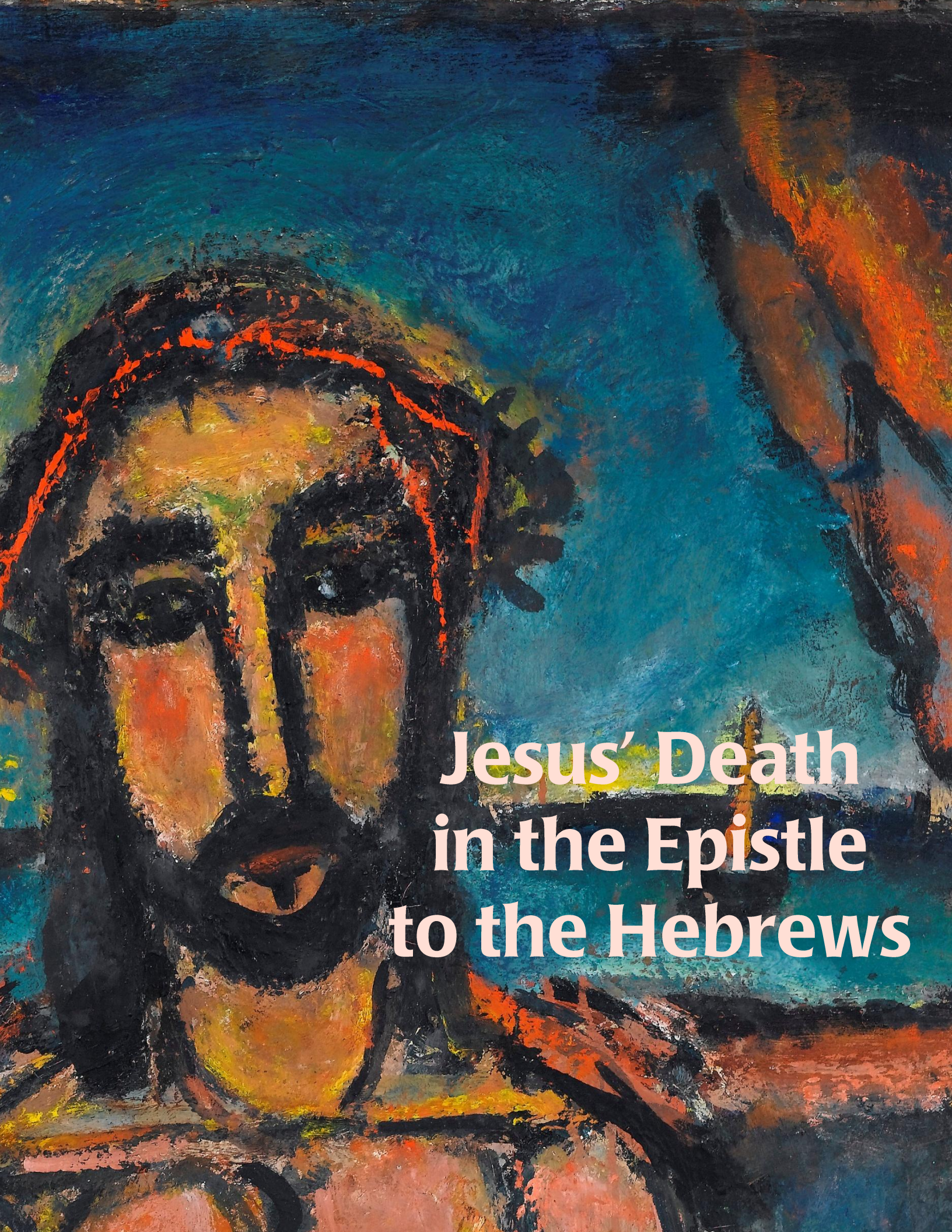
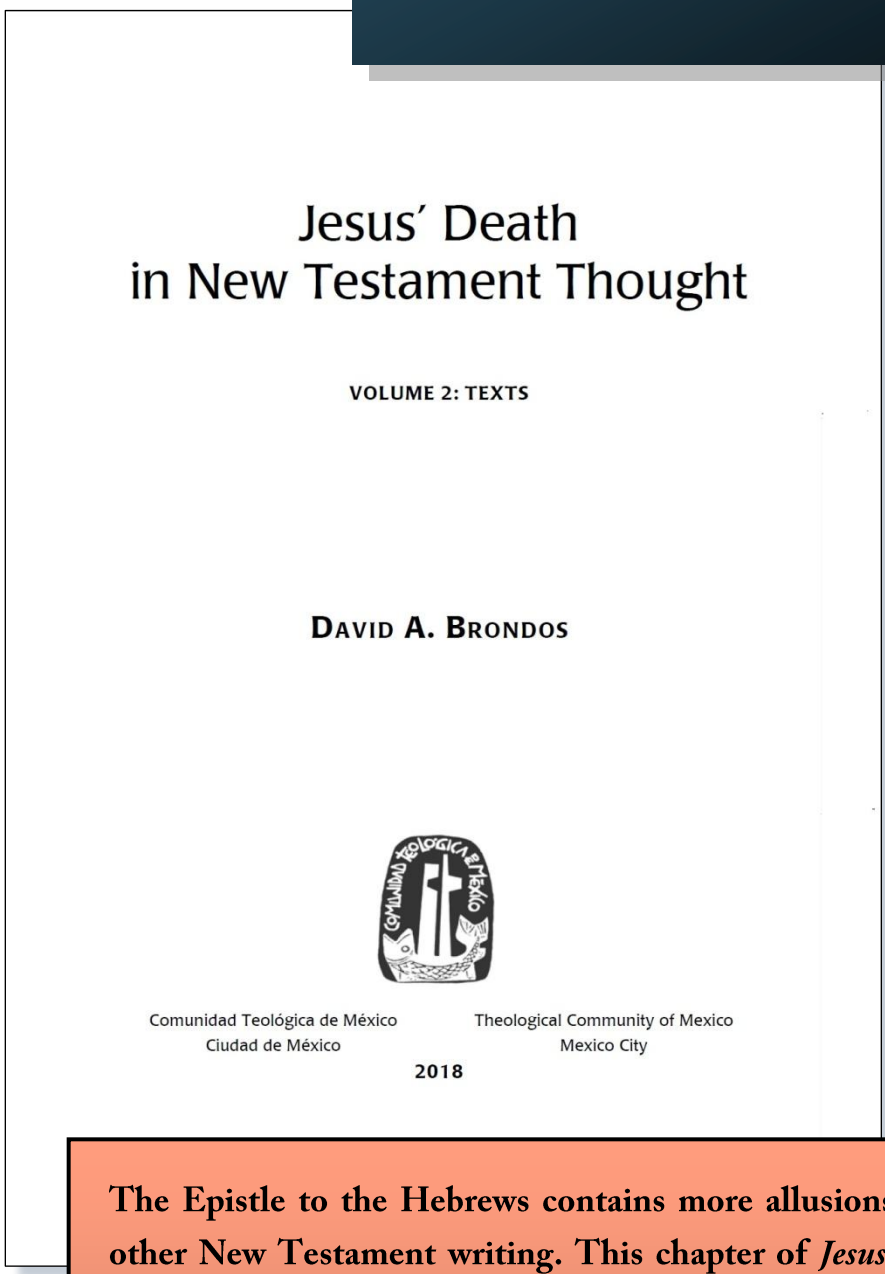


Jesus' Death in the Epistle to the Hebrews

Jesus' Death in the Epistle to the Hebrews



The Epistle to the Hebrews contains more allusions to Jesus' death than any other New Testament writing. This chapter of *Jesus' Death in New Testament Thought* examines those allusions in light of the Jewish views regarding sacrifice and the typological interpretation of Scripture considered in Volume One.

CHAPTER 15

Jesus' Death in the Epistle to the Hebrews

Of all the New Testament writings, none refers to Jesus' death and blood with the use of brief formulas more frequently than the epistle to the Hebrews. This writing is unique among the books of the New Testament in a number of ways. Outside of the Gospels and Acts, Hebrews is the only New Testament writing in which the author does not identify himself. While it has been customary to call it an epistle or letter, its form is that of a sermon or, to use the author's own phrase, a "word of exhortation" (Heb. 13:22). Many have even suggested that it is inaccurate to refer to it as an epistle, since only the very end of Hebrews, chapter 13, seems to follow the customary form of an epistle.[1] Nevertheless, because I will be examining the text of Hebrews as it now stands from a synchronic rather than a diachronic perspective, here I will refer to it as an epistle or letter. Even if it was originally a homily, it has been recast as an epistle.

For the most part, New Testament scholars have given up on attempts to identify the author of Hebrews.[2] Opinions continue to vary greatly regarding the date and place of composition of Hebrews as well as the location and makeup of the community to which it was addressed.[3] As the title given to the letter indicates, up until recent times it has generally been assumed that the addressees are Christians of Jewish origin. In recent decades, however, it has become increasingly common to claim that the audience is predominantly

1. On the reasons for regarding Hebrews as a homily or sermon rather than a letter, see Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 211-26; David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews"* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 23-39.

2. On the question of the authorship of Hebrews, see especially Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 3-21; Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 40-44. For the sake of brevity and convenience, I will assume that the author was male rather than female, even though we cannot be certain that such is the case. For the same reason, throughout the present chapter I will refer to those to whom the epistle to the Hebrews is addressed as its "readers," even though it is likely that the majority of those to whom the letter was sent had the letter read to them rather than reading it themselves.

3. On the circumstances of composition and the dating of Hebrews, see especially Johnson, *Hebrews*, 32-40. On the social setting of the recipients of the letter and the context to which it was addressed, see especially Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation and Commentary* (AB 36; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 64-78; deSilva, *Perseverance*, 2-23; William L. Lane, "Social Perspectives on Roman Christianity during the Formative Years from Nero to Nerva: Romans, Hebrews, *1 Clement*," in *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (ed. Karl P. Donfried and Peter Richardson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 214-24.

or exclusively non-Jewish.[4] Scholars of Hebrews have also disagreed greatly regarding the origin and background of many of the ideas that run throughout the epistle. While in the past it was thought that the author of Hebrews was influenced by gnostic thought, such views have gradually fallen out of favor.[5] Because the author displays an excellent command of koiné Greek, he clearly is acquainted with Hellenistic culture, yet this was true of many first-century Jews. Today the Jewish influence on the author's thought is widely recognized, though this does not rule out other influences.

Certain aspects of the situation of the addressees can be reconstructed from the letter itself.[6] Several passages suggest that some of the members of the community were distancing themselves from the community or abandoning it altogether (2:1-3; 3:12; 5:11—6:12; 10:23-25, 35-39; 12:1-3). The author also mentions the suffering of many of the addressees, at least some of which is due to some type of persecution, though it is not clear to what extent the political authorities are behind these persecutions (2:3-4; 3:6; 5:11; 6:1-4, 12; 10:22-25, 32-34; 13:22). In the past, it was often argued that some members of the community to which the letter is addressed were converting or reverting to Judaism and thus abandoning the Christian faith. While some scholars still adhere to this view, among others it has fallen out of favor.[7] Even if Hebrews is dated toward the end of the first century, such a clear distinction between Judaism and Christianity is now regarded as anachronistic and overly simplistic.

Throughout Hebrews, the author looks to the Hebrew Scriptures rather than to first-century Jewish realities and practices to develop his argument regarding Jesus and the salvation offered by God through him. In fact, the author never alludes explicitly to the Jerusalem temple or the sacrificial rites performed there before its destruction in 70 CE. Instead, in his discussion of sacrificial beliefs and practices and their fulfillment through Jesus, he focuses exclusively on the prescriptions found in the Mosaic law, which were believed

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4. Many scholars would agree with Norman H. Young that the addressees "were most likely a Jewish-Christian community, but then we should recall that 'nothing in early Christianity was un-Jewish'" ("'Bearing His Reproach' [Heb 13.9-14]," *NTS* 48 [2002]: 252). In contrast, deSilva argues that it is just as likely that Hebrews was addressed to non-Jewish Christians as it is that its addressees were Jewish Christians (*Perseverance*, 2-7). Eric F. Mason, however, claims that "the ethnicity of the recipients is not a determinative factor for interpretation of the book" (*You Are a Priest Forever: Second Temple Jewish Messianism and the Priestly Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews*; STDJ 74; Leiden: Brill, 2005, 5).

