; cf. Num 18:7; Gane, “Re-Opening Katapetasma,” 5-8). See also Young, “Where Jesus Has Gone,” 165-70. This phrase translates the Hebrew ממקה לֵךְפֵּרָר (which also appears in Num 18:7) so that καταπετάσμα translates the Hebrew פרֶס. Note, that in the OT the term פרֶס occurs 25 times and refers only to the inner veil of the sanctuary. Roy E. Gane and Jacob Milgrom, “פר,” Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. Douglas W. Stott, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 95-97.

Richard M. Davidson—though he does not oppose this view—has observed that “the case is strong but not watertight.” “Christ’s Entry,” 175, n. 4. He points out some differences in wording and syntax (Heb 6:19 adds the article to the phrase and εἰς is part of the compound verb in the LXX but stands alone in Heb 6:19 [though note the part. εἴσερχομένων in Heb 6:19]), but, more importantly, the case of Num 18:7. There, ενδοθεν τοῦ καταπετάσματος translates the Hebrew לֵךְפֵּרָר. Numbers 18:7 reads: “But you [Aaron the high priest] and your sons with you shall diligently perform your priestly duties in all that concerns the altar and the area behind the curtain [לֵךְפֵּרָר]. I give your priesthood as a gift; any outsider who approaches shall be put to death.” Richard M. Davidson points out that “the area behind the curtain” in Num 18:7 may refer to the sanctuary as a whole and not to the holy of holies exclusively because it is indicated there that Aaron and his sons will perform their duties in that area. (According to Lev 16:1-3 [cf. v. 32], only the high priest could enter the holy of holies.)

Roy Gane answers this objection by suggesting that in Num 18:7, “the altar and the area behind the curtain” refer to the altar of sacrifices and the holy of holies as the two extremes of the sanctuary. They constitute, then, a merism that by enumerating the extremes refer to a single entity, i.e., “the entire area of priestly officiation.” “Re-Opening Katapetasma,” 6, n. 5. Cf. Gane, Leviticus, Numbers, 652-3. (He suggests as further examples “near and far” in Jer 25:26; cf. Jer 48:24.) In this way, the verse does not say that Aaron and his sons will perform their duties in the holy of holies (“the area behind the curtain”), but that Aaron and his sons will perform their duties in the sanctuary as a whole, assuming further delimitations of their responsibilities.

Timothy R. Ashley offers a complementary observation. He suggests that the question in Num 18:7 is not the “entrance” of Aaron or his sons into the holy of holies but “guarding what was behind it against encroachment.” The Book of Numbers, NICOT, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), 343. Jacob Milgrom agrees, noting that the literal translation of תְּפַרַּה שָׁמַר (Num 18:7) is “guard your priesthood.” This expression explicates and forms an inclusion with לָכֶּךְ וְלָכֶּךְ אַחֲרֵךְ שָׁמַר אַחֲרֵךְ וְלָכֶּךְ “you and your sons alone shall bear
author creates an analogy between Jesus’ ascension and the entrance of the high priest into the holy of holies of the Israelite sanctuary. In the Israelite cult, this entrance regularly happened only on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:1-3). There is one exception, however. The inner room of the sanctuary was also entered during the inauguration of the sanctuary by Moses (Exod 26:33-34; cf. 40:1-9; Lev 8:10-12; Num 7:1), or by the priests in the inauguration of the first temple (2 Chr 5:7). This exception is important because the book of Hebrews refers to the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary in 9:23.¹

A majority of commentators believe that Heb 6:19-20 foreshadows Hebrews’ cultic argument in chaps. 9-10 in the sense that it interprets Jesus’ ascension in terms of the entrance of the high priest into the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement to make expiation for the sins of the people.²

The relationship between the meaning of the ascension in 6:19-20 and that of chaps. 9-10 is by no means straightforward, however. There are three issues that complicate this relationship. The first has to do with terminology. Hebrews 6:19-20 describes Jesus’ ascension as an entrance εἰς τὸ ἐσωτέρον τοῦ καταπετάσματος (6:19), responsibility for offenses connected with the priesthood” in 18:1. Thus, Num 18:7 may refer to the performance of cultic duties in relation to the guarding of “the sancta against encroaching nonpriests and disqualified priests.” Numbers: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation, JPS Torah Commentary, ed. Nahum M. Sarna (Philadelphia, Pa.: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 148.

¹ Davidson, “Christ’s Entry,” 177. (This is also implied in 2 Chr 35:3. See above section “Josiah.”)

² Regarding this, see the debate between Richard M. Davidson and Norman H. Young in AUSS 39 (2001) and 40 (2002).
which—as mentioned above—denotes in the LXX the holy of holies. Hebrews 9-10, however, describe Jesus’ ascension as an entrance εἰς τὰ ἅγια (9:12; cf. 9:24; 10:19), which denotes in the LXX the sanctuary as a whole or the outer court but not the holy of holies.¹ This raises the following question: Is this discrepancy a minor lapse on the part of the author, or indicative of a nuance in his argument?² The second has to do with the purpose of Jesus’ entrance “within the veil.” The immediate context of 6:19-20 does not describe the purpose of Jesus’ ascension as one of expiation.³ The author may have that in mind, but he does not develop this aspect of Jesus’ ascension in our passage. Finally, the third has to do with the nature of the general argument in both sections. We need to recognize that the idea of an eschatological or transcendent Day of Atonement dominates neither the argument of 6:19-20 nor the one of chaps. 8-10. In the first case, the author is concerned—in the immediate context—with the danger that the readers may commit

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² This discrepancy is the more evident when Heb 9:3 uses ἅγια ἅγιων and not ἅγια (cf. 9:2) to refer to the holy of holies. See Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 447.

³ The author has explained, thus far, the purpose of Jesus’ priesthood as one of providing “help” for those who are being tempted (2:18; 4:15-16). It is true that the author has also referred to Jesus’ priesthood as being able to provide “atonement for the sins of the people” (1:3; 2:17; cf. 5:1). This aspect, however, has not been developed in the argument thus far.
apostasy (5:11-6:12) and—in the mediate context—with the appointment or inauguration of Jesus as high priest (5:1-10; 7:1-28). In the case of chaps. 8-10, although the Day of Atonement plays a more prominent role, it is the inauguration of a new covenant that rules the shape of the argument. 1 Thus, an elucidation of the complex relationship between the references to the ascension in 6:19-20 and chaps. 9-10 requires an analysis of the argument of chaps. 8-10, which I will attempt only later. I believe, then, that we should interpret Heb 6:19-20 on its own terms and resist the temptation of interpreting Heb 6:19-20 in terms of the argument to be developed in chaps. 8-10.

In summary, Jesus’ ascension is described in 6:19-20, in terms of its imagery, as the entrance of the high priest into the holy of holies, something Moses did only at the

1 I think that this cannot be overemphasized. For example, William R. G. Loader recognizes that “Einerseits muß klar gesehen werden, daß diese Typologie eine wichtige Rolle in den Gedanken des Vf in 9,1-10,18 spielt; andererseits darf ihre Besonderheit nicht so weit hervorgehoben werden, daß sie als eigentliches Thema oder vorherrschender Gedanke dieses Abschnittes bezeichnet Wird” (On the one hand, it must be clearly seen that this typology [Day of Atonement] plays an important role in the ideas of the author in 9:1-10:18; on the other hand, their peculiarity should not be overly emphasized to the extent that it be considered the actual subject or the dominant thought of this section). Loader, Sohn und Hoherpriester, 172. Nevertheless, this recognition does not seem to have adequately impacted his own work. Note Harold W. Attridge’s critique: “In his discussion of the high priestly act of Christ, Loader, while noting the rich texture of Hebrews, concentrates primarily on the Yom Kippur typology. While this is certainly an important element of the author’s complex argument in chap. 9, it is not clear that it is the dominant one. Rather, what seems ultimately to control the development of his theme is the notion that Christ’s death is primarily a covenant sacrifice, a theme to which Loader gives insufficient attention.” Review of Sohn und Hoherpriester: Eine traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zur Christologie des Hebräerbriefes, by William R. G. Loader, JBL 103 (1984): 304 (emphasis his). James P. Scullion, in his study of Yom Kippur in Hebrews, reaches a similar conclusion to that of William R. G. Loader: “It should be noted that the key to this central section is not Yom Kippur itself, but the connection that the author makes between the cult and the new covenant.” Scullion, 252 (emphasis mine).
initial setting up of the structure and that the Aaronic high priest could do only on the Day of Atonement. Now, what is the function of the ascension in the argument of Heb 6:13-20?

The Ascension Shows the Unchangeable Character of God’s Promises

The Role of the Ascension in Hebrews 6:19-20

Hebrews 6:20 closes a hortatory digression that began at 5:11. Hebrews 5:1-10 had explained that Jesus was appointed high priest by God on behalf of men after having suffered on earth. This was accomplished through God’s oath to him, “You are a priest for ever, according to the order of Mechizedek” (5:6). Hebrews 5:11 interrupts the argument by introducing an exhortation to the readers that closes in 6:20, where the author indicates his return to the original topic by repeating the topic sentence of the interrupted argument “having become a high priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek” (6:20).

The hortatory argument of 5:11-6:20 is composed of 4 units. In the first unit (5:11-6:3), the author confronts the readers’ “dullness” to understand “the basic elements

1 Note the similarity with the last statement of 5:10: “having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek” (5:10); “having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (6:20).

of the oracles of God” and lack of spiritual “maturity” and exhorts them to “go on towards perfection [maturity].” In the second unit (6:4-8), the author issues a blistering warning against “falling away” from the “Son of God,” of which they are in danger if they continue to neglect the “word of God” (6:5; cf. 5:12). The third unit (6:9-12) mitigates the previous warning with an expression of confidence in the audience’s outcome and an invitation to show “diligence” so that “through faith and patience” they might “inherit the promises.” In the final unit (6:13-20), the author drives the discourse back toward the main topic he had left behind: the appointment of Jesus as high priest (5:1-10). He deftly accomplishes this by showing how the appointment of Jesus as high priest is in fact God’s confirmation of his promises to them, providing an effective conclusion to the previous unit (6:9-12). The clear inference is that the readers would commit a gross error if they abandon their confidence now that the promises have been confirmed in the appointment of the Son as high priest of the heavenly sanctuary.

Hebrews 6:13-20 complements the positive exhortation of 6:9-12 by providing critical information regarding two of its points. The first point has to do with the author’s call “to realize the full assurance of [their] hope to the very end” (6:11). The second point

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1 The expression “word of God” (θεου ῥῆμα) is a common designation for the Hebrew scriptures (Num 24:16; Deut 33:9-10; Pss 12:6 [11:7 LXX]; 18:30 [17:31 LXX]; 107:11 [106:11 LXX]; Acts 7:38; Rom 3:2; 1 Pet 4:11; 1 Clem. 19.1; 53.1; 62:3; Pol. Phil. 7.1) or the utterances of God recorded in Scripture (Philo Posterity 28; Unchangeable 50). See Koester, Hebrews, 301.


3 Pierre Grelot, Une lecture de l’épître aux Hébreux (Paris: Cerf, 2003), 51. See also, Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 334.
has to do with the exhortation to be “imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (v. 12). He complements these points in 6:13-20 in reverse order. The author of Hebrews provides Abraham as an example of faith and patience in vv. 13-15 and explains the ascension of Jesus as the assurance of their hope in vv. 16-20.¹

Abraham was a celebrated example of faith and patience in Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity, particularly because of his offering of Isaac.² The author of Hebrews refers to this event and presents Abraham as an example “of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (6:15; cf. v. 12). He refers to the fact that, on the occasion of Abraham’s offering of Isaac, God promised him an abundant offspring.³ He quotes in 6:14 the first part of the promise registered in Gen 22:17. His point, however, is that God confirmed his promise to Abraham with an “oath”—something that is mentioned only in the original context of the passage he quotes:

*By myself I have sworn, says the LORD: “Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your*  

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¹ Regarding the structure of this last unit, see Vanhoye, *La structure littéraire*, 120-23.


³ The author of Hebrews refers to himself in 11:32 with a masculine, singular participle. This suggests that the author was male.
offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore.” (Gen 22:16-17; emphasis mine)

The author of Hebrews makes the point, then, that after Abraham “patiently endured,” he “received [ἐπέτυχε] what was promised” (Heb 6:15, NIV).

This statement seems to conflict with Heb 11:13, 39 where Abraham is included among all those who “did not receive [ἐκομίσαντο] what was promised.” Some suggest that 6:15 means that what Abraham obtained according to Hebrews was a confirmation of the promise. This is improbable, however, because the whole point of the passage is to emphasize that God’s “oath” is reliable (cf. 6:17-18), something that could not be proven unless it was shown that God had fulfilled his promise. It would be of little comfort for the readers to know that Abraham, after “having patiently endured,” received only a confirmation of the promise. Instead, the author wishes to emphasize that God fulfilled his promise to Abraham through Isaac and the readers themselves are part of the evidence (cf. 2:16). This argument would appropriately fit the author’s description of the readers

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1 Hebrews quotes only a part of v. 17, but it clearly implies v. 16 where the oath is mentioned.

2 E.g., NRSV; NASB; Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 151; Swetnam, Jesus and Isaac, 184-5.

3 Note that 3:7-4:11 registers a previous oath by God. The force of the exhortation there relies on the fact that God fulfilled that oath (3:16-19).

4 E.g., NIV; NJB; Koester, Hebrews, 326; Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 338-9; Michel, Hebräer, 251; Spicq, 2:160.

Most likely, the term ἐπαγγελία in 6:15 has a different referent than in 11:13, 39; that is, God fulfilled his promise to Abraham but not in the sense that believers are able to enjoy now (11:39-40). See, Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 338-9. Additionally, Harold W. Attridge suggests that the verbs κομίζω (Heb 11:39; cf. 10:36; 11:19) and ἐπιτυγχάνω (Heb 6:15; cf. 11:33) may carry slight distinctions in nuance,
as being at the threshold of the fulfillment of the promises. The promises have already
been confirmed and have begun to be fulfilled in Jesus (2:9).¹ They have already “tasted”
the “heavenly gift, . . . the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to
come” (6:4-5). Thus, they are not in the position to “shrink back” but to “have faith” and
be “saved” (10:35-39).

In Heb 6:16-20, the author develops the first point made in the previous unit:
“And we want each one of you to show the same diligence so as to realize the full
assurance of hope to the very end” (6:11, emphasis mine). His argument is that the oath
of God is the basis for the believer’s “full assurance of hope”: “when God desired to
show even more clearly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his
purpose, he guaranteed it by an oath” (6:17, emphasis mine). Here the author refers not
to the oath that God swore to Abraham but to the oath referred to in 5:6: “You are a priest
for ever, according to the order of Melchizedek” (quoting Ps 110:4 [109:4 LXX]).² This

¹ For Hebrews’ description of the readers as being at the threshold of the
fulfillment of the promise, see Dunnill, 134-48.

² Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 181-2; deSilva, 250; Ellingworth, The
Epistle to the Hebrews, 342; Guthrie, The Structure of Hebrews, 110-11. Contra Koester,
Hebrews, 328; Johnson, Hebrews, 170; Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 152.

Here, the author is introducing a new element in this unit, of which the promise to
Abraham is a paradigm and possibly a precursor as well. This verse (6:17) compares
believers today with Abraham as “heirs” of a “promise” that has been mediated through
an oath (cf. 6:12). The author creates an analogy here between the oath made to Abraham
and the oath made to Jesus at his appointment as high priest (Heb 5:5-6; cf. 7:20-22)—
is clearly shown by the fact that 6:20 refers back to that oath. Then, just as God confirmed his promise to Abraham with an oath (vv. 13-14), God has confirmed (ἐμεσίτευσεν) the promises to his children with an oath. This oath is the believers’ “full assurance of hope to the very end” (6:11) and has the purpose of “strongly” encouraging them “to seize the hope set before us [them]” (v. 18).¹

What is, then, the function of Jesus’ ascension to heaven in 6:19-20?

Jesus Is the Hope That Enters
“within the Veil”

In this passage the author describes the believers’ hope as a “sure and steadfast anchor of the soul . . . that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain” (6:19).² Hope is described as entering the holy of holies in the sense that it is anchored on God’s throne which is, in fact, a promise for believers today (6:18-20). Thus, the assertion “when God desired to show even more clearly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character [τὸ ἐμεταθέτων] of his purpose, he guaranteed it by an oath [ἐμεσίτευσεν ὄρκῳ]” (Heb 6:17) alludes to Ps 110:4 (109:4 LXX; quoted in Heb 5:6): “The LORD has sworn [ὁμοσευ] and will not change his mind [μεταμεληθήσεται], ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.’”

¹ The text refers to the encouragement provided by “two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God would prove false.” What are these two things? These have been understood mostly as referring to the promise (or the word of God by which he promises) and the oath. Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 181-2; Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 342; Johnson, Hebrews, 171; Koester, Hebrews, 328; Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 152; Michel, Hebräer, 253; Schröger, 128-9. Or, God’s issuing the oath and God’s witnessing the oath. David R. Worley, “Fleeing to Two Immutable Things—God’s Oath-Taking and Oath-Witnessing: The Use of Litigant Oath in Hebrews 6:19-20,” ResQ 36 (1994): 223-36.

² On the legal, nautical, and cultic elements of the imagery, see Johnson, Hebrews, 172-3.
itself in the heavenly sanctuary by means of the oath.\(^1\) That is to say, since God has

guaranteed the promise with an oath, the honor of his throne has been grounded on the
fulfillment of that promise.\(^2\) The author adds immediately that this is exactly the place
where Jesus has entered on our behalf (6:20). Thus, Jesus is identified as the believers’

hope.\(^3\)

Furthermore, just like the believers’ hope was anchored in God’s throne because

of the oath, Jesus was able to enter the heavenly holy of holies because of the oath by

means of which he was appointed “high priest for ever according to the order of

Melchizedek” (6:20; cf. 5:5-6). The author describes, then, Jesus’ ascension to heaven as

the anchoring of the believers’ hope of salvation in the throne of God by means of an

oath.

**Jesus Embodies God’s Oath Which Confirms
God’s Promises to the Believers**

In a deeper and more important level of the discourse, the author identifies Jesus

with God’s oath.

The author has said that God guaranteed (ἐμεσπεσεν) his promise with an oath

\(^{1}\) The ark of the covenant is considered in the OT as the footstool of God’s throne

(1 Sam 4:4; 1 Chr 28:2; Pss 99:5; 132:7). See, Choon-Leon Seow, “Ark of the

Covenant,” Anchor Bible Dictionary, ed. David Noel Freedman, vol. 1 (New York:


\(^{2}\) Regarding the importance of the honor of God’s throne and its maintenance by

judgment and expiation, see Gane, Cult and Character, 334-54.

\(^{3}\) Johnson, Hebrews, 172.
The oath is an act of God by which he corroborates the veracity of his intentions regarding the heirs of the promise. Jesus’ appointment as high priest fulfills the same function. Hebrews 5:1-10 makes clear that Jesus’ appointment as high priest on our behalf was an act of God (esp. v. 5). God called Jesus (5:4; cf. v. 10), appointed him (5:5), and perfected him (v. 9) so as to make him high priest “on behalf” of humanity (ὑπὲρ ἀνθρώπων; 5:1). Thus, we should understand Heb 6:20’s reference to Jesus’ appointment as high priest and his entrance into the heavenly holy of holies an act of God.

This act of God, in the context of 6:13-20, has the purpose of corroborating the promise made to the believers. Jesus has entered as a “forerunner [πρόδρομος] on our behalf” (πρόδρομος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν; 6:20). In this sense, the ascension evidences for believers the certainty of God’s purpose of salvation for them. This should be understood in relation to Hebrews’ interpretation of Ps 8 in chap. 2. The author says there that God’s original purpose of crowning human beings “with glory and honor, subjecting all things

1 Because God cannot swear by any other than himself, he is at the same time the one who promises and the guarantor of his promises.

2 When Hebrews refers to the sufferings of Jesus, it makes clear that they were the result of God’s plan. (It was God’s purpose that he would suffer on our behalf [2:10-18; 4:14-16; 5:1-10; 8-10 passim].) Thus, Jesus “was made lower than the angels” (2:9), God made “the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (2:10), “he . . . was tested” (2:18; cf. 4:15), he was “made perfect” through sufferings (5:8-9). Finally, his appointment as high priest after the suffering of death presupposes his resurrection, which was also an act of God (cf. 13:20).

3 The πρόδρομος was the one who came first in a military campaign or a race. See references in Koester, Hebrews, 330, 335.
under their feet” (2:6-8) was fulfilled when Jesus was enthroned “at the right hand of the majesty on high” (1:3; cf. 2:9). Notwithstanding, Jesus’ enthronement did not exhaust God’s purpose for humanity. God led Jesus to glory through the suffering of “death for everyone” (ὑπὲρ πάντων, emphasis mine) so that he might bring “many children to glory” (2:10). Therefore, Jesus’ ascension confirms God’s original purpose of “glory and honor” for human beings not only in the sense that it brings that purpose into realization in the person of Jesus but, more importantly, in the sense that it makes possible its fulfillment for them.⁠¹ Thus, Jesus is appointed as high priest by means of an oath (6:17-18, referring to 5:5-6) but his appointment and ascension, in turn, functions figuratively as an oath that confirms God’s promise of salvation to the believers.

The author expresses this notion later in the epistle by assigning Jesus the title μεσίτης τῆς καλνής διαθήκης (mediator of the new covenant, cf. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). The noun μεσίτης derives from μέσος (“middle”) and denotes the one who walks or stands in the middle. It “became[, however,] one of the most varied technical terms in the vocabulary of Hellen. law.”⁠² It could denote (1) an arbiter, (2) a negotiator or business broker, (3) a witness in the legal sense of the word, or (4) one who stands as a surety and

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¹ Note that the author of Hebrews has focused, thus far, on the function of Jesus’ priesthood as one of “helping” believers (2:17-18; 4:15-16).

thus guarantees the execution of an agreement.\(^1\)

The English term “mediator,” however, is probably too narrow a translation for μεσίτης in Hebrews. Since it is normally understood as “one that mediates between parties at variance,” it focuses only on the first two or three uses of the Greek term.\(^2\) Hebrews, however, emphasizes its fourth meaning. Jesus is not conceived as μεσίτης in the sense that he settles a dispute between God and humans, or a peacemaker that reconciles parties in disaffection, or a witness that certifies the existence of a contract or its satisfaction.\(^3\) The term μεσίτης describes in Hebrews only the role of Jesus regarding the new covenant (8:6; 9:15; 12:24).\(^4\) The author describes his death as the sacrifice that confirms the covenant (9:15-22) and his blood as the blood of the covenant (10:29; 13:20). This role is better described, then, as the surety or pledge that guarantees the execution of the covenant.\(^5\) Thus, μεσίτης is equivalent in Hebrews to εγγυος


\(^2\) See Mish, ed., s.v. “mediator.”

\(^3\) The covenant, however, has the effect of reconciling God and humankind: God will forgive the sins of humans (Heb 8:12; 10:17). Thus, it is true that Jesus plays the role of a mediator or negotiator when he intercedes on behalf of humans before God (7:25; cf. 4:15-16; 2:17-18); nevertheless, this role is not described in Hebrews with the term μεσίτης.

\(^4\) Peterson, 193, n. 12.

\(^5\) Note that “in Hebrews, as elsewhere in the Bible, the covenant, whether old or new, is not a mutual agreement, contract, or negotiation, for which an arbitrator may be needed; it is a unilateral gift from God.” Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 410.
The author states this explicitly in Heb 7:22, “Jesus has also become the guarantee [ἐγγυος] of a better covenant.”

Jesus guarantees the covenant in two ways. His death makes the institution of the new covenant possible because it satisfies the claims of the first (Mosaic) covenant which had been broken (9:15-22). In this sense, Jesus is the guarantor that “prend[s] sur soi toutes les obligations juridiques dans un contrat de garantie.” In a second sense, Jesus’ ascension to and exaltation in heaven guarantees that God’s promises to human beings will be fulfilled (2:5-18; 6:19-20).

In summary, the ascension of Jesus to the presence of God in this passage is the realization of his appointment as high priest “for ever” on behalf of human beings.

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1 Becker, 1:374-5; Oepke, 4:620; Spicq, Theological Lexicon of the New Testament, 2:468. See, Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 410; Guthrie, Hebrews, 312; Moffatt, 100. Contra, Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 208, n. 32.


3 ( . . . takes upon himself all the legal obligations in a contract of guarantee.) Spicq, L’épître aux Hébreux, 2:196. In this connection, Sir 29:15-17 is significant: “Do not forget the kindness of your guarantor [ἐγγυόυ], for he has given his life for you. A sinner wastes the property of his guarantor, and the ungrateful person abandons his rescuer.”

Moses may also have prefigured the role of Jesus as mediator of the covenant in this sense. Note Gudmundur Olafsson’s interpretation of Exod 32:32: “Either you, God, nāšā’ the wrongs of the people [i.e., forgive them] or let me nāšā’ them and suffer the consequences [i.e., die],” “The Use of NS’ in the Pentateuch and Its Contribution to the Concept of Forgiveness” (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 1992), 261.

4 See Spicq, L’épître aux Hébreux, 2:196. See above section “Jesus Embodies God’s Oath which Confirms God’s Promises to Believers.”
according to the order of Melchizedek. By this fact, God wanted to “show even more clearly to the heirs of the promise [i.e., the believers] the unchangeable character of his purpose” (6:17). This is the result of a play of ideas on a deeper level of this passage. Jesus was appointed high priest by an oath from God (6:17 referring to 5:5-6; cf. 7:20-22). This oath, however, though originally given to Jesus as an assurance of the permanence of his ministry (5:5-6; cf. 7:20-22), is interpreted in the passage as given to the believers (6:17). Therefore, just like the oath confirmed the promises given to Abraham (6:13-16), Jesus’ ascension to heaven confirms God’s purpose of salvation for human beings. In this sense, Jesus’ ascension has become the surety of the fulfillment of the promises (cf. 7:22). From the point of view of the believers, then, Jesus is “the hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain” (6:19). This makes the fulfillment of the desire expressed in 6:11 possible that the readers may “realize the full assurance of hope to the very end” (6:11).

**When Did Jesus Become a High Priest?**

I am suggesting here, then, that Jesus’ entrance into the presence of God is an integral part of his appointment as high priest and that this appointment, in turn, is the believers’ assurance of their hope. This raises a problem, however: Did Jesus become a high priest when he was enthroned in heaven? Was this the moment in which God pronounced the oath, “The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’” (Ps 110:4, quoted in Heb 5:5-6)?

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1 Note that Jesus’ high priesthood is based on the Christian belief that Jesus is the
This question is difficult to answer. The syntactical construction of the phrase ὅπου . . . εἰσῆλθεν Ἰησοῦς . . . ἀρχιερεὺς γενόμενος (“where Jesus . . . has entered, having become a high priest” [Heb 6:20]) allows for two interpretations: (1) Jesus became high priest before his ascension or (2) at his ascension.¹ The problem, as we will see, is that the wider context of the epistle does not help us much. Hebrews associates Jesus’ priesthood with his sufferings on earth, as well as with his exaltation in heaven.

The difficulty in defining the point in time in which Jesus became high priest is related to the difficult question of when Jesus became the Son of God (see above section “Jesus as ‘Son’ in Hebrews”). The sonship of Jesus and his high priesthood are intimately connected.

So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”; as he says also in another place, “You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.” (Heb 5:5-6)

The argument of the author is that the one who adopted Jesus as his royal Son

Son of David. If Jesus was not the Son of David, the Davidic Messiah, the author of Hebrews would not have scriptural basis for Jesus’ high priesthood of the heavenly sanctuary because he would not have been able to apply Ps 110:4 to Jesus (Heb 5:5-10; 7:28). A similar phenomenon, but in the opposite direction, is found in T. Lev. 4:2. There, royal language (sonship) is applied to the high priest: “The Most High has given heed to your prayer that you be delivered from wrongdoing, that you should become a son to him, as minister and priest in his presence” (cf. 18:3; T. Jud. 21:1-5).

¹ The author uses an aorist participle (γενόμενος) to refer to Jesus’ appointment as high priest and an aorist verb (εἰσῆλθεν) to refer to the ascension. The time denoted by the participle is relative and is determined by its relationship with the main verb. An aorist participle when related to an aorist verb may denote an action antecedent to the action of the main verb or an action coordinated with that of the main verb. See BDF, §339; Wallace, 624-5. Also, Peterson, 192.
(Heb 1:5, quoting Pss 2:7) is the same one who appointed him as high priest. The author’s connection of Jesus’ sonship and high priesthood seems not incidental but deliberate. If he wanted just to connect the concept of kingship to the concept of priesthood, it was only necessary for him to say that if Ps 110:1 (quoted in Heb 1:3, 13) applied to Jesus, then v. 4 should apply to him as well. The quotation of Ps 2:7 in this context, however, is a deliberate attempt to connect the notions of sonship and priesthood. This is confirmed by the fact that sonship plays an important role in the “perfecting” of Jesus as high priest in 5:8-10:

Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

(emphasis mine)

In fact, in 7:28 the author connects the appointment of Jesus as high priest with his perfecting as Son:

For the law appoints as high priests those who are subject to weakness, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever. (emphasis mine; cf. 4:14; 7:3)

Thus, both aspects of Hebrews’ Christology are intimately related. It is possible, 

1 Koester, Hebrews, 298-9.

2 It is possible that by this association the author wants to substantiate the transcendent nature of Jesus’ high priesthood. Jesus’ death was an event of human history which outsiders considered shameful (12:2). Hebrews, however, interprets it as the sacrificial act of the eternal/royal Son of God culminated in the heavenly holy of holies which provided Jesus’ priesthood a transcendent nature. More likely, Jesus’ priesthood reinterprets and revitalizes the concept of Jesus’ sonship. The Son is an effective mediator because he has suffered for us and is now enthroned in heaven. Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 147; Moffatt, 64; Riggenbach, 128; Schröger, 119; Laub, Bekenntnis und Auslegung, 122, 135.
then, that Hebrews is ambiguous regarding the moment when Jesus became a high priest, just as in the case of his sonship.

Jesus’ earthly life and death are essential to his priestly ministry.¹ According to Hebrews, Jesus’ high priesthood has two purposes: to provide “help” for those who are

This passage (Heb 5:9-10) relates the “designation” (προσαγορευθεὶς) of Jesus as high priest with the fact that he was “perfected” (τελειωθεὶς) through “sufferings.” This suggests the idea that Hebrews may be using the verb τελειοῦν in the technical sense found in the LXX of consecration to the priesthood. (The technical sense of the phrase τελειοῦν τὰς χεῖρας is commonly reviewed in Hebrews’ literature, e.g., Gerhard Delling, “τελειοῦν,” Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1972], 8:80-81; Loader, Sohn und Hoherpriester, 40, 47-48; Peterson, 26-30. For an analysis of the language of perfection in Philo and its relation to Hebrews, see Charles Carlson, “The Vocabulary of Perfection in Philo and Hebrews,” in Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology, ed. Robert A. Guelich [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978], 133-60.) This view has found two main critiques. Hebrews does not use the complete phrase τελειοῦν τὰς χεῖρας; instead, it uses the absolute τελειοῦν. (There is one case in the LXX [Lev 21:10], however, where the absolute τελειοῦν translates the phrase προσαγορευθεὶς Μαχα discredit, “and his hands filled,” i.e., consecrated.) Furthermore, the cultic sense of τελειοῦν as consecration in the LXX depends on the presence of a ritual context. In Hebrews, however, τελειοῦν—and its cognates τελειος (5:14; 9:11), τελειότης (6:1), τελειωτὴς (12:2), and τελειωμος (7:11)—appears in a diversity of contexts in which the cultic sense of consecration is not warranted. Scholer, 190. (This objection is not catastrophic either because the author is not obligated to use a term with absolute consistency. Moises Silva, “Perfection and Eschatology in Hebrews,” WTJ 39 [1976]: 62.) It is usually considered, then, that τελειοῦν carries its general or formal sense of “to complete,” “to fill,” “to make perfect” in relation to his ministry as Son/high priest in Hebrews. Thus, the perfection of Jesus refers to his effectiveness in achieving the goal of his mission in the sense of bringing “many sons to glory” (Peterson, 187), or his “intimacy with God” which qualifies him as a high priest able to help a persecuted community (Kevin McCruden, “Christ’s Perfection in Hebrews: Divine Beneficence as an Exegetical Key to Hebrews 2:10,” BR 47 [2002]: 40-62), or his access to the direct presence of God (Scholer, 200). For a brief evaluation of the different understandings of the vocabulary of perfection in Hebrews, see Scholer, 185-200.

¹ A majority of Catholic commentators assert that Christ was consecrated as high priest at the moment of his incarnation, e.g., Cody, 97, 102. See also Peterson, 193.
tempted (2:14-18; 4:14-16; 7:25) and expiate the sins of those who confess him (1:3; 2:17; 9:11-14, 24-26; 10:5-10, 12; 13:12). The author of Hebrews argues that Jesus is qualified for fulfilling these purposes by two actions he accomplished while on earth. First, Jesus “shared” with human beings their “sufferings” so that he might become a “merciful” high priest who is “able” to help (2:17-18; 4:15). Second, Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the people (7:27; 9:14, 26; 10:10). Furthermore, both actions are qualified by his life on earth. His life of faithfulness qualifies him to be both a competent helper to those who are being “tested” (4:15) and a sacrificial victim “offered . . . without blemish to God, [to] purify our conscience” (9:14; cf. 7:26; 3:1-6). Thus, in this sense, Jesus’ priestly ministry includes his life on earth.

Hebrews, however, emphasizes the heavenly aspect of Jesus’ ministry and sacrifice. Jesus is able to “help” those who are tempted because he has ascended to heaven and is in the presence of God (4:14-16). Hebrews also emphasizes the heavenly dimension of Jesus’ sacrifice (9:11-14, 23-26; 10:12-14). For example, Heb 8:4 says: “Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law” (emphasis mine). Finally, Heb 7:16 presupposes Jesus’

1 When the author speaks about Jesus’ sacrificial death, he is certainly thinking about the cross (12:2-3).

2 The author may have considered Jesus’ “prayers and supplications” as part of his sacrificial offering: “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered [προσφέρω] up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him” (5:7; cf. the believers’ praise as a sacrifice to God in 13:15). E.g., Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 289; Johnson, Hebrews, 145-6; Koester, Hebrews, 298. Contra Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 149; Delitzsch.
resurrection to his becoming high priest: “one who has become a priest, not through a legal requirement concerning physical descent, but through the power of an indestructible life” (emphasis mine).¹ This agrees with the fact that Jesus became a high priest with an oath which, arguably, was uttered at the moment of his enthronement as Son.²

We need to recognize, then, that Hebrews considers Jesus’ sacrifice and appointment as high priest as heavenly in nature (Heb 8:4). This does not exclude events which occurred on earth. Jesus’ identification with human beings in adopting their human nature (2:14) and his sufferings and death on earth (5:7-10; 12:2-3) are an integral part of his heavenly appointment and ministry as high priest. One cannot exist without the others.

The question, then, regarding the moment in time when Jesus became the eternal high priest of the heavenly sanctuary has a complex answer. This “moment” includes several “points in time”: incarnation, sufferings and death, resurrection, and exaltation in heaven. Each of these “points in time” is an essential component of a larger entity (i.e., Jesus’ inauguration as priest) which cannot be ignored without destruction of the whole.

¹ Contra Ceslas Spicq and others who see the incarnation as the moment in which Jesus acquired “the power of an indestructible life.” Montefiore, 125-6; Spicq, L’épître aux Hébreux, 193. See the discussion in Michel, Hebräer, 272-3. The problem is that Jesus’ life did experience destruction. Hebrews emphasizes that Jesus identified with men even regarding death (2:9, 14-8; 4:15; 5:7-8). Peterson, 110-11.