5. In his extensive introduction to the epistle to the Hebrews, Johnson no longer even considers the possibility of gnostic influence, though he does see the influence of Platonic thought in the letter (*Hebrews*, 3-60). The claim that the author was influenced by Gnosticism is particularly associated with Ernst Käsemann, *The Wandering People of God: An Investigation of the Letter to the Hebrews*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville and Irving L. Sandberg (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984). For a critique of Käsemann's proposal, see especially L. D. Hurst, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: Its Background and Thought* (SNTSMS 65; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 67-75.

6. On the problems and contexts that Hebrews addresses, see especially Robert P. Gordon, *Hebrews* (RNBC; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 14-22.

7. On the different possibilities concerning the situation of the recipients with regard to Judaism, see Iutisone Salevao, *Legitimation in the Letter to the Hebrews: A Construction of a Symbolic Universe* (JSNTSup 219; New York: Continuum, 2002), 107-17; deSilva, *Perseverance*, 7-20.

to have been addressed to the people of Israel long before the construction of the first temple under Solomon. Because of this, scholars continue to disagree as to whether the second temple was still standing when Hebrews was written.[8]

Although it is important to be aware of the many questions that exist with regard to the composition of Hebrews, it is not absolutely necessary to propose answers to these questions or even discuss them in further detail in order to accomplish our purpose here, namely, to examine the significance that the author ascribes to Jesus' sufferings and death in the epistle. It will be important, however, to consider the letter's allusions to Jesus' sufferings and death against the background of the argument of Hebrews as a whole as well as the argument that the author is developing in each of the sections in which those allusions appear. At the same time, because of the continuity of thought between Hebrews and the rest of the New Testament writings and the common tradition that they share, we must also take into account the interpretations given to Jesus' sufferings and death that we have examined throughout the present work in order to see how the author of Hebrews draws on that same tradition and those same interpretations to develop his arguments regarding the role of Jesus and his death in the salvation of the readers.

HEBREWS 1

The first allusion to Jesus' death in Hebrews occurs at the outset of the letter in Heb. 1:3. It is important to examine this verse in the context of the opening passage as a whole. The letter begins:

> 1:1 Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. 3 He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Immediately following this passage, the author uses a catena of quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures to stress the greatness of God's Son and his superiority in relation to the angels, as well as the greatness of the salvation that has been granted to the readers (1:5-13; 2:3). As Scott Mackie notes, the language of the author of Hebrews in this section also implies that Jesus is superior to the Roman emperor, whose title as *pontifex maximus* of the empire as well as his own sacrificial activity are usurped by Jesus, the true priest and king.[9]

While the affirmation that God's Son "made purification for sins" (*katharismon tōn hamartiōn poiēsamenos*) in 1:3 does not mention Jesus' death explicitly, there can be little question that the author has it in mind. The aorist

8. On this question, see Scott D. Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (WUNT 2/223; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 84-86.

9. Ibid., 149.

participle *poiēsamenos* depends on the verb in the indicative that immediately follows, "he sat down" (*ekathisen*), and thus communicates the idea that, prior to his being seated at God's right hand, the Son made purification for sins.[10] The language of purification from sins also reflects sacrificial imagery. Given that Hebrews, like other New Testament writings, presents Jesus' death metaphorically as a sacrificial offering, there can be little doubt that the allusion is therefore to Jesus' passion and death.

It is highly significant that the phrase under consideration occurs at the very outset of the letter. Obviously, the author has not yet developed the notion that Christ presented himself as an offering to God in a manner similar to the way in which the high priests of Israel presented sacrificial offerings to God. The fact that the author uses such a brief, formulaic phrase to refer to Jesus' death indicates that he expected his readers to understand the phrase without any difficulty, evidently because he believed that they were well-acquainted either with the phrase itself or else with the ideas behind the phrase. It is possible, of course, that the author did not expect that his readers would understand the phrase until after they had read through the rest of the letter, but this seems very unlikely. For this reason, in order to understand this allusion to Jesus' death, we should look to the tradition of interpretation and the ideas regarding the significance of Jesus' death that we have examined throughout our study on the basis of the assumption that both the author and the readers were familiar with that tradition or those ideas.

As we have seen repeatedly, Jesus' first followers did not attribute the forgiveness of sins to Jesus' death alone. Rather, that forgiveness was also attributed to everything that God had done through Jesus during his ministry as well as all that God would continue to do through the risen Jesus until the time when his reign would be established definitively. However, what enabled believers to obtain salvation and the forgiveness of sins was not only what God had done and would continue to do through Jesus, but also everything that God had done in ancient times prior to Jesus' coming and even before creation, when God conceived of the divine plan that he would carry out through Jesus. In previous centuries, God had revealed that plan to his prophets, who under God's direction and guidance had written down in the Scriptures of Israel what God had made known to them.

Among Jesus' followers, therefore, the common belief was that when God had conceived of the sacrificial rites that he had commanded the Israelites to carry out in the Mosaic law, he already had contemplated what would later take place through his Son. According to this idea, God had designed many aspects of the sacrificial rites found in the Scripture to point forward to what would some day come to pass through Jesus. This included not only the things that would take place during Jesus' lifetime and immediately following his

10. Several ancient manuscripts add the phrase *di' heautou* immediately before *katharismon*. This involves affirming that the Son made purification of sins "through himself." The addition of *di' heautou*, however, does not seem to change the meaning of this phrase in any significant way.

death, but also the realities that the communities of Jesus' followers would experience in the years after his death and resurrection. In the language of Hebrews, the Scriptures contained symbols (*parabolai*), copies (*hupodeigmata*), antitypes (*antitupa*), and shadows (*skia*) of what would come to take place in the time of Jesus and in the period between his resurrection and his second coming (9:9, 23-24; 10:1).[11]

All of this is precisely what the author of Hebrews mentions at the outset of the epistle. From ancient times, God had spoken "in many and various ways by the prophets," including especially those responsible for writing the Scriptures (1:1). Even before then, however, God had a Son who was a reflection of his glory and the exact imprint of his being (1:3). By means of this Son God had "created the worlds" or "ages" (*tous aiōnas*) and continued to sustain all things with his word (1:3). In recent times, God had sent this Son to speak on his behalf and to reveal things that went beyond what the prophets of old had affirmed (1:2). A little further on in the epistle, the author seems to claim that those who heard the Son speak personally passed on the things he had told them to others, including the author himself and his readers, whether directly or indirectly (2:3). After the Son had spoken what God desired to communicate, he "made purification for sins" through his sufferings and death and subsequently was exalted to God's right hand above all angels and the whole of creation (1:3-4).[12]

The allusions to God appointing the Son to be "heir of all things" (1:2) and the Son's inheriting a name more excellent than that of the angels (1:5) seem to refer to what took place when God exalted his Son to heaven following his death rather than something that occurred prior to the Son's coming or a time before creation.[13] While the author here seems clearly to attribute to Christ some type of preexistence as the reflection of God's glory and the imprint of his being and as the one through whom God created the ages,[14] nowhere in Hebrews or the New Testament is the preexistent Son spoken of as sitting at God's right hand *before* entering into the world as a human

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11. On the use and background of the Greek terms *hupodeigma*, *skia*, and *antitupos* in Hebrews, see especially L. D. Hurst, "How 'Platonic' are Heb. viii:5 and ix:23f.?," *JTS* 34 (1983): 156-68. Peter W. Macky observes that *hupodeigma* "is commonly used in the New Testament in the sense 'example,' where something concrete exemplifies a principle" (*The Centrality of Metaphors to Biblical Thought: A Method for Interpreting the Bible*; SBEC 19; Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1990, 95).

12. Daniel A. Smith rightly notes that "resurrection language is not found in the letter to the Hebrews, where at times the author moves right from Jesus' death to his exaltation" (*The Post-Mortem Vindication of Jesus in the Sayings Gospel Q*; LNTS 338; London: T & T Clark, 2006, 152). The only explicit allusion to Jesus' resurrection is found in Heb. 13:20.

13. As Ellingworth observes, while in Hebrews "sonship is spoken of as a permanent attribute of Christ, not as a title which is given or acquired at the time of his exaltation," nevertheless for the author "in his exaltation Christ reassumed the dignity of Son which he had laid aside when he became temporarily 'lower than angels' (2:9)" (*Hebrews*, 105). Attridge also notes in these verses the "tension... between what Christ is from all eternity and what he is at his exaltation" (*Hebrews*, 47).

14. William Lane notes that Hebrews 1 affirms both that "as a result of his exaltation the status of the Son has been declared superior to that of the angels," and that through the use of the Psalms he cites, including Ps. 104:4, the author seeks "to substantiate the conclusion that the Son is superior by documenting his eternal, unchangeable nature and his role in creation" (*Hebrews 1-8*; WBC 47A; Dallas, TX: Word, 1991, 24).

being.[15] Thus, in accordance with the tradition known to us through the other New Testament writings, the author of Hebrews regards the risen and exalted Christ as occupying a place at God's right hand that he had not previously occupied and existing in a condition that is distinct from that which he had prior to his coming into the world in human form. In fact, the author will affirm this explicitly in 2:9-17.

These points are of great importance for interpreting not only Hebrews as a whole but especially the allusion to the Son making purification for sins in 1:3. When one reads the first chapter of Hebrews, this allusion hardly appears to stand out in importance. Instead, its brevity and the use of a participle rather than a verb in the indicative tend to lead one to see this allusion as something mentioned only in passing in order to develop extensively in the following verses through the use of the Hebrew Scriptures the imagery of the Son now sitting in glory at God's right hand, far above angels and the entire created order. However, as we have just seen, the reason that the Son now sits at God's right hand in glory and power is not that he is God's Son by nature or because of anything he did prior to becoming human, but due to *that which he did after he had come into the world*. For the author of Hebrews, it is what the Son did while upon earth that led God to exalt him to his right side (1:4, 13), give him a name more excellent than that of the angels (1:4), declare him his Son whom he has begotten (1:5), establish him on a throne over a kingdom (1:8), anoint him with the oil of gladness (1:9), and declare his years to be without end (1:12). Even when the author uses Deut. 32:43 LXX (cf. Ps. 97:7) to affirm that God had the angels worship the Son after he was sent into the world as the first-born (1:6), this worship is something the angels are said to do during the Son's time on earth or after his exaltation.[16] Therefore, for the author, the angels worship the Son not simply because he is God's Son but because he entered into the world to carry out a task given him by God and successfully completed that task.[17]

This means that, while the Son's activity during his life on earth is scarcely mentioned in the first chapter of Hebrews, that activity constitutes the basis upon which everything said regarding the Son's present position of superiority,

15. Richard Bauckham argues this point, though he notes that James Dunn's perspective is distinct ("Monotheism and Christology in Hebrews 1," in *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism*; ed. Loren T. Stuckenbruck and Wendy E. S. North; JSNTSup 263; London: T & T Clark, 2004, 184).

16. On the background to Hebrews' allusions to angels, see especially Johnson, *Hebrews*, 82-84. Scott Mackie also notes that "the divine throne, temple veil, glory of God, and angels are commonly encountered in ancient Jewish texts that purport to describe the heavenly throne room. Furthermore, they are almost always characterized as presenting obstacles to the presence of God, and/or engendering fear and a sense of inadequacy on the part of the visionaries. A close examination of these motifs in Hebrews has revealed the innovative manner in which the author transforms them and their connotations, presenting them instead as encouraging, facilitating, and even ensuring access to a welcoming God" ("Ancient Jewish Mystical Motifs in Hebrews' Theology of Access and Entry Exhortations," *NTS* 58 [2012]: 103).

17. As Kiwoong Son notes, in Heb. 1:3 both priestly and kingly imagery are used: "the kingly exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of God is inseparable from the high priestly entry to the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 1:3; 4:14; 5:5-6; 8:1), and thus the kingship of Jesus is always presupposed in the discussion of the high priesthood of Jesus" (*Zion Symbolism in Hebrews: Hebrews 12:18-24 as a Hermeneutical Key to the Epistle*; PBM; Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2005, 164).

power, and glory depends. The reason that God exalted his Son to his right hand is that he was faithful all the way to his death in accomplishing the task given him (cf. 3:1-6). While the author no doubt believes that his readers know very well what that task was, here in the context of the first part of his letter he explicitly mentions two things: the Son's speaking God's words to others (1:2) and his making purification for sins (1:3). It would seem logical to assume that these two activities are closely related to one another rather than constituting two entirely different activities that have two distinct and unrelated purposes.

It is also highly significant that in his catena of citations from the Hebrew Scriptures, the author includes Ps. 45:6-7: "But of the Son he says, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed (*echrisen*) you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions'" (Heb. 1:9). This passage points clearly to the reason why God gave his Son an everlasting throne and a righteous scepter of his kingdom and made him his anointed one (*christos*): because he loved righteousness or justice and hated wickedness. The author's intention here seems clear: he is affirming that God exalted his Son because of the activity he carried out while on earth in favor of righteousness and justice and against wickedness.