² The fact that the author relates Jesus becoming a high priest with his adoption as the Royal Son (5:5-6) suggests that this was the moment when God designated him high priest “for ever according to the order of Melchizedek.” Likewise, the fact that the author uses Ps 110:4 to substantiate the appointment of Jesus as high priest and 110:1 for his enthronement at the right hand of God.
Thus, “attempts to be overly precise about when Christ became High Priest ignore this complexity.”\(^1\) It is better to conclude, then, with David Peterson: “If the enthronement marks also the proclamation of his eternal high-priesthood at the Father’s right hand, this new representation of Christ cannot be divorced from his previous work as high priest but must be viewed as its consummation.”\(^2\)

Summary

The purpose of Heb 6:13-20 is to explain how the believers may “realize the full assurance of hope to the very end” (6:11) and become “imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (6:12). The author explains both elements in reverse order. Verses 13-16 present Abraham as one who through patient endurance inherited the promises and vv. 17-20 present Jesus as the full assurance of the hope of the believers. He argues, then, that God’s oath to Jesus by which he becomes our high priest (6:17 referring to 5:5-6) is one of the “two immutable things” on which their certainty of salvation is established (cf. 6:9).

In this passage Jesus’ entrance into heaven is considered the attainment of

\(^1\) Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 147. Note that rituals—e.g., the ritual of the consecration of a high priest—are *systems* of actions and sounds whose meaning, by necessity, is derived from the whole. For an application, e.g., of Frits Staal’s “Ritual Syntax” to the Israelite Day of Atonement, see Gane, *Ritual Dynamic Structure*. For an analysis of the ritual of the consecration of the high priest, see Frank H. Gorman, Jr., *The Ideology of Ritual*, JSOTSup, ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies, no. 91 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 103-39; Gerald A. Klingbeil, *A Comparative Study of the Ritual of Ordination as Found in Leviticus 8 and Emar 369* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen, 1998).

\(^2\) Peterson, 193.
salvation (6:9) or inheritance of the promises (v. 12). In this sense Jesus is the “forerunner” who confirms that God’s purpose for humanity (i.e., to bring them to “honor and glory”) is for real. Jesus’ entrance into heaven is considered also the consummation of the appointment of Jesus as high priest “on our behalf” so he becomes a powerful helper “in time of need” (4:16). This “help” is related to the help Jesus provides those who are “tested” by sufferings (2:18; 4:15).

“When Christ Came as a High priest of the Good Things That Have Come” (9:11-14, 24; 10:19-25): Ascension and the Inauguration of the New Covenant

The Ascension Inaugurates the New Covenant (Hebrews 9:11-14)

But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the Holy Place [τὰ ἁγία, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God! (Heb 9:11-14)

Jesus’ ascension to heaven plays a central role in Heb 9:11-14. Jesus is described here as a high priest entering τὰ ἁγία with “his own blood” to obtain “eternal redemption.” This redemption is explained as the purification of the conscience that permits believers “to worship the living God.”

This description is very similar to that of the Day of Atonement ritual in which the high priest entered the holy of holies to cleanse the sanctuary from sins committed
throughout the year (Heb 9:7; cf. Lev 16; cf. 23:26-32; Num 29:7-11). Most commentators see here an analogy between the Day of Atonement ritual and Jesus’ death. In many cases this analogy is understood in terms of a typological relationship to the effect that the description of Jesus’ death and ascension in Hebrews is understood as an eschatological Day of Atonement of sorts. The following passage (Heb 9:15-23), however, interprets Jesus’ death on the basis of vv. 11-14 not as an eschatological Day of Atonement that provides cleansing of the conscience but as the eschatological fulfillment of the inauguration of the new covenant that provides forgiveness. This agrees with the main burden of the whole section (8:1-10:18) that describes Jesus as inaugurating a new covenant; therefore, making the first covenant obsolete (8:13). Therefore, any analogy between the Day of Atonement and Jesus’ sacrifice and ascension should be understood in the context of the inauguration of the new covenant, which is the dominant concern of

1 For an analysis of the Day of Atonement ritual and its purpose, see Gane, *Ritual Dynamic Structure*.

2 See references in p. 13, n. 1. For a different position, see Davidson, “Christ’s Entry,” 175-190; idem, “Inauguration,” 69-88.

3 Note that the author introduces vv. 15-23 with δυνατόν making vv. 11-14 the basis for his identification of Jesus’ death as the sacrifice for the inauguration of the new covenant.

Jesus’ death and ascension are described here as making possible “the good things that have come.” This expression has eschatological significance (cf. Heb 1:1-2). Note that in Isa 52:7 ἀγαθός is used absolutely to refer to eschatological gifts (likewise, Rom 10:7). This passage (Isa 52:7) was interpreted messianically in the rabbinic tradition. See Str-B 3:282; Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 450.

The adjective ἀγαθός (good) is regularly applied in the LXX to the promised land (e.g., Exod 3:8; 20:12, Num 14:7; Deut 1:25; 8:7).
the central section of the Letter to the Hebrews.¹

I will proceed here in two stages. The first analyzes Heb 9:11-14’s description of Jesus’ death and ascension and the OT imagery it uses to this end. The second considers the role of the ascension in Heb 9:11-14 and the wider argument.

**Hebrews 9:11-14 Describes Jesus’ Entrance into the (Heavenly) Sanctuary of the New Covenant**

The author’s use of imagery from the Israelite cult to describe Jesus’ death and ascension in 9:11-14 is complex for several reasons. First, in terms of the imagery, we are not very clear regarding the “whither” of Jesus’ ascension. For example, what are the referents for the expressions τῆς μείζονος καὶ τελειωτῆς σκηνῆς (“the greater and perfect tent”) and τὰ ἁγία? Did Jesus pass through the first in order to enter the latter, or do they denote the same entity in heaven? Second, the identification of the purpose of Jesus’ ascension—in terms of the imagery—is as well complicated. Should Jesus’ entrance into τὰ ἁγία be understood as an eschatological Day of Atonement, the inauguration of a new covenant, or both?

On the one hand we have the relationship between Jesus’ entrance into the τὰ ἁγία and the high priest’s entrance into the “second tent” (holy of holies) once a year described in Heb 9:7; but, on the other hand, we have the relationship between Jesus’ sacrifice in Heb 9:11-14 and the sacrifice for the inauguration of a new covenant in Heb

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¹ Forgetting that the inauguration of the new covenant is the dominant concern of 8:1-10:18 has led to a distorted understanding of the argument of the central section of Hebrews. Attridge, review of *Sohn und Hoherpriester*, 304. See also Loader, *Sohn und Hoherpriester*, 172; Scullion, 252.
9:15-23. The same question could be posed in different terms: Does the comparison of Jesus’ death with the sacrifices of “goats and calves” (9:12) allude to the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement (9:7), the sacrifices for the inauguration of the covenant (9:19), or the sacrifices of the Israelite cult in general? Finally, if there is an allusion to the Day of Atonement ritual in this passage, what is its relationship to the imagery of the inauguration of the covenant that controls the wider argument?

I will proceed to explain first the relationship between our passage (9:11-14) and the preceding argument (9:1-10). Second, I will explain the use of cultic imagery to explain Jesus’ ascension in Heb 9:11-14. (For example, what are the referents of the “greater and more perfect tent” and ἡγαία etc.) This will prepare the way to answer the question of the function of Jesus’ ascension in Heb 9:11-14 in the next section.

The Day of Atonement in Heb 9:1-10 illustrates the transition between covenants.

There is a consensus that vv. 11-14 form a comparison with vv. 1-10.¹ These two paragraphs contrast the “earthly sanctuary” (vv. 2-5) with the “greater and more perfect tent” (9:11), the continuous entrance of the priests into the first tent (v. 6) with Jesus’ “once for all” entrance into ἡγαία (v. 11-12), the (animal) blood of the sacrifices (v. 7) with Jesus’ “own blood” (v. 12), the gifts and sacrifices offered in the first tent (v. 9) with Jesus’ offering of “himself” (v. 14), the “regulations for the body” (v. 9-10) and Jesus’

¹ E.g., Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 245; deSilva, 303; Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 445; Koester, Hebrews, 412; Lane, Hebrews 9-13, 233-4; Spicq, L’épître aux Hébreux, 2:246; Vanhoye, La structure littéraire, 149-51; Long Westfall, 196-205.
offering “through the eternal spirit” (v. 14), and the impossibility that offerings and
sacrifices may “perfect the conscience of the worshiper” (v. 9) with Jesus’ purification of
our “conscience” through the offering of himself (v. 14). Thus, the relationship between
these two passages has been described as a “rigorous antithetical parallelism.”

Some further argue that this antithetical relationship is confirmed by a μέν . . .
δέ construction that includes vv. 1-10 and vv. 11-14. In this sense the emphatic μέν οὐν
of 9:1 opens an antithesis that is closed with the δέ of v. 11. Given this antithesis, it is
concluded that the Day of Atonement—which has a prominent place in the argument of
9:1-10—provides the imagery necessary to understand Jesus’ entrance into heaven.

Norman H. Young, for example, suggests that the description of the entrance of the high
priest in the holy of holies is used by the author of Hebrews to explain Jesus’ entrance
into heaven:

1 Vanhoye, La structure littéraire, 150-51. Cf. Buchanan, 150; Ellingworth, The
Epistle to the Hebrews, 445. Cynthia Long Westfall suggests a comparison in three
steps—from the general to the particular—that includes the priests, the high priest, and
Jesus. Long Westfall, 201. This is not convincing to me. Instead, it seems that the high
priest in this text is not an intermediate step, but a type or figure that points forward to
Christ.

2 Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 445.

3 Koester, Hebrews, 412; Lane, Hebrews 9-13, 229, n. a; Long Westfall, 197. It
has been protested, however, that the δέ of v. 11 is too far from the μέν of v. 1 to be
directly related. Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 420. Thus, others consider that
the μέν οὖν of 9:1 is a resumption of the covenant theme from 8:7. Attridge, The Epistle
to the Hebrews, 231; Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 420; Spicq, L’épître aux
Hébreux, 2:247.

Regarding the use of μέν οὖν, see BDF §450; L&N 2:812; BDAG, 630.

4 See references in p. 13, n. 1.
The terms in Heb. 9. 11-12 and in 9. 25 [which describe Jesus’ sacrifice and ascension] follow an identical pattern to those in 9. 7 [which describe the Day of Atonement], as the table below demonstrates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hebrews 9. 7</th>
<th>Hebrews 9. 11-12</th>
<th>Hebrews 9. 25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ὃ ἀρχιερεύς</td>
<td>ὁ ἀρχιερεύς</td>
<td>ὁ ἀρχιερεύς</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>εἰς τὴν δευτέραν</td>
<td>εἰς τὰ ἅγια</td>
<td>εἰς τὰ ἅγια</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἀπαξ τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ</td>
<td>ἐφάπαξ</td>
<td>κατ’ ἐνιαυτόν</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>οὐ χωρίς αἵματος</td>
<td>οὐδὲ δι’ αἵματος . . . διὰ ἐν αἵματι ἄλλοτρῷ</td>
<td>οὐ τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While it is clear that these two passages contrast Jesus’ achievements with the ineffective rituals of the first covenant, I believe that the Day of Atonement ritual described in vv. 6-7 does not have the purpose of explaining Jesus’ sacrifice and ascension to heaven but has a more general purpose: it is a “parable” (παραβολή) that illustrates the transition from the first (Mosaic) covenant and its imperfect institutions (earthly sanctuary and ministry) that are ineffective to the new covenant and its heavenly institutions (heavenly sanctuary and ministry) that bring perfection.² Let us take first, then, a look into the argument of Heb 9:1-10 before considering its relationship to 9:11-14.

Hebrews 9:1-10 is a description of the first (Mosaic) covenant. It describes two of its aspects: its “regulations for worship” (δικαίωματα λατρείας) and its “earthly sanctuary” (τὸ τε ἅγιον κοσμικόν; 9:1). These are discussed in an inverted order: first the sanctuary (vv. 2-5) and then the regulations of worship (vv. 6-10). The author creates in its description of the earthly sanctuary a contrast between two tents that are separated

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¹ Young, “Gospel,” 199.

² I will be following here the argument I advanced in Cortez, 527-47.
by the veil. The first tent, or holy place, is described in simple terms (v. 2) while the second tent is described in glowing terms (vv. 3-5). Regarding the second, the author repeats three times that its furniture was built of gold and culminates its description with the “glorious cherubim” (Χερουβίν δόξης) that overshadowed the “atonement cover” (ἄλαστήριον).¹ Franz Laub correctly notes that there is a theological intention behind this antithetical description.² The antithesis between the first and second rooms of the sanctuary lays the ground for the building of the more important antithesis between the ministries in the first and second rooms of the sanctuary introduced in vv. 6-7 and interpreted in vv. 8-10. Thus, the description of the earthly sanctuary in Heb 9:2-5 is geared towards the exposition of Heb 9:6-10 which crowns the argument of this section.

Hebrews 9:6-10 is a carefully constructed “period.”³ Periods were important

¹ Note that the furniture of the first tent was also made of gold but the author chose not to mention this fact (cf. Exod 25:23-40; 37:10-24).

Regarding the inclusion of the altar of incense in the second tent, see Harold S. Camacho, “The Altar of Incense in Hebrews 9:3-4,” AUSS 24 (1986): 5-12. He notes that, like Heb 9:3-4, the altar of incense is described as “belonging” to the holy of holies in 1 Kgs 6:19-22 (cf. Exod 30:6; 40:5). The altar of incense belongs to the holy of holies in the sense that its function is directed to it.

² Laub, “Ein für allemal hineingegangen in das Allerheiligste,” 69.

³ Several scholars have identified this sentence as a “period.” E.g., Young, “Gospel,” 200; Lane, Hebrews 9-13, 216; Gräßer, 216. According to Quintilian, other rhetoricians referred to the same structure by different names (Inst. 9.4.124).

The period is “a sentence that compresses several ideas into a complete thought and has a circular structure [hence its name: περί ἁδύναμα]. This structure may be achieved by, though not limited to, four figures of speech: antithesis, paromoiosis, isocolon, and hyperbaton.” Cortez, 529-34. See also, Manuel Alexandre Jr., “The Art of Periodic Composition in Philo of Alexandria,” in Studia Philonica Annual: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism, ed. David T. Runia, vol. 3, BJS, ed. Ernest S. Frerichs and others (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1991), 135-50; R. Dean Anderson Jr., Glossary of Greek Rhetorical
rhetorical devices used to introduce or conclude sections of the argument “by summarizing the points that preceded [or followed] the sentence itself.”¹ Quintilian, the most influential rhetorician of the 1st century C.E., emphasized the importance of the period in the art of persuasion:² “The Period is well suited to the Prooemia of important Causes, where the subject calls for anxiety, recommendation of the client, or pity; it also suits Commonplaces and every kind of Amplification. A severe type is required for prosecution, a more diffuse type for praise. The Period is also very important in the Epilogue” (Inst. 9.4.128 [Russell, LCL]). I want to suggest that the period of Heb 9:6-10 introduces the argument to follow in chaps. 9-10.

The period is divided in two sections that are antithetical in nature. Each part is clearly introduced by a genitive absolute:


² Quintilian’s “Institutio Oratoria is the longest and most complete technical treatise on rhetoric to survive from Antiquity,” however, it was Cicero (1st century B.C.E.) who became “Rome’s greatest orator and most influential writer on rhetorical technique.” Ruth Majercik, “Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism,” The Anchor Bible Dictionary, ed. David Noel Freedman, vol. 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:711.
Vv. 6-7: Τούτων δὲ οὖτώς κατασκευασμένων . . .

Vv. 8-10: τούτο δηλούντος τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἀγίου . . .¹

The first genitive absolute looks back forming an *inclusio* with v. 2 (note the use of the verb κατασκευάζειν), but the second looks forward (9:11-10:18).

The first section (vv. 6-7) describes a transition from the ministry in the first room to the ministry in the second room of the mosaic sanctuary as it occurred in the Day of Atonement. This section itself contains several antithetical structures very important for the argument (vv. 6-7). The antithetical structure is very clear and signaled by a tight syntactic *μὲν . . . δὲ* construction that describes and compares the ministries in the first and second rooms of the sanctuary. Three antithetical elements are set out in clear terms: (1) multiple priests (οἱ ἱερεῖς) versus one high priest (ὁ ἀρχιερεύς), (2) continuous entering (ὅσα παντὸς εἰσίασιν) versus one entrance (ἀπαξ τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ [εἰσίασιν]), and (3) unrestricted access versus the requirement of blood (οὐ χωρίς αἵματος).²

The author considered this annual transition in the OT cultus—i.e., the Day of Atonement—a parable (παραβολή, v. 9) the secret of which the Holy Spirit interprets for

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¹ Vv. 6-7: Such preparations having been made . . .
Vv. 8-10: By this the Holy Spirit indicates . . .

² The construction of the sentence implies that the high priest cannot enter the inner room without the blood of the sacrifice. The case for the outer room was different because the priests could enter the outer room without bringing any sacrifice. The author’s understanding seems to be derived from Lev 16:1-3 where the blood of the bull and ram are described as prerequisites so that Aaron may not die as he enters the inner room. On the other hand, there was a requirement that the priests should wash their feet and hands any time they entered the first room of the tabernacle or approached the altar of burnt offering (Exod 30:17-21). The author, however, does not mention this fact.
the believer.¹ The Day of Atonement—as a parable—illustrates the transition from the first tent into the second tent. This transition between “tents” and their ministries involves a transition from the ministry of several priests to the ministry of one, from several sacrifices to one sacrifice, and from unrestricted access to the outer tent to access only “through blood” into the inner tent. Finally, the author interprets this transition between tents as a transition from the cleansing of the body to the cleansing of the conscience in the second section of the sentence (vv. 8-10).²

¹ Cf. Gräßer, 2:133. I agree with him that the interpretation implies some secret γνώσεως. However, I disagree with his general bent toward Gnosticism; cf. Hurst, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 67-75. In my view, the Holy Spirit’s actions should be understood in the context of Jesus’ explanation of the meaning of the parables to his disciples (e.g., Matt 13:10-17).

My reading implies a use of the term παραβολή in the sense of “a narrative or saying... designed to illustrate a truth especially through comparison or simile” (BDAG, 759, emphases are mine). Thus, the “narrative” or “saying” the Spirit interprets is the two-phased ministry of the two-room Israelite tabernacle.

A majority of commentators and translators have understood it, rather, in the sense of a symbol; namely, “something that serves as a model or example pointing beyond itself for later realization.” E.g., NASB; NRSV; Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 241; Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 440; Koester, *Hebrews*, 398; Lane, *Hebrews* 9-13, 224. The main reasons have been their identification of the “first tent” (an object, not a saying or narrative) as the referent of the parable as well as its prefigurative function. Friedrich Hauck, “παραβολή,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1967), 5:752. Nevertheless, Hebrews’ use of παραβολή as illustration does not preclude its prefigurative function. I believe the term παραβολή is used again in Heb 11:19 in a similar manner to Heb 9:9. There, as James Swetnam argues, παραβολή refers not only to Isaac’s “resurrection” from the sacrifice but also to the wider narrative which includes Abraham’s offering of Isaac. Abraham’s offering of Isaac prefigures an offering; his reception of Isaac, a resurrection. The narrative illustrates and foreshadows, then, Jesus’ sacrifice as well as his resurrection. Swetnam, *Jesus and Isaac*, 119-23.

² Notice the intentional analogy between the temporal standing (acc. of στάσις; v. 8) of the “first tent” and the description of the present age as “standing/present” (ptc. pf. of ἐνίστημι, v. 9). Also, notice the antithesis between flesh (σάρξ) versus conscience
The author of Hebrews uses the Day of Atonement to illustrate the transition from
the first (earthy) tent and the first (Mosaic) covenant into the second (heavenly) tent and
the new covenant in 9:11-10:18.⁴ This transition includes a transition from the ministry of
many Levitical priests to one heavenly high priest (7:23-25), from many animal sacrifices

(συνείδησις) in vv. 9-10. The antithesis is signaled now not by a μὲν . . . δὲ construction
(on the one hand . . . on the other hand) but by the adverb μόνον (only). The NRSV
recognizes the antithetical function of both constructions (vv. 6-7; 9-10) and translates
them in the same way: “but only.”

⁴ There are two main variables in the exegesis of Heb 9:8. First, does the
expression πρώτης σκηνῆς have a “spatial” or “temporal” sense; that is, does it refer to
the outer room (spatial) or the whole sanctuary (temporal)? Second, does the expression
ἐχθρὸς στάσιν have a physical or legal meaning; namely, is the tent destroyed or does
it just lose its legal significance? These two variables make four interpretations possible.
(1) The outer room is destroyed, e.g., Buchanan, 144-5. (2) The first sanctuary is
destroyed, e.g., Gerhard Delling, “στάσις,” Theological Dictionary of the New
Testament, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids,
Mich.: Eerdmans, 1971), 7:570. (3) The outer room loses cultic standing, e.g., Attridge,
The Epistle to the Hebrews, 240; Gräßer, 2:132-4; Donald A. Hagner, Encountering the
(Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2002), 120; Koester, Hebrews, 397-8; Lane,
Hebrews 9-13, 223-4; Weiβ, 457-9. (See esp. Hofius, Der Vorhang, 60-65; Otfried
Hofius, “Das ‘erste’ und das ‘zweite’ Zelt: Ein Beitrag zur Auslegung von Hebr 9,1-10,”
in Neutestamentliche Studien, WUNT, ed. Martin Hengel and Otfried Hofius, no. 132
(Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 2000), 203-9. (4) The first sanctuary loses cultic standing,
e.g., Bruce, 208; Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 437-8; Simon J. Kistemaker,
“Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in Exposition of Thessalonians, the Pastoral,
Ray C. Stedman, Hebrews, IVP New Testament Commentary Series, ed. Grant R.
Osborne (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1992), 95.

As indicated in the sample of supporters mentioned above, the majority of
scholars choose the third option (3) and interpret Heb 9:8 in the following way: The Holy
Spirit is signifying that the way into the inner room of the sanctuary (τὰ ἅγια) has not
yet been disclosed as long as the outer room (τῆς πρώτης σκηνῆς) still has cultic
standing (ἐχθρὸς στάσιν). A very important tenet of this interpretation is that the term
(τὰ ἅγια in Heb 8-10) denotes the inner room of the sanctuary, the holy of holies. I will
argue below, however, that there is no support for this translation, neither in the LXX,
nor in the Pseudepigrapha, Philo, or Josephus. See, Cosaert, 91-103.
to the “once for all” sacrifice of Jesus (9:25-28; 10:11-13), from lack of access to access into the presence of God in the heavenly sanctuary (9:11-14, 24; 10:19-21), and from the cleansing of the “flesh” to the cleansing of the conscience (9:14; 10:2, 22).¹ In other words, it is suggested that the parable contains in nuce the argument for the central section of Hebrews. The period of Heb 9:6-10 introduces, then, the Day of Atonement not as a typology for Jesus’ sacrifice, but as an illustration (παραβολή) of the transition between covenants.²

This interpretation suggests that ὁδὸς is the antecedent of ἡττάς in vv. 8-9: “By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the sanctuary has not yet been disclosed, as long as the first tent is still standing. This [i.e., the way into the sanctuary] is an illustration of the present time . . .”³ The “way into the sanctuary” refers to the cultic

¹ See Cortez, 543-6.

² For a study of the relationship between the old and new covenants see Skip MacCarty, In Granite or Ingrained?: What the Old and New Covenants Reveal about the Gospel, the Law, and the Sabbath (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2007).

³ Admittedly, the antecedent (ὁδὸς) is somewhat removed from the relative pronoun (ἡττάς); however, this is not strange in Hebrews (cf. 9:2; 8:5).

A majority of interpreters consider that the phrase τὴν πρωτης σκηνῆς—which is closer to the relative pronoun—is the antecedent, e.g., Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 241; Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 439; Gräßer, 2:135; Koester, Hebrews, 398; Lane, Hebrews 9-13, 224. This position, as I will argue below, has the problem of the awkward relationship between the symbol (“first tent”) and the referent (“present time”). Others argue that the antecedent is the whole situation of vv. 6-8, e.g., Bruce, 209; Loader, Sohn und Hoherpriester, 164; Michel, Hebräer, 307; Montefiore. Though this interpretation is tempting for my argument, it has the problem of the awkward explanation of the relative pronoun whose gender is defined not by the antecedent, but by παραβολή, an element of its own clause. In my view, it is unnecessary.
system that requires a sequence of ministries; first in the outer tent (daily), then in the inner tent (annually). In fact, the carrying on of a ministry in the first tent impedes access into the second (Lev 16:17). Therefore, the “way into the sanctuary” was more an evidence of restriction than of access (Heb 9:6-7). Nevertheless, the author of Hebrews plays with the concept of the “way into the sanctuary” brilliantly by transforming the annual transition between tents and their cultic systems in the Day of Atonement (vv. 6-8) into an illustration of the transition between ages and their respective cultic systems (vv. 9-10).

The use of the transition in the ministry of the tents in the Day of Atonement as a parable removes a hurdle in the current interpretations of the “first tent” (τῆς πρώτης σκηνῆς) and its alleged relationship to “present time” (τὸν καιρὸν τὸν ἐνεστηκότα) of v. 9. Neither the “mosaic tabernacle” nor the “outer room” (understood as the referents of “first tent” [v. 8] in a majority of interpretations; see p. 334, n. 1) is an appropriate symbol of the “present time.” Both refer to non-fulfillment and imperfection; however, the main thrust of Hebrews is that Jesus has inaugurated the time of fulfillment and perfection. He is the “high priest of the good things that have come” (9:11; emphasis mine). Harold W. Attridge has argued, following J. H. Davies, that Hebrews uses “the inverse image” (first tent/imperfection) to symbolize the “present time” of perfection. However, this is unconvincing because the author of Hebrews had a better option. If the main point of Hebrews is that Jesus “is seated at the right hand of the throne of the

1 The Epistle to the Hebrews, 241-2; Davies, Hebrews, 86.
majesty in the heavens” (8:1; cf. 1:3); that he has “entered the inner shrine behind the
curtain” (6:19; cf. 4:14-16; 10:19-22); why didn’t he use the “second tent” (the inner
room), a symbol of God’s throne room and presence, to symbolize the “present age”? It
seems a poor choice in one of the better argued documents of the New Testament. Craig
R. Koester, on the other hand, rightly points out that the author holds a view of an overlap
of ages similar to that of Paul.¹ His identification, however, of the “present time” as the
time where the first covenant regulations are still in force, and the “time of correction” as
the time when those regulations are set aside is awkward. It would say that the author
uses the phrase “present time” to refer to what he considers is only one of the two aspects
of the “present time.” In any case, the “first tent” continues to be an ill-adapted symbol
for the “present time” where the two ages overlap.

The Day of Atonement, however, as a time of transition between the ministries of
the first (outer) and second (inner) rooms is a fitting illustration of the “present time,”
which is also a time of transition. In the OT cultus, the ministries in the outer and inner
rooms were juxtaposed in the Day of Atonement. The regular rituals, performed every
day in the morning and evening in the outer room, were also performed on the Day of
Atonement; however, between the morning and evening ritual, the special ritual of
purification of the sanctuary was “inserted” which included the “once a year” ministry in
the inner room.² The ritual in the inner room, however, implied not only co-existence but

¹ Hebre움s, 398.
² See, Gane, Ritual Dynamic Structure, 297-305.
also a supersession of the outer room cultus (Heb 9:8; cf. Lev 16:17). The Day of Atonement illustrates appropriately, then, what is happening in the “present time”: Jesus has come and made the old covenant cultus “obsolete” so that it “will soon disappear” (8:13). This transition, however, has not totally transpired. The new covenant has been inaugurated, but the old has not yet vanished (8:13).¹ See table 6 on this respect.

I suggest then the following reading of Heb 9:6-10:

When such preparations have been made, the priests go continually into the first tent to carry out their ministry; but only the high priest goes into the second, and he but once a year, and not without taking the blood that he offers for himself and for the sins committed unintentionally by the people. This is what the Holy Spirit reveals: the way into the [heavenly or second] sanctuary has not yet been disclosed as long as the first [earthly] sanctuary continues to have [cultic] standing. The way of the sanctuary [first, ministry in the outer tent; then, access to the second tent] is a parable for the present time, according to which gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, but deal only with food and drink and various baptisms, regulations for the body imposed until the time comes to set things right.²

This understanding of the Day of Atonement as a parable of the transition to the new covenant provides a fitting culmination to the immediately preceding argument. Hebrews 8:7-13 argued that the promise of a new covenant in Jer 31:31-34 (quoted in Heb 8:8-12) implied the obsolescence and soon disappearance of the first covenant (esp. v. 13).³

¹ See Koester, Hebrews, 398.

² Franz Laub has a similar position in which Jesus’ movement through the tent should be understood—following a history-of-religions matrix—as a transition into the coming age and which is also the higher sphere of the philosophical speculation. In this sense, in Hebrews both the apocalyptic worldview that distinguishes between ages and the philosophical (Plato/Philo) contrast between lower and higher spheres intersect. “‘Ein für allemal hineingegangen in das Allerheiligste’,” 65-85.

³ George H. Guthrie suggests that 8:7 and 13 create an inclusion around the word “first” (πρῶτος). The Structure of Hebrews, 85-86.
Table 6. Transition from the Daily to the Yearly Ritual in the Israelite Cult (the Day of Atonement) and the Transition between the Old and New Covenants in Hebrews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily Ritual</th>
<th>Yearly Ritual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ministry in the outer room</td>
<td>Ministry in the inner room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of many Levitical priests</td>
<td>Only the high priest ministers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many daily sacrifices</td>
<td>One yearly sacrifice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No access to the immediate presence of God</td>
<td>Access through sacrifice to the immediate presence of God</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Old (Mosaic) Covenant**

- Ministry in the *earthly* tabernacle
- Ministry of *many* Levitical (High) Priests
- *Many* sacrifices
- No access to the presence of God
- Cleansing of the *flesh*

**New Covenant**

- Ministry in the *heavenly* tabernacle
- Ministry of *one*, eternal high priest
- *One* sacrifice (“once for all”)
- Access to the presence of God through the blood of Jesus
- Cleansing of the *conscience*
Hebrews 9:1-10 rounds off the argument by suggesting that the ritual of the sanctuary itself (esp. the Day of Atonement) illustrated this transition. Note that the concluding argument of this section (vv. 9-10) is in essence equivalent to 8:13, as shown in table 7.¹

Table 7. Literary Relationship between Hebrews 9:9-10 and 8:13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hebrews 9:9-10</th>
<th>Hebrews 8:13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“This is a symbol of the present time, during which gifts and sacrifices are</td>
<td>“. . . what is obsolete and growing old . . .”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, but deal only with</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>food and drink and various baptisms, regulations for the body . . .”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“. . . imposed until the time comes to set things right.”</td>
<td>“. . . will soon disappear.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, Heb 9:1-10 has the purpose of pointing out that the first covenant itself—through the Day of Atonement ritual—illustrates its own inefficacy and the need of a better covenant with better institutions. In this sense, it fulfills the same function that the story of Abraham’s encounter with Melchizedek (7:1-10) and God’s promise of rest in Ps

¹ Thus, I agree with those who consider that the μεν οὖν of 9:1 is a resumption of the covenant theme from 8:7. Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 231; Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 420; Spicq, L’Épître aux Hébreux, 2:247. I consider that the μεν οὖν here functions as a marker of result and could be translated in the sense of “accordingly.” L&N 2:783-4; cf. BDF §450; L&N 2:794-5, 812; BDAG, 630. On the other hand, the μεν οὖν of 9:1 is not directly related to the ἐκ of v. 11. Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 420.
95 (3:7-4:11) played in previous sections of the argument. The story of Levi paying the tithes to and being blessed by Melchizedek—through Abraham—served as evidence of the inferiority—therefore, inefficacy—of the Levitical priesthood and the need of a greater priesthood established under a better law (7:11-28). Similarly, God’s promise of rest through David in Ps 95 had the purpose of showing that the rest given by Joshua was inferior and there remained a need for a superior rest for the people of God.

This view of the Day of Atonement as a “parable” of the transition to the new covenant fits perfectly with the argument of 9:11-18 because there—as we will see—Jesus is not described as entering the heavenly holy of holies, but entering the heavenly sanctuary. Therefore, this passage refers not to an eschatological Day of Atonement but to the inauguration of the new covenant ministry and its heavenly sanctuary.

Τὰ ἀγαθαρχία denotes the sanctuary of the new covenant

The term Hebrews uses for the place Jesus entered at his ascension (τὰ ἀγαθαρχία) does not refer to the inner room of the sanctuary specifically, but to the sanctuary in general (8:2; 9:2, 8, 12, 24, 25; 10:19; 13:11).¹

In his study of the term τὰ ἀγαθαρχία in the LXX when it appears in connection to the sanctuary, Alwyn P. Salom found that with one exception τὰ ἀγαθαρχία does not refer to the inner room (holy of holies) but to the sanctuary in general and—in a few cases—to the outer room.² Carl P. Cosaert studied the use of the term in the OT Pseudepigrapha, Philo,

¹ BDAG, 11.
² Alwyn P. Salom concluded that ἀγαθαρχία appeared 170 times in the LXX in
and Josephus and reached the same conclusion: “Despite the variety of uses of ἅγιος, one pattern, however, does appear to be consistent throughout: the plural form by itself is never used to describe the Holy of Holies alone. Whenever the plural form by itself is used, it exclusively describes the whole sanctuary in general. Moreover, whenever specific reference is made to the Most Holy Place, the plural form by itself is never used” (emphasis his).¹ Hebrews itself refers to the inner room in 9:3 with a different term: ἅγιος ἁγίων. Thus, to say that Jesus entered the holy of holies at his ascension would entail a new meaning for the term τὰ ἅγια and “identifying what is called τὰ ἅγια in v. 12 as the heavenly counterpart of what was called Ἁγιὰ ὁ ἅγιον in v. 3.”²

Erich Gräßer and others hold, however, that Hebrews follows Lev 16 (vv. 2, 3, 16, passim) where τὸ ἅγιον refers to the inner room.³ Erich Gräßer notes:

connection to the tabernacle or temple. Of the 66 times it appears in singular, 45 times refer to the sanctuary, 13 to the outer compartment, and 8 to the inner compartment. Of the 104 times it appears in plural, 97 refer to the sanctuary, 6 to the outer compartment, and 1 to the inner compartment (221). This study is of limited utility, however, because it fails to include the references to the LXX on which the findings are based. For example, we don’t know where ἅγιον denotes the inner room, the holy of holies. Though somewhat dated, Henry S. Gehman’s article is more useful. He agrees with Salom in the fact that ἃγιον translates the Hebrew term וְדַמְיָם in the LXX when it refers to ‘sanctuary’ in the general sense. When לֹא הַמְּלָכָה refers to the tabernacle, it may be translated by τὸ ἅγιον; still the plural occurs more frequently (340-41). The only place in the LXX where Gehman identifies that τὰ ἅγια refers to the inner room is Ezek 41:21 (345). (Probably, Salom had the same verse in mind.)

¹ Cosaert, 102-3.

² Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 447.

³ Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 218; Gräßer, 81; Hofius, Der Vorhang, 56-57. Others hold that τὰ ἅγια refers to the inner room not because of Lev 16, but for other
Der Hebr folgt dieser Terminologie [i.e., Lev 16], ersetzt den Singular aber durch den Plural (9:8, 12, 24f; 10:19; 13:11\textsuperscript{38}), der in der LXX nur vereinzelt für das Allerheiligste steht (Ez 41,21).

\textsuperscript{38} Den Beweis findet Hofius\textordmasculine*, Vorhang 57 Anm. 60 m.R. in 13,11, wo Lev 16,27 zitiert wird, der dortige Singular τὸ ἅγιον aber als Plural erscheint. Vgl. A.P. Salom, \textit{TA HAGIA} in the Epistle to the Hebrews, \textit{AUS5} (1967) 59-70.\textsuperscript{1}

A second argument refers to the literary context in which τὰ ἅγια is used. As noted above, Norman H. Young shows in a table how Hebrews’ description of Jesus’ entrance into the heavenly sanctuary (τὰ ἅγια, Heb 9:11-12, 25) follows “an identical pattern” to the description of the entrance of the high priest into the inner room on the Day of Atonement in Heb 9:7. Because of this alleged connection between Jesus’ entrance into heaven and the high priest’s entrance into the most holy place on the Day of Atonement, it is concluded that τὰ ἅγια in Hebrews refers to the inner room of the heavenly sanctuary and not the sanctuary as a whole.\textsuperscript{2}

What has tipped the balance in most cases in favor of understanding τὰ ἅγια as referring specifically to the holy of holies is the typological correspondence most scholars reasons. Chief among them, the typological correspondence between Jesus’ entrance into heaven and the high priest’s entrance into the inner room on the Day of Atonement. Michel, \textit{Hebräer}, 311-2; Loader, \textit{Sohn und Hoherpriester}, 363; Rissi, 37-41; Laub, \textit{Bekenntnis und Auslegung}, 203-7; Scholer, 160; Wilson, \textit{Hebrews}, 150; Bénétreau, \textit{L’épître}; Young, “Gospel”; Hughes, \textit{Hebrews}, 281, n. 54.

\textsuperscript{1} Gräßer, 2:81-82. Translation: “Hebrews follows this terminology [i.e., Lev 16], but he replaces the singular with the plural (9:8, 12, 24f; 10:19; 13:11\textsuperscript{38}), which stands for the most holy place in the LXX only occasionally (Ezek 41:21). [Translation of note 38:] Hofius finds the evidence correctly in 13:11 where Lev 16:27 is cited (\textit{Vorhang}, 57 n. 60). There [Lev 16:27] it is the singular τὸ ἅγιον but here [Heb 13:11] appears the plural. Cf. A.P. Salom, \textit{TA HAGIA} in the Epistle to the Hebrews, \textit{AUS5} (1967) 59-70.

\textsuperscript{2} Young, “Gospel,” 199. I will deal with 9:25 below.
believe is developed in Hebrews between Jesus’ entrance into heaven and the high priest’s entrance into the inner room on the Day of Atonement.¹

This position is not convincing, however. It must be borne in mind that Lev 16 LXX uses the singular (τὸ ἁγίον) to refer to the inner room of the sanctuary, while Hebrews uses the plural (τὰ ἁγία).² In using the plural—which elsewhere refers to the sanctuary in general—and not the singular—which in Lev 16 refers to the inner room, Hebrews sides with the rest of the LXX and not with Lev 16. Erich Gräßer overstates his case when he says that τὰ ἁγία (plural) “occasionally” (vereinzelt) refers to the inner room. There is only one verse in the LXX where τὰ ἁγία refers to the inner room: Ezek 41:21. This verse, however, is riddled with textual critical problems. Referring to vv. 15b-26, Brandon L. Fredenburg notes: “These verses are among the most difficult to translate in the entire book because of the rare terms used and the high probability of copyists’ errors due to their rarity.”³ In my opinion, it is not wise to establish the meaning

¹ For references, see p. 13, n. 1.

² It is not clear why Lev 16 uses the singular. The fact is that the singular is not used to refer to the inner room outside of Lev 16. Cosaert, 98, n. 35. Cf. John William Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Leviticus*, SBLSCS, ed. Bernard A. Taylor, no. 44 (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1997), 240-41.


Walther Zimmerli’s conclusion about the textual status of this section, especially vv. 21b-22, is more severe: “Rather one must suppose that vv 21b-22 . . . have been added by the hand which took over vv 15b-26 from another.” Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* 2, 386. Steven Shaun Tuell reaches a different conclusion: “The terminological evidence cited by Zimmerly for the secondary character of 41:15b-26 in particular is strong, but not finally compelling; such shifts may be for stylistic effect, to break up the monotony of the interminable rounds of measurement and description.” Steven Shaun Tuell, *The Law of
of a term on the evidence of one passage that belongs to a section with a high probability of copyists’ errors, against the majority of biblical texts.

Moreover, the “proof” Otfried Hofius presents that Hebrews changes the singular τὸ ἁγιὸν of Lev 16 for the plural τὰ ἁγία is not compelling.\(^1\) He argues that Heb 13:11 alludes to Lev 16:27 but substitutes the singular τὸ ἁγιὸν with the plural τὰ ἁγία.\(^2\) We cannot be sure, however, that Heb 13:11 is referring to Lev 16:27. Day of Atonement sacrifices were not the only ones whose blood was taken into the tent by the high priest, the priests could not eat from them, and their carcasses were burned “outside the camp.”

The carcasses of purification offerings as well as the consecration offerings were burned outside the camp (Exod 29:14; Lev 4:12, 21; 8:17; 9:11).\(^3\) More specifically, however, the blood of the purification offering for the high priest (Lev. 4:5-7) and the blood of the sin offering for the community (Lev. 4:16-21; 6:30) were brought into the sanctuary,\(^4\) and

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\(^1\) See above, p. 344, n. 1.

\(^2\) “For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary [ἐἰσεῖσθαι . . . ἐμεῖς τὰ ἁγία] by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp” (Heb 13:11, emphasis mine).

“The bull of the sin offering and the goat of the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place [ἐἰσπέρχεσθαι . . . ἐν τῷ ἁγίῳ], shall be taken outside the camp; their skin and their flesh and their dung shall be consumed in fire” (16:27, emphasis mine).

\(^3\) Johnsson, “Day of Atonement,” 115.

\(^4\) “The rabbis add the he-goat of the community (Num 15:22-26), which, in their view, is brought for the sin of idolatry (m. Hor. 1:4; Siphre Shelah 112; Sipra, ֶהֶפֶּשֶׁע 6:10). Some commentators feel that this rule applies only to the previously mentioned
the priests could not eat from them (Lev 6:30; cf. Heb 13:10). Therefore, Hebrews 13:10-13 could allude either to the purification offerings of the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:27) or the purification offerings on behalf of the community or the high priest (Lev 6:30; cf. Lev 4:1-21). The terminology is on the side of the latter because, in the LXX idiom, the term τὰ ἁγία is equivalent to the τὴν σκηνὴν τοῦ μαρτυρίου of Lev 6:30 and not to the τῷ ἁγίῳ of Lev 16:27.

Some scholars adopt a middle position. Craig R. Koester and others believe that τὰ ἁγία denotes the whole sanctuary. For example, he argues that in the expression τῶν ἁγίων λειτουργός καὶ τῆς σκηνῆς τῆς ἁληθινῆς, ἤν ἐπηξέν ὁ κύριος, οὐκ ἄνθρωπος (and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man; Heb 8:2 NIV) καὶ has an explanatory function making τῶν ἁγίων and τῆς σκηνῆς τῆς ἁληθινῆς synonyms: “The two nouns are followed by the singular ‘which’ (ἡν), suggesting that only one tent is intended.”3 They argue, as well, that the main contrast in Hebrews is not between two parts of the heavenly sanctuary (an outer and inner room), purification offerings (4:1-21; Ibn Ezra, Ramban), but its generalized formulation argues for greater comprehensiveness.” Milgrom, Leviticus 1-16, 407-408. Also, Gane, Leviticus, Numbers, 144.

1 Gane, Leviticus, Numbers, 144.

2 Koester, Hebrews, 376; Bruce, 180, n. 3; Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 400; Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 199, n. e, 205; Harald Hegermann, Der Brief an die Hebräer, THKNT, ed. Erich Fascher, Joachim Rohde, and Christian Wolff, no. 16 (Berlin: Evangelische, 1988), 163; Weiß; Peterson, 130-31.

3 Koester, Hebrews, 376. As I will argue below, the same relationship between ἁγία and σκηνή is found in 9:11-12. See below section “‘The Greater and Perfect Tent’ Denotes the Sanctuary of the New Covenant.”
but between the earthly and heavenly sanctuary. In their opinion, however, this does not invalidate the typological role of the Day of Atonement for Jesus’ ascension. The entrance of the high priest into the most holy place foreshadows Jesus’ transition from earth to heaven (cf. Heb 9:6-10).¹

A problem with this view is that we cannot infer from it that Hebrews considers heaven to be the inner room and earth the outer room of Hebrews’ true (heavenly/cosmic) sanctuary.² If this were the case, Jesus was sacrificed in the outer room of this cosmic sanctuary; yet, Hebrews does not show any interest in relating the work of Jesus on earth with the outer room of the heavenly sanctuary and its ministry. Hebrews does not show interest in a division in the heavenly sanctuary.³ In fact, Hebrews considers that Jesus suffered “outside of the camp” (Heb 13:10-13). Moreover, the view presented above that Hebrews uses Day of Atonement imagery to illustrate a transition from the first covenant and the earthly sanctuary to the new covenant and the heavenly sanctuary is less problematic in this sense.⁴

¹ Ibid.

² Philo believed that the heavenly sanctuary was a symbol of the soul or the universe (Philo, Dreams 1.215). He preferred the latter, however. Heaven symbolizes in his view the most sacred part of this sanctuary (Spec. Laws 1.66; cf. Moses 2.101-108; QE 2.91). For Josephus, also, the most sacred section of the sanctuary symbolized heaven (Ant. 3:123, 179-181; J.W. 5.211-214). Lincoln D. Hurst, however, argues that those who hold this view of the heavenly sanctuary as a symbol of the universe fall short of proof. Hurst, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 24-33.

³ Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 446-7; Hughes, Hebrews, 289; Koester, Hebrews, 409.

⁴ Cortez, 527-47.
"The greater and perfect tent" denotes the sanctuary of the new covenant.

The plethora of different interpretations of διὰ τῆς μείζουνος καὶ τελειοτέρας σκηνῆς ("through the greater and more perfect tabernacle," NASB) attests to the difficulty of its interpretation. The referent of this expression depends in great measure on whether the preposition διὰ has a locative or instrumental meaning.

The preposition διὰ, when used with verbs of motion, usually has the locative sense of "extension through an area or object." The prepositional phrase "through [διὰ] the greater and more perfect tabernacle" modifies the verb of motion εἴσηλθεν (entered). On this basis, some conclude that "the greater and more perfect tabernacle" denotes a location through which Jesus entered into the "Holy Place." In terms of the cultic imagery of the Mosaic sanctuary, "the greater and more perfect tabernacle" would refer to the outer room and the "Holy Place" to the inner room of the heavenly sanctuary. This is possible because the term "tabernacle" (σκηνή) in Hebrews may denote both the whole sanctuary (8:5; 9:21; 13:10) or one of its compartments (9:2, 3, 6). Since Heb 9:1-10 describes two "tents" or rooms of the earthly sanctuary, it is not difficult to conclude that the heavenly sanctuary has also two rooms. The cultic imagery of 6:19 and Heb 10:20

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1 BDAG, 223-224.

2 E.g., Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 246; Bénétreau, L'épître; Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 450; Gräßer; Johnson, Hebrews, 235-6; Lane, Hebrews 9-13, 236-7; Michel, Hebräer, 310-12; Thompson, Beginnings, 106.

3 Lane, Hebrews 9-13, 236; Paul C. B. Andriessen, "Das größere und vollkommenere Zelt (Hebr 9, 11)," BZ 15 (1971): 76-92; Gräßer; Spicq, L'épître aux
seems to support this view because they refer to Jesus’ entrance as going through the celestial equivalent of the curtain that divided the outer from the inner room in the Mosaic tabernacle; thus implying the existence of a heavenly anteroom to the place of God’s presence. This understanding might fit, as well, 4:14 where Jesus’ ascension is described as passing “through the heavens” into the presence of God and 7:26 where it is said that Jesus has been “exalted above the heavens” (emphasis mine). ¹

There are several problems with this view, however. First, it seems awkward that Hebrews would refer to the anteroom as “the greater and more perfect tabernacle” while the object of its concern—the place of God’s presence—is referred to simply as the “Holy Place.” ² Second, Paul Ellingworth has shown that Heb 4:14-16 and 9:11-14 employ two different types of spatial language in Hebrews and that it is problematic to equate them. ³ We cannot simply consider both types of language equivalent as if their

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¹ Riggenbach, 255; Moffatt, 120; Laub, Bekenntnis und Auslegung, 186.

² Koester, Hebrews, 409.

³ Ellingworth, “Jesus and the Universe,” 337-50. The first belongs to vertical language and is perhaps largely traditional (4:14-16; 2:9; 7:26). It is mainly used to convey the reality of Christ’s exaltation over creation and the angels and presupposes an intermediary sphere populated by angels. In other words, it presupposes a three-tiered universe: earth, heavens (angels), above the heavens.

The second belongs to horizontal language and is used to express the significance of Jesus’ sacrifice as providing direct access to God (6:19-20; 9:11-14; 10:19-20). This type of language does not presuppose an intermediate sphere but a simple contrast between heaven and earth. In other words, it presupposes a two-tiered universe—an outer and an inner region in reference to the throne of God. (Note that Heb 8:1-2 and 9:24 convey this two-tiered universe in vertical fashion.)
only difference was their respective vertical and horizontal orientations. For example, 4:14-16 asserts that Jesus “has passed through the heavens” (emphasis mine)—implying that Jesus is now somewhere beyond “the heavens”—while 8:1 asserts that Jesus sits “at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (emphasis mine; cf. 12:23, 25).¹ Thus, while we may concur that both 4:14-16 and 9:11-14 are equivalents in terms of their meaning, they are not in terms of their imagery; therefore, we cannot explain the imagery of one in terms of the other.² Third, Hebrews does not seem to be interested in any distinction between two sections in the heavenly sanctuary.³ Instead, it compares two covenants and their sanctuaries (8:1-6; cf. 9:1). If “the greater and more perfect tabernacle” denotes the outer room of the heavenly sanctuary, this “greater and more perfect tabernacle” is irrelevant both in 9:11-14 and elsewhere in Hebrews. At the most, its existence is implied in 6:19-20 and 10:19-21 but its significance never explained. Finally, this interpretation makes necessary that τὰ ἅγια denotes the heavenly holy of holies which is incorrect—as shown above.⁴

Others consider that διὰ has an instrumental meaning. Albert Vanhoye and others have noted that the preposition modifies both the verb εἰσῆλθεν (entered) and the

1 Similarly, 9:24 asserts that Jesus “entered into heaven itself.”

2 Though their imageries are contradictory (Jesus is above/in “the heavens”), both images coincide in that Jesus is in the presence of God interceding in our favor.


4 See previous section.
participial phrase “obtaining eternal redemption.” Therefore, they suggest, it is incorrect to determine the function of the preposition on the basis of the verb only.\(^1\) In this sense, Jesus entered into the “Holy Place” \textit{by means of} “the greater and more perfect tabernacle.” The phrase “through [διὰ] the greater and more perfect tabernacle” is one of three prepositional phrases that explain \textit{how} Jesus “entered [ἐλθὼν] . . . the Holy Place [τὰ ἱερὰ] . . . obtaining eternal redemption” (v. 12, emphasis mine). All three use the preposition διὰ: (1) “through [διὰ] the greater and more perfect tabernacle,” (2) “not through [διὰ] the blood of goats and calves,” (3) “but through [διὰ] His own blood.” Since it is clear that διὰ in the prepositional phrases 2 and 3 has an instrumental meaning, it is likely that διὰ also has an instrumental sense in the phrase “through the greater and more perfect tabernacle.”\(^2\)

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\(^2\) Hebrews can use the same preposition in different senses in the same context; e.g., πρὸς in 1:7-8, ὑπὲρ in 5:1, εἰς in 7:25, πρότερ in 9:1-2, 8; and probably διὰ in 10:20. Attridge, \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews}, 245, n. 18; Ellingworth, \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews}, 451; Hofius, \textit{Der Vorhang}, 67, n. 110; Moffatt, 121. For a study of how διὰ changes its meaning from spatial to instrumental in 10:20, see Young, “Heb. X. 20,” 100-104.

Craig R. Koester claims that nowhere else in Hebrews does the preposition διὰ plus the genitive have a spatial sense. \textit{Hebrews}, 408. Yet, the phrases διὰ τοῦ καταπέτασματος in 11:29 and διὰ τοῦ καταπέτασματος in 10:20 have the spatial sense of extension through an area and an object respectively. See also, Attridge, \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews}, 245,
Many of those who adopt this view interpret “the greater and more perfect tent” metaphorically as referring to the body of Christ.¹ This view can take many forms. It has been suggested that the tent denotes Christ’s humanity, his resurrected body, his eucharistic body, or the church as the body of Christ.² In support of this view, it is noted that this paragraph has a chiastic structure in which “tabernacle” parallels “his own blood.”³ Similarly, they argue, 10:19-20 introduces Jesus’ flesh metaphorically as the “veil” of the heavenly temple.⁴

¹ Chrysostom PG 63.119; Ps.-Oecumenius PG 119.336; Theophylact; Calvin. They base their interpretation on the basis that God’s Word “became flesh” and “tented” among us (John 1:14) and that Jesus identified his body as a “temple” (John 2:21). William L. Lane suggests that taking διά as instrumental makes necessary “to give to οἶκος a symbolic value.” Lane, Hebrews 9-13, 236. Craig R. Koester evidently disagrees because he understands διά as instrumental but understands the οἶκος to refer to the heavenly sanctuary. Koester, Hebrews, 408-9.


³ This is the suggested chiastic structure:

A But Christ, having arrived as high priest of the good things that have occurred,  
B through (dia) the greater and perfect tent  
C not (ou) fabricated by hands—that is, not of this creation—  
C¹ and not (oude) through (dia) blood of goats and calves,  
B¹ but through (dia) his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.  
A¹ He entered once for all into the sanctuary and secured an eternal redemption

Vanhoye, “Par la tente,” 2. Also, Hofius, Der Vorhang, 66; Koester, Hebrews, 407; Vanhoye, La structure littéraire, 149-51.

⁴ On 10:19-20, see below the section “The Ascension Is Described as Providing
There are several drawbacks, however, to a metaphorical understanding of the “tabernacle.” First, the fact that the lines containing “tabernacle” and “his own blood” are parallel in form does not necessarily mean that they are parallel in content.\(^1\) Second, if the body of Christ is meant, how do we understand the description of the “tabernacle” as not belonging to this creation?\(^2\) Finally, and more important, the justification for the symbolic interpretation of the “tabernacle” rests on Christian symbolism extrinsic to Hebrews. Nowhere else in Hebrews does the tabernacle denote the church or Christ’s body.\(^3\)

An instrumental understanding of διά, however, does not require a metaphorical understanding of the expression, “the greater and more perfect tabernacle.” As mentioned above (p. 355), διά modifies not only the verb εἰσήλθεν but also the participial phrase αἰωνίαν λύτρωσιν εὑράμενος (obtaining eternal redemption). In other words, it explains how Jesus entered with the result that he “obtained eternal redemption.” The phrase διά τῆς μείζονος καὶ τελειοτέρας σκηνῆς οὐ χειροποιήτων refers to one of the prevailing circumstances which makes possible Jesus’ entrance to provide “eternal redemption.”\(^4\) A more literal translation of Heb 9:11-14 would be this:

Full Access to the Presence of God.”

\(^1\) Koester, Hebrews, 409.

\(^2\) See also Hughes, Hebrews, 285-6.

\(^3\) See ibid., 283-90. Also, Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 246. The assertion in Heb 3:6 that “we [the believers] are his house” does not necessarily imply that the church is a heavenly sanctuary.

\(^4\) I understand, then, διά in the specific sense that it marks “the circumstance whereby someth. is accomplished or effected.” BDAG, 224. Cf. Rom 2:27; 4:11; 8:25;
But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, in virtue of the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), and not in virtue of the blood of goats and calves, but in virtue of his own blood, [he] entered once for all into the sanctuary obtaining eternal redemption. (emphasis mine)

This third option makes better sense in my view. The “greater and more perfect tabernacle” denotes the heavenly sanctuary as a whole.¹ In this sense, it is equivalent to τὰ ἡγιασματικά in v. 12.² Τὰ ἡγιασματικά—where Jesus entered—is the “greater and more perfect tabernacle” because it is superior to the Mosaic (first covenant) sanctuary. This understanding fits the overall comparison between the first and new covenants in the larger context (8:1-10:18). Jesus’ entrance into the “greater and more perfect tabernacle” inaugurates the greater realities of the new covenant that make possible what the first covenant cult was not able to accomplish: provide forgiveness and access to God.

14:20; 2 Cor 2:4; 2 Pet 1:3.

¹ Johnson, Hebrews, 235-6; Koester, Hebrews, 409; Montefiore, 153; deSilva, 304. Paul Ellingworth argues that the τὰ ἡγιασματικά and ἡ σκηνή refer to the same heavenly reality. The Epistle to the Hebrews, 447-8. He strongly argues, also, that the διὰ has a locative sense. He does not explain, however, the awkward expression that results from identifying τὰ ἡγιασματικά and ἡ σκηνή (He entered the heavenly sanctuary through the heavenly sanctuary).

If I understand David A. deSilva correctly, “the greater and more perfect tabernacle” refers to the sanctuary as a whole, of which the “Holy Place” is a part. deSilva, 304-5. This interpretation is unsatisfactory because it understands τὰ ἡγιασματικά as referring to the inner room of the sanctuary, a meaning that is not attested in the LXX or other early Jewish Literature.

² Note that the expression τῶν ἡγιασματικῶν λειτουργὸς καὶ τῆς σκηνῆς τῆς ἀληθείας (“a minister in the sanctuary and true tent”) in 8:2 is a hendiadys; that is, it refers to one entity and not two. This is suggested by the comment ἦν ἔπηξεν ὁ κύριος, οὐκ ἄνθρωπος (“that the Lord, and not any mortal, has set up”) in which the singular relative pronoun ἦν suggests that the τὰ ἡγιασματικά and ἡ σκηνή constitute a single entity that has been built by God. See Koester, Hebrews, 375-6. Contra Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 217-8.
This description of the heavenly sanctuary as “the more perfect tabernacle” is particularly appropriate. In Hebrews the process of perfection involves suffering and entrance into God’s glory (2:10; 5:9; 7:11, 19, 28). This sanctuary is “more perfect” in the sense that it provides access to the presence of God.¹

The sacrifice of “goats and calves” does not refer particularly to the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement.

Hebrews 9:12 contrasts Jesus’ sacrifice to those “of goats and calves” (τράγων καὶ μοσχων). The expression “goats and calves” (τράγων καὶ μοσχων), however, does not refer specifically to the animals sacrificed on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16).

Richard M. Davidson notes correctly that, according to the LXX, τράγοι (he-goats) were not offered on the Day of Atonement.² The LXX refers, instead, to χιμαρεί (young male goats, Lev 16:5, 7-10).³ In fact, τράγοι and χιμαρεί translate different Hebrew nouns: נוֹתְנֵי and שֵׁם, respectively.⁴ The sacrifices of τράγοι appear in cultic contexts in the Pentateuch only in Num 7 as part of the sacrifices for the inauguration of the tabernacle.⁵

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¹ deSilva, 304; Johnson, Hebrews, 235-6; Koester, Hebrews, 409.
² Davidson, “Christ’s Entry,” 182-5.
³ Ibid., 183. Also, Westcott, 258; Spicq, L’épître aux Hébreux, 2:257. James Moffatt mistakenly says that the term μοσχων substitutes χιμάρων (121). See also, Lust, Eynikel, and Hauspie, comps., Greek-English Lexicon, 2:479, 516.
⁵ Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 452. In non-cultic contexts it appears also in the list of Jacob’s animals and in the divine promise of abundance (Gen 30:35;
Richard M. Davidson suggests, then, that the phrase “with the blood of goats and calves” (δι᾽ αἷματος τράγων καὶ μόσχων) is an allusion to the complex of events related to the inauguration of the covenant and not to the Day of Atonement. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that Heb 9:19 refers to the sacrifice of τράγοι and μόσχοι as part of the ritual for the inauguration of the Mosaic covenant.¹

Hebrews also refers to the sacrifices of τράγοι and ταύροι in Heb 9:13 and 10:4. In the latter verse, the sacrifices of these animals are referred to in the context of the ineffectiveness of the annual ritual of the Day of Atonement (10:3).² What is the relationship between the sacrifices of these two pairs of animals?

Paul Ellingworth argues that the references to these two pairs of animals (“blood of goats [τράγων] and calves [μόσχων]” in 9:12, 19 and “blood of goats [τράγων] and bulls [ταύρων]” in 9:13; 10:4) are synonyms and, thus, both refer to the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement: The phrase “goats and calves” (v. 12) becomes “goats and bulls” (ταύρων replaces μόσχων) in v. 13 because “the young bullock of Lev 16:3 could be

31:10, 12; Deut 32:15); see, Davidson, “Christ’s Entry,” 183, n. 24. In non-cultic contexts it translates either [��TextWriter] (Gen 31:10, 12; Deut. 32:14) or [_writtenTextEditor] (Gen 30:35; 32:15).

¹ The reading “καὶ τῶν τράγων” is probably original (see p. 33, n. 4). For a short discussion of the text, see Metzger, Textual Commentary, 599.

² Similarly, the Greek versions of Aquila (early 2d c. C.E.) and Symmachus (late 2d-early 3d c. C.E.) use the term τραγος instead of χιμαρος for the he-goat of Lev 16. Field, ed., 2:194. See especially the discussion in Young, “Day of Dedication,” 65. Also, Westcott, 258; Moffatt, 121; Spicq, L’épître aux Hébreux, 257. Regarding the versions of Aquila and Symmachus, see Porter, 1102.
called either μόσχος or ταύρος.”¹ This view faces the problem, however, that Heb 9:19 identifies one pair of these sacrificial animals as belonging to the ceremony of the inauguration of the covenant; therefore, if these references are synonyms, they cannot refer to the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement.

It seems to me, then, that we have two options.

First, if these two references to sacrificial animals are not synonyms, then Hebrews’ references to sacrificial animals is more sophisticated: The sacrifices of τράγος and μόσχος refer to the sacrifices for the Inauguration of the Mosaic covenant (9:12, 19) and the sacrifices of τράγος and ταύρος refer in general to all the sacrifices of the Israelite cult (9:13-14; 10:1-4). Similar general expressions referring to animal sacrifices can be found in Ps 50:13 (Ps 49:13 LXX; “Do I eat the flesh of bulls [ταύρων], or drink the blood of goats [τράγων]?”) and Isa 1:11 (“I do not delight in the blood of bulls [ταύρων], or of lambs [ἀρνῶν], or of goats [τράγων]”).² The sacrifice of τράγος and ταύρος in Heb 9:14 is mentioned together with the “ashes of a heifer.”³ Note that these ashes were not used on the Day of Atonement in particular,⁴ but their juxtaposition to the

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¹ Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 452.
³ The ashes of a red heifer were used to cleanse those who had incurred ritual contamination through contact with a corpse (Num 19; cf. Philo, Spec. Laws 1.262-72; Josephus, Ant. 4.78-81).
⁴ Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 249; Koester, Hebrews, 410. Although Heb 10:4 refers to “the blood of bulls and goats” in the context of the Day of Atonement (10:3), the Day of Atonement itself represents in this section all the sacrificial systems of the Israelite cult (cf. 10:1). See below section “Jesus’ ascension and the Day of
sacrifices of τραγοί and ταύροι may have had the intention of representing all the means of purification under the first covenant to which Jesus’ blood is contrasted as superior.  

“By grouping ‘the blood of goats and bulls’ and ‘the sprinkled ashes of a heifer,’ the writer implies that all the sacrifices of the old covenant were able to provide merely an external and symbolic removal of defilement” (emphasis mine).  

In this sense, Hebrews’ comparison of Jesus’ death to the sacrifice of “goats and calves” (9:11-12) has the purpose of identifying Jesus’ death as the inauguration of a new covenant (cf. 9:19). Hebrews’ comparison of Jesus’ death with the sacrifice of “goats and bulls” (9:13-14), then, would have the purpose of emphasizing the superiority of Jesus’ death over all the sacrificial systems of the Israelite cult (cf. 10:1-4).

Second, if the references to the sacrifices of these two pairs of animals are synonyms, both kinds of references denote all the animal sacrifices of the Israelite cult. In this case, then, the specific terms for neither pair of animals have the purpose of identifying a specific ritual, but refer in general to the animal sacrifices of the Israelite cult. Further specification of the ritual in question is made only through the context that Atonement.”

1 Note that the ashes of the red cow functioned as blood and when mixed with water became a “purification offering” (Num 19:9). This is because the ashes already contained blood. This is further emphasized by the fact that the ashes were made by burning a red cow with cedar wood and crimson yarn, all of which emphasized the color red (Num 19:6). See Gane, Leviticus, Numbers, 660; Jacob Milgrom, “The Paradox of the Red Cow (Num. XIX),” VT 31 (1981): 63.

2 Lane, Hebrews 9-13, 239. Thus, Jesus’ sacrifice seems to be compared in this passage (9:14) not to the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement in particular, but to all the sacrifices of the first covenant in general.
surrounds each reference to the sacrificial animals (e.g., Heb 9:19 [Inauguration of the covenant]).

Whether we accept option one or two, it seems clear that the references to the sacrificial animals in 9:12-14 do not have the intention of comparing Jesus’ death to the ritual of the Day of Atonement.

**Hebrews 9:11-14 Understands the Ascension as the Inauguration of the Ministry of the New Covenant**

This passage is considered by Albert Vanhoye (9:11-14)—especially the word Χριστός—the fulcrum or “keystone for the entire structure” of Hebrews.¹ Whether we agree with his judgment or not, we can agree that this passage strikes the theological core of the exposition of Hebrews.² According to this passage, Jesus accomplishes through his death and ascension to heaven what the first covenant institutions were not able to. The first covenant did not provide access to the presence of God because its institutions (priesthood, ritual, sanctuary) were not able to perfect the conscience of the worshiper (τὸν λατρεύοντα; Heb 9:8-10). Now, however, Jesus is able to cleanse the conscience of believers and habilitate them “to serve [λατρεύειν] the living God” (v. 14 NASB) because he has offered himself as a sacrifice on their behalf and has entered the heavenly


sanctuary as a high priest on their behalf. Thus, Jesus’ death and ascension inaugurate an age of forgiveness and direct access to God or—in cultic categories—Jesus’ sacrifice and entrance into the heavenly sanctuary inaugurates the new covenant which promised such forgiveness and access to God (Heb 8:8-12; 9:8-10).

This is what the author wants to say with the assertion that Jesus has arrived as the “high priest of the good things that have come” (9:11). The expression “good things” (ἀγαθά), which describes the benefits brought about by Jesus (also 10:1; cf. 13:21), anticipates the expression “eternal redemption” (αἰωνία λότρωσις) in 9:12. In the LXX, ἀγαθά is often applied to the promised land (Exod 3:8; Num 14:7; Deut 1:25; 8:1) and sometimes it was used as a noun to denote the eschatological gifts (Rom 10:15, 23).

1 In this sense, Heb 9:1-14 repeats and develops the idea introduced in 8:1-6 that “Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted through better promises.” See especially Long Westfall, 203-5.

2 This is based on the reading γενομένων supported by mss P† B D* 1739 itd syr(σ), h, (pal) geo, among others. The variant reading μελλόντων is supported by mss Ν A D2 l1vid 075 0150 33 81 itar, b, comp, vg cop sa, bo, fay arm, etc. Though both readings are well supported, the first “appears to have superior attestation on the score of age and diversity of text type.” Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 598. It is probable that μελλόντων is the result of assimilation to the expression τῶν μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν in 10:1. Thus, there is a growing tendency among interpreters to accept γενομένων as the superior reading. NA27; UBS4; Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*; Braun; Bruce; Buchanan; Cody, 138-41; Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 449; Héring; Hughes, *Hebrews*; Koester, *Hebrews*, 407-8; Kistemaker, “Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews”; Lane, *Hebrews* 9-13; Weiss; Westcott. Contra, Michel, *Hebräer*; Moffatt; Montefiore; Spicq, *L’épître aux Hébreux*.

3 In 10:1, ἀγαθά recapitulates σωτηρίας (9:28).
quoting Isa 52:7). It is probable that here it carries a comparative sense (“better things”) emphasizing, therefore, that what Jesus offers is better than what the first covenant was able to offer. In this sense, Jesus has arrived as the “high priest of the better things that have come,” that is, the new covenant and its institutions.

Jesus’ ascension to the heavenly sanctuary, then, inaugurates the new covenant. It is important to note in this connection that the heavenly sanctuary was central in the OT to God’s covenental relationship with Israel. Elias Brasil de Souza concluded in his study of the heavenly sanctuary/temple motif in the OT that

the impression emerges of a heavenly sanctuary/temple fully active in the covenental experience of ancient Israel. These covenental activities may be thus classified in three categories. First, the heavenly sanctuary/temple functioned as a surety for the covenant, as implied in Gen 28:1-11 and Exod 24:9-11. Second, the heavenly sanctuary functioned as a place where YHWH granted atonement and forgiveness to his people in the context of covenant transgression [e.g., Exod 32-34]. Third, the heavenly sanctuary/temple relates with the covenant inasmuch as it is depicted as the place wherein YHWH undertakes a covenant lawsuit against his people because of their breaking of the covenant [e.g., Mic 1:2-3].

Note, also, that the first covenant was consummated with a covenant meal where the 70 elders of Israel ascended to a certain distance from the top of the mountain and had a heavenly sanctuary/temple vision and with Moses’ ascension to the presence of God at the top of Sinai. Similarly, Jesus has ascended into the very presence of God to

\[\text{Ellingworth, } \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews}, 450.\]

\[\text{2 'Aγαθός has no regular comparative. The term κρείσσων (stronger, mightier, more powerful) is one of its substitutes which, in fact, constantly emphasizes in Hebrews the superiority of the new covenant (e.g., 7:19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24). Ibid.}\]

\[\text{3 de Souza, 490.}\]
consummate the new covenant on behalf of Christian believers.

This idea that Jesus’ sacrifice and ascension implies the inauguration of the new covenant and its superior blessings for believers is developed in 9:15-23, which compares Jesus’ death with the sacrifice for the inauguration of the new covenant.

Hebrews 9:15-23 describes Jesus’ sacrifice and ascension as the inauguration of a new covenant.