This means that for the author there is a third aspect to the activity that the Son carried out on earth that led to his exaltation by God: the task given him by God involved not only serving as God's instrument to communicate his word and making purification for sins but also promoting righteousness or justice and acting against wickedness. Once again, we should not see these as isolated activities but as parts of a whole. On the basis of the tradition with which the readers were well-acquainted, this is undoubtedly how the author would have understand these three aspects and expected his readers to understand them as well: as components of a single task given to the Son by God. And because the Son fulfilled this task faithfully, God exalted him to his right side, from where he now reigns.

The fact that the author of Hebrews affirms that Jesus "made purification for sins" without entering into any discussion regarding what purification for sins involves indicates that he also makes a further assumption regarding his readers: that they are acquainted with the way in which purification for sins was made according to the Mosaic law and probably Jewish tradition as well. In this case, they had to be familiar not only with the tradition passed down concerning Jesus but also with the sacrificial system prescribed in the Mosaic law. If Hebrews is dated before the destruction of the Jewish temple and was addressed to believers of Jewish origin, it is possible that some of the recipients had participated in the sacrificial rites for sin carried out at the temple. Even if the letter is dated after 70 CE, many Jews remained well-acquainted with the procedures involved in those rites, not only because they read about them in their Scriptures but also because a great deal of information regarding

how those rites were performed seems to have been passed down in Jewish tradition. This is evident from the fact that both the writings of Josephus and the rabbinic literature, including especially the Mishnah, demonstrate considerable knowledge of many details regarding the sacrificial practices that took place in the temple before its destruction. The rites carried out at the Jerusalem temple thus continued to constitute a topic of considerable discussion among Jews long after 70 CE.

Whether Hebrews is considered to be addressed to believers of Jewish or non-Jewish origin, the author would undoubtedly expect his readers to understand the allusion to the Son's making purification for sins in light of the sacrificial system prescribed in the Hebrew Scriptures and practiced throughout the history of Israel rather than looking to the sacrificial practices of non-Jewish peoples. Throughout the epistle, he refers exclusively to the sacrificial system established by Israel's God under Moses. Therefore, even if some or all of the recipients of Hebrews are believers of non-Jewish origin, the author expects them to look to the Hebrew Scriptures and perhaps certain aspects of Jewish tradition in order to understand what the Son's making purification for sins involved.

All of this means that, on the basis of their knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures, the tradition regarding Jesus that they had received—including the common interpretations of the significance of Jesus' death—, and possibly the Jewish sacrificial practices that existed in the years preceding the temple's destruction, the author would expect his readers to understand his allusion to the Son's making purification for sins by recalling how the Israelite priests made purification for sins at the temple. Undoubtedly, there were many different purification procedures prescribed in the Mosaic law, many of which did not involve sacrificing an animal or performing rites with its blood. However, sacrifices *for sins* generally involved both of these things. The priest took the sacrificial blood and sprinkled some of it in the direction of the sanctuary veil and smeared another part on the horns of the altar or else sprinkled some of the blood on the sides of the altar. He then poured out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar (Lev. 4:5-7, 17-18; 5:9).[18] According to Lev. 16:11-22, on the annual Day of Atonement, the high priest took sacrificial blood into the Holy of holies and sprinkled it upon the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. He then smeared a part of the blood on the horns of the altar and sprinkled another part on the altar itself. Following this, the high priest carried out the rite over the goat for Azazel, which was subsequently led out to the desert.

At first glance, of course, nothing that Jesus did in his passion and death resembled what the priests did when they presented sacrifices for sin or what

18. Of course, the rites with the blood varied depending on whether the offering presented was a guilt-offering (*asham*) or a sin-offering (*hattat*). It is not clear, however, to what extent different meanings were ascribed to these two types of offerings for sins in first-century Judaism. In any case, both offerings were seen as making purification for sins in some sense.

the high priest did on the Day of Atonement. Following his arrest, Jesus had not performed any type of rite or manipulated his blood in any way and had not entered the precincts of the temple. According to the tradition handed down among his first followers, however, what Jesus *had* done in common with the Israelite priests and high priests in his death is something that is not explicitly mentioned in the biblical texts just considered: *he had offered up to God a prayer*, *asking God to forgive the sins of his people*. As we have seen previously, it was common knowledge that when the priests and high priest carried out the sacrificial rites for sin they uttered prayers asking God to forgive those on whose behalf the sacrifice was being offered. This was true not only among Jews but among non-Jews as well, since prayer was just as indispensable a part of the sacrificial practices of non-Jews as it was of Jewish sacrificial practices.

It is important to recall as well the *basis* upon which the priests and high priest were thought to offer up their prayers asking God to forgive those on whose behalf they offered sacrifices, which was also the basis upon which God was thought to accept favorably those prayers and sacrifices: the repentance and renewed commitment to obedience of those who sought God's forgiveness for their sins by means of the sacrificial offerings. Without that repentance and renewed commitment, the prayers and sacrifices offered to God were believed to be unacceptable to him and *no purification from sins was thought to take place*.

In the case of Jesus' self-offering and implicit prayer on behalf of others, the same condition would be seen as applying to his act of purification of sins. Only those who were truly repentant and committed themselves to living according to God's will would receive divine forgiveness through that which Jesus had done on their behalf. However, in the sacrificial system as prescribed in the Hebrew Scriptures and as practiced by Jews in antiquity, the people's expressions of repentance and recommitment to God's will generally took place *prior to* the sacrificial rite or *at the same time* that the rite was performed. In contrast, once Jesus' first followers came to understand his death metaphorically as a sacrifice for the sins of others, their expressions of repentance and recommitment to God's will naturally could take place only *after* the event of Jesus' death.

Because Jesus was believed to have offered himself up sacrificially for many people and not simply for one individual in particular, when his death was understood in sacrificial terms derived from the Mosaic law, it would be compared either to the *hattat* sacrifice offered for the sins of the "whole congregation of Israel" prescribed in Lev. 4:13-21 or else the sacrificial rites performed on the Day of Atonement, rather than the sacrifices for sin or purification that individuals offered on their own behalf. According to Lev. 4:13-14, however, the *hattat* sacrifice was offered for the people as a whole only when they became aware of some particular sin that they had committed collectively. Strictly speaking, then, the *hattat* was a sacrifice for occasional sins rather than the everyday sins of the people as a whole.

It is fairly certain, therefore, that when Jesus' death was interpreted as a sacrifice for sins, it would be seen as comparable to the sacrifice for the people's sins made on the Day of Atonement rather than the *hattat* sacrifice described in Lev. 4:13-21. The fact that the Day of Atonement took place annually would also make it more likely that Jesus' self-offering would be compared to the Day of Atonement sacrifices, since these were broader in scope in that they addressed *all* of the sins of *all* of the people committed throughout the whole year. Although of course Jesus did not die every year but had died only one time, because the same adverb "once" could be applied to the annual Day of Atonement sacrifice for the people's sins in the sense that it took place once a year, this sacrifice would also lend itself more readily to being associated with Jesus' death. It is also significant that, after describing the rites to be carried out on the Day of Atonement, Lev. 16:30 states that through these rites the people would be cleansed or purified from their sins, thus using the same vocabulary as Heb. 1:3. The verb used in Lev. 16:30 in the Septuagint is *katharizein*, from which *katharismon* is derived.

As we shall see further on in this chapter, the author of Hebrews develops several of these ideas elsewhere in the letter and specifically associates the Day of Atonement sacrifices with Jesus' death rather than other sacrifices for sin. Whether or not this was already evident to the readers of Hebrews in 1:3, however, the fact that it was obvious that not all Israelites from around the world could be present physically at the Jerusalem temple on the Day of Atonement or when other sacrifices for sin were offered on their behalf but could nevertheless participate in the sacrificial rites from afar would also be significant for the sacrificial interpretation that Jesus' first followers would give to his death. Those members of God's people who could not be present in Jerusalem when the sacrifices for their sins were offered, especially on the Day of Atonement, would be expected to turn facing toward the Jerusalem temple, preferably at the same hour at which the rites were being performed, and to participate by expressing in some way their repentance and their renewed commitment to living according to God's will as defined in the Mosaic law.[19] This participation would probably include prayers in which they made a general confession of sins, asked God for forgiveness, and vowed to obey the commandments to the best of their abilities with God's assistance. It would also include physical and visible expressions of repentance, such as fasting and perhaps kneeling in prayer, beating one's breast, wearing certain attire, and performing other ritual actions.

In biblical and Jewish thought, therefore, one could participate in the sacrificial rites through which one sought divine forgiveness for one's sins, including especially the rites performed on the Day of Atonement, at a great distance from the tabernacle or temple. This distance would be *spatial* yet

19. As the Talmud mentions, the practice of turning toward the Jerusalem temple to pray has its roots in 1 Kgs. 8:30, 44, 48; 2 Chron. 6:32, 34 (*Yerushalmi Berakhot* 4:6; see *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: A Preliminary Translation and Explanation*, Vol. 1: *Berakhot*, trans. Tzvee Zahavy; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989, 182-83).

might also be to some extent *temporal*, since those who were far away had no way of knowing for certain whether the rites were being performed by the high priest at the exact same time that they offered up their prayers and expressions of repentance. For this reason, it would not be problematic for Jesus' first followers to think that, even though Jesus had offered himself up for others asking God's forgiveness for their sins many years earlier in a place that was far away, through their own faith and repentance they might include themselves among those on whose behalf Jesus had offered up his life sacrificially asking God to accept them and forgive their sins.

Nevertheless, Jesus' followers would also be convinced that the basis upon which Jesus in his death had petitioned God to forgive them their sins was that they come to repent of their sinful life and commit themselves to living according to God's will by following Jesus in the context of the community of believers. This commitment to doing God's will, of course, was also the basis upon which God had accepted favorably Jesus' petition on their behalf by raising and exalting him. As we have seen elsewhere in this study, according to the New Testament, this belief appears to have been common to Jesus' first followers everywhere.

The author of Hebrews, therefore, could rightly expect that when he stated that Jesus had "made purification for sins," the readers would understand his statement on the basis of the ideas just considered. Jesus had gone to his death asking that God forgive and accept as pure or clean all those who would come to live under him as their Lord. By definition, to accept him as Lord involved repenting of their former sinful life, renouncing their rejection of other lords, including sin and Satan, and committing themselves to obeying him. The reason why the author speaks of Jesus making purification for sins in general rather than "our" sins is that, like the high priest on the Day of Atonement, Jesus had offered up his life and his prayer for all who would choose to identify themselves as members of God's people under him. In other words, he had made purification not simply for specific sins committed previously or the sins of a certain group of people belonging to a particular time and place, but for the sins of any who would come to be included in the community of those who identified themselves as his followers. Omitting the word "our" makes the affirmation more open-ended: Jesus "made purification for sins" in a general sense.[20]

Whether or not the question of *why* Jesus had to make purification for sins through his death would have arisen among the original readers of Hebrews, it is commonly raised among Christian interpreters today. According to traditional atonement views, especially those based on the idea of penal substitution, this question has been answered by affirming that God or God's justice required that Jesus die on the cross in order that God might forgive sins freely without compromising his righteousness and holiness. This, however, is not the logic of Hebrews. As I have argued above, for the author of Hebrews,

20. There is some textual evidence for the reading "our sins" in Heb. 1:3, but it is very weak.

Jesus' task involved not merely making purification for sins but communicating God's word and working on behalf of justice and against wickedness. According to the logic of Hebrews, if one asks why God's Son had to die to make purification for human sins, it would also be necessary to ask why God needed to send his Son to communicate his word through him, especially if God had already spoken that word "in many and various ways by the prophets" (Heb. 1:1). One could also raise other questions about the need for God to send Jesus or other aspects of Jesus' work for justice and righteousness.

As I have argued previously, among Jews in general as well as Jesus' first followers, the fundamental question regarding salvation was not how a perfect and holy God could forgive sins, but how God's people could be brought into conformity with God's will. In their minds, the primary need was not that of appeasing God's wrath or enabling a righteous God to declare sinners righteous, but instead that of overcoming the disobedience that *occasioned* that wrath and enabling sinners to come to live righteously so that God could rightly declare them righteous. For this reason, nothing but repentance and a recommitment to obeying God could put away God's wrath and enable the people to be purified from their sins. For the author of Hebrews, neither the repeated sacrifice of animal victims nor Christ's sacrifice in itself could lead to that purification, since without repentance and a commitment to obey God no expiation or purification was possible.