The interpretation of Jesus’ death as the sacrifice for the inauguration of the new covenant in 9:15-23 is the subject of debate. Most commentators see a semantic shift in the use of the word διαθήκη from the sense “covenant” to the sense “will/testament” in vv. 16-17 and back to the sense “covenant” in vv. 18-22.1 This view, however, faces several crippling difficulties.2

First, nowhere else in Hebrews does διαθήκη have the sense of testament.3 Thus, 

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1 It is argued that the mention of the “promised eternal inheritance” (τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν . . . τῆς αἰωνίου κληρονομίας) “provides the logical basis for a semantic shift that otherwise seems arbitrary.” Johnson, Hebrews, 241. Others who understand a semantic shift in vv. 16-17 include Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 253-6; Buchanan, 151; Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 462-3; Koester, Hebrews, 418, 424-6; Thomas G. Long, Hebrews, IBC, ed. Paul J. Achtemeier (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 1997), 99; Pfitzner, 131.


we should be cautious in identifying a shift in the use of this term. Second, certain peculiar expressions of 9:16-17 do not fit the understanding of διαθήκη as testament. For example, a literal translation of the clause διαθήκη γὰρ ἐπὶ νεκροῖς βεβαιά (v. 17a) is “for a διαθήκη is confirmed upon dead [bodies]” (emphasis mine).¹ The problem is that the plural νεκροῖς is awkward if the death of a testator is in view.² Third, wills or testaments in Greek, Egyptian, and Roman laws were ratified or validated (βέβαιω) not upon “dead bodies” but when they were written down, witnessed, and deposited with a notary.³ Therefore, it is difficult to understand in what sense Hebrews argues that a διαθήκη is confirmed upon dead bodies. Fourth, inheritance did not have to follow the death of the testator. In “Hellenistic testamentary practice, a testament disposition could take effect either at the testator’s death, as donatio, or immediately, as parental distribution inter vivos.”⁴ Thus, Hebrews’ argument that a διαθήκη “is not [μη’ποτε; lit. “never”] in force as long as the one who made it is alive” (v. 17) or that where there is a

¹ Hahn, “Covenant, Cult, and the Curse of Death,” 73.
² Similarly, v. 16b is awkward: ὃποι γὰρ διαθήκη, θάνατον ἀνάγκη φέρεσθαι τοῦ διαθεμένου (lit. “where there is a διαθήκη, it is necessary the death of the testator to be borne”). The only thing that the author had to say is that “where there is a covenant, it is necessary for the testator to die.”
⁴ John J. Hughes, 61-62. He refers to examples in Taubenschlag, 23; Wolff, 1:543.
διαθήκη, “there must of necessity [ἀνάγκη] be the death of the one who made it” (v. 16 NASB; emphasis mine) would be just plainly false if understood as referring to testamentary practice.\(^1\) Finally, a shift in the meaning of διαθήκη would obscure the argument because the concept of testament does not fit in the argument of the inauguration of a new covenant in Heb 8-10. Scott W. Hahn expresses this problem with clarity:

A “testament” simply is not a “covenant,” and it is hard to see how the analogy between the two has any validity. In a “testament,” one party dies and leaves an inheritance for another. In a “covenant,” a relationship is established between two living parties, often through a mediator. Testaments do not require mediators, and covenants do not require the death of one of the parties. Moreover, it is hard to understand either the “new” or the “old” covenants—as portrayed in Hebrews—as a “testament.” If the old covenant is understood as a “testament,” God would be the “testator”; yet it is absurd to think of God dying and leaving an inheritance to Israel. In the new covenant, Christ indeed dies, but he is a mediator (9:15; 12:24), not a “testator.” Moreover, he does not die in order to leave an inheritance to the Church, but rather to enter the inheritance himself (Heb 2:10-3:6).

Clearly, then, the mode of the inheritance of salvation in Hebrews is based on a Jewish covenantal and not a Greco-Roman testamentary model. Therefore, it is hard to see how the analogy the author draws in Heb 9:15-18 has any cogency.\(^2\)

In view of these problems, a few authors have decided to maintain the usual meaning of “covenant” for διαθήκη in vv. 16-17.\(^3\) This understanding is built on four

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\(^{1}\) Regarding Craig R. Koester’s reference to a papyrus death-notice as evidence that “legally people had to present evidence that the testator had died for a will to take effect” (Koester, Hebrews, 418, 425), Scott W. Hahn argues that “the papyrus cited does not actually mention a will or inheritance as being at issue in the notice of death.” Hahn, “Covenant, Cult, and the Curse of Death,” 74, n. 32. See also, John J. Hughes, 62-63.


\(^{3}\) E.g., John J. Hughes, 27-96; Lane, Hebrews 9-13, 226-52; George Milligan, The
facts regarding ANE covenant practice. Covenant making invariably implied (1) the swearing of an oath, (2) this oath was a conditional self-malediction or curse, (3) the self-malediction referred to the death of the covenant maker, and (4) this curse of death was often ritually enacted, often through the sacrifice of animals.

If we apply the covenantal background to vv. 16-17 it would produce the following reading. The assertion “Where a covenant is involved, the death of the one who made it must be introduced [lit. “borne”]” (v. 16) would refer to the death of the covenant maker as symbolically represented by the sacrificial animals. The assertion, “for a covenant is confirmed upon dead bodies” (v. 17a) would describe covenant-making practice. The assertion “since it [a covenant] is never in force while the covenant-maker lives” would be understood symbolically, in the sense “while the covenant-maker is still ritually alive, not yet having undergone the death represented by the sacrificial animals.”

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Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1899), 166-70; Pursiful, 77-79; Westcott, 298-302.


2 E.g., in Ezek 17:13-19 “oath” and “covenant” are in some cases interchangeable. For extra-biblical examples, see Hahn, “Covenant, Cult, and the Curse of Death,” 75-76.

3 Thus, the invocation of deities in covenant making. Ibid., 76-77.

4 Thus, the covenant curses of Lev 26 and Deut 28, and other biblical passages that refer explicitly to the transgression of a covenant (Deut 4:25-26; 17:2-7; Josh 7:10-15; 23:16; Jer 22:8-12; 34:18-21) and refer to its punishment as death or leading to death (Deut 31:16-17; Isa 33:8-12; Jer 11:10-16; Hos 7:13 [cf. 6:7]). Ibid., 77.


6 Ibid., 80.
This interpretation is not satisfactory either. First, covenants were not always ratified by the sacrifice of animals. Therefore, the author could not say that it was “necessary” to establish the ritual or symbolic death of the covenant maker to establish the covenant (v. 16).\(^1\) Second, this view understands the reference to the death of the testator in symbolic terms. It seems clear, however, that the author of Hebrews is speaking of the actual death of the covenant maker.\(^2\)

I have been convinced, however, by Scott W. Hahn’s argument that Heb 9:15-22 becomes clearly intelligible if we understand that the author is not referring here to covenant making in general but specifically to the first or Sinai Covenant which is understood as a covenant that has been breached and, thus, requires the penalty of death for the transgressors.\(^3\)

Hebrews 9:15 clearly explains that Jesus’ death had the purpose of redeeming believers “from the transgressions [\(\pi\alpha\rho\alpha\beta\lambda\sigma\varepsilon\omicron\nu\)] under the first covenant.” Verses 16-17 explain why Jesus’ death was necessary. Since this covenant was ratified with a ritual enactment of the curse of death (9:18-22; cf. Exod 24:1-11), the covenant-maker who transgressed the covenant must endure death. Thus, v. 16 should read: “Since there is a

\(^1\) “Covenants or contracts, of whatever sort, simply do not require the death of one of the parties.” Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 256.

\(^2\) Ibid.

\(^3\) The first covenant has been breached in the sense that the people of Israel did not meet their end of the agreement with God as established at Sinai (Exod 20-24) and renewed at Moab (Deut 29-30); therefore, their transgression has brought upon them the penalty of sin established in that covenant.
[breached] covenant, the death of the covenant-maker must [ἀνάγκη] be borne [φέρεσθαι].”¹ (Note that this translation does not do violence to the syntax or lexical meaning of the terms.)

Admittedly, at first sight, the second clause of the verse is circumlocutory, that is, it uses more words than necessary to express the simple idea that the covenant maker should die. He could have just said διαθέμενον ἀνάγκη ἀποθανεῖν (“the covenant-maker must die”). A closer look reveals, however, that there is probably a deeper intention in the circumlocution of the second clause. The construction θάνατον ἀνάγκη φέρεσθαι τοῦ διαθεμένου (“the death of the covenant-maker must be endured”) asserts not that the covenant-maker must die but that his death must be borne. This opens the possibility for a representative of the covenant-maker to bear/endure the death of the transgressor in his stead. This is what happened in the case of Jesus’ death. Jesus did not break the covenant (cf. 3:1-6; 4:15; 7:26-27) but he died as a representative of the covenant transgressors (i.e., as their high priest) so as to redeem them from the penalty of death (9:15). In fact, the author’s use of φέρω is probably influenced by the use of ἀναφέρω in Isa 53 which is clearly alluded in Heb 9:28.² A similar use of φέρω, but in

¹ “Ὅπου is taken here as indicating cause or reason “with special reference to a set of relevant circumstances.” L&N §89.35; also, BDAG, 717. This adverb is clearly causal in 1 Cor 3:3-4. A causal sense is also probably appropriate in Heb 6:20; 10:18.

On the other hand, φέρεσθαι carries its normal sense “to bear, to endure.” L&N §90.64; BDAG, 1052, meaning 9.

² Hahn, “Covenant, Cult, and the Curse of Death,” 83. Note that according to Lev 10:17 the priest must eat the meat of the sin offering so that he may “bear” (גָּלֹה) the guilt (מִדְרֶשׁ) of the people. “To bear the guilt” means that a person is culpable, therefore,
the opposite direction, is found in Heb 13:13. There the author invites believers to respond to Jesus’ sacrifice on their behalf (13:12) by “bearing (φέροντες) his reproach” (13:13 NASB); that is, by enduring an abuse that belongs to another, in this case to Jesus.

Hebrews 9:17a elaborates on this concept: διαθήκη γὰρ ἐπὶ νεκροὶς βεβαιά (“For a [breached] covenant is confirmed upon dead [bodies]”).¹ This passage asserts, then, that the only way to enforce a covenant after it has been breached is to enforce its punishment. Thus, the execution of the penalty of death upon Jesus attests to the validity of the first covenant (cf. 2:1-2). The following clause (17b) confirms this idea: ἐπεὶ μὴ ποτε ἴσχυεν ὅτε ζῇ ὁ διαθήμενος (“for it [i.e., the breached covenant] is never in force while the one who made it lives” NASB). This expresses the principle that a covenant created under the penalty of death is not in force (when breached) unless that “deserve[s] and may suffer any consequences.” Gane, Leviticus, Numbers, 196. Thus, the culpability remains on the priest—who is immune to its consequences—until the Day of the Atonement where he transfers the culpability to Azazel’s goat (ibid.). According to Exod 34:7, God forgives in the same way by “bearing” (καρτίζομαι) the “guilt” (χείριζομαι) of the sinner. Thus, the priest who eats the meat of the sin offering participates with God (of whom he is a representative) in the expiation of the sin of the offerer by “bearing his guilt.” Likewise, the Servant of the Lord has “borne” (καρτίζομαι) our infirmities (Isa 53:4). See ibid., 195-7; esp. idem, Cult and Character, 91-105; Olafsson.

This throws light on the argument of Hebrews. Jesus, as the mediator and guarantee of the covenant (Heb 7:22; see section “Jesus Embodies God’s Oath which Confirms God’s Promises to Believers”), has “borne” our culpability and thus endured the punishment for our transgression of the covenant, that is, he literally bore our death (φέρω; Heb 9:16; cf. 9:28).

¹ Νεκροὶς is used as a substantive here. It refers to dead persons or corpses. See BDAG, 667-8. It is plural because it refers to the people as covenant makers who, after breaking the covenant, should endure death.
penalty is enforced.\textsuperscript{1} Thus, Scott W. Hahn shows that the flow of thought of 9:16-22 can be paraphrased in this way:

A broken [breached] covenant requires the death of the covenant-maker (Heb 9:16-17); hence, the first covenant liturgically portrayed the death of the covenant-maker by bloody sacrifice (9:18-21). Nearly everything about the first covenant was covered in blood, representing the necessity of death for the forgiveness of transgressions of the covenant (Heb 9:22, cf. 9:15).\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{1} Hahn, “Covenant, Cult, and the Curse of Death,” 84.

\textsuperscript{2} Ibid., 85. This may have important consequences for the argument of Hebrews which we can only adumbrate here. The first covenant was breached at the golden calf apostasy (Exod 32:1-14). God wanted to enforce the covenant at that time by destroying the people (v. 10), but Moses interceded for them, invoking the oath God had sworn to Abraham that he would bless his offspring (Gen 22:16-18; quoted in Heb 6:13-15). Thus, God could not enforce the covenant and at the same keep his oath to Abraham. In response God instituted the Levitical priesthood (Exod 32:25-34) and promised that a time would come to punish the people for their sin (v. 34). This implies that the covenant was not enforced then; but was held in abeyance until the time for its enforcement.

Meanwhile, according to the author of Hebrews, the law was instituted on the basis of the Levitical priesthood (Heb 7:11). Hebrews is referring here to its cultic aspect that prefigured Jesus’ death and ministry on our behalf (cf. Haber, 105-24; Lehne, 119). This law was only “a shadow of the good things to come and not the true form of these realities” (10:1). This law, however, was “weak and useless” (7:18) because it could not perfect the conscience of the people (9:9), instead it was more like a pedagogical apparatus (“a shadow of the things to come”) that only reminded the people of their covenant violation (Heb 10:3). On the other hand, it pointed forward to the “heavenly realities” (which include the heavenly sanctuary and Jesus’ ministry in it according to the argument of Hebrews) that would be able to provide “perfection.”

Thus, Hebrews seems to understand that the penalties have not been enforced upon the people because of God’s oath to Abraham. That is why he identifies the readers as the “descendants of Abraham” (2:16) and refers to that oath as part of the basis for their confidence of salvation (6:13-15; in this context it is tempting to consider that God’s oath to Abraham is one of the two things “in which it is impossible that God would prove false” [v. 15]. The other is God’s oath to Jesus in Ps 110:4). Note, however, that that oath was the result of Abraham’s offering of Isaac. Hebrews considers the offering of Isaac and his deliverance from death a “parable” (11:19). It is not difficult to infer that it is a parable of the death and resurrection of Jesus. If this is correct, we may conclude that Jesus’ sacrifice is the place where two things happen at the same time. First, it is the place where the first covenant is finally enforced (9:16-17). God discharges the penalties
Thus, Jesus’ sacrifice functions at two levels. It redeems from the penalties incurred under the first covenant—i.e., it has an expiatory function—and mediates a new covenant with better promises—i.e., it has a bonding function.¹

Hebrews’ comparison of Jesus’ death with the sacrifice for the ratification of the Mosaic covenant implies that the latter (Exod 24) had also both bonding and expiatory functions. It is possible, however, that Hebrews is not providing a Christological revision of the event at Sinai—as it is commonly understood among Hebrews scholars—but that that sacrifice already included both aspects.² The covenant sacrifice of Exod 24 had primarily a bonding function. In other words, the sacrifice of “young calves” (μοσχάρια) in Exod 24 established a bond of blood between God and Israel and a curse of death for the transgressor. Commenting on the sacrifice of young calves in Exod 24, William H. C. Propp comments:

> Because the blood comes from a common source, it symbolizes the horizontal, literal kinship of all Israelites and also their vertical, fictive kinship with their

of the transgression of the first covenant upon Jesus. Second, it is also the place where God fulfills his oath to Abraham to bless his descendants by making possible, through the sacrifice of Jesus, the believer’s entrance into the inheritance (9:15). See Hahn, “Covenant, Cult, and the Curse of Death,” 85-88.

¹ Both views are introduced together in 9:15; cf. 10:29; 12:24; 13:20.

² On Heb 9:18-22 as a Christological revision of the OT event, see, e.g., D’Angelo, Moses, 243-9; Haber, 108-12. For a list on the ways in which Hebrews deviates from the account of Exod 24, see Moffatt, 129-30.

Thus, if the covenant sacrifice of Exod 24 did not include a redemptive aspect in addition to its covenantal bonding, Hebrews sees in the use of blood a prefiguration of the expiatory function of Jesus’ sacrifice in addition to its bonding function because in the cult of the first covenant the shedding of blood had mainly an expiatory function—as Hebrews points out (Heb 9:22).
Heavenly Father. Herodotus 3.8 describes a similar Semitic ritual whereby parties to an oath mingle their blood on sacred pillars, presumably symbolizing their fictive kinship. In a Greek parallel, Aeschylus *Seven Against Thebes* 43-47 describes heroes taking an oath by touching bull’s blood collected in a shield (cf. also Xenophon *Anabasis* 2.2.9).

Covenantal bloodletting has another function: it represents the sanguinary fate that awaits the traitor to the pact. In 24:8, sprinkling the people is as much as to say, “if you do not keep the Covenant, your blood is forfeit like this blood” (Saadiah *apud* ibn Ezra). It follows that the blood sprinkled against the altar in v 6 constitutes Yahweh’s own bleeding wound. He, too, must keep his promises.¹

He continues, however, arguing that the covenant sacrifice of Exod 24 may have included a redemptive dimension as well.² It is worthwhile to quote him at length again:

Apropos of circumcision and the paschal rite, I have had occasion to describe the Arab rite of *fidyafedu* ‘redemption,’ wherein, during rites of passage, blood is applied to persons or things—originally to repel demons. In Exodus 24, “Covenant blood” has a similar purifying, protective function. According to Zech 9:11, for example, “covenant blood” liberates captives from “the pit” (i.e., exile).

Exodus 24 may in fact be read as the mirror image of the *Pesah*. The blood ritual

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² Moshe Weinfeld notes that the cutting of the animals that often accompanied the making of a covenant (Gen 15, Exod 24, Ps 50) was not only a symbolic act denoting the fate that will befall the one who transgresses the covenant, it is also considered sacrificial and, thus, subordinate to the laws of the cult. M. Weinfeld, “תָּבִיא,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, trans. John T. Willis, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1975), 2:262-3; Hasel, “The Animal Rite of Gen 15.”

It is noteworthy that the “blood of the covenant”—which ratified the first covenant (תָּבִיא תְּבִיאוֹ; Exod 24:8)—is mentioned in Zech 9:11 as the basis of God’s redemption of Israel (תָּבִיאוֹת תְּבִיאוֹת; lit. “because the blood of your covenant [i.e., of my covenant with you], I will set your prisoners free”) and not as the basis of Israel’s punishment. See Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah* 9-14, 139-40. Cf. Ezek 16:59-63.
in Exodus 12 initiates Israel’s freedom; the blood ritual of Exodus 24 terminates it. Released from involuntary servitude to Pharaoh, Israel voluntarily enters Yahweh’s servitude. (Compare 21:6, where a man becomes a permanent slave by standing “before the Deity” and having blood drawn from his ear.) Later Judaism would apply the phrase of 24:8, dam bêtîr ‘Covenant blood,’ to the surgical operations whereby each Jewish boy separately enters into the Covenant, symbolically dramatizing the conceit that all later generations stood with their ancestors at Sinai (see already Deut 5:2-4; 29:13-14). The people will finally leave Sinai after making the second Pesah.

In 19:6, Yahweh promised to make Israel “a priests’ kingdom and a holy nation.” The prerogative of holy priesthood is to approach God without suffering harm. The blood of Exodus 24 functions like the blood applied to the priest in 29:20, 21: it is a symbolic wound that confers protection from the divine presence. From Sinai onward, all Israel is Yahweh’s “priests’ kingdom and holy nation.” In confirmation that the rite of passages has been efficacious, Exodus 24 describes Israel’s representative elders beholding God unscathed.

Thus, for William H. C. Propp, the sacrifice of Exod 24 has three functions: It is a sacrifice that consummates (1) the covenantal bond between YHWH and Israel, (2) the redemption of Israel from servitude from Egypt, and (3) consecrates the nation to priesthood.

Note that Targum Onqelos interprets also the sacrifice of Exod 24 as providing atonement. It translates Exod 24:8 in this way: “Moses took the blood and sprinkled (it) on the altar as an atonement for the people. He said, ‘This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you concerning all these things’” (emphasis mine). This is very significant because—as I mentioned above—Jesus’ death as a covenant sacrifice both mediates a new covenant and redeems from transgressions under the first covenant.

1 Propp, 309. He actually makes a reference to Heb 9:19-22 in this context.

2 Israel Drazin, Targum Onkelos to Exodus: An English Translation of the Text with Analysis and Commentary ([Denver, Colo.]: Ktav, Center for Judaic Studies University of Denver and Society for Targumic Studies, 1990), 238.
Hebrews includes, however, two other dimensions that we need to explore. Jesus’ new covenant sacrifice implies as well the consecration of the heavenly sanctuary and of the believers as priests.

The inauguration of the new covenant includes the consecration of the heavenly sanctuary

It is important to note in this connection that Hebrews’ description of the inauguration of the first covenant deviates from the account of Exod 24:1-11 in several respects.

Hence not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment had been told to all the people by Moses in accordance with the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the scroll itself and all the people, saying, “This is the blood of the covenant that God has ordained for you.” And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. (Heb 9:18-21)

Exodus 24 refers to the sacrifices of μοσχάρια (“young bulls”) but Hebrews to the sacrifices of μόσχων (“calves”) and τράγων (“goats”). Hebrews inserts “with water and scarlet wool and hyssop.” Exodus 24 does not refer to the sprinkling of “the scroll.” Hebrews changes ἰδοὺ τὸ αἷμα . . . (“Behold, the blood . . .”) to τοῦτο τὸ αἷμα . . . (“This is the blood . . .”). Hebrews follows a later Jewish view (e.g., Josephus Ant 3.8.6) that Moses used blood to sprinkle the tent and the vessels used for worship, but Exod

1 For the reading “και τῶν τράγων,” see p. 33, n. 4.

2 Luke T. Johnson mentions five other ways in which the explicit quotation of Exod 24:8 differs from the LXX. He suggests that the author of Hebrews is consciously or unconsciously accommodating Moses’ words to those of Jesus. Johnson, Hebrews, 241.
40:9-10 and Lev 8:10-11 refer to the use of oil.\(^1\) The most striking deviation is, however, that Hebrews merges the ratification ceremony of the first covenant with the ceremony for the consecration of the tent found in Num 7:1.\(^2\)

These deviations, however, are important for the argument of Hebrews. They make possible the description of the sacrifice of Christ as a complex event that included—in addition to its bonding and expiatory functions (see previous section)—the consecration of the heavenly sanctuary (9:23) and the inauguration of the believers’ priestly access to the presence of God (10:19-23).\(^3\)

\(^1\) Moffatt, 129-30. For further analysis, see D’Angelo, Moses, 243-9; Haber, 108-12.

\(^2\) “Even if the author of Hebrews is not trying to suggest that the consecration of the tent took place as part of the covenant ceremony, he certainly intends it to be understood as an extension of that ceremony.” D’Angelo, Moses, 244.

\(^3\) The building of a sanctuary was an integral part of the covenant between God and Israel. It was ordered in the context of the establishment of the covenant (Exod 25) and had the purpose of providing a residence for God in the midst of its people (Exod 25:8) and as a means of communication (v. 22). This was accomplished with the inauguration of the sanctuary (Lev 9:23-24; Num 7:89).

Mary Rose D’Angelo has suggested that the inclusion of the consecration of the sanctuary in the inauguration of the covenant ceremony may agree with the description of Moses’ vision at Mount Sinai (Exod 25:40, quoted in Heb 8:6). Ibid., 231-6. According to Hebrews, the vision was given when Moses “was about to erect [ἐπίτελεὶν] the tent” (Heb 8:6). This explanation of the circumstances of the vision connects the inauguration of the covenant and the building of the tent. (I remain unconvinced by D’Angelo’s argument that “Hebrews does not mean to cite Ex. 25.40 in 8.5 but rather refers to another oracle, or a repetition of this oracle on another occasion.” Moses, 234.) She argues, however, that the vision referred not only to the building of the tent, but also to its consecration. She argues that the verb ἐπίτελεὶν may mean “to complete, finish, or accomplish” (a building in this case; e.g., 1 Esd 4:55); or, “discharge a religious duty, celebrate.” Ibid., 233. Cf. LSJ, 665. In fact, Heb 9:6 uses ἐπίτελοῦντες to refer to the rites performed by the priests in the tent. From this she argues that what Moses saw in the vision included instructions for building as well as performance of the rituals. In this
Thus, the author of Hebrews extrapolates from his description of the inauguration of the first covenant and the tent with blood that there was a need of better sacrifices for the “heavenly things”:

Thus it was necessary for the sketches of the heavenly things to be purified with these [τούτοις] rites, but the heavenly things themselves need better sacrifices than these. (Heb 9:23)

The problem of this passage is that it describes the heavenly things as in need of cleansing. Why would they need to be cleansed?¹

A majority of commentators understand this cleansing in one way or another as not referring to heaven itself. For example, Crysostom and many others identified the “heavenly things” with the church.² But this idea is little warranted by the context. Similarly, Harold W. Attridge considers that the “heavenly things” represents the conscience.³ This is appealing because the cleansing of the conscience is clearly referred to in Heb 9:9, 14 and in the ultimate sense the cleansing of the “heavenly things” implies the cleansing of sins committed by humans. The spatial language of v. 24, however, suggests that Hebrews is referring to heaven itself.⁴ Others allow that this passage refers to the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. They argue that because sin affects all sense, what Moses saw in the vision was not only the “sketch and shadow” of the heavenly sanctuary but also those rituals which included the consecration of the tent.

¹ Ceslas Spicq considers the idea that heavenly things need cleansing as nonsense. L’épître aux Hébreux, 267.

² See Bruce; Montefiore; Vanhoye, Old Testament Priests, 205.

³ Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews.

⁴ For a critique of this view see, Johnsson, “Defilement/Purification,” 94-95.
creation, the purification provided by Christ’s sacrifice extends to all creation—including heaven.¹

In trying to understand this passage, we need to notice first that Hebrews refers to the inauguration of the Mosaic tabernacle as a purification ritual. Note its description of the inauguration of the first sanctuary: “It was necessary for the sketches of the heavenly things [i.e., “the tent and all the vessels used in worship” (v. 21)] to be purified [καθαρίζεσθαι] with these rites” (v. 23, emphasis mine). Thus, the first question we need to answer is, in what sense was the inauguration of the first sanctuary a cleansing?

The inauguration of the Mosaic sanctuary was a complex event (Lev 8; cf. Exod 29, 40; Num 7).² The ritual consisted of three stages:³ (1) anointing the sanctuary and the high priest (Lev 8:6-13), (2) the offering of sacrifices, and (3) anointing of the priests.⁴

¹ Koester, Hebrews, 421. Also, Bénétreau, L’épître; Dunnill, 232; Johnson, Hebrews, 243; Lane, Hebrews 9-13.

² Exod 29 is a prescriptive text and Lev 8 is a description of how the ritual was carried out. Gane, Leviticus, Numbers, 162; Gorman, 103-105. For a study of Lev 8, see Klingbeil, 117-323.

³ The ritual lasted seven days. All the sacrifices were repeated on each of these days (Exod 29:35-37). See Milgrom, Leviticus 1-16, 541. For the structure of the ritual see Gane, Leviticus, Numbers, 163-4; Klingbeil, 111-4; Milgrom, Leviticus 1-16, 542-4. Cf. Gorman, 113-5.

⁴ The first stage included the (1) washing of Aaron and his sons with water (v. 6), (2) dressing of Aaron in his high priestly regalia (vv. 7-9), (3) anointing of the sanctuary and its utensils (v. 10), (4) anointing of the altar and its utensils (v. 11), (5) anointing of
This complex event alternated rites of purification with rites of consecration and blended them in the sprinkling of oil and blood on the priests and their vestments (Lev 8:30).  

This alternation is most clearly seen in the purification and consecration of the altar. Exodus 29:36-37 instructed explicitly: “Also you shall offer a sin offering for the altar, when you make atonement for it, and shall anoint it, to consecrate it.” This was 

Aaron’s head (v. 12), and (6) the dressing of Aaron’s sons in their priestly vestments (v. 13).

The second stage included (1) a purification offering (LXX μόσχος, young bull) on behalf of the priests by which the altar is purified and consecrated (vv. 14-17), (2) a burnt offering (LXX κριός, ram) on behalf of the priests (vv. 18-21), and (3) an ordination sacrifice (LXX κριός, ram) on behalf of the priests by which they are consecrated by the application of blood on the lobe of the right ear, the thumb of the right hand, and the big toe of the right foot of Aaron and his sons. Parts of the sacrifice with some cakes, oil, and wafers were placed on Aaron and his sons and then elevated (vv. 22-29).

The third stage consisted of a second anointing with blood from the altar mixed with oil and includes Aaron and his vestments and Aaron’s sons and their vestments (v. 30).

1 The purification aspect of the ritual included washing of Aaron and his sons (Lev 8:6), a purification sacrifice for the altar (vv. 14-17), and a burnt offering sacrifice (vv. 18-21). In fact, however, the whole ceremony was considered “to make atonement” for them (Lev 8:34). The consecration aspect of the ritual included dressing the high priest (8:7-9), anointing the tent and its utensils, the altar and its utensils, and Aaron’s head (vv. 10-12), the dressing of the priests (v. 13), the sacrifice of the ram of consecration (vv. 22-29), and the sprinkling of the priests and their vestments with oil and blood (v. 30).

2 This poses a problem. Leviticus 8:10-12 refers to the anointing of the altar before its purification (8:15). A closer look shows, however, that Lev 8:15 interprets the manipulation of the blood of the purification sacrifice as accomplishing the (1) purification and (2) consecration in the appropriate order, though it is not clear what its relationship to the anointing with oil mentioned in v. 11 is. (Cf. Lev 16:18-19 where the re-consecration of the altar on the Day of Atonement by the application of blood and sprinkling had the same purpose.) For different solutions to the problem see Klingbeil, 264-70; Milgrom, Leviticus 1-16, 522-3.
carried out—according to Lev 8:15—by Moses when he daubed the blood on the horns of the altar and then poured the rest on the base of the altar, thus purifying and consecrating it.¹

What were the tabernacle and priests purified from? This is a difficult question and a variety of solutions have been suggested.² Most likely, no specific sins were in view. Roy E. Gane argues to this effect: “Since the altar was in the process of becoming qualified for its function, it was not ready for expiation of specific sins or ritual impurities of the priests or anyone else.”³ More likely, purification here is inherent to the consecration process itself and implies preparation to enter a higher state of holiness but does not imply purification from previous specific acts of contamination.⁴ “The theological implication is that outside Yahweh practically everything is under the influence of impurity. Everything or every person who comes into contact with Yahweh must go through a cleansing ritual.”⁵ Cleansing is part of the habilitation of the tent and

¹ Similarly, Moses daubed blood on the lobe of the right ear, the thumb of the right hand, and the big toe of the right foot of the priests (v. 22-23), arguably to purify them (see Klingbeil, 290-95; Milgrom, Leviticus 1-16, 528-9), and sprinkled them with oil and blood to consecrate them (Lev 8:30). The parallelism between the blood ritual for the altar and the priests is made more evident in Ezek 43:20 where the blood is applied to the altar “on its four horns, and on the four corners of the ledge, and on the border round about; thus you shall cleanse it and make atonement for it,” corresponding to the right lobes, thumbs, and big toes of the priests. Milgrom, Leviticus 1-16, 529. Cf. Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, 433.

² See Milgrom, Leviticus 1-16, 521-2.

³ Gane, Leviticus, Numbers, 164.

⁴ See also, Milgrom, Leviticus 1-16, 541.

⁵ Angel Manuel Rodriguez, Substitution in the Hebrew Cultus (Andrews
its ministers for the service or worship of God.

Interestingly, the idea of cleansing was also closely associated with the inauguration of the future sanctuary in Ezekiel. The book refers to the inauguration of the altar following closely the instructions of Exod 29:36-37 (cf. Lev 8:15): “Seven days shall they make atonement for the altar and cleanse it, and so consecrate it” (Ezek 43:26, cf. vv. 19-27). This passage contains links to Ezek 45:18-20, which refers to the cleansing of the sanctuary. It is not clear, however, if this purification presupposes specific acts of contamination. The passage says the following:1

“Thus says the Lord GOD: In the first month, on the first day of the month, you shall take a young bull without blemish, and purify the sanctuary. The priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering and put it on the doorposts of the temple, the four corners of the ledge of the altar, and the posts of the gate of the inner court. You shall do the same on the seventh day of the month for anyone who has sinned through error or ignorance; so you shall make atonement for the temple.”

The event referred to in this passage is the subject of debate. Some see here Ezekiel’s answer to the annual Day of Atonement of Lev 16.2 Daniel I. Block argues, however, that Ezekiel refers here to “a one-time event, analogous to, if not associated with, the inaugural decontamination of the altar described in 43:18-27.”3 If this is the


1 Block, Ezekiel 25-48, 662-4.

2 Allen, Ezekiel 20-48, 266; Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, 482. Note that the LXX places the second cleansing (Ezek 45:20) not seven days after the first day of the first month, but in the seventh month on the first day of the month, thus, closer to the date of the Day of Atonement—though not precisely on it. It is improbable, however, that this reading reflects the original intention. Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, 482-3.

3 Block, Ezekiel 25-48, 664.
case, this passage described the inauguration of the future temple as an act of purification.¹

In early Judaism, the cleansing of the temple was integral to its inauguration especially because it presupposed previous transgressions.² The dedication of the temple

¹ I have mentioned (see above section “Ezekiel”) that Ezek 45 has an intriguing similarity to Hezekiah’s re-inauguration of the temple (2 Chr 29). See Japhet, 922; Tuell, *I & 2 Chronicles*, 214. Hezekiah’s cleansing and re-consecration of the temple was carried out in the first month of the first year of his reign (v. 3) and was preparatory for the Passover that was celebrated one month later (2 Chr 30). The Passover was celebrated in the second month, instead of the first, because the priests (and the house) had not been consecrated on time for the Passover (2 Chr 30:3). (Similarly, the Passover was kept after the reparation of the temple in the time of Josiah [2 Chr 34-35]. Similarly, the celebration of the inauguration of the first temple by Solomon probably also included the celebration of the Feast of Booths [2 Chr 7:8-10], Japhet, 611-3.)

In the case of Ezekiel this seems to be the case. The cleansing of the temple is ordered to be carried out on the first day of the first month (cf. Exod 40:2) and is, arguably, preparatory for the celebration of the Passover (Ezek 45:21-24).

² Regarding the inauguration of temples in the late Roman republic and the early empire, this was accomplished through an act of dedicatio and consecratio. The first term indicated the “surrender of an object into divine ownership, the latter its transformation into a rēs sacra (‘thing consecrated’).” *The Oxford Dictionary of the Classical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), s.v. “dedicatio.” (These two terms were used synonymously, however, since the late Republic. See also Christa Frateantonio, “Consecratio,” *Brill’s New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World*, ed. Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider, vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 698-9; idem, “Dedicatio,” *Brill’s New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World*, ed. Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider, vol. 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 167.) The ceremony consisted mainly of the pronunciation of a formula in which the dedicant transferred ownership to the divinity. For a fuller description of a dedicatio, see PW, s.v. “dedicatio.”

The performance of purifications, however, was closely related with new beginnings. A ceremony of purification was called lustrātiō. The most important was the lustrātiō of the Roman people as the conclusion of a census performed every five years (from where it comes the word “lustrum”) and was related with new beginnings. “The ceremony excluded evil . . . but it also denoted a new beginning, esp. for the Roman people at the census or for an army when a new commander arrived or when two armies were joined together.” *The Oxford Dictionary of the Classical World*, s.v. “lustration.”
after the return from exile—which was also preparatory for the Passover according to Ezra 6:14-22\(^1\)—included a purification of the people as the sin offerings of 12 male goats for the 12 tribes of Israel indicate (6:17).\(^2\) Likewise, the dedication of the temple in 1 Macc 4:36-59, after the atrocities of Antiochus IV, also relates both the cleansing and consecration of the temple: ἱδοὺ συνετρίβησαν οἱ ἐχθροὶ ἡμῶν ἀναβώμεν καθαρίσαι τὰ ἁγιά καὶ ἐγκαινίσαι (“See, our enemies are crushed; let us go up to cleanse the sanctuary and dedicate it,” emphasis mine). This celebration was the origin of Hanukkah or festival of dedication (ἐγκαίνια; cf. John 10:22).\(^3\) Finally, the Temple Scroll (11Q19

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\(^1\) The temple was finished “on the third day of the month of Adar” (Ezra 6:15) which was the 12th month. The Passover was celebrated on the 14th day of the first month (v. 19). Thus, it is not difficult to conceive that the inauguration of the temple was carried out on the first day of the first month. See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary*, OTL, ed. Peter Ackroyd and others (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster, 1988), 128-31.


\(^3\) VanderKam, “Dedication,” 2:123-5. Jesus would later identify himself in the context of this festival as “the one whom the Father has sanctified [ἡγιάσεν; cf. Num 7:1] and sent into the world.”

James C. Vanderkam has suggested that we should understand the narrative of John 10:22-39 in the context of this feast. He suggests that Jesus’ assertion “The Father and I are one” (v. 30) was pregnant with meaning because the Jews would remember on Hanukkah the blasphemies of Antiochus IV who proclaimed himself “god manifest” and, as a result, they would try to stone Jesus: “Jesus’ unbelieving audience . . . sees in the divine Son only another blasphemer who, like the Seleucid king, claimed to be god. Perhaps it is also no coincidence that just two verses before the notice about Hanukkah [vv. 20, 22] one reads: ‘Many of them said: “He has a demon, and he is mad . . .”’ (10:20: the word is μαλακτεταί). Is this charge meant to remind one of Antiochus whom some considered a madman (μαλακτετος)?” “John 10 and the Feast of the Dedication,” in
or 11QT\(^a\)) also juxtaposes purification and consecration aspects in the inauguration ritual (11Q19 XV, 16-18; cf. Exod 29:10; Lev 8:14).\(^1\)

Thus, Hebrews’ reference to the inauguration of the first sanctuary as a purification ritual is not awkward.\(^2\) The flow of the argument suggests that the author is describing here an antitypical day of inauguration and not an antitypical Day of Atonement.\(^3\) Hebrews introduces 9:23 with the coordinating conjunction ou=n

\[\text{References}\]

\(^{1}\) The ritual for the consecration of the priests and dedication of the altar is described in 11Q19 XV, 3-XVI, 4. For differences in the consecration ritual presented in the Temple Scroll from Exod 29 and Lev 8, see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 561-6; Yigael Yadin, ed., *The Temple Scroll*, 3 vols., English ed. (Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society, the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the Shrine of the Book, 1983), 91-96.

\(^{2}\) This answers the objection that this passage speaks of “purification” not “inauguration.” Johnsson, “Defilement/Purification,” 96. There is no contradiction. The simple fact that the author of Hebrews refers to the inauguration of the first tent as the purification of “the sketches of the heavenly things” shows that he refers to the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary as a purification as well. Note that purity is a prerequisite to holiness. Because impurity excludes holiness there cannot be consecration of an object that has not been purified first. See especially Georg Gäbel, *Die Kulttheologie des Hebräerbriefes: Ein exegetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Studie*, WUNT, ed. Jörg Frey, no. 212 (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 2006), 420-24.

\(^{3}\) Those who hold this view include Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 477: “The ‘purification’ of the sanctuary, whether the earthly or the heavenly one, does not necessarily imply any previous ‘impurity’: it is a consecratory and inaugural rite.” Also, Spicq, *L’épître aux Hébreux*, 2:267. Philip E. Hughes: “There is much to attract in this proposal, which has both simplicity and strength.” Hughes, *Hebrews*, 380. Also, Gäbel, 420-24; Wolfgang Kraus, *Der Tod Jesu als Heiligtumsweihe: Eine Untersuchung zum Umfeld der Sühnevorstellung in Römer 3,25-26a*, WMANT, ed. Ferdinand Hahn and Odil Hannes Steck, no. 66 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1991), 387-8. For
(“therefore”) to signal the drawing of inferences from the preceding context.

Furthermore, the demonstrative pronoun τοῦτος refers back to the inauguration sacrifices described in 9:15-22. In other words, “Moses’ inauguration of the covenant has become the antitype of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, which must be cleansed with better sacrifices than these, that is, through the entry of Christ into the holy of holies in his own self-offering with his own blood.”¹

I want to suggest that we need to understand Jesus’ cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary (9:23) in the context of the double function of Jesus’ sacrifice regarding the inauguration of the new covenant. Jesus’ sacrifice both inaugurates a new covenant (bonding function) and redeems from “the transgressions under the first covenant” (expiation function, 9:15). Thus, regarding the heavenly sanctuary, Jesus’ sacrifice both inaugurates the heavenly sanctuary and cleanses it from transgressions.² The inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary is constitutive of the inauguration of the new covenant (cf. 9:1, 11) and its cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary essential to the redemption from transgressions promised by the new covenant (9:22; cf. 8:8-12).³

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other proponents, see Spicq, L’Épître aux Hébreux, 2:267.

¹ D’Angelo, Moses, 247. It is interesting, in this context, that though the Pentateuch does not refer to Moses’ entrance into the sanctuary on the occasion of its inauguration (though it is presupposed, cf. Exod 40), Philo does draw the picture of Moses’ entrance into the sanctuary in the context of the inauguration (Moses 2.153).

² In this sense Craig R. Koester is correct when he concludes that “since sin affects all creation, Christ’s work extends to all creation,” including the heavenly sanctuary. Hebrews, 421.

³ For a study of how the expiation of transgression implies the cleansing of the
Hebrews, however, emphasizes in 9:23 not the inauguration aspect of Jesus’ sacrifice and ascension, but the cleansing aspect. That is why the author decided to refer to Jesus’ sacrifice as accomplishing the cleansing (καθαρίζειν) of “the heavenly things.”¹ This refers back to the redemption from the transgression committed under the first covenant (9:15). This is confirmed in 10:18 where ἁφεσις is used absolutely—in a statement that epitomizes the argument thus far—to refer to the forgiveness of sin promised in the new covenant of Jer 31:31-34. (Note that the καθαρίζειν of the heavenly sanctuary [v. 23] parallels the ἁφεσις of v. 22.)² Thus, the important thing about the inauguration of the new covenant for the author of Hebrews is that it provides forgiveness of sin (ἁφεσις), while the first covenant could not. He will explain in 9:24-10:18 that Jesus’ ministry in the heavenly sanctuary accomplishes this in two phases. First, Jesus will “appear in the presence of God” in order to “remove sin by the sacrifice of himself” (ἐἰς ἀῤῥητῶν [τῆς] ἁμαρτίας, 9:25-26). Second, he will “appear a second time . . . to

heavenly sanctuary in the sense that there has been a tainting of God’s justice and holiness, see Gane, Cult and Character, chaps. 14-16. This work expands on the original insight of Jacob Milgrom that theodicy is foundational to the Israelite expiatory system. Jacob Milgrom observes about this work: “[Gane’s] book is a marvel of close reading and impeccable logic. . . . [It] is the first major critique of my work, and I am immensely happy and proud that it was done by my student and that my contribution is so comprehensively acknowledged. . . . It is a major work and will be the standard for a long time” (from the back cover).

¹ Verse 23’s assertion that “the heavenly things themselves need better sacrifices [plural] than these” does not affect Hebrews’ argument of the uniqueness (“once for all”) sacrifice of Jesus. Luke T. Johnson is correct in arguing that “this may be a case where grammatical choice is governed by the logic of the image rather than by the logic of the argument.” Hebrews, 243.

² Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 261.
save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (9:27-28).  

Summary

I have argued in this section that Heb 9:11-14 describes Jesus’ ascension to heaven as an entrance into the heavenly sanctuary. Against the majority position, I suggest that Hebrews does not describe this entrance as an eschatological or transcendental Day of Atonement, but as the inauguration of Jesus’ ministry in heaven and—therefore—of the new covenant. I have argued that Heb 9:11-14 does not refer to Jesus’ entrance specifically into the heavenly holy of holies but into the heavenly sanctuary in general. (Τὸ ἅγιον denotes the sanctuary in general and not the holy of holies in particular. The expression “the greater and perfect tent” refers also to the heavenly sanctuary.) This agrees with the flow of the argument in the section. First, the contrast developed between 9:1-10 and 9:11-4 is a contrast between covenants—including a contrast of their sanctuaries and ministries—and not of specific rituals;

1 The multiple functions of the sacrifice of Jesus should not disconcert us. In fact, we should expect this because “in Hebrews Christ’s sacrifice is the offering par excellence against which all other offerings are measured” (emphasis original). Haber, 117. Similarly, “le sacrifice du Christ résumant d’ailleurs en lui toutes les espèces de sacrifices en usage dans le culte israëlite” (“. . . moreover, the sacrifice of Christ summarizes all the kinds of sacrifices in use in the Israelite cult”). Spicq, L’épître aux Hébreux, 2:266.

2 Heb 6:19-20 and 10:19-23 refer specifically to Jesus’ entrance “within the veil,” an expression that denotes the holy of holies (see p. 302, n. 1). This image is used in 6:19 in the context of the inauguration of Jesus’ priesthood to refer to the total access he enjoys to the presence of God. The image of entering “through the curtain” in 10:20 (referring to the holy of holies again) refers again to the total access believers enjoy by virtue of Jesus’ sacrifice. I will suggest below that the imagery of 10:19-22 describes the privileges of the believers as the inauguration of a priestly function of access. See section
therefore, Jesus’ transition implies a transition from the earthly sanctuary of the first covenant to the heavenly sanctuary of the new covenant. Second, the function of the Day of Atonement in 9:1-10 is to illustrate the transition between covenants and not specifically Jesus’ entrance into the heavenly sanctuary. Third, neither the blood of “goats and calves” nor the blood of “goats and bulls” refers specifically to the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement.

I have argued that this is further confirmed by the fact that the immediately following section (9:15-23) interprets Jesus’ death and ascension as the inauguration of the new covenant, which, in the argument of Hebrews, implies the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary.

The Ascension Inaugurates the Fulfillment of the New Covenant Promises (Hebrews 9:24-28)

Hebrews 9:24 contains the second explicit reference to Jesus’ ascension in this section:

οὐ γὰρ εἰς χειροποίητα εἰσήλθεν ἄγιον Χριστὸς, ἀντίτυπα τῶν ἀληθινῶν, ἀλλ’ εἰς αὐτὸν τὸν οὐρανὸν, νῦν ἐμφανισθήσεται τῷ προσώπῳ τοῦ θεοῦ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν.

For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

The purpose of this verse and the following (Heb 9:24-28) is to explain what happened when Jesus entered into the heavenly sanctuary after the ascension.1 Verse 23

1 “The Ascension as the Basis for Exhortation (10:19-25).”

1 Jesus’ ascension is described here as entering heaven itself; that is, not “a
said that if “the sketches of the heavenly things (i.e., the heavenly sanctuary and its utensils, v. 21)”\(^1\) were purified with the sacrifices of the inauguration of the first covenant (cf. 9:15-22), “the heavenly things themselves need better sacrifices than these.” The γὰρ that introduces v. 24 marks the development of the contrast between the heavenly things and their earthly counterparts which the author introduced in v. 23.\(^2\) Thus, in brief terms, this passage explains the ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary in order to bring about the “purification” of the heavenly things.

sanctuary [ἅγια] made by hands, a mere copy of the true one” (9:24). The description of the earthly sanctuary as “a mere copy of the true one” implies the existence of a heavenly sanctuary (cf. Heb 8:5; quoting Exod 25:40). Regarding the reality of a heavenly sanctuary in the worldview of the Hebrew Bible and the ANE, see de Souza; also Beale, 31-44. Commonly agreed references to a heavenly sanctuary in the OT include Gen 28:11-22; Exod 25:8-9, 40; 2 Sam 22:7=Ps 18:6; Pss 29:9; 150:1; Isa 6:1-8; Zech 2:17; 3:1-10. Elias Brasil de Souza suggests a total of 43 references in the Hebrew Bible. For the idea of a heavenly sanctuary in the ANE, see de Souza (26-82). Regarding the idea of a heavenly sanctuary in Jewish and Greek literature, see McKelvey, 25-41. He refers, e.g., to 1 En. 14:16-18, 20; 26:1-2; 90:28-36; 91:13; 71:5-7; T. Lev. 3:4-6; 5:1-2; 2 Bar. 4:2-6; 4 Ezra 10:44, 48-50; Philo Moses 2.74-76; 1.158; QE 2.52-82; Plato Resp. 9.592 a, b. (some passages refer to the heavenly Jerusalem implying the presence of a temple there). Regarding the idea of a heavenly sanctuary in the NT, see Beale; McKelvey, 140-78. References in the NT include John 1:51; 14:2-3; 4:26; 2 Cor 5:1-5; Rev 4-20. (Again, some passages refer to the heavenly Jerusalem implying the presence of a temple there.) For typological language and the relationship between the earthly and heavenly sanctuary in the argument of Hebrews, see Richard M. Davidson, Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical Topos Structures, AUSDDS, no. 2 (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1981), 336-67. For the argument that τὰ ἅγια refers to the tabernacle as a whole and not to the holy of holies in particular, see above section “Τὰ ἅγια denotes the Sanctuary of the new covenant.”

\(^1\) The heavenly things refers only, in my view, to “the tent and all the vessels used in worship” (v. 21) because these were the only ones explicitly identified in Hebrews as being modeled after a heavenly pattern (Heb 8:5).

\(^2\) Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 480.
Since this passage describes Jesus’ ministry as the act of “appearing in the presence of God on our behalf,” I will explore first the meaning of this phrase and then the role of this image in the argument of Heb 9:24-28.

**Ascension as an Act of Appearance before God on Our Behalf**

Hebrews explains that Jesus entered the heavenly sanctuary ἐμφανισθηκαί τῷ προσώπῳ τοῦ θεοῦ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν (lit., “in order to appear before the face of God in our behalf”). This expression is equivalent to the Hebrew יְנֵּפֶסְמַּא יָרֵאָה אֵלִים (lit., “to be seen before the face of God”) which was “a technical term for a cultic encounter with the deity.”¹ It referred to people coming to the sanctuary in order to worship the Lord (Ps 42:2 [LXX 41:3]; cf. Deut 31:11; Isa 1:12).² This act implied a pilgrimage up to Jerusalem and bringing an offering. The Israelites were, in fact, required to make this pilgrimage to “appear before the Lord” three times a year, and it was clearly indicated

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² Similar expressions in the NT are found in Matt 18:10; Rev 22:4.
that they should bring an offering in order to worship the Lord (Exod 23:15; 17; 34:23; Deut 16:16).¹

Here the author of Hebrews describes Jesus as accomplishing the ideal act of worship of the Israelite cult. Jesus has made the ultimate pilgrimage and has arrived before the very presence of God. He has arrived at the heavenly sanctuary, “the true one,” in order to “appear” (ἐμφανισθήναι) before God not empty-handed but with a “better sacrifice” (v. 23)—his own blood. Note that in the argument of Hebrews Jesus is a forerunner into the presence of God (6:19-20; cf. 12:1-3; 2:10) who realizes the ideal of believers who journey “seeking a homeland,” desiring “a better country,” looking “forward to the city . . . whose architect and builder is God” (Heb 11:10, 13-16).²

Now the fact that Jesus has appeared “on our behalf” implies a second purpose as well. Mark S. Smith has shown that the purpose of pilgrimage in ancient Israel was to “see God” (e.g., Ps 42:2 [LXX 41:3]).³ This meant to experience God’s favor (Pss 17:15 [16:15]; 42:3 [41:3]).⁴ Similarly, the Hebrew expression to “seek the face of God” meant to ask God for help (2 Sam 21:1; 2 Chr 7:14; Pss 27:8 [26:8 LXX]; 105:4 [104:4] Hos

¹ Simian-Yofre, 604-5.
⁴ Simian-Yofre, 605; Koester, Hebrews, 422.
5:15). 1 This sense is appropriate here because Hebrews emphasizes that Jesus’ sacrifice and ascension to the presence of God qualify him to provide help to the believers (2:18; 4:15-16; 7:25). 2 This verse, then, is equivalent to Heb 7:25 where it is said that Jesus has been appointed as a high priest in order that he might “intercede” in behalf of believers. 3 The question is, What is Jesus interceding for in our behalf?

The Ascension Has the Purpose of Removing Sin and Executing Judgment

The context of the passage (vv. 24-28) suggests the purpose for Jesus’ appearance before God. Verse 26 explains that “[Jesus] has appeared [πεφανέρωτα] once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself” (emphasis mine).

It is necessary, however, to ask two questions regarding this passage and its relationship to v. 24. First, is it possible to identify Jesus’ “appearance” (πεφανέρωτα) in v. 26 as the same event referred to as Jesus’ “appearance” (ἐμφανισθηνα) “in the presence of God” in v. 24? Second, how should we understand the expression “to remove sin” (ἐξ ἀθέτησιν τῆς ἁμαρτίας)?

Hebrews 9:26 probably has a wider focus than v. 24. There, the author referred specifically to Jesus’ entrance into the heavenly sanctuary. In this passage, however, no specific mention is made of Jesus’ entrance into heaven, only the general statement that

1 It is used in a general sense of seeking out a person with authority (e.g., 1 Kgs 10:24, par. 2 Chr 9:23; Prov 29:26); see Simian-Yofre, 598-9.

2 Johnson, Hebrews, 243-4; Koester, Hebrews, 422.

3 Johnson, Hebrews, 243-4.
“he [Jesus] has appeared \[\text{πεφανέρωται}\] once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself.”\textsuperscript{1} Now, in what sense has Jesus “appeared \[\text{πεφανέρωται}\] once for all at the end of the age” according to v. 26?

The use of the verbal form \text{πεφανέρωται} (manifest, reveal) creates a verbal connection to Heb 9:8 where it was said that “the way into the sanctuary has not yet been disclosed \[\text{πεφανέρωσθαι}\] as long as the first tent is still standing.” This connection, however, is more than incidental.\textsuperscript{2} The manifestation of Jesus Christ at the end of the age (1:2; 9:11, 26) has put an end to the sacrificial system of the first tent (10:18) and opened the way into the heavenly sanctuary (10:20). Thus, the “manifestation” of Christ has brought about another “manifestation”: that of the way of the sanctuary into the presence of God (9:8; cf. 10:19-23).\textsuperscript{3} I have not answered yet, however, in what sense Christ has been manifested.

Hebrews changes in this verse (9:26), from the imagery of the Day of Atonement introduced in v. 25, to the use of traditional language for the salvation brought about by

\textsuperscript{1} The expression \text{συντελεία} τῶν αἰώνων—with some variations—is common in Jewish apocalypses; e.g., Dan 9:27; 11:35; 12:13; T. Dan. 11:3; T. Lev. 10:2; T. Benj. 11:3; 1QM 1, 5 (cf. Matt 13:39, 40, 49; 24:3; 28:20). See Attridge, \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews}, 264; Ellingworth, \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews}, 484-5; Johnson, \textit{Hebrews}, 244; Koester, \textit{Hebrews}, 422.

That Christ’s incarnation, death, and resurrection have inaugurated the time of the end is a common concept in the NT (e.g., Heb 1:2; cf. Acts 2:17; Gal 4:14). See Bruce.

\textsuperscript{2} The verb \text{φανερώω} is not used elsewhere in Hebrews. Cognate terms do appear, though: \text{φαίνω} (Heb 11:3); \text{φαντάζω} (12:21).

\textsuperscript{3} Attridge, \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews}, 265.
Jesus. Other NT authors refer to God’s bringing of Jesus onto the stage of human history to save us from sin as the “appearance” (φανέρωσις) of Jesus (1 Tim 3:16; 1 Pet 1:20; 1 John 3:5; cf. Rom 3:21; 16:26; 1 John 1:2; 1 Pet 5:4). (All of these passages use diverse forms of the verb φανερώω.) Likewise, his sacrifice is qualified as “once for all” (ἀπαύγασεν ἐκ τοῦ σώματός του; 1 Pet 3:18; Rom 6:10; cf. Heb 7:27; 9:12, 26, 28; 10:10). Logically, then, the “manifestation” of Jesus “once for all” in 9:26 is usually understood as referring to the incarnation and the death of Jesus on the cross. Moreover, the passage itself makes clear that Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross is an essential element of this “manifestation.”

However, I think it is a mistake to make a hard distinction here between Jesus’ appearance before God in heaven (v. 24) and the manifestation of Jesus on earth to offer

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1 Regarding the function of imagery of the Day of Atonement in this passage, see the following two sections.


3 James Swetnam suggests that Jesus’ sacrifice is the means of his own revelation. “Sacrifice and Revelation in the Epistle to the Hebrews: Observations and Surmises on Hebrews 9,26,” CBQ 30 (1968): 227-34. He argues that Jesus’ sacrifice may have a revelatory function in the NT. He presents as examples Rom 3:21-26—the sacrifice of Jesus reveals the righteousness of God—and Rev 4:1—the sacrifice of Christ provides an open door into heaven as a revelation of heavenly things. Likewise, he argues that Jesus’ sacrifice in Heb 10:20 has a revelatory function: the ripping of the flesh of Christ permits the entrance into or the vision (revelation) of the holy of holies (10:20).

I remain unconvinced, however, that this is true of Heb 9:26. The text could be read in two ways: “He has been manifested through the sacrifice of himself at the end of the age . . . to remove sin”; or, “he has been manifested . . . at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself.” I think that the latter makes more sense. The manifestation of Jesus results in his sacrifice for the removal of sins and not the other way around.
his life as a sacrifice (v. 26).\(^1\) We need to remember that, according to Hebrews, Jesus’ sacrifice is an event of the heavenly cult and belongs to the heavenly sanctuary (9:11-12; 23-26). Thus, the “manifestation” of Jesus in 9:26 includes Jesus’ death, resurrection, and exaltation. In this sense, Hans-Friedrich Weiβ is correct:

\[
\text{Gewiß ist das Geschehn jener „Offenbarung“ untrennbar mit dem einmaligen Eintritt des Hohenpriesters Christus in das himmlische Heiligtum (V.24), also mit seiner „Selbstdarbringung“ (V.25) bzw. mit seinem „Leiden“ (V.26a) verbunden, also mit seinem Opfer; sofern es sich jedoch bei alledem um ein „himmlisches“, alles Irdische überschreitendes Geschehen handelt, eröffnet sich von jenem „Einst-einmal“ her zugleich eine alle Gegenwart (und Zukunft!) umgreifende Perspektive.}\(^2\)

In summary, we should identify the entrance of Christ into the heavenly sanctuary in v. 24 with his manifestation at the end of the age in v. 26 because the first (v. 24) presupposes his sacrifice; and the second (v. 26), the heavenly nature of that sacrifice.

Now Jesus’ sacrifice—and, therefore, his heavenly ministry—has as its purpose “to remove [ἀθέτησιν] sin.” This means more than the forgiveness of sin (cf. 9:22; 10:18). The unusual term ἀθέτησις means literally “removal” of something and is used also in the legal sense of the “annulment” of something (cf. Heb 7:18).\(^3\) Here, it refers to

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\(^1\) See Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 485.

\(^2\) (Certainly, the occasion of that “revelation” is inseparable from the unique entrance of the high priest Christ in the heavenly sanctuary [v. 24] and, therefore, from the “offering of himself” [v. 25], that is to say, it is bound with his “suffering” [v. 26a], and, also, with his sacrifice; provided, however, that it deals with a “heavenly” happening which exceeds all of the earthly, opening itself from the “once-at-a-time” to an all present [and future!] encompassing perspective.) Weiβ, 490. Similarly: “But the Christ who has been made manifest is not just a Christ who has died. He is above all a Christ who is risen and who is alive.” James Swetnam, “Sacrifice and Revelation,” 231, cf. 232.

\(^3\) BDAG, 24; TLNT, 1:39-40. Cf. LSI, 31; L&N §§13.36; 76.24; TDNT, 8:158-9. Beyond Hebrews, it does not appear again in the NT and only in 1 Sam 24:12 in the
sin and denotes either figuratively the “removal” of sin or, in a juridical sense, the 
“annulment” of sin. Both uses are, of course, intimately related and a distinction between 
them in this passage is probably artificial.\(^1\)

An overemphasis on the legal sense could be misleading, however. Some consider, for example, that just as the 
institution of the Aaronic priesthood has been abolished [\(\tilde{\alpha}\theta\epsilon\tau\eta\sigma\lambda\zeta\)] (Heb 7:18) . . . Christ has been manifested to destroy the reign of sin by his own sacrifice (9:26). In both cases, \(\alpha\theta\tau\varepsilon\sigma\iota\) is chosen to express a judicial and official annulment; the hereditary priesthood is radically abolished; sin can never regain its power, since it has been conquered by the blood of Christ.\(^2\)

Against this, Paul Ellingworth notes that the context does not suggest a legal connotation and, more important, that a close parallel to the legal use of \(\tilde{\alpha}\theta\epsilon\tau\eta\sigma\lambda\zeta\) in 7:18 would implicitly identify the first covenant with sin.\(^3\) This would obviously be incorrect because Hebrews considers the first covenant ineffective, but not sinful (e.g., Heb 9:9-10; 10:1-2).

It seems better to see here more the idea of the “removal” of sin or the breaking of its power in a sense that goes beyond legal connotations. This passage goes beyond the

LXX. The verb \(\tilde{\alpha}\theta\epsilon\tau\varepsilon\omega\) is more common and has the sense of rejecting something as invalid (nullify), or rejecting by not recognizing something (reject), or simply to make of no account (be insolent or offensive). BDAG, 24. In the LXX \(\tilde{\alpha}\theta\epsilon\tau\varepsilon\omega\) “is frequently used for breaking faith with God and man, and for profanely disregarding and abusing something holy (e.g., God’s sacrifice, 1 Sam [1Ki.] 2:17; God’s law, Ezek. 22:26).” NIDNTT, 1:74. \('\alpha\theta\epsilon\tau\varepsilon\omega\ is used in the latter sense, e.g., in Heb 10:28.\)

\(^1\) For example, Harold W. Attridge blends both meanings in his interpretation of this passage. The Epistle to the Hebrews, 264-5.

\(^2\) TLNT, 1:39. Also, TDNT, 8:159; Bruce, 231; Koester, Hebrews, 422.

\(^3\) Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 482-3.
“annulment” of a sentence against the believer because of sin to the breaking of the power of sin over the believer. As Craig R. Koester argues, the removal of sin—or the breaking of its claim over humankind—implies a change in the human condition.¹ This is possible because the sacrifice of Christ has inaugurated the new covenant which promises the writing of God’s laws on human hearts (9:20; 10:16). As David A. deSilva notes, “‘Sin will cease’ not only because sins are forgiven and forgotten but also because human beings are effectively equipped to bring forth the fruits of righteousness, living lives pleasing to God (see Heb. 11:6; 12:18; 13:16, 21).”² He is referring here to the idea, common in apocalyptic traditions, that the Messiah would bring about an era of righteousness (T. Lev. 18:9; Ps. Sol. 17:36, 41).³ This passage is equivalent, then, to 1 John 3:5: “You know that he was revealed [ἐφανερώθη] to take away [ἀφίημι] sins, and in him there is no sin.” According to the following verses (cf. vv. 6-10), this results in the breaking of the power of sin over believers and their lives of obedience to God.

In summary, Jesus’ appearance before God—that is, the inauguration of his ministry in the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf (cf. 7:25)—has the purpose of “removing sin.”⁴ This amounts to the inauguration of the new covenant promise:

¹ Koester, Hebrews, 429.
² deSilva, 314.
³ See Michel, Hebräer. Also, Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 264-5. The same idea is expressed in Heb 10:22 as the cleansing of the heart from an “evil conscience” (cf. 13:18).
⁴ Cf. Dan 9:24. The same idea is probably repeated in negative terms in Heb 10:4: “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away [ἐφανερέω] sins.” The
This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach one another or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more. (Heb 8:10-12; cf. 10:16-17)

To reduce the purpose of Jesus’ sacrifice to the cancellation of the penalty of sin is to misunderstand both the nature of Jesus’ sacrifice and the nature of the new covenant. The new covenant promises both the forgiveness of sins (“I will remember their sins no more”) and the power to be obedient (“I will put my laws in their minds, and write them on their hearts”). Likewise, Jesus’ sacrifice both redeems from the transgressions under the first covenant and mediates a new covenant (Heb 9:15) which promises the power to the people to be righteous.¹

¹ The author seems to refer there to the inability of the first covenant sacrifices to “take away sins” themselves, not only their guilt. If the sacrifices were able to produce faithfulness in addition to clearing the guilt for transgressions committed, there would truly be no “consciousness of sin” (10:2; cf. v. 22) in the believer nor a remembrance of sins “year after year.”

¹ I have mentioned that though the author of Hebrews considers the sacrifice as being “once for all,” he envisions the ministry of Jesus’ in the heavenly sanctuary as consisting in two phases. I would like to make only some introductory remarks regarding the second phase because it stands beyond the scope of this study. The author of Hebrews says that “just as it is appointed for mortals to die once to bear the sins of many, and after that the judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear [\textit{avnenegkei/n}] the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (9:27-28).

In other words, the experience of human beings consisting in “death” and “judgment” represents two phases in the ministry of Jesus. The first phase, “death,” refers to the sacrifice of Jesus “to bear [\textit{avnenegkei/n}] the sins of many.” The author explained the first phase (“death”) in Heb 9:25-26 where he argued that Jesus’ sacrifice had the purpose of “removing sin.” This fulfills the promise of the new covenant (“I will put my laws . . .”). It is important to remember also that the first “appearance” of Jesus Christ (9:26) is an event that included both a sacrifice on earth and Jesus’ appearance before
God in heaven.

The second phase is represented by “judgment.” Hebrews 9:28 argues that the “second” appearance has the purpose of “saving” those who are “eagerly waiting” (ἀπεκδεχόμενος) for him. Almost all commentators see here a reference to the second coming. I think this is correct, but, just as the first appearance involved acts on earth (sacrifice) and in heaven (appearance before God), the second appearance should include an act in heaven as well as on earth.

This explains better the sense of Heb 9:28. The literal translation of the last phrase of 9:28 has a problem that often goes without mention: ἐκ δεύτερον χωρὶς ἀμαρτίας ὄφθησεν τοῖς αὐτῶν ἀπεκδεχόμενοις εἰς σωτηρίαν (“[Jesus] shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him” [NASB]). The problem is that at his second coming Jesus will “appear” to all not only to “those who eagerly wait for him.” Thus, the dative τοῖς αὐτῶν ἀπεκδεχόμενοι should probably be translated as a dative of advantage. The translation would be this way: “so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time [ἐκ δεύτερον . . . ὄφθησα], without reference to sin, in favor of those who are eagerly waiting for him [τοῖς αὐτῶν ἀπεκδεχόμενοι] for salvation [εἰς σωτηρίαν].” In this sense, Jesus’ appearance is in fact a “second time” before God, now “without relation to sin,” in order to save those who believe in him. This, I believe, better explains the sense of the verse. These two phases in the ministry of Jesus are probably also meant in Heb 10:12-13 with a different (royal) imagery: “But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, ‘he sat down at the right hand of God,’ and since then has been waiting ‘until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet.’” Note that there is first a sacrifice and exaltation in heaven (in the past from the perspective of the author) and, Second, a subjugation of the enemies under his feet (in the future from the perspective of the author). The first refers to Jesus’ sacrifice and intercession in heaven; the second, to the “salvation” of his people. (Note also the two “shakings” in Heb 12:26-29.)

Finally, this passage has an intriguing thematic resemblance to Dan 9:24-27 that would be worthwhile to explore. The theological argument of Heb 9-10 is that Jesus’ sacrifice has inaugurated a new covenant (9:15) and a new heavenly sanctuary (9:23). Thus, it has redeemed from transgression (9:15), removed the sacrifices (10:18), and removed sin (9:26). Notice as well, that Jesus’ removal of sin is preliminary to the judgment (9:27-28).

On the other hand, Dan 9:24 says that 70 weeks are decreed in order to “finish the transgression, to put an end to sin [removal of sin? Heb 9:26], and to atone for iniquity [redeem from transgressions? Heb 9:15], to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place [inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary? Heb 9:23].” Daniel 9:27 adds: “He shall make a strong covenant with many for one week [inaugurate the new covenant which is in fact a confirmation of the old? Heb 9:15-21], and for half of the week he shall make sacrifice and offering cease [cf. Heb 10:18]; and in their place shall be an abomination that desolates, until the decreed end is poured out upon the desolator.”
This helps us to understand better the comparison Hebrews makes between Jesus’ ascension and the Day of Atonement in Heb 9:25-26.

**Jesus’ ascension and the Day of Atonement**

Hebrews 9:24-26a directly and explicitly compares the Day of Atonement ritual with Jesus’ ascension to heaven. The text says:

> For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the Holy Place year after year [κατ’ ἐνακρυτὴν] with blood that is not his own; for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. (emphasis mine)

How does this comparison of Jesus’ death and ascension with the Day of Atonement ritual fit in the wider interpretation of Jesus’ death and ascension as the inauguration of a new covenant (and its heavenly sanctuary)?

I have argued above that the Day of Atonement in Heb 9:6-10 functions as a parable that illustrates the transition from the first covenant to the new covenant.¹ I will argue that here the Day of Atonement has a different function. It serves as the epitome of the Israelite cult, against which Jesus’ sacrifice and ascension are compared and shown superior.

It is important to note, first, that in the argument of Hebrews the comparisons between Jesus’ sacrifice and the inauguration of the new covenant—on the one hand—

Finally, note that there is a possible allusion to Dan 7:14, 18 (LXX) in Heb 12:28 where it is said that believers “are receiving a kingdom.” Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 484-5.

¹ See section “The Day of Atonement in Hebrews 9:1-10 illustrates the transition between covenants.”
and Jesus’ sacrifice and the Day of Atonement—on the other hand—are of a different nature. The first builds upon the similarities between both events to establish their identity while the second emphasizes the differences between them to establish their different worth. Let me explain.

It is clear that the purpose of Hebrews’ comparison of Jesus’ death and ascension to Moses’ sacrifice for the inauguration of the first covenant (9:15-23) was to identify Jesus as the “mediator of the new covenant” (8:6; 9:15; 12:24) and his sacrifice as the “blood of the covenant” (10:29; 13:20; cf. 7:22). The comparison between Jesus’ death and ascension with the Day of Atonement is of a different nature. Let’s review the explicit references to the Day of Atonement ritual in this section.

He [Jesus] does not have to offer himself again and again, as the high priest goes into the sanctuary year after year [κατ’ ἐναυτῶν] with the blood that is not his own. (9:25 NJB)

It can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered year after year [κατ’ ἐναυτῶν], make perfect those who approach. (10:1)

But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year [κατ’ ἐναυτῶν]. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. (10:2-3)

These explicit references to the Day of Atonement emphasize three aspects of the Day of Atonement ritual: (1) its yearly repetition,¹ (2) the fleshly nature of the sacrificial

¹ The common expression κατ’ ἐναυτῶν does not mean “throughout the year” but “every year”; thus, it refers to the Day of Atonement. It appears 27 times in the LXX and 3 times in the NT (all of them in Hebrews). It is used to refer to the yearly celebration of the feast of dedication or Hanukkah (1 Macc 4:59; 2 Macc 10:8; cf. 1 Macc 7:49; 13:52), the Day of Atonement (3 Macc 1:11), and the Feast of Tabernacles (Zech 14:16). See BDAG, 336-7 (cf. 512 under “marker of temporal aspect: distributively”).
offering, and (3) its inability to provide forgiveness or perfection.\(^1\) (In fact, the Day of Atonement is considered an annual “reminder” of sins [10:2].) These negative characteristics of the Day of Atonement are the same characteristics the author has critiqued from the first covenant. In the first place, the first covenant was not able to bring perfection (7:11, 19; 9:9). In the second place, the sacrifices of the first covenant consisted of the blood of animals (9:12, 13, 19); thus, the regulations of the first covenant are characterized as “regulations for the body” (δικαιώματα σαρκός, 9:10). Finally, as a result of their ineffectiveness, it was necessary that its sacrifices be repeated “day after day [καθ’ ἡμέραν]” (7:27).\(^2\) (Note that the sacrifices of the first covenant are always referred to in the plural.)\(^3\) See table 8.