Yet if it was repentance and a recommitment to living in conformity with God's will that purified sinners from their sins, why had sacrifices been necessary? And why had Jesus' sacrifice been necessary? We have already addressed the first of these questions in Chapter 3 of this study: just as Israel's God had given commandments and wanted his people to live in conformity with his will *not for his own sake but for theirs*, so also God had ordained sacrifices *for the sake of his people rather than his own*. In Jewish thought, God did not need sacrifices to forgive sins. However, he commanded the people to offer sacrifices as a means of constantly reminding them of their sins and their need for repentance and obedience, as well as a means of expressing visibly and palpably their repentance and obedience so that it could be strengthened and reinforced. By repeatedly offering up sacrifices that petitioned God for forgiveness and were believed to *obtain* that forgiveness when those sacrifices were true expressions of their repentance and commitment to obeying God, God's people were continually renewed in their commitment to practicing and establishing justice for their own good.

When the author of Hebrews says that Jesus made purification for sins in Heb. 1:3, then, *he presupposes the existence of a repentant*, *obedient*, *and righteous people under Jesus*. Because no one could ever be purified from sins without repentance and a recommitment to obey God, not even Jesus as God's Son could make purification for sins for the unrepentant who did not commit themselves to obeying God. Furthermore, just as God wanted his people to be repentant, obedient, and righteous *for their own sake*, so also it can be said

that God desired and commanded that his people be *pure*, not for *his* sake, but for *theirs*. Jesus had had to make purification for sins, *not for God's sake*, so as to enable God to forgive, but *for the sake of others*, *so that they might actually be purified in their way of thinking and living for their own well-being and that of those around them*. In the mind of the author of Hebrews and Jesus' first followers in general, this is what Jesus had sought throughout his ministry and up to the moment of his death, as well as what God had sought *through* Jesus in his ministry and by giving him over to death on the cross.

In early Christian thought, however, Jesus' death had been necessary since *it was the only way in which the purification of the way of thinking and living that God and Jesus had sought to bring about in others through Jesus' ministry could fully become a reality*. When that ministry led to the threat of death, if Jesus had been unwilling to offer up his life to God but had instead backed away from that ministry, he would have been unable to bring into existence a community of people absolutely committed to living in conformity with God's will for their own good. Similarly, if at that time God had held back his Son from death rather than giving him up to die, God could not have expected Jesus' followers to be fully committed to living in the way he desired and commanded for their own good, and thus no new, obedient people would have been brought about through Jesus. How could God demand of others a commitment that he himself had refused to make?

Therefore, when the author of Hebrews affirms that the Son made purification for sins, he must have in mind not only Jesus' death but that which had *led* to that death, namely, everything else that Jesus had done—and that God had done through him—to bring about a repentant and obedient people. In his death, Jesus could make purification for sins only because he had completed the task of laying the foundation for such a people to exist. Yet that is also precisely the reason why Jesus' death had been necessary to make purification for sins: because only by offering himself up to God in his death after laying that foundation could he ensure that the people who would live under him would actually *leave behind* their sinful ways and *live* in a pure manner. Likewise, from God's perspective, it had been necessary for Jesus to die to make purification for sins because only if Jesus was willing to offer up his life in obedience with God's will in order to bring about the pure people God desired to see could such a people actually come into existence. In other words, from the perspective of the author of Hebrews, nothing but Jesus' self-offering for others in death could have made purification for sins because God's activity of communicating his word through Jesus and working through his Son in other ways to bring about a people committed to practicing righteousness and opposing evil eventually left God with only two alternatives: to intervene in order to spare his Son from the violent death that would result as a consequence of the Son's activity to establish such a people or to hand him over to that death. Only by doing the latter could God hope to form a people who would live righteously and on that basis be purified from their sins.

Once again, then, it is impossible to understand what Hebrews and the New Testament writings in general say about Jesus' death unless that death is viewed in the context of the ministry that led to Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. As the author of Hebrews affirms, that ministry involved speaking God's word, promoting righteousness and justice, and opposing evil in its various forms. After he had dedicated his life to these things in order to lay the foundation for a people who would live the pure, obedient life God desired to see in them for their own good, Jesus had made purification for sins for all who would come to live under him as members of God's people, not simply by dying, as if his death in itself purified others, but by offering himself up to God with the petition that God forgive and accept those people. And it had been necessary for Jesus to make purification for sins in this way, through his death, because only his faithfulness unto death to the task given him by God could lead to the existence of a people who repented of their sins and committed themselves to leading pure lives in the way God desired so as to be *declared* pure of their sins by him. Just as God had commanded sacrifice not for his own sake but for the sake of his people, so also God had willed that his Son offer up his life not for *his own* sake, as if God needed that death in order to be able to regard sinners as pure in spite of their sinfulness, but *for the sake of those sinners themselves*, since only in that way could they be brought into conformity with God's will for their own good.

HEBREWS 2

In Heb. 2:1-4, the author directs the attention of the readers or hearers to the greatness of the salvation declared through the Lord and reminds them of the signs and wonders God worked among them and their reception of the Holy Spirit.[21] He then alludes to Jesus' death several times in the remainder of chapter 2 of the letter, in a passage that can only be understood properly if we abandon for a moment the use of inclusive language so as to translate the words *anthrōpos* as "man" and *huios* as "son":

> 2:5 Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. 6 But someone has testified somewhere, "What is 'man' (*anthrōpos*) that you are mindful of 'him,' or the 'son of man' (*huios anthrōpou*), that you care for 'him'? 7 You have made 'him' for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned 'him' with glory and honor, 8 subjecting all things under 'his' feet." Now in subjecting all things to 'him,' God left nothing outside 'his' control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to 'him,' 9 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 (*huper pantos*).
>
> 10 For it was fitting that he on account of whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their

21. If the signs and wonders mentioned in Heb. 2:4 are those performed by Jesus during his ministry, as some commentators believe, this would be one of the few allusions to Jesus' ministry in Hebrews. In this regard, Elllingworth observes that Heb. 2:3 "could naturally refer to Christ's preaching during his earthly ministry" (*Hebrews*, 140).

> salvation complete through sufferings. 11 For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all proceed from the same one. For this reason [Jesus] is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, 12 saying, "I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you." 13 And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Here am I and the children whom God has given me."
>
> 14 Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. 16 For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the seed of Abraham. 17 Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, in order to expiate the sins of the people. 18 Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

The use of the words "man" and "son" in this translation preserves the ambiguity that is present in vv. 6-9. It is not entirely clear at what point in the passage references to "man" become references to Jesus himself.[22] For our purposes here, however, it is not necessary to enter into a discussion of this question. In vv. 5-9 and 16, the author also alludes repeatedly to angels, as he has done in 1:5-14. Here, however, he no longer argues that the risen and exalted Jesus is superior to the angels, but instead stresses that the salvation God brings through Jesus is not intended for the angels but for human beings and that, for a little while, Jesus was made inferior to the angels. It seems clear that he has in mind the time that Jesus spent on earth.

The author's use of the Septuagint version of Ps. 8:4-6 (LXX 8:5-7) in 2:6-8 allows him not only to mention God's care for human beings but also to interpret the passage eschatologically. Whereas the Hebrew version of Ps. 8:6 speaks of "man" being made a little lower than God or the angels (depending on how *elohim* is translated there), the Greek adjective *brachu* employed in the Septuagint, "lower" or "less," can be understood either spatially or temporally.[23] If it is taken temporally, then the subjection of human beings to angels is only "for a little while." The author's omission of what immediately follows upon the words he quotes from Psalm 8 also makes an eschatological interpretation possible, since the Psalm originally refers to the subjection of all the animals to "man" (Ps. 8:6-7). Obviously, for the Psalmist, that subjection is something God established at the time of creation rather than something still awaited. In spite of the affirmation in the past tense that God submitted all

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22. Johnson, for example, sees the allusion to "all things being subject under his feet" in Ps. 8:5 as an allusion to Christ (*Hebrews*, 91). Koester proposes that this phrase be understood both on a "christological level" as well as referring "to the eventual subjection of all things to the people of God" (*Hebrews*, 216). Mason writes regarding the quotation of Ps. 8:6 in Heb. 2:8, "Some interpreters see the quotation as speaking of humanity in general, which would seem to be the intent of the psalmist, with a subsequent shift to discussion of Jesus in Heb. 2:9, whereas others argue that the author of Hebrews read the quotation prophetically as referring to Jesus. The quotation is best interpreted as intentionally ambiguous; it is applied to Jesus but intended to evoke its original application to humanity in general in order to stress Jesus' solidarity with humanity" (*You Are a Priest Forever*, 20).

23. On this point, see Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 154. Ellingworth himself argues for a temporal interpretation, claiming that the allusion is to the short time between the incarnation of God's Son and his death and exaltation.

things under the feet of "man," in 2:8, the author of Hebrews sees this subjection not only as an act of God in the past but also as something God will do in the future, since he affirms that we do "not yet" (*oupō*) see all things subjected to "man." This contrasts with Jesus, who "for a little while" (*brachu*) was made lower than the angels, but whom we now see "crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone" (2:9).

In Heb. 2:9 and the verses that follow, it is important to avoid seeing the author's concern as having to do with ontological questions. On the basis of the type of soteriology associated with patristic thought, traditional interpretations of Heb. 2:5-18 often stress the union of God's Son with "human nature" in his "incarnation," which supposedly made it possible for God to redeem sinful humanity through Christ.[24] These ideas are read back into the passage, which speaks of Jesus having the same origin as other human beings and sharing their flesh and blood (2:11-14), so as to speak of the "necessity" of the Son's becoming fully human in v. 17: "Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect." When salvation is understood in terms of an ontological transformation of humanity, the author's affirmation that Jesus was "crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death" in 2:9 is understood in the sense that, in order for the new, glorious humanity to be brought into existence through Jesus, it was necessary for the old, sinful humanity first to be done away with in his death. In this case, when the author speaks of Jesus' death, he has in mind primarily the physical and biological aspect of dying. The reason Jesus had to die is that, by definition, a human being cannot be raised in a new, glorious body until the old body subject to corruption and decay has been put to death.

As we have seen elsewhere, however, when alluding to Jesus' death with the use of brief formulas such as those which we find here, the New Testament writings generally have in mind not simply the fact that Jesus died but that he gave up his life out of love for others. Jesus' death is not isolated from the ministry that preceded it or the new, exalted existence at God's right hand that followed it. If one keeps this in mind, then the affirmation that Jesus was "crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death" must be interpreted in the sense that God exalted Jesus to a position of glory and honor at his side, not merely because he suffered and died, but because he gave up his life as a result of his commitment to seeking the salvation of others in love for them.

For the same reasons, the following phrase, "so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone," should not be understood against the background of ideas associated with the ontological and penal substitution views of Christ's work. His death is not "for everyone" in the sense that it brings into existence a "new humanity" in which others may now participate or in the sense that, in his sufferings and death, he endured the penalty to

24. See, for example, Käsemann, *Wandering People*, 157.

which all human beings were subject as their substitute so that they may now be free from that penalty. Instead, we must look at the context of the epistle to determine what the author means by this phrase.

If the allusion to Jesus tasting death for everyone in 2:9 is viewed in connection with what immediately precedes it, then it would appear that the author has in mind something to do with all things coming to be subject to human beings or to Jesus himself at the *eschaton*. In this case, Jesus tasted death "for everyone" in the sense that Jesus died as a result of his efforts to bring others into conformity with God's will so that some day they might attain the salvation God intended for them, which will involve the subjection of all things to them under Jesus' lordship.[25] The fact that God raised and exalted Jesus to his present position of glory and honor as a result of his faithfulness to death to the task given him means that the promised eschatological salvation is now certain to come through him. Jesus therefore experienced death on behalf of all people in the sense that, after dedicating himself entirely to the salvation of others during his ministry, he gave up his life for them so that he might then be raised and exalted as Lord for them and thereby be enabled to make that salvation a reality in its fullness.[26] As we saw in Chapter 6 of this study, while in early Christian thought Jesus hoped and expected to be raised and exalted, he was not seeking these things selfishly for his own sake but for the sake of others. As he went to his death, he wished to be glorified so that he might continue to serve others and ultimately return in power in order to put an end to sin and injustice and make God's reign a reality for them in all of its fullness.