The Day of Atonement, then, epitomizes the weaknesses of the first covenant. Hebrews, on the other hand, underlines the opposite characteristics in Jesus’ sacrifice and ascension.

First, the uniqueness of Jesus’ sacrifice is clearly emphasized: Christ did not enter

\(^1\) Cf. Haber, 117-21.

\(^2\) Sacrifices for the high priest (and his house) and for the people were offered on a regular basis “every year” on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:5-6). Similar sacrifices, though much simpler, could be offered on other occasions as needed (Lev 4:1-21). In my view, Heb 7:27 is not referring to the Day of Atonement rituals in particular (otherwise, he should have said “year after year”) but to the need of repeating sacrifices because of the sinfulness of the high priests and people. In this sense, the phrase “day after day” is equivalent to the phrase “again and again” in 10:11.

\(^3\) Heb 9:9, 12, 13, 19, 23, 25, 26-28; 10:1, 4, 6, 9-10, 11-12. When sacrificial animals are mentioned, they appear in pairs (9:12, 13, 19, 10:4). Note that if the reading “καὶ τῶν πράγματων” in 9:19 is not original, this would be an exception. (For a short discussion of the text, see Metzger, Textual Commentary, 599.)
Table 8. The First Covenant and the Day of Atonement in the Argument of the Letter to the Hebrews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Covenant Sacrifices</th>
<th>Day of Atonement Ritual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They are repeated “day after day” (Heb 7:26; cf. 10:11)</td>
<td>It is repeated “year after year” (Heb 9:25; 10:1, 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They consist of the blood of animals (Heb 9:12, 13, 19)</td>
<td>The high priest offers the blood that is not his own (Heb 9:25; 10:4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They cannot provide perfection (Heb 7:11, 19; 9:9)</td>
<td>It cannot provide perfection (Heb 10:1, 2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

heaven “to offer himself again and again” (πολλάκις, 9: 25) nor “to suffer again and again” (πολλάκις, v. 26), but he was “offered once to bear the sins of many” (ἀπαξ, v. 28). The terms ἀπαξ or ἐφαπαξ (once for all) are used to characterize Jesus’ sacrifice 6 times in Hebrews (7:27; 9:12; 9:26, 27, 28; 10:10; cf. 10:14). The contrast reaches its climax in 10:11-13 where the first covenant priests stand (ἐστήκεν) “day after day . . . offering again and again the same sacrifices,” while Jesus is seated (ἐκάθισεν) waiting the fulfillment of the Father’s promise after having “offered for all time one sacrifice.”

Second, the author contrasts the sacrifices of “bulls and goats” (10:4; cf. 9:12, 19) to the offering of Jesus’ body and “will” to obey (10:5-10). In other words, Jesus’ sacrifice includes two dimensions, the flesh and the conscience. (These two dimensions of Jesus’ sacrifice are condensed in the assertion that Jesus “offered himself” [7:27; 9:14,
The dimension of the conscience is important for the argument of Hebrews. The word συνείδησις appears for the first time in Heb 9:9 as part of the antithesis between the first and second covenants. It refers to the individual’s internal awareness of sin and always appears in opposition to flesh (σάρξ). After Heb 9:9, it shows up again in 9:14; 10:2, 22. This antithesis strikes the core of the argument of Heb 8-10. The inefficacy of the old covenant and its cultus resided in its external nature. It consisted only of “regulations for the body” (δικαίωματα σαρκός, 9:10) that purified only the flesh (9:13); thus, its sacrifices could not cleanse the conscience (10:2). In fact, these sacrifices reminded of sins (v. 3). There was a need, then, for a better sacrifice (9:23) because “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (10:4).

Third, the sacrifice of Jesus perfected him (2:10; 5:9; 7:28) and brings perfection to the believers (7:19; 10:14; 12:2) because it is able to purify their consciences (9:14; 10:22; cf. 13:18). The underlying reasoning is that the blood of animals, since it belongs

1 Jesus’ offering of “himself” implies the sacrifice of a person as the result of a conscious decision over against the sacrifice of an animal that does not have the power of choice.

2 Gary S. Selby, “The Meaning and Function of Συνείδησις in Hebrews 9 and 10,” ResQ 28 (1985-1986): 145-54. The exception is 13:18 where no opposition to flesh is present. Selby contrasts Paul’s understanding of the conscience as a “positive moral guide” with Hebrews’ understanding of it as “the individual’s personal cognizance of sin” (147); however, Philip Bosman’s study of the linguistic and conceptual development of the term in Philo and Paul shows that the concept of conscience as the awareness of sin was present from the earliest stages. Conscience in Philo and Paul: A Conceptual History of the Synoida Word Group, WUNT, ed. Jörg Frey, no. 166 (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 2003), 276-83. Philip Bosman’s work brings to the fore another element in the discussion of conscience which is important for Hebrews: παρρησία (“boldness, confidence”). The cleansing of the conscience provides παρρησία to the individual which is essential in his approach to God (Heb 3:6; 4:16; 10:19; 10:35).
to the realm of the flesh, purifies only the body. Jesus’ sacrifice is superior in this respect because it belongs to both realms: flesh and conscience. Hebrews 10:5-10 explains that Jesus’ sacrifice included his body—“a body you have prepared for me”—as well as his will—“See, God, I have come to do your will.” Hebrews concludes that it is the volitional nature of Jesus’ sacrifice that cleanses our conscience: “By this will [that is, Jesus’ determination to obey] we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

There is a transition here from the external efficiency of the old covenant to the internal cleansing power of Jesus’ blood. This transition is essential in the new covenant passages of the OT. They expressly indicate that the difference between the first covenant and that which God will institute is that God will transform the inner selves of the people, enabling them to obey. It is the inward thrust of God’s action that is new in the new covenant (cf. Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:24-28). See table 9.

The Day of Atonement, then, works as a foil that provides the appropriate contrast to gauge the greatness of Jesus’ sacrifice and ascension.

To some extent, the Day of Atonement plays the same role that the angels and the

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2 I take issue here with the NRSV translation: “And it is by God’s will . . .,” which makes univocal what is ambivalent in the text. The phrase ἐν ὦ ὑπ' ὑπάρχειν ἔλεγχος τὸ ἔλεγχον (v. 7) explains the phrase τοῦ ποιήσαι ὥς ὁ θεὸς τὸ ἔλεγχον σου (v. 7). In other words, Jesus’ will is to do God’s will. Therefore, there are two wills involved in the passage, not only one as NRSV would make us believe. Cf. Lane, Hebrews 9-13, 265.

3 See Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, 248.
Table 9. Jesus’ Sacrifice and the Sacrifices of the Day of Atonement and First Covenant in the Argument of the Letter to the Hebrews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Covenant Sacrifices</th>
<th>Day of Atonement Ritual (epitome of the first covenant)</th>
<th>Jesus’ Sacrifice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They are repeated “day after day” (Heb 7:26; cf. 10:11)</td>
<td>It is repeated “year after year” (Heb 9:25; 10:1, 3)</td>
<td>Jesus died “once for all” (Heb 7:27; 9:12; 9:26, 27, 28; 10:10, 14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They consist of the blood of animals (Heb 9:12, 13, 19)</td>
<td>The high priest offers the blood that is not his own (Heb 9:25; 10:4)</td>
<td>Jesus offered his body and will (Heb 10:5-10; cf. 7:27; 9:14, 25, 26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They cannot provide perfection (Heb 7:11, 19; 9:9)</td>
<td>It cannot provide perfection (Heb 10:1, 2)</td>
<td>Jesus’ sacrifice brings perfection (Heb 7:19; 10:14; 12:2; cf. 2:10; 5:9; 7:28) Jesus’ sacrifice purifies the conscience (Heb 9:14; 10:22; cf. 13:18)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Levitical priesthood played in earlier moments of the argument. The author did not introduce the angels to explain the nature of Jesus’ exaltation in heaven but as a background that brings into focus by contrast the significance of his enthronement. The angels, though considered powerful beings in the world of 1st century C.E.,¹ are introduced as servants, created, and transient (1:5-14). On the other hand, Jesus is the

¹ See, Stuckenbruck.
enthroned Son, creator of all things, and eternal (1:1-14). It is, instead, the “son of Man” of Ps 8 (Heb 2:5-10) who explains the nature of Jesus’ exalted status.¹

Similarly, the Levitical priesthood does not explain the heavenly priesthood of Jesus. The author of Hebrews emphasizes that the Levitical priests appointed through the law of descent are mortal (therefore, the multiplicity of priests), and sinful (7:11-28). Jesus, on the other hand, was appointed through the oath of God, lives for ever, and is sinless (7:11-28). It is, instead, the priesthood of Melchizedek that explains the nature of Jesus’ priesthood. Melchizedek is a priest who “remains for ever.” His name suggests righteousness. And, he was not appointed through the law of descent; in fact, he does not have a genealogy.

There are, then, at least two types of comparisons in Hebrews.² One builds upon similarities in order to identify the nature and purpose of Jesus’ work. The other emphasizes differences in order to stress the superiority of Jesus’ achievements. The first identifies Old Testament persons and institutions as patterns for the work of Jesus. The second identifies Old Testament persons and institutions as foils that bring into focus the

1 It should be remembered that the Son of man of Ps 8 is not a type of Jesus. Instead, Ps 8 is understood in Hebrews as the expression of God’s purpose for humanity which is finally fulfilled in Jesus. See above section “Enthronement as the Basis for Exhortation: The Son’s Exaltation Prefigures and Makes Possible the Glorification of the Sons.”

2 The comparison between Jesus and Moses in Heb 3:1-6 is complex and needs further study. One the one hand, the faithfulness of Moses prefigures the faithfulness of Jesus. On the other hand, Moses contrasts with the Son; for example, Jesus is Son while Moses is servant and Jesus is builder of the house while Moses is part of the house. For a study of the relationship between Jesus and Moses in the argument of Hebrews, see D’Angelo, Moses.
greater reality of the new covenant. See table 10.

The relationship, then, between Jesus’ death and the sacrifice for the inauguration of the new covenant on the one hand and between Jesus’ death and the ritual of the Day of Atonement on the other hand is complex but harmonious. The first comparison (with the inauguration of the Mosaic covenant) has the purpose of explaining the nature and purpose of Jesus’ death. The second comparison (with the Day of Atonement ritual) has the purpose of bringing out the superiority of Jesus’ achievements.

The Day of Atonement and the inauguration of the first covenant in the argument of Hebrews

There is a more subtle reason why the author of Hebrews adds the Day of Atonement to the comparison of Jesus’ death and ascension with the inauguration of the first covenant: the close relationship that exists between the Day of Atonement and the inauguration of the sanctuary in the Israelite cult.¹

¹ John Dunnill argues that a number of covenantal narratives in Jewish tradition associate the inauguration of the covenant with the Day of Atonement and identified the latter as “‘the day’ in which the covenant of salvation is complete” (139). He mentions—for example—that according to *Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer* 29, Abraham was circumcised on the Day of Atonement at Mount Moriah and, by this means, inaugurated the covenant; cf. *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer: (The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great) According to the Text of the Manuscript Belonging to Abraham Epstein of Vienna*, trans. and annotated Gerald Friedlander (New York: Blom, 1971), 203-4. Likewise, also on the Day of Atonement, Abraham offered Isaac (*Pirqe R. L. 31*) and Moses descended from Mount Sinai to give Israel the law (*Pirque R. L. 46*). The traditions to which he refers, however, are late. *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* achieved its present form probably around the 9th century C.E. Miguel Pérez Fernández, trans., *Los capítulos de Rabbi Eliezer*, Biblioteca Midrásica, no. 1 (Valencia: Institución S. Jerónimo para la Investigación Bíblica, 1984), 20-21. I will argue, instead, that the intimate relationship between the inauguration of the
Table 10. Patterns and Foils That Explain the New Covenant Realities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Jesus</th>
<th>Foil</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Son is ruler</td>
<td>The Son is ruler (Heb 1:3, 13, passim)</td>
<td>Angels are servants (Heb 1:7, 14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Son is creator</td>
<td>The Son is creator (Heb 1:3, 10)</td>
<td>Angels are created beings (1:7; cf. 1:2-3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Son is eternal</td>
<td>The Son is eternal (Heb 1:8, 11-12)</td>
<td>Angels are transient (1:7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melchizedek is a priest without genealogy</td>
<td>Melchizedek is a priest without genealogy (Heb 7:3)</td>
<td>Levitical priests are appointed through the law of descent (Heb 7:16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melchizedek remains a priest for ever</td>
<td>Melchizedek remains a priest for ever (Heb 7:3; cf. v. 8)</td>
<td>Levitical priests are many because they are mortal (Heb 7:23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melchizedek’s name means “king of righteousness”</td>
<td>Melchizedek’s name means “king of righteousness” (Heb 7:2)</td>
<td>Levitical priests are sinful (7:27-28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covenant sacrifices are inherently “once for all”</td>
<td>Covenant sacrifices are inherently “once for all” (Thus, the transgression of the covenant requires the death of the transgressor, Heb 9:16)</td>
<td>Day of Atonement is repeated “year after year” (Heb 9:25; 10:1, 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses offered “the blood of calves and goats”</td>
<td>Moses offered “the blood of calves and goats” (Heb 9:19)</td>
<td>Jesus offered his body and will (Heb 10:5-10; cf. 7:27; 9:14, 25, 26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Heb 9:19)</td>
<td>The high priest offers the blood that is not his own (Heb 9:25; 10:4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pattern</td>
<td>Jesus</td>
<td>Foil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses’ inauguration of the covenant purified the people and the sanctuary (Heb 9:18-23)</td>
<td>Jesus’ sacrifice brings perfection (Heb 7:19; 10:14; 12:2; cf. 2:10; 5:9; 7:28)</td>
<td>It cannot provide perfection (Heb 10:1, 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jesus’ sacrifice purifies the conscience (Heb 9:14; 10:22; cf. 13:18)</td>
<td>It reminds of sins (Heb 10:3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Moses’ offering of “the blood of calves and goats” could fit just as well on the side of the foils because it consists of the blood of animals—like the Day of Atonement sacrifices. OT patterns—or types—are limited in nature and therefore cannot express with precision all the aspects of the greater reality of the NT. (For a list of limitations of the sanctuary and the Israelite cult system as a pattern of the NT realities, see Roy E. Gane, *Altar Call* [Berrien Springs, Mich.: Diadem, 1999], chaps. 8-9.) There is, however, an explicit intention to describe the events of the inauguration of the first covenant as a pattern for Jesus’ actions. This intention is clearly indicated by the use of the adverb ὅτεν (hence) in 9:18 and the coordinating conjunction οὖν in 9:23. More importantly, from the description of the ceremony of inauguration of the first covenant, the author extrapolates that “it was necessary” (ἀνάγκη) that Jesus’ actions accomplished similar things.

The Day of Atonement had the purpose of restoring the sanctuary to its original status of purity by cleansing it of the ritual and moral evils that had accumulated during the year.\(^1\) In this sense, the Day of Atonement was a re-inauguration or re-consecration of the sanctuary.

covenant and the Day of Atonement is clear from the ritual itself.

\(^1\) For a study of the accumulation of ritual and moral evils in the sanctuary throughout the year and how they were cleansed through the Day of Atonement in order to prevent God from leaving the sanctuary, see Gane, *Ritual Dynamic Structure; Cult and Character*, referring to aspects of Jacob Milgrom, “Israel’s Sanctuary: The Priestly ‘Picture of Dorian Gray’,” *RB* 83 (1976): 390-99.
The ritual [of the Day of Atonement] clearly reflects the structure of a community rite of passage. More specifically, it reflects community passage to a renewed and reordered state of existence. Thus, it must be seen primarily as a ritual of restoration—it serves to restore the community to its prescribed and founded state. Thus, restoration will include in this context the idea of re-founding—a return to the founded order of creation [emphasis mine].

This is explicitly shown in the fact that the ritual required that after the priest had cleansed the sanctuary with the blood of the bull (Lev 16:11-14) and the goat (vv. 15-17), he was to go to the altar in order to cleanse it and consecrate it.

Then he shall go out to the altar that is before the Lord and make atonement on its behalf, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and of the blood of the goat, and put it on each of the horns of the altar. He shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it and hallow it from the uncleannesses of the people of Israel. (Lev 16:18-19)

This act of cleansing and consecration of the altar was, in fact, an act of re-consecration. The altar had been cleansed and consecrated at the inauguration of the sanctuary, as Lev 8:15 shows:

Moses took the blood and with his finger put some on each of the horns of the altar, purifying the altar; then he poured out the blood at the base of the altar. Thus he consecrated it, to make atonement for it (cf. Exod 29:36-37).

Thus, the Day of Atonement brings the tabernacle back to its original state of purity and, in this sense, re-founds it or re-inaugurates it.

This relationship between the Day of Atonement and the inauguration of the sanctuary is important for the argument of Hebrews. I mentioned above that Hebrews

1 Gorman, 61.
2 Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 1036-8, 1040.
refers to the sacrifice of the inauguration of the first covenant and its sanctuary (9:15-23) as a blood sacrifice that *cleanses* the people and the sanctuary (see esp. vv. 22-23). In this way, the ceremony for the inauguration of the covenant becomes the “first of the yearly cleansings,” that is, the first of the Days of Atonement.

This helps us understand the logic of the argument of Hebrews. The first covenant and its sanctuary were inaugurated with the blood of “calves and goats” (v. 19). But these sacrifices are not effective because they “cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper” (vv. 9-10). In other words, they cannot “remove sin” (v. 26) in the sense that they cannot enable a life pleasing to God in the believer. Thus, the iterative nature of the animal sacrifices—their repetition “year after year” (9:25-26)—attests to their inefficacy in general and to the inefficacy of the inauguration sacrifices in particular.

This argument reaches its climax in 10:1-4. The assertion that the animal sacrifices are ineffective—that is, they “can never . . . make perfect those who approach”—is that they are repeated “year after year” (10:1). The author argues that if they had been able to “perfect those who approach” they would “have ceased to be offered” because, “having once been cleansed, [they] would no longer have had consciousness of sin” (10:2 NASB). Instead, the Day of Atonement reminds them every

1 See above section “The inauguration of the new covenant includes the consecration of the heavenly sanctuary.”


3 See above section “The Ascension Has the Purpose of Removing Sin and Executing Judgment” for the argument that to “remove sin” in v. 26 refers to a change in the human condition that enables people to live lives pleasing to God.
year of their sins and their sinfulness (v. 3). The argument requires that here the cleansing of the conscience be understood as more than the “removal” of guilt to include the “removal” of sin itself as evidenced in a life pleasing to God (cf. Heb 11:6). Thus, v. 4 says: “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away [ἀφαίρεσιν] sins” (emphasis mine).¹ The “yearly” repetition of the Day of Atonement becomes, then, the proof that the sacrifices for the inauguration of the covenant—representing animal sacrifices in general—were ineffective. Note that, in the same way, the Day of Atonement was in 9:8 a parable that “shows” (δείκνυμι) that “the way into the sanctuary has not yet been disclosed.”² That is, according to 9:8, the Day of Atonement was the evidence that there was not access to the presence of God under the first covenant; according to 10:1-4, the repetition year after year of the Day of Atonement is the evidence that animal sacrifices, in general, and the sacrifice for the inauguration of the first covenant, in particular, were ineffective.

Jesus’ sacrifice for the inauguration of the covenant, on the other hand, is effective because it is “once for all” (7:27; 9:12, 26, 27, 28; 10:2, 10). In other words, in contrast to the sacrifices of the inauguration of the covenant, “by a single offering he [Jesus] has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (10:14, emphasis mine; cf.

¹ This was the problem of the first covenant people. They forfeited the blessings because of the sin of disobedience that resulted from their unbelief (3:17-19; cf. chaps. 3-4). The first covenant sacrifices—represented here by the inauguration sacrifices and the Day of Atonement—were not able to solve this problem.

² See above section “The Day of Atonement in Hebrews 9:1-10 illustrates the transition between covenants.”
10:12). This helps to explain the apparently harsh transition from the comparison of Jesus’ death and ascension with the inauguration of the covenant in 9:23-24 to the comparison with the Day of Atonement in 9:25-10:4. Jesus’ sacrifice for the inauguration of the new covenant (and its heavenly sanctuary) is “once for all”; not like the sacrifice for the inauguration of the first covenant (and its sanctuary) that had to be repeated “year after year” on the Day of Atonement.

The rhetorical strategy of the argument is brilliant. The Day of Atonement was the greatest of the festivals of the Israelite cult in the 1st century C.E. The author, however, chose to epitomize in this greatest festival the weaknesses of the Israelite cult in order to compare it with Jesus’ sacrifice and ministry in the heavenly sanctuary (9:25-10:4). Also, he had previously used this greatest festival as an illustration of the passing away of the first covenant (9:6-10). Thus, the author transformed the climax of the Israelite cult into the evidence of its ineffectiveness (9:25-10:4) and an illustration of its own demise (9:6-10).²

¹ “It is certain that during the time of the Second Temple the Day of Atonement was already considered the greatest of the festivals.” *EncJud* 5:1378.

² Note that the different roles the Day of Atonement plays in the argument of Hebrews are evidenced in one detail of its description which is often overlooked. When the Day of Atonement is used as an illustration of the transition from the first to the new covenant, the author describes the event as happening “once a year” (ἐπεζευγάδων ἑτεροον, 9:7). That is to say, just as that transition is unique in salvation history, the Day of Atonement is unique among the rituals of Israel. On the other hand, when the Day of Atonement epitomizes the deficiencies of the first covenant, the author describes the event as happening “year after year” (κατὰ ἑτεροον, 9:25; 10:1, 3). That is to say, the iterative nature of the Day of Atonement is emphasized to express the inefficacy of the animal sacrifices of the first covenant.

Hebrews’ comparison of Jesus’ death to the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement is
The purpose of Jesus’ ascension, according to 9:24, is that Jesus may appear in the presence of God on our behalf. According to this passage, Jesus has ascended in order to “remove sin” by the sacrifice of himself. This not only refers to the forgiveness of sin but implies a change in the human condition so as to bring about righteousness in the lives of the people. This refers to the fulfillment of God’s new covenant promise: “I will put my laws in their minds, and write them on their hearts . . . for they shall all know me” (Heb 8:10-11; 10:16). Thus, Jesus’ ascension inaugurates the fulfillment of God’s new covenant promises.

Ascension as the Basis for Exhortation (Hebrews 10:19-25)

The Ascension Is Described as Providing Full Access to the Presence of God

"Εχοντες οὖν, ἀδελφοί, παρρησίαν εἰς τὴν εἰσόδον τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ αἵματι Ἰησοῦ, ἦν ἐνεκαίνισεν ἡμᾶς ὁ δόλον πρόσφατον καὶ ζώσαν διὰ τοῦ καταπετάσματος, τούτ’ ἔστιν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ . . .

particularly significant when studied in the context of the use of “amplification” (ἀὔξεσις) in Greek rhetoric. (For an introduction to ἀὔξεσις, see Anderson Jr., 26-29.) Ἀὔξεσις was a method used to promote (or denigrate) any given matter that had already been demonstrated (Aristotle, Rhet. 1.9.40). Anaximenes (3rd century B.C.E.), for example, suggested that one of the ways to accomplish this was “to set in comparison with the thing you are saying the smallest of the things that fall into the same class, for thus your case will appear magnified, just as men of medium height appear taller when standing by the side of men shorter than themselves” (Anaximenes of Lampsacus, Rhet. Alex. 3 [Rackham, LCL]). Hebrews, instead, compares Jesus’ death to the greatest of Israelite sacrifices. Similarly, Aristotle suggested that comparisons with ordinary people should be attempted only if comparison with superior personages was not possible (Aristotle, Rhet. 1.9.39): “And you must compare him with illustrious personages, for it affords ground for amplification and is noble, if he can be proved better than men of worth” (Aristotle, Rhet. 1.9.38 [Freese, LCL]).
Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh) . . .

This text describes Jesus’ ascension to heaven as a passage “through the curtain” (διὰ τοῦ καταπετάσματος) of the heavenly sanctuary which “inaugurates” (ἐνεκαύνωσε) for the believers “a new and living way” into the (heavenly) sanctuary (ἐὰν εἰσόδον τῷ ἀγίῳ), that is, into the presence of God (cf. 4:16; 6:19-20; 7:19, 25).  

The author’s use of similar language to that of 6:19 (cf. 9:3) suggests that the veil referred to here is that which separated the inner from the outer room of the Israelite sanctuary. The image is simple. The holy of holies—where the ark of the covenant stands (cf. Heb 9:3-5)—represents God’s throne room. The imagery denotes that Jesus has entered heaven into the very presence of God with his own blood. Here, like in 6:19-20, the author emphasizes that Jesus has full access to the presence of God, something that

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1 For a discussion regarding the use of καταπετάσμα in Hebrews, see p. 302, n. 1. Καταπετάσμα is used in the LXX only in relation to the Israelite sanctuary. It is also used only in cultic contexts elsewhere. See Gurtner. In the LXX, it could refer either to the veil that divided the forecourt from the temple proper or the outer from the inner room of the sanctuary. BDAG, 524.

The wider argument of the document makes clear that the author is referring here to Jesus’ entrance into heaven (9:24; cf. 1:3; 4:14-16; 8:1-5; 9:11-12, 24; 12:22-25).

2 For the ark of the covenant as embodying God’s presence, see Num 10:35-36: “Whenever the ark set out, Moses would say, ‘Arise, O LORD, let your enemies be scattered, and your foes flee before you.’ And whenever it came to rest, he would say, ‘Return, O LORD of the ten thousand thousands of Israel’” (cf. vv. 33-34; likewise, 1 Sam 4:2-9).

For the Ark of the Covenant as God’s footstool, see 1 Chr 28:2: “Then King David rose to his feet and said: ‘Hear me, my brothers and my people. I had planned to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, for the footstool of our God . . .’” (likewise, 1 Sam 4:4; Pss 99:5; 132:7). Also, Seow, “Ark of the Covenant,” 1:386-93.
was illustrated but not achieved by the Levitical priests on the Day of Atonement (cf. 9:8).\(^1\) That is, “through Jesus’ death and mediation all barriers between God and humanity have been broken down and we now have full access to the Father.”\(^2\)

This simple cultic image, however, is paradoxically complicated by the explanatory phrase τούτ’ ἐστὶν τὴς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ—“that is, through his flesh”—in at least two ways.\(^3\) First, it is not clear what the antecedent of this explanatory phrase is; that is, does this phrase qualifies the “way” or the “veil”?\(^4\) Second, if it qualifies “veil,” which

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\(^1\) Two elements of Jesus’ entrance into the sanctuary in Heb 10:19-21 follow the description of the Day of Atonement ritual in Heb 9:7: (1) Jesus is described as a high priest (ἱερέα μέγαν, 10:21; cf. Lev 21:10; Num 35:25; 2 Kgs 12:11; 22:8; Neh 3:1; Hag 1:12; 2:4; Zech 3:8; Jdt 4:6, 15:8; Sir 50:8; passim) and (2) he enters with his “blood” into the sanctuary (10:19; cf. 9:25; Lev 16:3). Hebrews 9:6-10, however, illustrates the transition from the first to the second covenant.

Note, however, that in the argument of Hebrews, Jesus’ entrance follows, instead, the model of the inauguration of the (Mosaic) first sanctuary which consisted in a sprinkling of the tent and its vessels with blood (cf. 9:18-23). (See also my argument above regarding the relationship between the ritual for the inauguration of the covenant and the Day of Atonement in the argument of Hebrews [pp. 414-9].)


\(^3\) This phrase is not a “later gloss” as suggested by C. C. J. Holsten, *Exegetische Untersuchungen zu Hb 10,20* (Bern: 1875), 15, quoted in Young, “Heb. X. 20,” 100. See also, Héring; Buchanan, 168. Hans-Martin Schenke considers the phrase awkward, but does not seem to challenge its originality; instead, he points out that this phrase complements ἐν τῷ αἵματι Ἰησοῦ—“by the blood of Jesus”— of v. 19, whose originality is not challenged. “Erwägungen zum Rätsel des Hebräerbriefes,” in *Neues Testament und christliche Existenz*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz and Luise Schottroff (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1973), 427. Finally, there is no MSS evidence to support the challenge to its originality.

\(^4\) If it qualifies the term “way,” the passage would read in the following way: “by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, *a way consisting in his flesh*)” (emphasis mine).
immediately precedes the phrase, it needs to be explained whether the implied preposition διά should be understood as locative ("a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, through His flesh") or instrumental ("a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is by means of His flesh"). The answer we give to these questions will define the role that Jesus’ “flesh” played in his ascension according to Hebrews.

It is possible to understand τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ as a genitive of dependence that refers back to ὁδὸν (= τοῦτ’ ἐστιν [ὁδὸς] τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ). This would yield the following translation: “He inaugurated for us a new and living way through the veil, that is, a way consisting in his flesh” (emphasis mine). Jesus’ “flesh” would be here an instance of metonymy that denotes Jesus’ earthly existence through which he passed in order to access the presence of God (cf. Heb 2:14; 5:7; 2 Cor 5:16). This implies, of

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1 There is also the related matter of whether καταπέτασμα is understood in the passage as a hindrance or a means of access. Young, “Heb. X. 20,” 100, n. 4; Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 519.

2 Those who relate τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ to ὁδὸν include Westcott, 319-21; Alexander Nairne, The Epistle of Priesthood (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1913), 161, 381-2; Alexander Nairne, The Epistle to the Hebrews, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, ed. John Parry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921), 78; Spicq, L’épître aux Hébreux, 2:316; Montefiore, 173; Héring, 91; Hofius, Der Vorhang, 81-82; George W. MacRae, “Heavenly Temple and Eschatology in the Letter to the Hebrews,” Semeia 12 (1978): 188.


3 See Westcott, 320.
course, Jesus’ suffering and sacrifice and parallels the concept of the previous verse that “[believers] have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus” (Heb 10:19). Just as Jesus entered into the presence of God through the way of his life in the flesh (i.e., suffering), believers access God through Jesus’ blood (cf. 9:12-14).

The major objection against this view has been the word-order. Τοῦτ’ ἔστιν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ follows immediately after καταπέτασμα; thus, it seems logical that they are connected.¹ This is not, however, a strong argument. Paul C. B. Andriessen has claimed that the author uses τοῦτ’ ἔστιν throughout the work to refer back to substantives that do not immediately precede it (Heb 2:14; 7:5; 9:11; 11:16; 13:15).² Though closer analysis shows that not all of these passages support his argument, it is clear that at least 7:5 and 13:15 do.³ This is not, then, a convincing objection.

Norman H. Young has shown, however, that the author of Hebrews consistently uses τοῦτ’ ἔστιν elsewhere to introduce appositional phrases.⁴ This strongly suggests that τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ should be connected to καταπέτασμας and not to ὅδον. Τοῦτ’ ἔστιν cannot introduce τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ as an appositional statement to ὅδον

¹ E.g., Bruce; Koester, *Hebrews*, 443.


⁴ Ibid., 103.
Additionally, the word order, though not decisive (see above), privileges a connection to καταπετάσματος over ὁδόν.

This realization leads us to the second question. Since τοῦτ’ ἐστιν introduces an appositional statement to διὰ καταπετάσματος, the preposition διὰ governs τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ (= διὰ τοῦ καταπετάσματος, τοῦτ’ ἐστιν [διὰ] τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ). This poses a problem. Διὰ καταπετάσματος should be understood as locative, not instrumentally. It has been often argued that the “veil” represents a barrier that Jesus overcomes to enter into the presence of God (cf. 6:19; 9:2), not an instrument. On the other hand, Jesus’ “flesh” is not an obstacle into the presence of God, but the instrument that makes possible that entrance. This is very clear—as Joachim Jeremias has shown—in the parallelism between vv. 19-20. Jesus’ “flesh” in v. 20 parallels his “blood” as a means of access:

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1 Ibid.

2 E.g., Spicq, L’épître aux Hébreux, 2:316; Héring, 91; Hofius, Der Vorhang, 83-84.

3 Contra Braun; Gräßer. The flesh is not the curtain that blocks access to the holy of holies in the sense that it confines the person to the realm of fear, death, and impurity (2:14-15; 5:7-8; 9:10-13). This view has some affinities with gnostic sources (Hyp. Arch. 94.9-10; Gos. Phil. 84.23-85.10). In Hebrews, however, “flesh” and “body” play a positive role in redemption. Koester, Hebrews, 444. Regarding the relationship between Gnosticism and Hebrews, see Hurst, The Epistle to the Hebrews.

The “flesh,” instead, which refers to Jesus’ earthly existence and suffering, is what makes possible Jesus’ (and the believer’s) entrance into the presence of God. See Spicq, L’épître aux Hébreux; Peterson, 154; Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews; Bruce, 252; Lane, Hebrews 9-13; Weiβ; Koester, Hebrews, 443-4.

v. 19: [Εχοντες οὖν, ἀδελφοί, παρρησίαν
a) εἰς τὴν ἐνσόδον
b) τῶν ἁγίων
c) ἐν τῷ ἁματί Ἰησοῦ,

v. 20: ἦν ἐνεκαίνισεν ἡμῖν
a) ὁ δόν πρόσφατον καὶ ζῶσαι
b) διὰ τοῦ καταπετάσματος,
c) τοῦτ' ἐστιν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ,

It seems to me, however, that this problem is artificial. The locative sense of διά identifies the “veil” as the point of access to the presence of God; a meaning that is, in fact, because of the image, analogous to the instrumental. The veil as a point of access (locative) is in an analogous sense a means of access as well (instrumental).¹ Admittedly, there is a progression in the meaning of the preposition, but this is something that we should expect from the use of metaphorical images.² Thus, we should understand this expression in the following way: “by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, [by means] of his flesh.”³

The Ascension Is the Basis for the Exhortation to Approach God

What is the function of Jesus’ ascension in the argument of this passage?

Verses 19-25 form a single periodical sentence.⁴ I have mentioned above (pp. 334-336) that periods were important rhetorical devices used by Greco-Roman writers to

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¹ See Laub, *Bekenntnis und Auslegung*, 181; Peterson, 154; Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 287.

² See Young, “Heb. X. 20,” 104.


introduce or conclude sections of the argument “by summarizing the points that preceded [or followed] the sentence itself.” The periodic sentence is structured in two sections and has a double function. The first section is introduced by the participle ἐγκαταλέγω and involves vv. 19-21. It explains what believers have: (1) boldness to enter the sanctuary and (2) a great high priest. This summarizes the argument of the central section of Hebrews (5:1-10:18) but in reverse order. The assertion “since we have a great priest over the house of God” summarizes the argument of the appointment of Jesus as high priest developed in 5:1-7:28. Verses 19-20 (“we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus . . .”) summarize the argument that Jesus’ death is a sacrifice that cleanses the conscience of the believer and provides him with access to the presence of God that was presented in 8:1-10:18. This summary of the argument has the purpose of serving as the basis for a call to action.

The second section (vv. 22-25) exhorts the believers to act on the basis of what they already have (vv. 19-21). This is expressed with three hortatory subjunctives: “Let us draw near [προσερχόμεθα] with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith” (NASB), “Let us hold fast [κατέχωμεν] the confession of our hope without wavering,” and “Let us consider [κατανοοῦμεν] how to provoke one another to love and good deeds.” It is interesting to note that these three exhortations are, in fact, developed in the final section


2 See the analysis in Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 516; Vanhoye, La structure littéraire, 175-7.

of Hebrews (Heb 11-13). We cannot explore this relationship further here, though.¹ What I want to emphasize now is that this sentence is an important transition in the macro-structure of the argument of Hebrews.