In 2:8-9, however, the author of Hebrews may also have in mind Psalm 110.[27] As we shall see further on, this Psalm plays a key role in the argument of the epistle, not only because of v. 1, "The Lord said to my lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet,'" but also because of v. 4, "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'" Although the language in Heb. 2:8 is somewhat different from that of Ps. 110:1, if the author does have the latter passage in mind, the idea in Heb. 2:9 may be that, by giving up his life for everyone, Jesus has been exalted to his position at God's right hand, from where he will subject all things under his feet in order to bring about the salvation God has promised. Once again, however, his death "for everyone"

25. Albert Vanhoye rightly stresses that, in the thought of the author of Hebrews, "In reality, what produced the glorification of Jesus is not his death itself but the way he faced his death. He made it the occasion of a perfect offering of filial obedience to God and fraternal solidarity with humankind...." (*The Letter to the Hebrews: A New Commentary*, trans. Leo Arnold; New York: Paulist, 2015, 74).

26. I would concur with Robert Jewett that the phrase "for the sake of every one" in Heb. 2:9 should be seen in the context of the solidarity with sinners and all sorts of people throughout his ministry (*Letter to Pilgrims: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*; New York: Pilgrim, 1981, 44-45). Jesus' *death* was "for the sake of everyone" only because he had dedicated his *life* to all those around him during his ministry and continued to seek in his death what he had sought throughout his ministry.

27. Lane, for example, suggests that the author has Ps. 110:1 in mind in Heb. 2:8 due to the fact that throughout the New Testament "Ps. 8 is almost invariably cited in association with Ps. 110:1" (*Hebrews 1-8*, 46).

would be understood against the background of the idea that he gave up his life asking God to raise and exalt him so that he might bring about the salvation of others.

If the author has in mind both the subjection of all things to Jesus as a result of his death and exaltation as well as the future subjection of all things to human beings, then Jesus' death and exaltation can be interpreted as "for others" through what these events reveal. Because the readers see that Jesus was exalted to glory and honor and that all things are subjected to him as a result of his faithfulness to God unto death out of love for others, they can now have assurance and hope that if they also remain faithful to God unto death out of love for others, they will be exalted like Jesus and will one day have all things put under their feet as well.

Rather than looking only to what immediately precedes it, the affirmation that Jesus tasted death for everyone in 2:9 may also be understood on the basis of what follows it. In this case, after employing the phrase "so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone," the author has decided to explain to his readers what he meant by that phrase. This takes us to v. 10, which reads: "For it was fitting that he on account of whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer (*archēgos*) of their salvation complete (*teleiōsai*) through sufferings." Both the initial *gar*, "for" or "because," and the use of *archēgos* tie this verse in with the previous one. The noun *archēgos* refers to one who leads others in doing something or to one who originates or begins something that will be followed by others, often as the first in a series.[28] It is possible to see this as referring to what the author has just affirmed in 2:9: just as Jesus was crowned with glory and honor and all things are now subject to him as a result of his faithfulness unto death, so also those who are faithful all the way to their death as Jesus was will be crowned with glory and honor and have all things subjected to them.[29]

However, the interpretation of v. 10 is complicated somewhat by the use of the verb *teleioun*, which appears here for the first time in the epistle. Throughout the rest of the epistle, the author uses the same verb repeatedly to refer both to Jesus and to believers. Scholars have debated extensively over the

28. Donald A. Hagner suggests as translations for *archēgos* "'pioneer,' 'originator,' 'author,' 'founder,' or 'pathbreaker'" ("The Son of God as Unique High Priest: The Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *Contours of Christology in the New Testament*; ed. Richard N. Longenecker; MNTS; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005, 254). George Johnston has argued that *archēgos* is best translated "Prince," since it points to "royal prerogatives and princely powers in the service of God, power that Jesus, rather than David or Ezekiel or the author of Ps. Sol. 17, filled with love's graces, humility, sacrifice, patience, and so on" ("Christ as Archegos," *NTS* 27 [1981]: 383-84). As Sylvia Hagene notes, Moses is called *archēgos* in the Septuagint and other ancient Jewish writings (*Zeiten der Wiederherstellung: Studien zur lukanischen Geschichtstheologie als Soteriologie*; NANF 42; Münster: Aschendorf, 2003, 251). For a general background to the term and its use in ancient Jewish sources, as well as Hebrews, see 248-57.

29. In this case, according to Barnabas Lindars, the author is affirming that "Jesus is the 'pioneer' of our salvation because he has completed the process first," and is also the "'perfecter (*teleiōtēs*) of our faith' (12:2) because he enables those who hold fast to the Christian profession to reach the same goal" (*The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*; NTT; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 45).

meaning of this verb in Hebrews without reaching any consensus.[30] Clearly it has something to do with achieving an end or goal (*telos*) and becoming complete, whole, perfect, or mature in some sense (*teleios*). This can be understood in various ways. For reasons already mentioned, I would question the notion that the author is referring to some type of ontological perfection, as if the goal or fullness involved merely some type of physical or bodily glory. At the same time, the idea of attaining a condition of glory and honor by being raised from the dead and taken into God's presence is almost certainly present in some sense when the author uses the word. This completeness and perfection can also be understood in a moral sense as referring to an existence in which one lives fully in accordance with God's will. While this idea is probably present in some of the other passages from Hebrews in which the verb appears, something more than this seems to be involved.

Rather than offering a precise definition of the verb *teleioun* as used in Hebrews in order then to use that definition to interpret the term each time it appears in the letter, I would argue that we must not assume that the term means precisely the same thing in every passage in which it appears. While it is undoubtedly helpful to grasp the background of the term and to discuss the ways in which it was used in antiquity, I believe the best and safest approach is simply to interpret the term in its general sense and let the context determine how it is best understood. This is the approach that I will follow here. In addition, for our purposes in this chapter, it is not necessary to enter here into further discussions regarding the meaning of *teleioun* in Hebrews or define the term precisely.

Even if one leaves open the question of the verb's precise meaning in Hebrews, it is necessary to translate it into English. Most English translations use the language of "perfection." While in general this appears to be the best option, it is important to recognize that such language is highly problematic because of the manner in which the notion of perfection has been used in traditional Christian theology, where it has been understood in an absolute,

30. For discussions regarding the meaning of perfection in Hebrews, see David G. Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in 'the Epistle to the Hebrews'* (SNTSMS 47; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); John M. Scholer, *Proleptic Priests in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (JSNTSup 49; Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 187-207. Scholer concludes that *teleioun* has to do with "'attaining the goal,' which is the direct presence of God." It is therefore very close in meaning to *proserchesthai* and *eiserchesthai* (200). For deSilva, *teleioun* involves "bringing something to, or having something arrive at, its appointed end" (*Perseverance*, 196; see 194-204). Craig Koester prefers to translate *teleiōsis* in terms of "completion," arguing that it means "bringing something to its goal or *telos*," that is, "bringing God's purposes to their goal" ("God's Purposes and Christ's Saving Work according to Hebrews," in *Salvation in the New Testament: Perspectives on Soteriology*, ed. Jan G. van der Watt; NovTSup 121; Leiden: Brill, 2005, 383). Kenneth L. Schenck argues that there is "a strong link between promise and perfection in Hebrews," so that perfection has to do primarily with obtaining God's promises (*Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews: The Settings of the Sacrifice*; SNTSMS 143; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 73; see 63-77). It appears that little more can be concluded with any certainty from these discussions than that which Schenck writes: "In the end, it must simply be admitted that the particular kind of perfection in each instance varies depending on the entity in question. There is always the idea of 'bringing to the appropriate goal' or 'completedness' in mind, but there is not one specific goal in each case. For each kind of item, there is its own appropriate 'completeness'" (70-71). Such a view avoids imposing the same understanding of perfection on every passage in Hebrews in which that terminology appears.

categorical sense. There it has been common to speak of God's perfection as an abstract divine quality and an obstacle to human salvation, since God's perfection supposedly prevents God from accepting imperfect sinners into his presence. Jesus is often said to have been "perfect" in that, throughout his entire life, from birth to death, he was absolutely sinless. Such perfection is also supposedly demanded of human beings, yet because they are incapable of being perfectly sinless, it was necessary for Jesus to be sinless in order to die in their place. Later theological ideas such as these must not be read back into the language of Hebrews regarding perfection. Instead, it must be stressed that the author of Hebrews has in mind the general idea of reaching a state of completeness, wholeness, or fullness or attaining a particular goal or objective. It is this, rather than some abstract concept of absolute sinlessness, that the author of Hebrews has in mind when he speaks of the perfection of Christ and believers. In addition, the only one who has been perfected is Christ himself; believers now have access to God in a way that they did not before, yet they still await their eschatological perfection.[31]

By affirming that it was "fitting" (*eprepei*) that God bring Jesus to perfection, fullness, completion, or the desired goal by means of sufferings, the author refrains from using the language of necessity, which he will use later in the epistle. Because the author has just spoken of Jesus being "crowned with glory and honor because of the sufferings of death" in 2:9 and then in 2:10 alludes to God's "bringing many children to glory," in this case the verb *teleiōsai* should be understood in terms of attaining the glorious condition following one's resurrection. This is something that Jesus has already done, in contrast to believers, who still await that glory, which will come at the *eschaton*. Nevertheless, these two verses should be understood in the sense that Jesus suffered death in order to be exalted to a position of honor and glory, not simply for his own sake, but for the sake of those "children" whom he sought to be able to bring to glory once he had attained his present position.[32] The author does not yet explain *why* it was fitting that God bring Jesus to the desired goal by means of suffering, yet he will do so in the following verses. It is important not to overlook, however, the author's allusion to God as the one "through whom and for whom all things (*ta panta*) exist." In this case, rather than referring merely to "things," the author seems to have in mind *persons*, including especially human beings in general, but perhaps Jesus as well. It is perhaps best to understand the author's allusion to God as the one "through whom and for whom all things and all people exist."

In 2:11-13, the author stresses the common origin of Jesus, "the one who sanctifies," and "those who are sanctified," before affirming that Jesus is "not

31. On this point, see especially Scholer, *Proleptic Priests*, 200, 202.

32. Referring to the perfection of Christ as this idea is presented in Hebrews, Sebastian Fuhrmann writes: "This perfection into which he grew, enabled him to become a high priest, for it is a constituent part of his completely different liturgy (Heb. 8,6: *diaphorōteras tetuchen leitourgias*) that he became merciful, reliable (Heb. 2,17) and compassionate (Heb. 4,15), in order to intercede with God (Heb. 7,25) for those in need of it (Heb. 2,18; 4,16)" ("Christ Grown into Perfection: Hebrews 9,11 from a Christological Point of View," *Biblica* 89 [2008]: 99).

ashamed to call them brothers and sisters." The author then quotes Ps. 22:22 to present Jesus as the one proclaiming God's name and praising him in the midst of his brothers and sisters, as well as the Septuagint version of Isa. 8:17-18, "I will put my trust in him," and again, "Here am I and the children whom God has given me." While these passages establish Jesus as the brother of others, they do not seem to respond to the question of why Jesus might be ashamed to *call* them brothers and sisters. In itself, being human or sharing in flesh and blood would not appear to be a cause for shame. While the coming of God's Son involved becoming "lower than the angels" for a "little while," Hebrews nowhere speaks of this as humiliating or shameful in itself or alludes to God's Son emptying himself or setting aside his divine glory and power to become human.

Instead, what appears to be a motive for shame is suffering.[33] The author has just mentioned Jesus' "suffering of death" in v. 9 and has stressed the appropriateness of God having had Jesus endure suffering in order for him to be made complete and attain the desired end in v. 10. The author also mentions Jesus' death throughout this section and ends it with an allusion to Jesus being "tested by what he suffered" (2:18). Later on, in 12:2, the author will speak of Jesus disregarding the shame of the cross in the context of his exhortation to the readers to "not grow weary or lose heart" in their sufferings, struggles, and trials but instead to "consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners" (12:3; see 12:1-14).

The relation between suffering and shame is particularly evident in 10:32-34: "But recall those earlier days when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and persecution, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion for those who were in prison, and you cheerfully accepted the plundering of your possessions, knowing that you yourselves possessed something better and more lasting." These verses stress the past willingness of the readers not only to endure abuse and persecution publicly but to show solidarity with others who suffered, including especially those who were similarly abused publicly and those who had been imprisoned by the authorities. By showing compassion to those in prison, the readers had identified openly with them, making evident both to the authorities and to everyone else who observed them their solidarity with those imprisoned due to their faith. In the words of 2:11-18, the readers were not ashamed to call those publicly abused and those in prison their brothers and sisters. In 6:10, the author mentions the work and love of the readers in serving the saints, which probably refers to their solidarity with those sisters and brothers who were suffering some type of need. Toward the end of the letter, after mentioning that Jesus was crucified "outside the city gate," the author also tells the readers, "Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he

33. In principle, what might have moved Jesus to shame is suffering, being reviled, and being viewed with contempt by society (see Johnson, *Hebrews*, 96; Koester, *Hebrews*, 230). Since Jesus' brothers and sisters—the addressees—are undergoing the same things, he is by no means ashamed to identify with them as their brother.

endured" (13:12-13). In this way, he encourages them to be willing to suffer openly for their faith and for doing good to others by identifying with the way Jesus was willing to do these same things.

All of this suggests that, when the author affirms that Jesus was not ashamed to call others his brothers and sisters, he has in mind Jesus' willingness to suffer and even be exhibited publicly on the cross due to his solidarity with them. In the context of the letter, what might be a motive for shame is precisely the endurance of abuse, humiliations, persecution, and suffering in the eyes of others. This would be especially true in the context of Roman society, where honor was valued so highly and therefore suffering any type of public humiliation that diminished one's honor was to be avoided at all cost. Whether the readers come from a Jewish or non-Jewish background, the reason that some seem to be abandoning the community of believers is that they have faced hostility, humiliation, and persecution on account of their faith and, since the salvation they had hoped for has not yet arrived, they have grown weary of suffering and are disillusioned. For this reason, the author stresses throughout the letter not only the love that Jesus showed them by enduring sufferings and death for them but also the greatness of the salvation given through him, as well as the certainty that the promised salvation will indeed come to pass.

In 2:14-18, the author of Hebrews makes a variety of affirmations that seem to have little relation among themselves.[34] While he continues to mention Jesus' solidarity with his brothers and sisters, he also alludes to Jesus destroying the devil as the one who had power over death so as to free others from their slavery to fear of death (vv. 14-15), the fact that Jesus did not come to help angels but the seed of Abraham (v. 16), Jesus' becoming a high priest to expiate the sins of the people (v. 17), and his ability to help those who are tested as he was (v. 18). Precisely what these ideas have in common is not immediately clear.

Although it is not an easy task to relate these ideas to one another, they all seem to have something to do with Jesus sharing in the condition of his brothers and sisters in the sense of suffering with them. This is not because the author ascribes any salvific significance to suffering in itself but rather because, for the author, Jesus' willingness to suffer made it possible for him to deliver others from the power of the devil and the fear of death, become a high priest to expiate the sins of the people, and help those who are tested.

It has been common to interpret 2:14-15 on the basis of a *Christus Victor* view of Christ's death, according to which Christ defeated the devil after engaging in a struggle with him.[35] As we have noted elsewhere, this is often

34. On the difficulties involved in translating Heb. 2:14-18 see Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 174-78.

35. Koester, for example, claims that "Hebrews presents Jesus' death and exaltation as a battle for deliverance," and compares it to the way in which Heracles in Antiquity was believed to have descended into the netherworld, "where he overcame the 'dark-robed lord of the dead'" (*Hebrews*, 239). Koester then continues: "The great adversary is the devil, who wields death as a weapon that intimidates and enslaves people (2:14). Unlike others, Jesus did not encounter death as a slave, but as an assailant; he intruded into death's domain in

seen as implying some type of mortal combat in which Christ, by virtue of his superior divine power, is able to overpower, subdue, and then bind the devil so that he can no longer do any harm to believers or human beings in general. This struggle and Christ's victory are usually seen as taking place either on the cross or in the realm of the dead following his descent into the underworld. Of course, this raises the problem of why the devil still remains active in the world at present. The common response to this problem is to affirm that Christ has only defeated the devil in principle or that he has won the decisive battle, thereby ensuring that in the end the devil will be defeated. I have pointed out the multiple problems with such a view previously in this work.

A close look at 2:14-15 reveals that the author's thought is distinct. First of all, his use of the present participle *echonta* in referring to the devil as the one who has the power of death suggests that the devil *still* has power over death. That has not changed as a result of Jesus' death and exaltation. Second, the verb that the author uses to speak of Christ overcoming the devil, *katargein*, does not generally mean to defeat or destroy. Instead, it means to render ineffective, nullify, cancel, set aside, or abolish. If *katargein* is understood in this way in v. 14, then what Christ has done is not to defeat or destroy the devil but to render him ineffective or powerless, nullify him, or put him out of the way.[36]

Because this is the only allusion to the devil in Hebrews, there are no other passages in the epistle that might serve as a basis for understanding the way in which the author believed that Christ had overcome or nullified the devil. This means that we must look elsewhere in the tradition for the background necessary to understand the author's affirmation. If we look to the reconstruction of the beliefs of Jesus' first followers that I have proposed previously, the way in which Christ overcomes or nullifies the devil is simply by remaining faithful to the task God had given him all the way to his death rather than giving in to the temptation to save his own life or to obtain a position of power and glory in a way that would not involve suffering and dying. According to this idea, the only sense in which Christ can be said to have struggled with the devil in his death or to have defeated him is that he did not succumb to the devil's temptations. In fact, in a couple of passages in the epistle, the author mentions Christ being tempted, yet adds that he overcame that temptation (2:18; 4:15). There is nothing in the tradition, however, to suggest that Christ was thought to have defeated the devil by means of some type of face-to-face struggle or combat in heaven or the underworld.

These ideas provide the basis necessary for understanding the author's argument in 2:14-15. By sharing in flesh and blood like the "children" do,

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order to overcome it" (*Hebrews*, 239-40). Such affirmations go well beyond what is found in the text of Heb. 2:14-16, as well as the rest of the New Testament, where we find no allusions to Jesus engaging Satan in battle in the netherworld or the "harrowing of hell." Throughout the New Testament, it is merely Christ's refusal to give in to the temptation to avoid the cross that defeats the devil.

36. Ellingworth suggests that the Greek verb *katargein* can be understood as to "make ineffective" or "incapacitate" (*Hebrews*, 173).

Jesus became subject to suffering and death like them. His purpose in doing so was that "through death he might nullify (or render ineffective) 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." The author of Hebrews does not state what the "power of death" refers to here. This power might be seen as consisting of the ability to bring to an end the life of human beings, whether by natural or other means, or to make the souls or spirits of those who die descend into the realm of the dead in the underworld. The author may also have in mind the power to end human life prematurely or to put human beings to death by violent means, similar to the way in which Jesus was put to death. In whatever way the power of death is understood, the author does not say or imply that the devil has now lost this power.

What the author does affirm is that, through his death, Jesus has nullified or rendered ineffective the devil, together with this power, and freed those who were held in slavery on account of their fear of death. This should be interpreted in the sense that, while the devil still holds the power of death, thanks to Jesus' willingness to suffer and die, his brothers and sisters no longer have any reason to fear death or the devil. According to the author's logic, when one lives in constant fear, one becomes enslaved by that fear by subjecting oneself to those who hold one's life in their hands. It is not clear whether the author associates the devil with human powers, such as the Jewish or Roman authorities, who might put believers to death for their faith. While there is evidence elsewhere in the New Testament that both Jewish and Roman authorities did this, Hebrews does not contain any explicit allusions to the readers being threatened with death for their faith. It mentions only that the readers have been persecuted, though it is not clear what this persecution consisted of, who was behind it, and whether it was of a formal or informal nature.

In whatever way the idea of being "held in slavery by the fear of death" is understood, for the author the readers have been freed from this fear and its corresponding slavery through Christ's death, not because Christ vanquished or destroyed the devil, but rather because, thanks to Christ's willingness to give up his life for others and his Father's response of raising and exalting him, they no longer have to be afraid of dying. They can instead be confident that, if they are faithful to God to the end of their life as Jesus was, God will raise them from the dead and bring to pass for them through Jesus the promises of salvation that he has made. The devil is therefore now powerless to frighten them and reduce them to slavery through the fear that he previously provoked in them due to his power over death.

It is very likely that these ideas lie behind the author's decision to quote Isa. 8:17 LXX in the verse immediately preceding 2:14-15, where Jesus is presented as affirming, "I will put my trust in him," that is, in God (2:13). This is precisely what Jesus did when he suffered and faced the threat of death. And because he did so, placing in God's hands not only his own life but

the salvation he had sought for others throughout his ministry as well, God responded by raising Jesus so that he might complete and consummate that salvation for others. Through his trust in God, then, not only Jesus was delivered from death and the fear of death but believers as well, since they now know that those who put their trust in the God of Jesus in the midst of their sufferings and the threat of death will not be disappointed or abandoned, but will ultimately attain the promised salvation.

After affirming that Jesus has freed others from the slavery resulting from the fear of death, the author continues: "For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the seed of Abraham" (2:16). The difference between angels and human beings is that only the latter "share in flesh and blood." When Jesus took flesh and blood, he was made a little lower than the angels, as the author has stated in 2:9. He subsequently endured suffering and death, which also distinguishes Jesus from angels and instead makes him like other human beings who suffer and die. While the author states the purpose of Jesus' coming as that of helping the descendants of Abraham, he implies that this was the purpose of Jesus' sufferings and death as well. The idea, therefore, is that Jesus became like his brothers and sisters not only by taking flesh and blood, but also by suffering and dying as they do in order to help them in some way.

According to this verse, those whom Jesus sought to help by becoming lower than the angels, sharing flesh and blood, and subsequently suffering and dying were not human beings in general but the seed or descendants of Abraham. This implies that in the preceding verses, Jesus is presented as being united not to all human beings collectively but only to those who are descended from Abraham. It is likely that the author understood this in the way that Paul does in Galatians, where he refers to believers of both Jewish and gentile origin as the true children of Abraham (Gal. 3:7, 29; cf. Rom. 4:16-19; 9:7-8). Even if he is referring only to those of Jewish origin, however, he is not necessarily excluding those of non-Jewish origin. As we have seen previously, according to the story told by Jesus' first followers, during his lifetime Jesus dedicated himself to serving almost exclusively other members of God's people Israel. It was only when he and the apostles who followed him met with the rejection of many of those within Israel that they turned to the gentiles. Thus, even if God's Son Jesus came initially to help the descendants of Abraham and had them in mind when he went to his death, those believers who are not descendants of Abraham according to the flesh have also ended up receiving the assistance he came to bring.

The author of Hebrews returns to the idea of Jesus' entering into solidarity with his brothers and sisters in 2:17, where he writes: "Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, in order to expiate the sins of the people." The Greek verb *ōpheilen* used at the beginning of this verse does not go so far as to imply necessity, as the verb *edei* would have done. Instead, like *eprepen* in v. 10, it points to something that was proper or that

ought to be done. In this case, this involves Jesus' becoming like his brothers and sisters in every respect.

The following verse makes it clear what the author means by the phrase "in every respect" (*kata panta*). He is referring to Jesus' suffering and being tested or tempted: "Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested" (2:18). This raises the question of why this suffering or testing was necessary or fitting in order for Jesus to be a "merciful and faithful high priest" and to "expiate the sins of the people."

Although the author has already mentioned Jesus making purification for sins in 1:3, this is the first explicit allusion to his serving as high priest, a central theme of the letter. A little further on, the author will himself explain what the activities of a high priest involve according to the Mosaic law and the way in which Christ fulfills those activities. Whether he assumes that his readers are already acquainted with the role of a high priest or instead intends to explain this to them further on is not clear. A key passage in this regard, however, is 4:14—5:3:

> 4:14 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. 15 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. 16 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. 5:1 Every high priest chosen from among mortals
> is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sac-
> rifices for sins. 2 He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since
> he himself is subject to weakness; 3 and because of this he must offer sacrifice for
> his own sins as well as for those of the people.

The idea most commonly associated with the work of a high priest is that of presenting offerings to God, which the author mentions in 5:1. This involves what we might call a "Godward" activity in that the priest draws near to God with sacrificial gifts on behalf of those offering those gifts, acting as a mediator between them and God. However, the author immediately mentions the high priests "dealing gently with the ignorant and wayward" in 5:2. In this case, the mediatorial activity is what we might call "humanward," in that he draws near to human beings on God's behalf in order to offer them guidance and assistance. This same humanward activity is mentioned in 4:15, which presents an idea closely resembling 2:18: as high priest, Christ is able "to sympathize with our weaknesses," since "in every respect" he has "been tested as we are."