What is the function of the ascension, then, in this important transitional passage of Hebrews? The author is very clear: By virtue of his ascension, Jesus “inaugurated for us a new and living way through the curtain” (10:20, translation mine). Thus, “[believers] have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus” (10:19). In this sense, Jesus has “opened the way to the heavenly sanctuary [into the presence of God] by himself going first and thus making it possible for others to follow after him.”² This agrees with the conception introduced before in Hebrews that Jesus is the pioneer (ἀρχιγέρος, 2:10; cf. 12:2) and forerunner (πρόδρομος, 6:19-20) of the believers.³

What is this “new and living way” that has been inaugurated?⁴ I want to suggest

¹ See Guthrie, The Structure of Hebrews.

² Dahl, 403. An often noted and striking parallel to this idea is Lucius Annaeus Florus’ comment on the legendary devotion of Decius Mus. I quote here from Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 285, n. 26: “While the other consul [scil., Decius Mus], as though acting upon a warning from heaven, with a veiled head devoted himself to the infernal gods in front of the army, in order that, by hurling himself where the enemy’s weapons were thickest, he might open up a new path to victory along the track of his own blood” (Epitome 1.14.3, emphasis mine).

³ Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 285.

that it is the new covenant that has been inaugurated with Jesus’ sacrifice and ascension into the heavenly sanctuary as the author has argued in Heb 8-10. Let me explain.

The term ἐνέκαλυπτευμένον (10:20) has cultic connotations. In the LXX, ἐγκαινίζω translated either the piel of שֶׇׁיִּ֫ ר or הַלֲּ. The former Hebrew term—“to make anew, restore”¹—usually carried the connotation of a new beginning (cf. Pss 51:12; 104:30; Lam 5:21; Job 10:17; cf. Sir 36:5); hence, it was used for the installation of royalty (1 Sam 11:14), the renovation of the altar (2 Chr 15:8), or the restoration of the temple (2 Chr 24:4, 12).² The latter—“dedicate” (הַלֲּ)³—carried the sense of “begin to put into use,” and was used for the dedication of a private house (Deut 20:5), but especially the inauguration of the Mosaic tabernacle and Solomon’s temple (Num 7:10-11 [ἐγκαινίσμος]; 1 Kgs 8:63; 2 Chr 7:5; 1 Macc 4:36, 54, 57; cf. ἐγκαίνια in John 10:22).⁴

In Heb 10:20 what Jesus inaugurated was a “new and living way.” I believe this expression refers to the new covenant. First, the author uses this term for the inauguration

Heb 10:19-23 refers instead to the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary (404). As far as I was able to understand, also Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 518-9. He mentions 2 Macc 14:36 in which πρόσφατος “recently” refers to the recently rededicated temple (also, Jdt 4:3-14). They are correct as long as it is recognized that the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary is inherent to the inauguration of the new covenant and, thus, inextricable from it.

¹ HALOT 1:294.

² In 2 Chr 24:4, 12, ἐπισκευάζων (inf. aor. of ἐπισκευάζων) translates שֶׇיִ֫ ר.

³ HALOT 1:334.

of the covenant in 9:18—the only other place in the NT where ἐγκαινίζω appears.¹

Second, “like the covenant he inaugurated, the way that Christ opened is ‘new,’ providing unprecedented access to God.”² Third, like the inauguration of the covenant, Jesus’ “inauguration” of the way includes a sacrifice.³ And fourth, the expression “new [πρόσφατον] and living [ζῶσαν]” contrasts the description of the old covenant (8:13), “obsolete [παλαιόμενον] and growing old [ηράσκον].”⁴

Finally, the inauguration of the “way” parallels the inauguration of the first covenant in another respect. According to the argument of Hebrews, the inauguration of the first covenant was ratified through a covenant sacrifice that cleansed the people and sanctuary through the sprinkling of blood (and its vessels; 9:15-23). Similarly, the inauguration of the “way” in Heb 10:19-20 implies the cleansing of believers through the sacrifice of Jesus. Verse 22 says that in order to approach God, believers need to have their “hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and . . . bodies washed with pure water” (v. 22).⁵ This refers to the “blood of Jesus” that gives us the “confidence to enter

¹ The cognate ἐγκαίνια appears in John 10:22.

² Koester, Hebrews, 443.

³ Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 285; Dahl, 403.

⁴ Dahl, 404.

⁵ Regarding the cleansing of conscience in our particular passage, the author “would not only say that we need no longer have a bad conscience because of our past sins. He would probably say as well that we have been made free from an evil attitude of mind, a consciousness full of evil inclination.” Ibid., 408. Note that the cleansing of the conscience manifests itself in a life full of faith (10:22), which in Hebrews involves “faithfulness” (3:18-19). Koester, Hebrews, 444.
the sanctuary” (v. 19). Thus, the inauguration of the “new and living way” is equivalent
to the inauguration of the new covenant because it includes the purification of the
believers through the blood of Jesus and implies the inauguration of the heavenly
sanctuary.¹ On the other hand, Jesus’ death and ascension accomplish what the sacrifice
for the first covenant was not able to: “access into the presence of God.” Thus, the Spirit
indicated that in the first covenant “the way into the sanctuary has not yet been disclosed”
(9:8), but now the author asserts that “by the blood of Jesus” a “new and living way” has
been inaugurated “through the curtain” into the very presence of God (10:19-20).

N. A. Dahl considers correctly that “the juxtaposition of sprinkling and ritual
washing more closely parallels another Old Testament ceremony, the initiation of
priests.”² This is an interesting observation for several reasons. The inauguration of the
sanctuary, which in Hebrews is subsumed under the inauguration of the covenant,
includes the initiation of the priests (Exod 40; Lev 8-9). Similarly, the inauguration of the
new covenant in Hebrews implies priestly roles for believers. They are enabled to access
the sanctuary through the veil (10:19-23). In fact, they are the “house” of the great high
priest (10:21; cf. 3:6) who serve at a new altar (13:10) where they offer spiritual
sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise (12:28; 13:15-16).³

¹ I do not see here an identification of the “new and living way” with the heavenly
sanctuary. Instead, the inauguration of the new covenant implies the inauguration of the
heavenly sanctuary.


³ Note the cultic nuance of the terms προσέρχεσθαι and εἰσέρχεσθαι in Hebrews.
Regarding this, see Scholer, 91-149.
Summary

I have argued that the main concern of the author in Heb 8-10 is the inauguration of the new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah through the sacrifice of Jesus.

Hebrews 9:11-14 describes Jesus’ ascension as his entrance into the heavenly sanctuary. Jesus’ ascension marks a transition from the earthly sanctuary to the heavenly sanctuary and therefore from the first to the new covenant which they represent. This transition had been illustrated—according to the argument of Heb 9:6-10—by “the way of the sanctuary,” that is, the transition in the ministry of the Israelite sanctuary from the outer (first tent) to the inner room (second tent) as it happened on the Day of Atonement. This annual transition in the Israelite cult between the ministries of the two rooms (or tents in the argument of Hebrews) illustrated the transition between two sanctuaries and their covenants. Thus, Jesus’ sacrifice and ascension inaugurate the new covenant and the fulfillment of its promise of providing forgiveness (i.e., the cleansing of conscience, 9:14).

Hebrews 9:15-23 confirms this idea by comparing Jesus’ death and ascension to the ritual for the inauguration of the first covenant, which included the consecration of its tent. Hebrews 9:24-10:18 will flesh out this idea by explaining that Jesus’ sacrifice has been able to accomplish what no sacrifice (including Day of Atonement sacrifices) of the first covenant was able to: the forgiveness of sin and the empowerment of the believer to be faithful to the covenant requirements. Thus, Jesus’ sacrifice will “remove sin,” which includes forgiveness and the empowerment of the believer.

Finally, Heb 10:19-25 exhorts the readers to “approach God” as a result of the benefits that result from Jesus’ inauguration of the new covenant. The new covenant is
described here as a “new and living way” into the presence of God. This is so because it cleanses believers from their evil consciences so that they have a “full assurance of faith” in order to approach God.

“You Have Come to Mount Zion” (12:18-29): The Ascension of the Believers to the Heavenly Jerusalem

The book of Hebrews finishes with one last description of an ascension, only in this case it is not Jesus who ascends, but the believers who come into the presence of God—through the “way” Jesus has opened.

You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them. (For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned to death.” Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.”)

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven! At that time his voice shook the earth; but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.” This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of what is shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

This is an intriguing passage. It describes the readers as already experiencing what the author has exhorted them to endure and struggle for throughout the Letter. He had encouraged them to “approach” (προσερχόμεθα) God with confidence (4:14; 10:22; cf. 7:25, 10:1; 11:6); now, he asserts that they “have come [προσέλθατε] . . . to God
the judge of all” (10:22-23). He had encouraged them to enter into the “rest” (4:1-11) and described the patriarchs as “strangers and foreigners on the earth” (11:13) who were looking for a “city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (11:9, 16) and for a “homeland” (11:14, 16); now, the author describes them as having reached the end of their journey. They “have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (12:22). They have come not as visitors but as citizens, members of the heavenly city’s assembly (ἐκκλησία). Similarly, the author had exhorted

1 For a study of use of προορίζω in Hebrews, see ibid., 91-149.

2 George Wesley Buchanan has argued that the author does not refer in this passage to a heavenly reality: “‘Heavenly Jerusalem’ was not used to mislead the reader into thinking Mount Zion was in heaven, although Jews and Christians believed there was a Jerusalem in heaven as well, but to affirm its divine origin, just as in 6:5 the heavenly gift was something believers on earth had tested, meaning it was a teaching considered divine or heavenly” (222).

His argument is unconvincing. The idea of a heavenly gift in Heb 6:5 does not exclude the notion that believers are destined for heaven. There is a clear sense in Hebrews that Jesus has ascended into heaven (e.g., 9:24; 4:14; passim) and that believers will follow him there (e.g., 6:19-20, 2:10). In fact, the notion of a heavenly city had already appeared in Heb 11:10, 14, 16. Finally, it is difficult to believe that “heavenly Jerusalem” refers to an earthly restoration of Jerusalem (G. W. Buchanan offers as examples of the restoration of Jerusalem, Zech 14:9-11 and Ezek 40-48 [222-3]), since in the immediate context Hebrews refers to the “removal” of the “created things” (12:26-27). For further critique of this position, see Attridge, The Épistle to the Hebrews, 374; Ellingworth, The Épistle to the Hebrews, 678.

3 The members of the “assembly of the firstborn” are not actually specified. Some critics consider it as parallel to the immediately preceding expression; therefore, they identify its members as angels. Käsemann, 50; Spicq, L’épître aux Hébreux, 2:407; Montefiore, 231. The idea of being “enrolled in heaven,” however, suggests that it refers to faithful human beings (Exod 32:32; Ps 69:28 [68:29 LXX]; Isa 4:3; Dan 12:1; Luke 10:20; Rev 13:8; 17:8; 1QM XII, 1-4; cf. Phil 3:20). The “‘firstborn’ are those who share the inheritance (12:16) of the Firstborn par excellence (1:6).” Attridge, The Épistle to the Hebrews, 375. Also deSilva, 466-7; Ellingworth, The Épistle to the Hebrews, 679-80; Johnson, Hebrews, 332; Koester, Hebrews, 545; Lane, Hebrews 9-13, 468-9. Note, as
the readers to “go on towards perfection” (6:1); now, he describes them as joining the
“spirits of the righteous made perfect” in the heavenly assembly (12:23; cf. 7:11, 19; 9:9;
10:1, 14; 11:40). ¹

Two questions arise from this passage. First, in what sense have the readers
arrived at the heavenly Jerusalem? Second, what is the role of this description of the
readers’ “ascension” in the argument of Hebrews?

### The Believers Have Ascended to the Heavenly Jerusalem
in the World of the Scriptures

In what sense have the readers already arrived at Mount Zion (12:22-24)?

The context suggests that, in addition to the present dimension of the passage,
there is a future thrust in this description of the believers’ “ascension” to the heavenly
Jerusalem. The believers’ participation in the heavenly “festal gathering” of Heb 12:22-

well, that God’s people are called his firstborn in Exod 4:22-23 (cf. Sir 36:17 [36:11
LXX]; 2 Esd 6:58 [55]).

¹Εκκλήσια has here, probably, the ordinary sense of an assembly of the city, i.e.,
its legislative body. Cf. 1 Macc 3:13; Sir 26:5; Acts 19:32, 39, 40; Josephus, Ant. 12.164;
19.332; BDAG, 303-304; L&N §11.78. See Bruce; deSilva, 466-7; Koester,
Hebrews, 550-51; Johnson, Hebrews, 332.

¹ The meaning of the phrase “the spirits of the righteous made perfect” is debated.
The image of souls or spirits of departed human beings in the presence of God was
common in the apocalypses and other Jewish literature. E.g., 1 En. 22:3-9; 39:4; 70:4;
103:3, 4; Pr Azar 1:64 (Add Dan 3:86 [LXX]), 2 Bar. 3:2; 3 Bar. 10:5; 4 Ezra 7:99; Rev
6:9; Wis 3:1; Philo, Alleg. Interp. 3.74; 3 En. 43:1; Sifre 40. See Attridge, The Epistle to
the Hebrews, 376, nn. 82-83. Here, however, the phrase has a different sense. It is parallel
to “the assembly of the firstborn” who has in mind the believers who are not yet dead
(see also previous note). Thus, it seems that this phrase should be understood in the
context of Hebrews’ understanding that “human hearts, minds, and spirits have been
‘perfected’ and granted access to God’s own realm by the cleansing sacrifice of Christ.”
Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 376.
24 is the basis for the exhortation to not “reject the one who warns from heaven!” (v. 25). This warning of punishment for those who reject God suggests that positive and negative rewards still lie in the future. Thus, v. 28 reminds the believers that they “are receiving [παραλαμβάνοντες] a kingdom that cannot be shaken,” which recognizes that though the believers have begun to enjoy the promise (of a “heavenly city”; cf. 11:10-16) in the present they are still waiting for its consummation in the future.¹ In fact, the author plainly recognizes that they had not yet arrived at their heavenly destination when he says—a little later—“we are looking for the city that is to come” (13:14).²

On the other hand, the fact that the author characterizes the experience of Israel at Mount Sinai as something that could be “touched” (ψηλαφωμένον; 12:18-21) may suggest that what the author describes as its opposite in 12:22-24 (i.e., the festal gathering at Mount Zion) was incorporeal or spiritual in nature.³

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¹ Bruce, 383, n. 199; Koester, Hebrews, 557; Michel, Hebräer, 475-6; Spicq, L’épître aux Hébreux, 2:413. Esp. Laub, Bekenntnis und Auslegung, 253; Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 382; Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 690. (They emphasize correctly the “already/not yet” character of salvation expressed in this passage.) Contra, Cody, 141. The idea that the place from which God rules is unshakable is an OT motif (Pss 93:1; 96:10; 125:1; Isa 33:20). Lane, Hebrews 9-13, 484-6.

² Cf. the exhortation to enter the rest (Heb 4:1-11). Similarly, the description of the patriarchs as looking for the heavenly city (Heb 11:10-16) and the realization that neither they nor the readers have obtained the promises (11:39-40); therefore, they need to endure in the race (12:1-13).

³ James W. Thompson considers this passage an evidence of the metaphysical dualism of the author: “That which is “heavenly” (ἐπουράνιος) is set over against that which is ψηλαφημένος. This contrast indicates that ψηλαφημένος is used by the author as a code-word for ‘earthly’ in a metaphysical sense. The Sinai event is evaluated and interpreted with the assumptions which indicate the author’s metaphysical dualism. . . . Thus, by the use of ψηλαφημένος, the author indicates that he does not think merely in
On the basis of these two observations, scholars have understood the readers’ participation in the festal gathering at the “heavenly Jerusalem” as being complex in nature. On the one hand, it takes place in the present “in principle and in their imagination.”¹ That is to say, Heb 12:22-24 describes the future consummation of the promises as “already present in faith” (emphasis mine):² “Der Glaubende hat jetzt schon Zutritt zur himmlisch-transzendenten Wirklichkeit als den ἠλπιζομένα und οὐ βλέπομεν.”³ In this sense, then, the event transcends sensual experience in the present typological terms of old event and new event, as his tradition probably did. His intention is not to point to the correspondence between Sinai and Zion; rather Sinai becomes merely an event in the created order. This reinterpretation of the tradition is made in the context of a cosmological dualism.” Beginnings, 45-46. Against him, I believe the perspective of the author is mainly eschatological (or typological, to use Thompson’s term). The part. ψηλαφημένος reminds us, instead, of the palpable darkness of Egypt (Exod 10:21). See, Koester, Hebrews, 543; Lane, Hebrews 9-13, 461. Also, Dunnill, 144-5. For a critique of the use of Platonism as the background of thought of Hebrews, see Hurst, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 7-43; Adams; Williamson, Philo and Hebrews.

¹ Johnson, Hebrews, 328.

² Koester, Hebrews, 544. Cf. Hofius, Katapausis, 147-9; Lane, Hebrews 9-13, 466.

³ (The believer even now has access to the heavenly-transcendental reality as the ἠλπιζομένα [hoped for] and οὐ βλέπομεν [not yet seen; cf. Heb 11:1]). Gräßer, 3:310. See also, Weiβ, 674-5.

Similarly, “Man „naht“ sich den Heiligungen, indem man das Wort Gottes ernst nimmt, das durch den Neuen Bund eine besondere Dringlichkeit empfängt. Dies „Nahen“ ist einerseits eschatologisch: wir stehen unmittelbar vor der endzeitlichen Vollendung; andererseits gegenwärtig: wir sind im Glauben an das Wort gebunden” (One draws near to the good things of salvation when one first grasps the word of God, which receives through the new covenant a particular urgency. This “drawing near” is on the one hand eschatological: we stand immediately before the final perfection. On the other hand, it is present: we are bound by faith to the word). Michel, Hebräer, 460, n. 2.
and is “proleptic” in nature, that is, it anticipates the future.¹

This position implies that the use of the perfect tense (προσελθήθων [vv. 18, 22], “you have come”) has a rhetorical purpose. The author refers to a future event as having already occurred in order to add “vividness” and “forcefulness” to his exhortation and give listeners “incentive to persevere in the earthly city where they live” (emphasis mine).² Similarly, Demetrius (2nd century B.C.E.) argued: “Furthermore, the following words, ‘I am dead’ instead of ‘I am dying,’ add yet more vividness by the use of an actual past tense, since what has already happened is more forceful than what will happen or is still happening” (Demetrius, Eloc., 214 [Innes, LCL]; emphasis mine).

This understanding of Heb 12:22-24 is correct as far as it goes but neglects the historical dimension of this passage. While it is clear that in Hebrews the consummation of salvation is future,³ the author also argues that believers “have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come” (Heb 6:4-5, emphasis mine). Thus, I argue that the use of the perfect “you have come” is more than a rhetorical strategy on the part of the author, and that the “present” experience described in 12:22-24 is more than a prolepsis, an act of...
the imagination, or an act of faith in the future.\footnote{1} Instead, it is the historical dimension of this passage (as opposed to its eschatological dimension) that provides the hortatory argument of Hebrews with its compelling force. It is not that the future becomes present through their faith (cf. 11:1) or that the certainty of the future should make them feel \textit{as if} they were already there. The argument is, instead, that they have already been there and, therefore, should act accordingly (cf. 6:4-6). Let me explain.

This passage consists of a contrast which the author develops into an \textit{a fortiori} argument (\textit{“from the lesser to the greater”}).\footnote{2} The author compares here—once again—the experience of the ancient Israelites before Sinai at the inauguration of the first covenant to the experience of believers at Mount Zion on the occasion of the inauguration of the new covenant (2:1-4; cf. 3:7-4:11; 9:15-23).\footnote{3}

On the one hand stands Sinai.\footnote{4} The mountain is enshrouded in the numinous phenomena of the blazing fire, the darkness, the gloom, the tempest, and the sound of the trumpet. These were all-powerful physical events that produced fear even in Moses, the

\footnote{1}{\textquoteleft}The perfect tense [προσελήνισκε “you have come”] indicates that the action, and the relationship it symbolizes, has begun and is still in effect.” Attridge, \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews}, 372.}

\footnote{2}{Johnson, \textit{Hebrews}, 326. Contra, Ellingworth, \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews}, 669.}

\footnote{3}{There is no close parallel between items in each list. Harold W. Attridge counts 7 in the first and 12 in the second. \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews}, 372, n. 6. Otto Michel notes that attempts to count the characteristics of the new (vv. 22-24) as only 7 (e.g., Hughes, \textit{Hebrews}, 545) are “künstlich” (artificial) and therefore should be rejected. Michel, \textit{Hebräer}, 462-3.}

\footnote{4}{The mountain itself is not referred to by name. The description assumes that the readers are familiar with Deut 4:11-12. Hebrews 12:21 quotes Deut 9:19 which refers to}
mediator of the covenant. This formidable scene climaxes in a “voice” that “made the
hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them” (v. 19).

On the other hand stands Zion where a “festal gathering” stands in contrast to the
dreadful scene of Mount Sinai. No phenomena or barriers prevent access to God; instead,
believers blend with angels in the celebration that takes place. The description culminates
with the “sprinkled blood” of Jesus that “speaks a better word than the blood of Abel” (v.
24, emphasis mine).

The main point of the contrast is that at the climax of each event both Israel and
the believers have “heard” a voice. This is the pivot on which the hortatory argument of
the passage turns. On this basis the author warns the readers:

See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape
[ἐξεγαγόν] when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will
we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven! (Heb 12:25, emphasis mine)

This warning repeats, in essence, the first warning of the Letter:

Therefore we must pay greater attention to what we have heard, so that we do not
drift away from it. For if the message declared through angels was valid, and every
transgression or disobedience received a just penalty, how can we escape
[ἐκφευρόμεθα] if we neglect so great a salvation? (2:1-3a)

This passage, then, culminates the extended argument of Hebrews that Jesus’
achievements—especially the new covenant he has mediated—are superior to all that the

Moses’ fear to approach God after the golden calf incident.

1 Ironically, “the physical phenomena, which might seem to manifest divine
power, do more to conceal God than to reveal him.” Koester, Hebrews, 549.

2 For the relationship of this passage to Heb 1-2 see Vanhoye, La structure
littéraire, 233-4.
first covenant was able to offer. It is the “word” spoken at the foundation of each covenant, however, that embraces the whole exhortation of the Letter: “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son [Èν Υιόν]” (Heb 1:1-2a). Therefore, after showing what was spoken Èν Υιόν to be superior throughout the Letter, the author warns the readers towards the end: “See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if


Craig R. Koester explains how the three main series of arguments culminate in Heb 12:18-27. The first series traced Israel’s journey through the wilderness where the faithless perished (3:7-19); yet, the author held the hope that the promise of the celebration of a “Sabbath rest” remains for the people of God (4:1-11). This argument culminates in our passage in the transition from the gloom of Sinai in the wilderness to the joyous celebration of the righteous. The second series of arguments announces the superiority of the new covenant inaugurated with Jesus’ blood to the first covenant that was inaugurated with the blood of animals (chaps. 7-10). The superiority of the new covenant consists in the fact that Jesus’ sacrifice perfects the consciences of believers and provides access to the presence of God. The first covenant, on the other hand, cleansed only the body and did not provide access to God. This argument culminates in the fearful description of the inauguration of the first covenant where the phenomena conceals God, access to him is forbidden, and his voice is unbearable. On the other hand, believers stand purified in the presence of God and the “sprinkled blood” of the new covenant “speaks a better word.”

The third series of arguments follows the pilgrimage of the righteous who endure in the midst of trials waiting “to be made complete” (or “to be perfected”) through the realization of God’s promises of a “better country” and a “city” built by God (11:10-16, 39-40; cf. 10:36-39). This series culminates with the “spirits of the righteous made perfect” in “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” Koester, Hebrews, 548-9.
we reject the one who warns from heaven!” (12:25).

I will argue that a correct understanding of the nature of God’s speech referred to in the Letter is the key to understanding the nature of the presence of the believers at Mount Zion in 12:18-27. This is also what provides the hortatory argument of the work its compelling force.

**Hebrews’ Use of the Old Testament Creates a World in Which the Readers Stand in the Presence of God**

No other document of the NT quotes the OT as often as Hebrews does.¹ Beyond the number of quotations, however, there is something unique to Hebrews’ use of Scripture: the oral nature of the word of God and its immediacy.²

Pamela Michelle Eisenbaum has noted—and I will follow her argument here—

¹ See George H. Guthrie, “Old Testament in Hebrews,” *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997), 841-2. Pamela Michelle Eisenbaum has identified 31 such quotations. She identifies as quotations only those places where the OT material is formally introduced and the original OT text is largely intact. *The Jewish Heroes of Christian History: Hebrews 11 in Literary Context*, SBLDS, ed. Pheme Perkins, no. 156 (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1997), 90-91. Hebrews’ scholars do not agree, however, on the number of quotations of, and allusions to, the OT in Hebrews largely because they use different criteria to identify them. For an overview of the different lists and criteria, see Kistemaker, *Psalm Citations*, 16. George Guthrie, for example, counts 36 quotations and 37 allusions. “Old Testament in Hebrews,” 846-9.

² Eisenbaum, 89-133. Richard B. Hays argues convincingly that there was a hermeneutical tradition in early Christianity to understand the Psalms as having been spoken by Jesus and that this phenomenon is the matrix from which early Christology arose. Richard B. Hays, “Christ Prays the Psalms: Israel’s Psalter as Matrix of Early Christology,” in *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 101-18. The difference with Hebrews is that Hebrews emphasizes this aspect in the introduction to its quotations from the OT,
that almost all the quotations from the OT “are quotations of direct speech” (emphasis hers).\(^1\) The significant thing is that whether he quotes the oracles of the prophets or the meditations of the psalmist, the author of Hebrews understands and presents them as instances of divine utterance.\(^2\) In some cases, Hebrews quotes God’s *ipsissima verba* from the LXX; for example, “I will surely bless you and multiply you” in Heb 6:14 (quoting Gen 22:17). In other cases, when Hebrews quotes a person inspired by God such as a prophet or a psalmist, it makes no mention of the human agent.\(^3\) Sometimes, the

while placing the Psalms in the mouth of Jesus elsewhere in the NT is implicit.

\(^1\) Eisenbaum, 92. She identifies the following quotations as being of “direct speech” (the numbers in parenthesis refer to OT passages quoted from the LXX): Heb 1:5a (Ps 2:7); 1:5b (2 Sam 7:14); 1:6b (Deut 32:43); 1:7 (Ps 103:4); 1:8-9 (Ps 44:7-8); 1:10-12 (Ps 101:26-28); 1:13 (Ps 109:1); 2:12 (Ps 21:23); 2:13a (Isa 8:17=2 Sam 22:3); 2:13b (Isa 8:18); 3:7-11 (and several times in the section; Ps 94:7-8); 5:5 (Ps 2:7); 5:6 (Ps 109:4); 6:14 (Gen 22:17); 7:21 (Ps 109:4); 8:5 (Exod 25:40); 8:8-12 (Jer 38:31-34); 9:20 (Exod 24:8); 10:5-7 (Ps 39:7-9); 10:16-17 (Jer 38:31-34); 10:30a (Deut 32:35); 10:30b (Deut 32:36); 10:37a (Isa 26:20-21); 10:37b (Hab 2:3-4); 11:18 (Gen 21:12); 12:5-6 (Prov 3:11-12); 12:21 (Deut 9:19); 12:26 (Hag 2:6); 12:29 (Deut 4:24); 13:5 (Deut 31:8); 13:6 (Ps 117:6).

There are two exceptions: Heb 4:4 (Gen 2:2) and 11:5 (Gen 5:24). There are, as well, two that are of an intermediate nature (neither direct nor indirect speech). These are introduced by the verb *μαρτυρέω*: 2:6-8a (Ps 8:5-7); 7:17 (Ps 109:4). Both of them imply the written nature of the word of God. See Eisenbaum, 98-100.


\(^2\) Eisenbaum, 92.

\(^3\) There are three exceptions: David is mentioned in Heb 4:7 and Moses in 9:19-20; 12:21. In both cases, however, the mention of the human agent is necessary for the argument of the letter. The mention of David in 4:7 makes clear that the promise to the wilderness generation to enter the rest was repeated centuries later. This is important for two points. One, it proves that Joshua did not lead them into the rest. Two, the promise is
quotation itself makes clear that God is speaking; for example, “The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel . . .” (Heb 8:8, quoting LXX Jer 38:31, emphasis mine). Other times, the use of the first person in the quotation itself identifies God as the speaker; for example, “I will be his Father, and he will be my Son” (Heb 1:5, quoting LXX 2 Sam 7:14, emphasis mine). Finally, in the vast majority of cases, Hebrews introduces the quotation with a verb of saying in which God is the subject.¹

Thus, implicitly or explicitly, the author of Hebrews describes God as speaking directly to the audience of the Letter in the words of the Scriptures. Note that the “word

still available for the readers of the psalm.

The mention of Moses in 9:19-20 is important because it serves as the basis for a typological relationship between Jesus and Moses which explains the nature of Jesus’ sacrifice as the inauguration of the new covenant.

Heb 12:21 is a unique quotation because it is the only example of direct speech in which God is not the speaker. The purpose of the quotation is clearly to make the scene more vivid.

There are two quotations which are of an intermediary nature, 2:6-8a (Ps 8:5-7); 7:17 (Ps 109:4). See p. 436, n. 1.

¹ There are cases in which Jesus (2:12; 10:5) or the Holy Spirit (3:7) are identified as the speakers.

Verbs of saying are common in introductory formulas for the quotation of Scripture in Qumran, the NT; and the Mishnah; see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “The Use of Explicit Old Testament Quotations in Qumran Literature and in the New Testament,” in Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament, SBLSBS, no. 5 (Missoula, Mont.: Society of Biblical Literature and Scholars Press, 1974), 7-17; Bruce M. Metzger, “The Formulas Introducing Quotations of Scripture in the NT and the Mishnah,” JBL 70 (1951): 297-307. Note, however, that only in a few cases is God the subject of the verb in the Qumran and the NT. Fitzmyer, “The Use of Explicit Old Testament Quotations,” 10-12. In the Mishnah, the great majority of cases use the Niphal form of the verb—implying its written nature. In the minority of cases where the active form is used, the Scriptures or God are the implied subject. Metzger, “Formulas,” 298-9.
of God” is spoken, not written.\textsuperscript{1} It is a striking fact that the author of Hebrews does not use the common formula “as it is written.” Many other ancient authors—including Qumran and the Mishnah—use verbs of saying to introduce OT quotations; however, “no other author uses them to the complete exclusion of writing verbs or references to scripture qua scripture, i.e., as written text.”\textsuperscript{2}

This leads us to the second peculiar characteristic of Hebrews’ use of Scripture: its immediacy. Note that a quotation of direct speech—as the vast majority of Hebrews’ quotations are—is in fact a subcategory of the more general term “quotation” and has unique characteristics.\textsuperscript{3} A quotation evokes the past and therefore is bound to the original context and meaning.\textsuperscript{4} As George W. Savran affirms: “Repetition [i.e., quotation] . . .

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\textsuperscript{1} This does not negate that the author of Hebrews recognizes that God has spoken through human agents. Hebrews 1:1 makes clear that he understands this. Attridge, \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews}, 24. He, however, has chosen to present Scripture as spoken immediately by God in the presence of or to the audience; see Eisenbaum, 97; Luke Timothy Johnson, “The Scriptural World of Hebrews,” \textit{Int} 57 (2003): 239-40.

\textsuperscript{2} Eisenbaum, 97. “The author never uses the word ‘written’ in any form in connection with biblical material.” Ibid. Hebrews 2:6 and 7:17, however, seem to imply or at least to point toward the written nature of the word of God. Kenneth Schenck suggests that the author considered the scriptures as “instantiations” of the word of God. “God Has Spoken: Hebrews’ Theology of the Scriptures,” Paper presented at the \textit{The St. Andrews Conference on the Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology} (St. Mary's College, St. Andrews, Scotland, July 18-22, 2006).

\textsuperscript{3} Savran, 7.

\textsuperscript{4} A quotation is a speech act and, as such, not only informs or describes something, but is itself an act. Speech acts comprise (1) locution (what is actually said), (2) illocution (what is done or accomplished in an utterance), and (3) perlocution (the effect on the hearer). See, J. L. Austin, \textit{How to Do Things with Words} (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962). See also the development and refinement of his ideas in John R. Searle, \textit{Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language} (Cambridge: Cambridge
de-emphasizes the present moment by *supplying the perspective of an earlier time*” (emphasis mine).\(^1\) A quotation of direct speech has a different force, however. It “*speaks directly to and within the new context*, with as much immediate impact as it had in its original context” (emphasis mine).\(^2\) In other words, a quotation refers the hearer to a time and context different from his, but the quotation of direct speech *reuses* the past to speak to the hearer in the present. In this sense, the “quotations in Hebrews are reused prophetic oracles” which retain their original oracular force.\(^3\)

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University Press, 1969). We are interested here with the illocutionary force of quotations, that is, with what they accomplish or do.

A quotation may “accomplish” or “do” several things. For example, a quotation may lend an “air of objectivity” to the argument of the author who quotes the words of another as independent witness of his point of view. If that independent witness is a recognized authority, it gives the “illusion of external evidence.” A quotation may demonstrate the fulfillment of a past idea in the present. Also, the repetition of something said in the past suggests a comparison between the past and the present. See Eisenbaum, 110. On the illocutionary force of Hebrews’ description of God’s speech, see also Dunnill, 245-8. Cf. Harold W. Attridge, “God in Hebrews: Urging Children to Heavenly Glory,” in *The Forgotten God: Perspectives in Biblical Theology*, ed. A. Andrew Das and Frank J. Matera (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 203-8.

\(^1\) Savran, 12.

\(^2\) Eisenbaum, 109. Also, Schenck, “God Has Spoken: Hebrews’ Theology of the Scriptures.”

\(^3\) Eisenbaum, 111. Her discussion of the function of prophetic biblical oracles in Hebrews in contrast to their function in Matthew and John, for example, is illuminating.

She argues that biblical prophetic oracles have two essential characteristics: they had to be proclaimed and the proclamation itself was causative, that is, it triggered the realization of its own prophecy. (For the nature of biblical prophetic oracles, see Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1988], 458-69. For the nature of oracles in the Mediterranean world, see David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983]).

Matthew and John quote prophetic oracles from the Hebrew Bible but in a
The effect of the use of direct speech in Hebrews is, then, that quotations in Hebrews are not used to refer to or evoke something God said in the past but to “represent” God’s words to the audience in the present.\(^1\) They speak “directly to and within the new context” of the audience. In this sense, they are a new speech-act of God.\(^2\)

different way from Hebrews. The oracles they quote, however, have lost their original force; that is, they are not a re-proclamation of the word of God and do not set off the fulfillment of their own proclamation. Instead, they refer to them as belonging to the past and emphasize their fulfillment in the present. Matthew often concludes that such-and-such event happened “in order that” a certain oracle “be fulfilled.” E.g., Matt 1:23 (Isa 7:14 LXX); 2:6 (Mic 5:2); 2:15 (Hos 11:1); 2:18 (Jer 31:15); 2:23 (prob. Isa 11:1); 4:15-16 (Isa 9:1-2); 8:17 (Isa 53:4); 12:17-21 (Isa 42:1-3 and 42:4 [LXX]); 13:35 (Ps 78:2); 21:4-5 (Isa 62:11 and Zech 9:9); 26:15 and 27:9-10 (Zech 11:12-13 and Jer 18-19). (See Craig A. Evans, “Old Testament in the Gospels,” Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1992], 585.) Similarly, John invariably introduces in the second half biblical prophetic oracles with “in order that it be fulfilled (12:38, 39-40; 13:18; 15:25; 19:24, 28, 36, 37). See Evans, “Old Testament in the Gospels,” 587.