The affirmation that it was fitting that Jesus "become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest" initially points to this humanward activity of Jesus as high priest. This is evident from the word "merciful." Clearly, this cannot refer to Jesus' Godward activity, since it is not necessary for Jesus to show mercy to God. The ones to whom Jesus must be merciful as high priest are the "children," his "brothers and sisters," that is, the "descendants of Abraham" who need to be "helped" by

him, as 2:16 affirms. The same idea is then developed in 2:18: as high priest, Jesus is able to help those who are going through trials and temptations as he did when he suffered. The fact that he has himself suffered and in this regard is like those he helps "in every respect" enables him to assist those who are going through difficult times, "sympathizing" with their weaknesses and "dealing gently" with them, as 4:15 and 5:2 state.

It is significant as well that for the author Jesus' mediatorial activity in relation to his sisters and brothers is something that is *ongoing* rather than something lying only in the past. This is stressed in 4:14-15, where the author speaks of Jesus as one who is already in heaven. It is from there that he sympathizes with the readers and is able to "deal gently" with them (5:2). The author points to Jesus' present activity as well in 2:18 when he states that Jesus is now "able to help those who are being tested" by the trials they face. This assistance is something he gives them in the present from heaven in his exalted condition.

These points are significant for considering the second part of 2:18, which refers to what Jesus does as a high priest in relation to God (*ta pros ton theon*) before affirming that he "expiates the sins of the people." In Chapter 3 of this work, as well as in our discussion of Rom. 3:25 in Chapter 12, we have already considered the meaning of *hilaskesthai* and *exilaskesthai*, which refer to making expiation for sins not only through sacrificial offerings but also *through the prayers that accompany those sacrificial offerings*.

Many commentators regard the allusion to Jesus expiating sins in 2:18 as referring to what he did in the past when he died. While this is possible, there are also several passages in Hebrews that would suggest that for the author Jesus' work of expiating sins as high priest in relation to God is also an *ongoing activity* carried out in heaven.[37] In 4:16, after mentioning Jesus' ability to sympathize with the weaknesses of believers, the author then exhorts the readers to "approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." While the expiation of sins is not mentioned explicitly here, the fact that through Jesus the readers can now draw near to God "with boldness" to "receive mercy" and "find grace" suggests that, because of Jesus' ongoing mediatorial activity on their behalf, they can approach God confidently, knowing that God will not hold their sins against them.[38]

A similar idea appears in 7:25-26, where the author affirms: "Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he

37. Attridge, for example, claims that for the author of Hebrews "Christ's intercessory priesthood would have begun with his exaltation" (*Hebrews*, 146). Michael Goulder, in contrast, affirms that "the centre of the epistle's theology is Christ's *death*, which as high priest he offers as the blood of the new covenant...." ("Hebrews and the Ebionites," *NTS* 49 [2003]: 399). Lane similarly claims that for Hebrews it was in "the suffering of death in a final act of obedience to the will of God" that Jesus "proved to be a faithful high priest" (*Hebrews 1-8*, 66).

38. Commenting on Heb. 4:6, Jewett writes: "The verb *proserchomai* is used seven times in the epistle, each time in terms of approach to God. This regularity of usage suggests it is a technical cultic term for the author" (*Letter to Pilgrims*, 79).

always lives to make intercession for them. For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens." Here again, although the language of expiation is not used, the risen and exalted Jesus is presented as the one through whom the readers can approach God without fear in spite of their sinfulness. The idea that Jesus "always lives to make intercession for them" should also be seen as related to the idea of expiating sins, since it involves not only offering sacrifices to God on behalf of others, but also offering up prayers for them, asking God to forgive their sins. Further on in the epistle, the author affirms that the readers can now approach God confidently through the risen and exalted Jesus, who has entered into heaven "now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf" (9:24). Then, in 10:21-22, the readers are told that, because they "have a great priest over the house of God," they can "approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith." As noted previously in this study, the idea that Jesus expiates sins from heaven appears elsewhere in the New Testament tradition as well, in particular 1 John 2:1-2 and, as I have argued in Chapter 12, probably in Rom. 3:25.

All of this suggests, therefore, that when the author states in 2:17 that Jesus has become "a merciful and faithful high priest in relation to God to expiate the sins of the people," he may have in mind Jesus' ongoing activity of interceding to God on behalf of believers, asking God to accept them by overlooking their sins. As we have seen elsewhere, the basis upon which God responds favorably to that petition is that through Jesus believers will be transformed into the people God desires and commands that they be for their own good. This idea appears explicitly here in that Jesus' ongoing activity of helping believers is mentioned in both v. 16 and v. 18. For the author of Hebrews, Jesus intercedes for sinful believers and God accepts that petition favorably precisely because, as they continually look to Jesus, he is able to help them live in accordance with God's will.

Hebrews does, however, also speak of Jesus making intercession in his death after calling him a high priest (5:5-7) and alludes several times to his offering himself up to God once for all in a sacrificial manner so as to take away sins (7:27; 9:11-14, 26-28; 10:10-22). None of these passages uses the language of expiation (*hilaskesthai*), which appears only in 2:17, yet the idea is virtually the same. This makes it possible that, when the author says that Jesus became a high priest to expiate the sins of the people in 2:17, he has in mind something that Jesus did in the past as he went to his death.

It is therefore difficult to conclude whether the author is referring to Jesus' past or ongoing activity when he speaks of him expiating sins in 2:17. It is even possible that he intentionally used ambiguous language that could be interpreted as referring both to what Jesus did when he was facing death and what he does now in heaven as high priest. For the author, these two ideas are not mutually exclusive but complement one another. On the one hand, Jesus made expiation for sins as he went to his death, since he offered himself up to

God with the petition that God accept and forgive all those who would identify themselves as members of God's people under him and relate to him as his "brothers and sisters" through faith. When God raised and exalted Jesus, in effect he granted that petition, declaring his acceptance of all those who would come to live under Jesus and giving assurance that he would overlook their sins. In this way, Jesus obtained the forgiveness of sins for all believers by establishing a new basis upon which they may now relate to God through him. This is the new covenant. By offering up to God his life on behalf of others, Jesus thus made expiation "once for all" for the sins of all who would come to live in the new covenant under him and, by raising Jesus, God gave assurance "once for all" that he would accept and forgive the sins of all who would live in that new covenant.

Nevertheless, only those who actually live under Jesus in the new covenant established through his death obtain this forgiveness. The sins of all who come to faith in Jesus so as to be incorporated into the community of God's people are forgiven by virtue of the expiation Jesus made in the past when he offered up his life to God with the prayer that God no longer take into account the sins of any who would live in this new covenant relationship. When God raised Jesus, in effect he already declared in the past that the sins of all who would look to Jesus as their Lord and high priest were forgiven. In order to continue to receive that forgiveness, however, believers must continue to live under Jesus in this new covenant relationship. As they do so, of course, they inevitably fall back into sin and are in constant need of further forgiveness. Jesus thus continues to intercede for them, asking God to continue to accept them in spite of the fact that they fail to live in that covenant relationship as they should. In a sense, it can be said that Jesus continues to expiate their sins in the present on the basis of the expiation of sins he made in the past when he offered himself up to God. It can also be said that through Jesus' ongoing intercession on their behalf God forgives the sins that believers commit in the present in fulfillment of the declaration he made in the past that he would forgive the sins of all those who would live in the covenant relationship under Jesus—a declaration he made when he granted the petition on behalf of others that Jesus offered up to him in his death by raising and exalting him.

The reason that Jesus had to become like his brothers and sisters in order to expiate their sins, therefore, is that he could expiate their sins only if he was also dedicated to the task of enabling them to live in conformity with God's will. In order to accomplish this objective, he had to become like them "in every respect," especially by suffering the same things that they suffer and enduring the same temptations they endure. As the author affirms in 2:18 and 4:15, Jesus is able to help the readers and offer them the sympathy and solidarity that they need in their weaknesses because he endured the same things they do. It is important to stress, however, that this should not be understood in the sense that, by becoming one with his brothers and sisters, Jesus learned what it is like to experience what they do, as if God's Son had

to become human in order to discover what it means to live and suffer as a human being in this world. Instead, the necessity had to do with believers being able to identify with Jesus as one who was acquainted with the difficulties that they experience in order that they might approach him confidently in order to receive from him the assistance necessary for them to live in a way that will enable them to attain the glory that God desired and intended not only for Jesus but especially for them. What has changed is not that Christ is now able to understand the readers, but rather that the readers can know that Christ is able to help them since he suffered the same temptations and trials that they do. The problem was not that Christ had previously been unable to identify with those who suffer, but that prior to his own sufferings, death, and exaltation, they could not look to Christ as one who was able to sympathize with what they suffer so as to be confident that he is able to help them in their own trials. In other words, what was necessary was not that Christ be able to identify with them, but that they be able to look to Christ as one who is able to identify with them. Because of Christ's full solidarity with them in their suffering and trials, they can be confident that he presents them to God as his true brothers and sisters since, due to their identification with Christ and the assistance he graciously provides for them, they are no longer committed to sinning but instead constantly seek to do God's will as he did.

If we bring together all of the ideas from 2:5-18, therefore, according to the author of Hebrews, God's intention from the beginning was to create a holy people (v. 11, 17) who might come to participate in the glory and salvation of the world to come (vv. 5, 10). In order to bring this about, God sent his Son Jesus, who became lower than the angels for a time, sharing in flesh and blood with the descendants of Abraham and becoming like them in every respect as their brother (vv. 9, 11-14, 17). This included being tested or tempted, suffering, and dying (vv. 9, 10, 14, 18). In obedience to God, Jesus endured these things so that he might be able to help others, his brothers and sisters, and bring about their salvation (vv. 9-10, 16, 18). God responded to Jesus' faithfulness by crowning him with glory and bringing him into his present condition of perfection, fullness, and completion (vv. 9-10). What Jesus suffered, in conjunction with his exaltation to his glorious condition, benefits others in that it gives them assurance that all who trust in God as he did will attain the same goal, thus freeing them from the fear of death that kept them in bondage to the devil (vv. 9-10, 14-15). His past sufferings also make it possible for him to help his brothers and sisters overcome the trials and temptations they now endure, which were similar to his own (vv. 16, 18), since they now know that he is able to sympathize with them. In this way, his sufferings and death were for each one of them, since they enabled him to become their leader once glorified so that he might bring them to the desired goal of salvation (vv. 9-10). This he does by helping them live obedient, sanctified lives as God's children and on that basis obtaining from God the forgiveness of their sins that he sought for them when he offered himself up to God in death and

that he now continues to seek for them from heaven as their high priest (vv. 11-13, 16-18).

HEBREWS 3-5

Immediately following Heb. 2:5-18, the author of Hebrews alludes once again to Jesus' faithfulness, which he has just mentioned in 2:17, where he speaks of Jesus as a "faithful high priest." He writes: "consider that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses also 'was faithful in all God's house'" (3:1-2). While it is necessary to use the verb "was" in the past tense here in the English translation, the author actually uses a present participle (*onta*), which leaves open the question of whether he is referring to Christ's faithfulness in the past, particularly when he died, or to his ongoing faithfulness in the present as high priest.[39]

The author then compares Jesus with Moses, arguing that "Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself" (3:3). For the author, Moses' faithfulness involved conveying the law, which pointed to what would come later through Jesus, and putting that law in writing: "Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that would be spoken later" (3:5). In contrast, Christ "was faithful over God's house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope" (3:6).

When the author alludes to Christ's faithfulness in the past, he seems to have in mind Jesus' faithfulness unto death to the task of bringing into existence the community of believers, which the author metaphorically calls a "house."[40] This reflects the same basic idea we have found in passages such as Acts 20:28 and Eph. 5:25-27, which explicitly define Jesus' goal in giving up his life in terms of establishing the church. It is worth noting here that only those who "hold [their] first confidence firm to the end" can be included among those who have become "partakers of Christ" (3:14) and form part of the community Jesus died to establish.

Throughout the rest of chapter 3 and the beginning of chapter 4, the author recalls the sin and rebelliousness of Israel during the forty years in the desert and exhorts his readers not to harden their hearts as the Israelites did in order that, unlike the Israelites, they may attain the promised rest (3:7—4:13). Immediately after this, however, in 4:14-16 he speaks of Jesus' activity as high priest, developing further the idea that he had already mentioned explicitly in 2:17 and implicitly in 1:3. There he alludes to Jesus' present exalted condition: he has "passed through the heavens" (4:14). As he does in 2:18, the author affirms in 4:15 that in Jesus the readers have a high priest who is able to

39. Ian G. Wallis, for example, claims that the present participle *onta* in Heb. 3:2 alludes to Jesus' present faithfulness in his ongoing role as priestly intercessor for others (*The Faith of Jesus Christ in Early Christian Traditions*; SNTSMS 84; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 145-50).