Hebrews, instead, does not focus on the fulfillment of the biblical oracles it quotes (though this is not contradicted or ignored) but on the “current” force those oracles have. Thus, when it says, for example, “today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion . . . ,” the author does not emphasize that this was true for the wilderness generation, or even the generation of the psalmist, but that this applies to his audience “today.” See her further analysis of other biblical oracles in Hebrews in Eisenbaum, 111-9.

\(^1\) They refer to or evoke the past only indirectly because the readers know that the author is using the words of Scripture. So Luke Timothy Johnson concludes: “But by constantly citing the LXX and by introducing such citations with verbs of speaking, Hebrews in effect treats texts as words from ‘the prophets’ through whom God spoke in the past. And because many of the verbs of introduction are in the present tense, the reader learns that God’s speech through these prophetic words is not only past but also present. . . Scripture, in other words, is not simply a collection of ancient texts that can throw light on the present through analogy; it is the voice of the living God who speaks through the text directly and urgently to people in the present. The word of God is therefore living and active (4:12)” (“Scriptural World,” 240-41).

\(^2\) Savran, 14.
Accordingly, Hebrews not only uses verbs of saying to introduce its quotations from Scripture but also, in most of the cases, the verb form introducing the quotation is indicative or present participle. In those cases in which it uses a perfect or an aorist verb, it uses it to refer to a text quoted earlier in the argument or to introduce a promise given in the past but which is still valid. Therefore, the author of Hebrews either presents the word of God as addressing the audience now, or as repeating promises spoken in the past which remain valid, that is, continue to speak to the audience in the present.

This immediacy of the word of God in Hebrews is very important for the argument. By means of the quotation of the word of God as direct speech, Hebrews has made a “theological redescription of time and space.” In other words, it has constructed through Scripture a world where the readers—or, hearers—stand in the presence of God and hear him speak.

1. I am referring here to the large majority of verses in which God is implicitly or explicitly understood as the subject. See p. 436, n. 1.

2. Hebrews 1:13; 5:5 refer to a text already quoted. Hebrews 2:6; 10:30ab; 12:26; 13:5 refer to a promise issued in the past which is still valid.
   The exceptions are Heb 1:5 that refers to what God has not said in the past to angels as a contrast to what God is saying to the Son in the present and 8:5 that refers to the erection of the Mosaic tabernacle.

3. Schenck, “God Has Spoken: Hebrews’ Theology of the Scriptures.” In this context it is interesting to note that “the author never follows a prophesy and fulfillment formula as in Matthew or John.” Eisenbaum, 97.

4. Dunnill, 134. Luke Timothy Johnson shows that Hebrews’ allusions to the Hebrew Bible (especially to the laws of Hebrew ritual in Heb 9-10) are also an important part of this theological redescription of the world. “Scriptural World,” 239-47.
God Performs the Events at Mount Zion through His Word

Now, what happens in this Scriptural world? How are space and time re-described? How should we define the event in which the readers are participating at Mount Zion?

Hebrews 12:22 defines the space as “Mount Zion and . . . the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” The priority in the structure of the sentence and the contrast to Mount Sinai in vv. 18-21 suggest that Mount Zion is the chief definition of the place in this passage. This is the only place where Mount Zion is explicitly referred to in Hebrews; nonetheless, Mount Zion is the scriptural background to the events referred to through scriptural quotations in the Epistle.¹

First, Mount Zion is the place where the Son of God is enthroned. Three of the Psalms Hebrews uses to describe the enthronement of the Son in chap. 1 have Mount Zion as their context. Hebrews 1:5 (also 5:5) quotes Ps 2:7 which refers to an event happening at Mount Zion: “‘I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.’ I will tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to me, ‘You are my son; today I have begotten you’” (Ps 2:6-7, emphasis mine). Likewise, Ps 110:1, quoted in Heb 1:3, 13 (passim), refers to an event in Zion: “The LORD says to my lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.’ The LORD sends out from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the

¹ For an introduction to Zion traditions in the Hebrew Bible, see Jon D. Leverson, Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible, New Voices in Biblical Studies, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins (Minneapolis, Minn.: Winston, 1985). For the study of Zion traditions in Hebrews, see Son, “Zion Symbolism in Hebrews.”
midst of your foes” (Ps 110:1-2, emphasis mine). Finally, the acclamation of Jesus’ eternal rule in Heb 1:10-12 uses the words of Ps 102:21-25 that again have Zion as their context (cf. vv. 13, 16, 21).

Thus, the “assembly of the firstborn” at Mount Zion in Heb 12:22-24 evokes—beyond Esau’s forfeiture of his “birthright for a single meal” (12:16)—the enthronement scene at Mount Zion where God introduces the “firstborn” into the heavenly world to enthrone him as Son (1:6).¹

Second, Mount Zion is the place where the Son is appointed as “priest for ever, according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb 5:6). As I have argued above (see above section “When Did Jesus Become a High Priest?”), the introduction of Jesus’ appointment as priest (5:6) with a reference to his adoption as Son of God (5:5), links the appointment of Jesus as high priest with his enthronement as king. Likewise, the scriptural context of Ps 110:4—the scriptural basis for Jesus’ appointment as high priest—is, again, Mount Zion (cf. Ps 110:2).

Finally, the argument of Hebrews implies that Zion is also the place where the covenant is inaugurated. Hebrews 7:12 argued that a change in the priesthood implies a change in the law (cf. 7:11-19). From this, the author develops the notion that a new covenant has been inaugurated with the appointment of Jesus as high priest (chaps. 8-10). This is confirmed in Heb 12:24 where at the center of the “festal gathering” at Mount Zion stand “Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and . . . the sprinkled blood that

¹ For the relationship between Heb 1 and 12, see Vanhoye, La structure littéraire.
speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”

These three events—Jesus’ enthronement, his appointment as high priest, and the inauguration of the new covenant—constitute the backbone of the structure of Hebrews’ expository sections and all of them are performed through God’s speech—or what contemporary philosophers would call God’s “illocution.” God enthrones Jesus above the angels (Heb 1-2) with the words of a catena of Psalms (Heb 1:5-14)—especially Pss 2:7 and 110:1. God appoints Jesus as high priest (Heb 5-7) with the oath of Ps 110:4. God creates a new covenant (Heb 8-10) with the words of Jer 31:31-34. Therefore, by referring to and using Scripture as God’s own speech in his exposition, the author of Hebrews has constructed a world in which the audience stands at Mount Zion where they hear God speak and, hence, witness the enthronement of the Son, his appointment as high priest, and the inauguration of the new covenant.

As Harold W. Attridge notes, “Hebrews . . . operates with the conceit that readers and hearers of Scripture can listen to God speaking to the Son and ultimately to all God’s children. In this conceit, the character of God and of his scriptural speech provides the raw material for both reflection and parenesis. . . . In the development of this conceit

1 Hebrews’ exposition follows a logical order that develops step by step from Jesus’ enthronement (Heb 1-4), through his appointment as high priest (Heb 5-7), to the inauguration of the new covenant (Heb 8-10). For a description of this linear development of the exposition of Hebrews, see Guthrie, The Structure of Hebrews, 116-27.

For a fuller analysis of God’s speech and a description of its role in the argument of Hebrews, see Attridge, “God in Hebrews,” 203-8.
resides the most creative theological work of this complex text.”

Now, though the author has discussed these three events in sequence throughout his exposition, they all are in fact constitutive of a single complex event. The enthronement of the Son “at the right hand of the majesty” (1:3, 13; quoting Ps 109:1 LXX) *implies* his appointment as high priest “according to the order of Melchizedek (5:6; quoting Ps 109:4 LXX). The appointment of Jesus as high priest “according to the order of Melchizedek” *implies*, as well, the abrogation of the commandment of Levitical descent and, therefore, the obsolescence and removal of the first covenant (7:11-19) and the inauguration of a new covenant with better promises (7:20-22). The author, then, has collapsed several events into one.

### The Audience’s Participation at Mount Zion Is What Provides Compelling Force to the Exhortation of Hebrews

Now, what is the role of Hebrews’ description of the readers’ participation at Mount Zion’s events in the argument of Hebrews?

The notion that the readers have heard God speaking to them through Scripture and, therefore, have stood in God’s presence at Mount Zion and witnessed the enthronement of the Son, his appointment as high priest, and the inauguration of the new


2. Note, again, that Hebrews explicitly connects Jesus’ appointment as high priest with his enthronement by referring to Jesus’ adoption as preliminary to his appointment as high priest (Heb 5:5-6; cf. 7:28). See section “When Did Jesus Become a High Priest.”

3. This is so because Hebrews considers that the people received “the law”—i.e., the first covenant—under the Levitical priesthood. See Haber, 105-24.
covenant is extremely important for the hortatory argument of Hebrews.

The hortatory argument of Hebrews contains five warning passages in which the readers are alerted against behavior that will lead them to disastrous results (2:1-4; 4:12-13; 6:4-8; 10:26-31; 12:25-29).\(^1\) They have a common element: “Each of these warnings concerns the hearers’ relationship to the word of God.”\(^2\) They advise the readers in the clearest terms against rejecting the “word of God.”\(^3\) It is noteworthy that three of them are built around an *a fortiori* argument (2:1-4; 10:26-31; 12:25-29) in which the rejection of the law of Moses is the lesser situation and the rejection of God’s word to the hearers is the greater situation. The logic is simple. If those who rejected the law of Moses received “a just penalty” (2:2) *how much more* those who reject “the one who warns from heaven!” (12:25). Thus, the readers need to pay “greater attention” to what they have heard “so that they do not drift away from it” (2:1-4) and “do not refuse the one who is speaking; . . . the one who warns from heaven!” (12:25).\(^4\)

\(^1\) For an analysis of the hortatory argument of Hebrews, see Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*, 127-39. He has suggested that the hortatory units of Hebrews may be grouped in four main sections (3:1-4:11; 5:11-9:12; 10:32-12:24; chap. 13). He has bracketed, however, the transitional sections (4:14-16; 10:19-25)—which also belong to the hortatory units—and treats them in a special section. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*, 105-11.

\(^2\) Ibid., 135.

\(^3\) Hebrews 4:12-13 does not warn expressly against rejecting God’s Word (all the other warnings do) but achieves the same effect by describing the Word of God as a formidable judge to whom readers “must render an account.”

\(^4\) Similarly, the readers need someone to teach them “again the basic elements of the oracles of God” (Heb 5:12) so that they may make the correct decisions. The plural “oracles” (λόγια) is used commonly to refer to the Law (Deut 33:9-
The hortatory argument has a positive aspect as well. Just as rejecting the “word of God” will result in punishment, hearing the “word of God” entails the inheritance of its promises. Mainly, two positive actions may secure the blessings for the readers: faithfulness (esp. 3:7-4:11) and endurance (esp. 10:32-12:24).¹ Those who do this will be able to inherit the promises of God which are referred to as entering God’s “rest” or the heavenly city.² In this sense, the readers need to “look” to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of their faith, and run with perseverance the race set before them (12:1-3; cf. 10:35-39).

The force of the hortatory argument, however, resides in two facts. First, past experience shows that those who have disobeyed the “word of God” have endured a punishment as well. The author mentions as negative examples those who disobeyed the law of Moses (2:1-4; 10:26-31; 12:18-29) and those who disobeyed the command to enter 10; Acts 7:38; Philo, Moses 2.56; Decalogue 36; cf. Ps 119:10-11, 102-3, 162-63) or Jewish Scriptures (Philo, Moses 2.188; Let. Aris. 176-77; Rom 3:2; 1 Clem. 53:1; 62:3). Most consider that Hebrews here refers to the OT or God’s revelation in general; e.g., Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 159; Hughes, Hebrews; Koester, Hebrews, 301; Spicq, L’épître aux Hébreux; Westcott.

I suggest, however, that the expression “the basic elements of the oracles of God” refers here specifically to the utterances of God to which the author refers throughout the document (1:5-13; 2:6-8; 3:7-11; 5:5-6). These oracles concern the dignity and office of Christ. The neglect of these oracles by the readers will lead them to “fall away” from the “Son of God” (6:4-8). The “oracles of God” of 5:12 are, then, intimately related to “the basic teaching about Christ” of 6:1. Thus, the author is probably referring to the basic elements of the Old Testament on which early Christians based their belief that Jesus was the Messiah promised by God. See Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 304; Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 137.

¹ Guthrie, The Structure of Hebrews, 137.

² Similarly, those who “hold fast to the confession” (4:14; 10:23) will be able to enter into God’s presence “within the veil” (6:19-20; 10:19-22).
Canaan (3:7-4:11). Second, Jesus’ exaltation in heaven shows, on the other hand, that God’s promises are real as well. In fact, the readers are considered witnesses that God’s purpose of “honor and glory” for humanity has been accomplished in Jesus who has been enthroned in heaven (2:5-10). This, however, does not exhaust the promises of God. Jesus has been exalted as their forerunner and leader into God’s glory (cf. 2:10; 4:14-16; 6:19-20; 12:1-3). Therefore, this is the time not to “shrink back” and be “lost” but to have “faith” and be “saved” (10:39).

The clinching argument is, however, that they “have heard” God themselves and participated through Scripture in the exaltation of the Son at Mount Zion. They are, therefore, witnesses of the reality of “God’s word” (cf. 6:5) so that they cannot elude their responsibility. It is on this fact that their liability to punishment resides (12:25). That is why their responsibility toward the “word of God” is so serious.

The argument is compelling, then, because readers are not exhorted to be faithful and endure on the basis of a promise of salvation that God intends to fulfill for them in

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1 See section “The Son and the Sons in the Argument of Hebrews.”
2 The author had also mentioned that the message of “great salvation”—which includes the notion of Jesus’ exaltation in heaven—had been attested to the readers by two witnesses (2:1-4): the testimony of those who heard Jesus and the testimony of God himself through “signs and wonders” and the distribution of gifts from the Holy Spirit (2:3-4).

The author also includes as corroborating evidence the Scriptures (Heb 2:6-8). Finally, the author notes that the readers themselves are witnesses of the truth of the word of God: they “have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come” (6:5; cf. 12:18-29).

the future, but on the present reality of that salvation in the exaltation of Jesus of which the readers have been witnesses.¹

Conclusion

In this chapter I have analyzed in order the six passages in which the ascension of Jesus is explicitly referred to in the Letter to the Hebrews. These passages are Heb 1:6; 4:14-16; 6:19-20; 9:11-14; 9:24; 10:19-25.² The analysis included two steps. The first step concerned the imagery of the passage and its logic. In other words, I tried to understand “how” the ascension is described in each passage and what that implies. The second step analyzed the rhetorical function of the ascension in the argument of the section of Hebrews to which that passage belongs. In other words, I tried to understand “why” the author of Hebrews explicitly referred to the ascension at that particular place.

These are the results of my study.

Hebrews 1:6 refers to the ascension of Jesus into heaven as an act of God in which he introduces the Son to the heavenly court as their ruler. Hebrews 1:6 is part of a

¹ Similarly, the inauguration of the Mosaic sanctuary and its priesthood included a theophany (Lev 8-9). This theophany was followed by the judgment with fire upon Nadab and Abihu, new priests, who had been on the mountain to witness God and saw the fire from heaven (Exod 24:1, 9, 17); thus, God’s warning regarding those who come near him (Lev 10:3).

Hebrews refers to the moment of Jesus’ exaltation as “today” (Heb 1:5; 5:5). He also refers to “today” as the moment of decision for the believers (3:7-4:11). For an analysis of the concept of “today” in the argument of Hebrews, see Anderson, “Who Are the Heirs?” 255-7; Dunnill, 135-6.

² Multiple passages in which Jesus’ ascension is assumed but not directly referred to were not studied (e.g., 8:1, etc.). In the end, this was not helpful because the argument of the Letter as a whole assumes Jesus’ ascension.
catena of OT passages (Heb 1:5-14) that describe the enthronement of Jesus as Son at the right hand of God. This description fulfills an important function in the argument of chaps. 1-2. God has fulfilled in Jesus his purpose of crowning humanity with “glory and honor” (Heb 2:6-9). At the same time he has provided Jesus as leader and pioneer (ἀρχηγός) for taking human beings into heavenly glory (2:10-18). Therefore, the author exhorts believers to “pay greater attention” to the Son and not “drift away” and “disobey” (2:1-4). (This hortatory argument is developed in new ways in the following sections of Hebrews.) Thus, the ascension in Heb 1:6 is part of Jesus’ enthronement ceremony as ruler over the universe.

Hebrews 4:14 describes the ascension as a journey through the heavens towards the throne of God. It has the purpose of explaining why Jesus is “a great high priest” able to help those who are journeying toward the heavenly rest. The description of Jesus’ passage “through the heavens” and his “tested” faithfulness make him an exceptional “helper” for those who are exhorted to enter into God’s rest but are being fiercely tempted on the journey. Thus, the ascension in 4:14 implies that Jesus has entered into God’s rest and as a result is able to help us in our journey.

Hebrews 6:13-20 describes Jesus’ ascension as an entrance “within the veil,” that is, into the immediate presence of God as the consummation of his appointment as heavenly high priest. This image is part of the author’s explanation of how believers may “realize the full assurance of hope to the very end” (6:11) and become “imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (6:12). The author explains both elements in reverse order. Verses 13-16 present Abraham as one who through patient endurance inherited the promises and vv. 17-20 present Jesus as the full assurance of the
hope of the believers. He argues, then, that God’s oath to Jesus by which he becomes the believers’ high priest (6:17 referring to 5:5-6) is one of the “two immutable things” on which their certainty of salvation is established (cf. 6:9). Jesus’ entrance into heaven is considered in this passage, then, the attainment of salvation (6:9) or the inheritance of the promises (v. 12). In this sense Jesus is the “forerunner” who confirms that God’s purpose for humanity (i.e., to bring them to “honor and glory”) is for real. Thus, the ascension in Heb 6:19 is the consummation of Jesus’ appointment as heavenly high priest that confirms the certainty of God’s promises for us.

Hebrews 9:11-14 describes Jesus’ ascension to heaven as an entrance into the heavenly sanctuary. Against the majority position, I suggest that Hebrews does not describe this entrance as part of an eschatological or transcendental Day of Atonement, but as constitutive of the inauguration of Jesus’ ministry in heaven and—therefore—of the new covenant. I argued that Heb 9:11-14 does not refer to Jesus’ entrance specifically to the heavenly holy of holies but to the heavenly sanctuary in general.¹ I suggested that the Day of Atonement in Heb 9:1-10 illustrates this transition between covenants and not specifically Jesus’ entrance into the heavenly sanctuary. Therefore, the contrast developed between 9:1-10 and 9:11-14 is a contrast between covenants—including a

¹ Heb 6:19-20 and 10:19-23 refer specifically to Jesus’ entrance “within the veil,” an expression that denotes the holy of holies (see p. 302, n. 1). This image is used in 6:19 in the context of the inauguration of Jesus’ priesthood to refer to the total access he enjoys to the presence of God. The image of entering “through the courtain” in 10:20 (referring to the holy of holies again) refers again to the total access believers enjoy by virtue of Jesus’ sacrifice. I will suggest below that the imagery of 10:19-22 describes the privileges of believers as the inauguration of a priestly function of access. See section “The Ascension as the Basis for Exhortation (10:19-25).”
contrast of their sanctuaries and ministries—and not of specific rituals. In summary, Jesus’ ascension to heaven implies a transition from the earthly sanctuary of the first covenant to the heavenly sanctuary of the new covenant and, therefore, the inauguration of the new covenant. This is confirmed by the fact that the immediately following section (9:15-23) interprets Jesus’ death and ascension as the inauguration of the new covenant—which, in the argument of Hebrews, implies the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary. This agrees, as well, with the fact that the overruling concern of chaps. 8-10 is the inauguration of the new covenant.

Hebrews 9:24 describes Jesus’ ascension as an act of appearance in the presence of God on our behalf. According to this passage, Jesus has ascended in order to “remove sin” by the sacrifice of himself. This not only refers to the forgiveness of sin but implies a change in the human condition so as to bring about righteousness in their lives. This refers to the fulfillment of God’s new covenant promise: “I will put my laws in their minds, and write them on their hearts . . . for they shall all know me” (Heb 8:10-11; 10:16). Thus, Jesus’ ascension inaugurates the fulfillment of God’s new covenant promises.

Finally, Heb 10:19-25 describes Jesus’ ascension as the opening of “a new and living way” “through the curtain,” that is, into the immediate presence of God. The “new” path Jesus has opened is the new covenant that cleanses believers and gives them “confidence” (παραποσία) to approach God. The ascension, then, is conceived as the inauguration of the “full access” believers enjoy in Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 12:18-25 does not refer to Jesus’ ascension but to the believers’ ascension, through Scriptures, to the heavenly Mount Zion. This passages integrates the
different aspects of Jesus’ ascension into a coherent image and forcefully concludes the hortatory argument of the Letter. The author argues that, through Scriptures, the believers have witnessed the event that transpired at Mount Zion. They have heard the voice of God speaking to them in Jesus. Through his speech God has accomplished two things: he has adopted Jesus as royal son and enthroned him as ruler over the universe (1:5-14) and has appointed him as high priest for ever (5:1-10). In this way God has made Jesus the mediator of the new covenant. Thus, the author concludes, believers should be careful not to disregard the One who speaks to them, lest they incur the wrath of God. Instead, the implicit argument is that they should “hold fast to the confession.”
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION: JESUS’ ASCENSION INAUGURATES HIS RULE AS THE ESCHATOLOGICAL “SON” OF GOD FULFILLING THE EXPECTATIONS OF A DAVIDIC RIGHTEOUS RULER IN THE OT

After concluding those passages in which Jesus’ ascension is explicitly referred to, we are ready to evaluate the suggestion I made at the end of the second chapter. I suggested there that Jesus’ exaltation in heaven embodies the achievements of righteous Davidic rulers. The difference is that Jesus’ achievements have an eschatological significance.

I concluded in chap. 2 that the analysis of the rule of righteous Davidic kings in biblical history showed a pattern of their actions that reached its most perfect expression in the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah. Seven main elements—not always in the same order—comprised this pattern. After ascending the throne, the king would (1) renew the covenant between God and the nation, (2) cleanse the land from spurious forms of worship, (3) build or repair the temple, (4) reform the cult by ordinances that secured a better service for the worshipers and reorganize or reestablish the cultic function of the priests and Levites, (5) promote the reunification of Israel, and (6) achieve “rest” by defeating their enemies. Finally, in several cases, the rise to power of the Davidic king coincides with (7) the emergence of a faithful priest. After the failure of the Davidic dynasty, the prophets projected the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant into the future and elevated the 7 elements of the pattern to eschatological proportions. Later on, early
Judaism reacted in diverse fashion to these hopes. Many gave up hope of the restoration of Davidic rule; some sectors, however, continued to hold a belief in the future coming of a Davidic ruler as political liberator and religious reformer.

I have argued that Hebrews describes Jesus’ ascension to heaven as part of a complex event that includes several aspects or facets. Hebrews emphasizes three main aspects of this event.

First, Jesus’ exaltation in heaven involves his enthronement as king (Heb 1:5-14; cf. 8:1, passim). The author of Hebrews considers this enthronement the fulfillment of the Davidic dynastic promises to which he refers explicitly in Heb 1:5 (quoting 2 Sam 7:14). The Davidic dynastic promises included (1) cutting off the enemies of the king, (2) a great name, (3) “rest” from enemies, (4) the building of a house for God by the Davidic scion, (5) the adoption of the Davidic scion as son of God, and (6) the establishment of the Davidic throne for ever (2 Sam 7:5-16). Hebrews relates most of these elements to the enthronement of Jesus. God (1) promised to subdue Jesus’ enemies under his feet (Heb 1:13; 10:13), (2) gave Jesus a more excellent name than that of the angels (1:4), (3) has offered the people entrance into his “rest” (4:1-11), (4) adopted Jesus as his Son (Heb 1:5; 5:5), and (5) established Jesus’ throne for ever (Heb 1:8-10; 12:28). Finally, Jesus is also considered the builder of a “house” (3:3, 6; cf. 1:2, 10), which is identified as

1 For the role that the belief in the permanence of the Davidic dynasty played in the blossoming of messianism in pre-Christian Judaism, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, The One Who Is to Come (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007), 33-55.

2 The assertion in Heb 3:4 that “the builder of all things is God” does not deny this. Hebrews 1:2, 10, and elsewhere in the NT (cf. John 1:3), notes that God created all
consisting of people who “hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope”.¹

As I mentioned above, this identification of Jesus as the Davidic heir is the basis of the author’s exposition throughout the Letter. On this basis he identifies Jesus as the heavenly high priest according to the order of Melchizedek, something that in turn implies the inauguration of a new covenant. It is important to note, however, that Hebrews does not argue this point but assumes it. This was an essential belief of early Christianity and he does not feel the need to elaborate on it.²

Second, Jesus’ exaltation involves his appointment as a faithful high priest over the house of God (3:1-6, chaps. 5-7). The books of Chronicles often refer to the ministry of a faithful priest in relation to the enthronement of a righteous Davidic king.³ The prophet Jeremiah related the raising of a “righteous branch” for David with the perpetuation of the Levitical priesthood (Jer 33:14-22). Similarly, Zech 6:9-13 seems to things “through” Jesus.

¹ The comparison with Moses in this context suggests that there is a connotation that the building of the believers implies the building of a sanctuary similar to the Pauline idea that the church is the temple of God (1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21).

² The belief that Jesus was the Son of David is clear in the NT. It is part of early Christian confessions (Rom 1:3; 2 Tim 2:8) and affirmed throughout the NT (e.g., Mark 12:35-37 [par. Matt 22:41-46; Luke 20:41-44]; Luke 1:32, 69; Acts 2:29-36). See Lohse, 484-8. See also Fitzmyer, The One Who Is to Come, 134-45.

³ Note that according to 1 Chr 29:22 the assembly anointed both Solomon as king and Zadok as priest together. This dual anointing brings to mind God’s commission of Joshua and Branch in Zech 6:9-13.

Similarly, several pairs of kings and priests are noteworthy in the story of Chronicles; for example, Jehoshaphat and Amariah (2 Chr 19:11), Joash and Jehoiada (chaps. 23-24), Uzziah and Azariah (26:16-21); Hezekiah and Azariah (31:13); Josiah and Hilkiah (chaps. 34-35).
refer to the joint anointment of a king and a priest. Jesus’ appointment as priest, however, has important differences from the OT pattern. The OT has in mind a *Levitical* priesthood and does not foresee the combination of the two offices in one person.¹ Hebrews, however, combines both offices in the person of Jesus and argues for the cessation of the Levitical priesthood.

Third, Jesus’ exaltation implies the inauguration of a new covenant (Heb 8-10). Righteous Davidic kings normally renewed the covenant between God and the people (Solomon, 1 Kgs 8:22-26, 56-58; Asa, 2 Chr 15:8-15; Joash, 2 Kgs 11:17; 2 Chr 23:16; Hezekiah, 2 Chr 29:10; Josiah, 2 Kgs 23:1-3; 2 Chr 34:29-33). Therefore, they acted throughout the history of monarchic Israel as the mediators of the Covenant between God and the people. It is noteworthy, however, that Ezek 37:24-26 identified the raising of a new David with the inauguration of a new covenant between God and the nation (cf. Ezek 37:22-28; cf. 36:24-28; see above section “Ezekiel”). Similarly, Jeremiah relates the restoration of Davidic rule over Israel in Jer 33:14-22 to the inauguration of the new covenant of Jer 31:31-34 (see above section “Jeremiah”).

Moreover, these three main aspects—the exaltation as enthronement, appointment to priesthood, and inauguration of the new covenant—subsume additional aspects (or, sub-aspects) of Jesus’ exaltation.

First, Jesus’ enthronement as king makes it possible for believers to enter into God’s “rest” (Heb 3:11-4:16). This is the result of Jesus’ defeat of the devil that resulted

¹ Though this is a possible meaning for Zech 6:9-13. See above section “Zechariah.”
in the deliverance of those who were under his dominion (2:10-18). Likewise, God’s promises to David included the defeat of his enemies and the provision of “rest” for the people (2 Sam 7:10-11). This implied that Israel’s entrance into Canaan under the leadership of Joshua had not really achieved God’s promised rest to Israel (see above section “The Davidic King as Refomer of the Cult . . .”). In fact, it could not have achieved it because the permanent place of the sanctuary/temple was not yet established. The book of Deuteronomy had instructed the nation that when they crossed “over the Jordan,” lived in the “land,” and God had given them “rest from . . . enemies all around” (12:10), God would choose “a place . . . out of all your tribes as his habitation to put his name there” (12:5, 11, 14, etc.). Thus, the rest under these conditions was achieved only when Solomon built the temple (2 Kgs 8:56; cf. 1 Chr 22:9; 23:5).¹ In the same way, the author of Hebrews argues that Joshua did not give the people rest (Heb 4:8); instead, it is Jesus who has given Israel the true rest.

Second, Jesus, the heavenly king-priest, is the mediator of a new covenant and, as such, he implements a major reorganization of the cult.² The cultic order of the first

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¹ Later on, Davidic kings are also described as receiving rest from God (e.g., Asa, 2 Chr 14:6; Jehoshaphat, 2 Chr 20:30; Hezekiah, 2 Chr 32:22).

² Jesus, like the Davidic king, is mediator of the covenant in a special sense. First, Jesus represents humanity in general and as such God fulfills in him his saving purposes for them (2:5-10). (Similarly, as I showed in pp. 64-69, God assigns to David and his descendants the promises he had made to Israel.) Second, Jesus mediates the blessings to believers. Jesus has been enthroned in order to lead “many children [υἱού] to glory.” He is their leader (ἄρχων) and forerunner and guarantees the fulfillment of God’s promises to them (7:22). (Similarly, the Davidic king is a channel of God’s promises for the people. See above section “The Davidic King as Covenant Mediator: He Renews the Mosaic Covenant under ‘Better Promises.’”)

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covenant that included multiple Levitical priests and multiple sacrifices has been replaced
by one eternal high priest according to the order of Melchizedek and the “once for all”
sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Similarly, righteous Davidic kings were described as reformers
of the cult. The building of the temple by Solomon fulfilled the conditions necessary for
the cultic changes foreseen in Deuteronomy (see 12:1-12, passim; see above section “The
Davidic King as Reformer of the Cult”). The most conspicuous element of this reform
was a change concerning the law of sacrifices, which centralized the sacrifices at the
place that would be chosen by God (cf. Deut 12). God also revealed to David new
stipulations regarding the priestly and Levitical courses and their service for the temple (1
Chr 28:13). The reform of the sacrifices began with but was not totally implemented by
Solomon. A full reform was achieved until the time of Hezekiah and Josiah.¹ Other
Davidic kings also implemented the Davidic stipulations regarding the priestly and
Levitical courses and, in fact, several of them implemented additional changes in the
cultic roles of the priests and Levites (e.g., Joash, 2 Chr 23:18; Hezekiah, 2 Chr 29-30;
and Josiah, 2 Chr 35:1-9).

Third, Jesus’ sacrifice cleanses believers from the transgressions committed under
the new covenant. This cleansing, however, denotes not only forgiveness (9:22) but also
the removal of sin through the interiorization of the law in the believers (9:25-10:10) as
promised in the new covenant (Heb 8:8-12). In other words, by inaugurating the new
covenant, Jesus’ sacrifice makes possible a new era of righteousness for the people of

¹ Hezekiah and Josiah finally removed the high places (since Manasseh had
rebuilt them; 2 Kgs 18:22; 23:5-9; 2 Chr 31:1; 32:12; 34:3).
God. Similarly, righteous Davidic kings tried to enforce faithfulness to Yahweh by cleansing the land from idolatry. Their reforms were short lived, however. Therefore, the prophets told of the coming of a righteous Davidic king who would bring about a new era of righteousness (e.g., Hos 3:4-5; Isa 9:6-7; 11:1-10; Jer 23:5-6; Zech 12:10-14; cf. Pss. Sol. 17).

Finally, Jesus’ inauguration of the covenant implies the consecration of a heavenly sanctuary with his “better” sacrifice (9:23). Similarly, the renewal of the covenant by righteous Davidic kings included either the inauguration of a new temple (Solomon), the reparation of the temple (Asa, 2 Chr 15:8; cf. 1 Kgs 15:15; Joash, 2 Kgs 12:1-16; 2 Chr 24:4-14; Josiah, 2 Chr 34:8-13; 2 Kgs 22:3-7) or, plainly, its re-consecration (Hezekiah, 2 Chr 29:5-19). Ezekiel prophesied as well that the restoration of Davidic rule would include the construction of a new temple (Ezek 37:26-28; cf. Zech 6:9-15).

The only aspect in which Hebrews does not show any interest is the reunification of Israel. A summary of this relationship is shown in table 11.

Hebrews’ purpose, however, is not to prove that Jesus’ exaltation fulfills the expectations for an eschatological Davidic ruler; instead, it assumes that the readers know this and establishes this notion as the foundation for his exhortation to the readers to hold on to their faith. In other words, these Davidic traditions function as an essential subtext of the Letter that provide the necessary force to its hortatory argument. Thus, the author of Hebrews argues that Jesus’ exaltation in heaven as the eschatological Davidic king and faithful high priest—which the readers have witnessed through the Scriptures (pp. 432-55)—demands their allegiance to him; otherwise, they will suffer the judgment of
Table 11. The Enthronement of the “Son” in Hebrews as an Eschatological Amplification of the Achievements of Righteous Davidic Rulers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achievements of the Davidic Righteous Rulers</th>
<th>Implications of the Enthronement of Jesus as Son</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Renewal of the covenant between God and the nation</td>
<td>Mediation of a new covenant (Heb 8-10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleansing of the land from spurious forms of worship</td>
<td>Cleansing of the conscience (9:14) and removal of sin by the interiorization of God’s law in the believers (9:24-10:10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The building or repair of the temple is followed by its consecration through cleansing</td>
<td>God builds the temple (3:3-4; 8:2) Jesus consecrates the heavenly sanctuary with better sacrifices (9:23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform of the Cult. This includes: (1) the centralization of the sacrifices at Jerusalem as disposed in Deuteronomy (2) new stipulations regarding the priestly and Levitical courses as revealed to David (1 Chr 28:11-19)</td>
<td>Substitution of the Levitical priesthood with a new high priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb 5-7) Substitution of animal sacrifices with the “once for all” sacrifice of Christ (10:18) Inauguration of a new spiritual worship for the believers (12:28-29; 13:10-16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reunification of Israel</td>
<td>Implied in the “new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah” that Jesus mediates [Heb 8:8]. This is not developed, however, in the argument of the Letter.¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Rest” from the enemies</td>
<td>Availability of God’s rest (3:7-4:16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The emergence of a faithful priest</td>
<td>Jesus is a faithful high priest over the house of God (3:1-6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ This aspect of the argument of Hebrews was brought to my attention by George H. Guthrie and David Moffitt at the Hebrews Section of the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (San Diego, Calif., November 17-20, 2007).
God. As members of Jesus’ household, they are to enter before God, as “priests” who therefore are bound to God and have greater accountability to holiness. He exhorts them, then, to “hold fast the confession” of their faith and “persevere” in the race so they may inherit the promises of God.

1 In New Testament times, upon ascension of a new princeps the military forces and the entire population took an oath of allegiance to the new emperor (e.g., Tacitus, *Hist.* 2.79-81; *Ann.* 1.7.3; Pliny the Younger, *Ep. Tra.* 10.52-53). This vow was renewed on each anniversary of his accession (see Lewis and Meyer, eds., 2:9-11). Similarly, the author of Hebrews exhorts his readers several times throughout the epistle: “Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful” (Heb 10:23; cf. 3:1; 4:14; 13:15). See Koester, *Hebrews*, 201.


McKnight, Scot. *Jesus and His Death: Historiography, the Historical Jesus, and Atonement Theory*. Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2005.


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