40. Johnson claims that the "house" mentioned in Heb. 3:6 refers to the "house of Israel" (*Hebrews*, 199). Koester, however, comments that the house of God in that verse can be taken as referring to the people, the universe, or the sanctuary (*Hebrews*, 245-46).

sympathize with them when they endure trials and temptations because Jesus himself experienced the same things. In 4:16, the author stresses Jesus' mediatorial role: because he is the high priest of believers, through him the readers can "approach the throne of grace with boldness" so as to "receive mercy and find grace for help in time of need."

After noting that according to the Mosaic law the high priest is chosen "to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins" on behalf of others and to "deal gently with the ignorant and wayward," even though as one "subject to weakness" the high priest must also offer up sacrifices for his own sins (5:1-3), the author continues:

> 5:4 And one does not presume to take this honor, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was. 5 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"; 6 as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek." 7 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. 8 Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; 9 and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, 10 having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

In 5:1-5, the author compares the high priests of Israel with Christ as the new high priest designated by God. Although when he explains what the activities of a high priest involve in vv. 1-3 he does not mention Christ explicitly, he is clearly making comparisons with Christ's high priestly activities there. As Robert Gordon observes, Heb. 5:2 "clearly derives its terms from the writer's view of Christ rather than from any Old Testament description of the high-priestly office."[41] Christ was also chosen by God to be in charge of things pertaining to God on behalf of the people, offering gifts and sacrifices for sins and dealing gently with the ignorant and wayward. While in these ways Christ is similar to the high priests of Israel, he is nevertheless distinct from them in that he is not "subject to weakness" and thus does not need to offer sacrifice for his own sins in addition to offering sacrifice for the sins of the people.

For the author, Christ is also similar to the high priests of Israel yet distinct from them with regard to his being designated as high priest. Like other high priests, Christ did not name himself high priest but was appointed to this honor by God (5:4-5). The author mentions Aaron in particular because Aaron was designated high priest personally by the God of Israel, in contrast to later high priests who were appointed on the basis of the law, and also because the author wishes to contrast the high priesthood of Aaron with that of Melchizedek and Christ.

It is not entirely clear precisely when the author regards Christ as having been appointed high priest. In 5:5 he cites Psalm 2:7, "You are my Son, today

41. Gordon, *Hebrews*, 67.

I have begotten you," which he has already quoted in 1:5. The author does not explicitly affirm that Christ was designated high priest at the time he was begotten by God as his Son, but only that the one who had begotten him as his Son appointed him as high priest. In 1:1-5, it is not clear whether the author regards Christ's being begotten as God's Son as something that took place before creation, at the time of his entry into the world, when he made purification for sins, or when he was exalted to God's right hand, since the author alludes to all of these ideas in the first four verses. The same ambiguity exists regarding the moment in which God is thought to have appointed Christ high priest, though in the context of the letter as a whole, this appears to be something that the author regards as having taken place either when Christ offered up his life to God or when God exalted him to his right hand.[42]

In 5:6, the author quotes Ps. 110:4, as he will do elsewhere in the letter, to refer to Christ as a "high priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek." Once again, it is not clear when the author considers Christ to have been named high priest forever. The fact that the first verse of Psalm 110 is used in Hebrews and throughout the New Testament to allude to Christ's being made to sit at God's right hand suggests that the author has in mind Christ's exaltation as the moment when he was designated high priest (Heb. 1:13; 10:12-13; cf. 1:3; 8:1; 12:2). The author repeats the idea that Christ was "designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek" in 5:10, where the reference does seem to be to Christ's exaltation, when he was "made perfect" and "became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (5:9). Later on in the letter, of course, the author will develop further the idea that Christ became high priest according to the order of Melchizedek rather than that of Aaron (6:20—7:22), yet here he does not elaborate on this idea.

After quoting Ps. 110:4 in 5:6, the author continues: "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" (5:7). The author seems to be alluding here to Jesus' death, though he does not make this allusion explicit. The Gospels all present

42. Philip Edgecumbe Hughes, for example, writes that for the author of Hebrews "it is only with his entry into heaven that his high priestly activity begins" (*A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977, 343). According to David M. Moffitt, when the author of Hebrews speaks of Jesus' offering of himself, his body, or his blood, "he *always* locates that offering in heaven" (*Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*; NovTSup 141; Leiden: Brill, 2011, 218; see 215-96). Likewise, Robert J. Daly affirms that "Hebrews seems to teach that Christ became high priest only with his glorification—his sitting down 'at the right hand of the Majesty on high' (Heb. 1:3; cf. 8:1; 10:12; 12:12)" (*The Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice*; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978, 70). Other interpreters, however, would maintain that for the author of Hebrews Christ's priestly activity began already when he was on earth. Koester comments that, while some passages "suggest that Jesus became high priest through his exaltation," there are others that "suggest that Jesus' priesthood began on earth, since his death was an offering, which implies that at the time of his death he was already a priest (9:11-14)" (*Hebrews*, 109). Attridge claims that if the author took seriously the idea that Christ became high priest at some particular point, "it would have to be the complex 'moment' in which death and exaltation are combined" (*Hebrews*, 147). I would maintain that Hebrews is not always clear on this question and that at times it presents Jesus' passion, death, resurrection, and exaltation as a single moment or event.

Jesus as having prayed at different times during the period of his ministry, yet never speak of him praying with "loud cries and tears" or asking to be saved from death prior to his final hours. This makes it likely that the author has in mind either Jesus' prayers in Gethsemane before his arrest or prayers he offered up as he was being crucified.[43] Both of these alternatives are problematic. The Synoptics mention Jesus asking to be saved from death while praying in Gethsemane, yet do not speak of any "loud cries and tears."[44] In contrast, the Synoptics present Jesus as offering up prayers while on the cross and, according to Matthew and Mark, at the moment he died he let out a loud cry (Matt. 27:46, 50; Mark 15:34, 37; Luke 23:34, 46). In the Synoptic accounts, however, Jesus does not explicitly ask God to deliver him from death as he is being crucified.

The affirmation that Jesus was "heard because of his reverent submission" is also problematic in that, if Jesus' prayer is understood in terms of asking God to save him from death, in a sense he was *not* heard, since God did not intervene to prevent him from dying on the cross. It is likely, however, that the author is referring to Jesus' resurrection and exaltation as the moment when God responded favorably to Jesus' prayer.[45]

As just noted above, however, the author does not explicitly mention the content of Jesus' "prayers and supplications." Jesus is said to have prayed to God as the one who was able to save him from death, yet he is not presented as praying that God save him from death.[46] Undoubtedly, one can argue that this is what the author actually means. However, it is extremely important to note that the author alludes to Jesus making prayers and supplications in the context of his argument that God appointed Jesus as high priest. As we have seen repeatedly elsewhere, numerous Jewish sources from antiquity mention the high priest offering up prayers and supplications to God when he carried out the sacrificial rites. In the case of sacrifices for sin, such as the sacrifice offered up on the Day of Atonement, these prayers and supplications involved

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43. Some interpreters understand the "loud cries and tears" in Heb. 5:7 as an allusion not only to Jesus' prayers in Gethsemane but also to his passion as a whole (see Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 288).

44. After arguing that Heb. 5:7 "cannot have been composed out of the Gethsemane scene" due to the differences that Hebrews presents in relation to the Synoptic accounts, Ellen Bradshaw Aitken affirms that "an early Christian hymn played a role in the formation of this passage.... I propose, therefore, that Heb. 5:7-10 provides evidence of a hymn or cultic performance that spoke of Jesus' prayer at the time of his suffering" (*Jesus' Death in Early Christian Memory: The Poetics of the Passion*; NTOA/SUNT 53; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004, 144-45).

45. Commenting on Heb. 5:7, Attridge notes that "the sense in which Jesus asked for deliverance is ambiguous, since *ek thanatou* can mean either 'from (impending) death' or 'out of (the realm of) death.' The latter is certainly the most natural understanding and conforms to the most common use of the phrase *sōzein ek*" (*Hebrews*, 150). On the reasons for understanding Heb. 5:7 in terms of a request for God to raise Jesus from the dead, see Matthew C. Easter, "Faith in the God who Resurrects: The Theocentric Faith of Hebrews," *NTS* 63 (2017): 82-86.

46. Patrick Gray notes that Jesus' "loud cries and tears" in Heb. 5:7 can be seen as an expression of boldness rather than anguish. After reviewing a number of texts from the Hebrew Scriptures, Gray adds: "Clearly there exists more than ample precedent for viewing the description of Jesus in Heb 5:7 as something other than a picture of cowering fear in the face of death" (*Godly Fear: The Epistle to the Hebrews and Greco-Roman Critiques of Superstition*; AcBib 16; Atlanta: SBL, 2003, 203). Intense pain, however, is not the same as "cowering fear."

asking God to forgive the sins of his people. Because they were in essence an expression of profound repentance and involved earnestly pleading with God to be gracious and merciful by overlooking the people's sins, these prayers and supplications may have been made with loud cries and tears.[47]

It is also significant that both Matthew and Mark affirm that, immediately after Jesus offered up a loud cry and "breathed his last," the curtain of the temple was torn in two (Matt. 27:50-51; Mark 15:37-38). Although, as we have seen previously, it is not entirely clear what significance Matthew and Mark ascribe to the rending of the temple veil, it is very likely that they associate it in some way with Jesus offering himself up to God sacrificially, entering into God's presence as priest on behalf of others, or establishing a new means of access to God as mediator. It is likely that Matthew and Mark have in mind some sacrificial activity on Jesus' part, either at the moment that he dies or after he is raised and exalted, and thus it may be significant that they relate this to the loud cry that Jesus emits as he breathes his last.[48]

All of this suggests that, when the author of Hebrews speaks of the prayers and supplications Jesus offered up to God with loud cries and tears, he has in mind prayers and supplications such as those that the high priests offered up when making sacrifices for sins, especially on the Day of Atonement.[49] This does not necessarily exclude the possibility that for the author Jesus was asking God to save him from death. However, if the author is associating Jesus' prayers and supplications with those made by the Jewish high priests when they offered up sacrifices for sins, then he must have in mind the idea that Jesus was praying *on behalf of others*, asking that God forgive them their sins. In fact, even if 5:7 is interpreted in the sense that Jesus prayed for himself, asking that God save him from death in the sense of delivering him from out of the realm of the dead after he had died, the author of Hebrews would have seen this as a petition made not only on his own behalf but on behalf of others: Jesus' desire was that he be saved from death so that he might continue to serve others as their high priest and mediator from God's side.

If this is the case, then when the author affirms that Jesus was heard because of his reverent submission or godly fear (*eulabeia*), he is referring not only to God's act of raising and exalting Jesus following his death, but also to God's acceptance of the prayers and supplications that Jesus offered on behalf of others, asking God to forgive them their sins. The idea may also be that

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47. Albert Vanhoye rightly observes that in Heb. 5:7, "Christ's Passion is presented as being at the same time a *prayer* and an *offering*" (*Old Testament Priests and the New Priest: According to the New Testament*, trans. J. Bernard Orchard; SS; Petersham, MA: St. Bede's, 1986, 125).

48. As was noted in Chapter 14, André LaCocque has argued that for Matthew, the loud cry that Jesus emits on the cross shortly before his death in Matt. 27:50 is to be understood in terms of Jesus fulfilling the role of high priest ("The Great Cry of Jesus in Matthew 27:50," in *Putting Body and Soul Together: Essays in Honor of Robin Scroggs*; ed. Virginia Wiles, Alexandra Brown, and Graydon F. Snyder; Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997, 154, 162).

49. Koester observes that as a high priest, Jesus "made an offering (5:7) that was similar to and different from those of other priests. If priests were to offer both gifts and sacrifices because of their weakness (5:3), Jesus made an offering with loud cries and tears, which shows that he understands what it means to be weak" (*Hebrews*, 298).

Jesus asked God to save him from death so that he might serve as high priest for others in heaven. By raising and exalting him, God responded favorably to that petition.

However one interprets the author's words in 5:7, it is important to see them in the context of his argument about Jesus being appointed high priest in order to bring about the salvation of others as their mediator before God. The author develops the latter idea in the following verses, where he speaks of the Son learning obedience through what he suffered, becoming the source of salvation for all who obey him following his own perfection, and his being designated high priest according to the order of Melchizedek (5:8-10). The affirmation in v. 8 that Jesus "learned obedience through what he suffered" has created difficulties for many interpreters, since it is not clear why Jesus would have to learn to be obedient if he was God's Son.[50] The author probably has in mind something similar to what he affirms in chapter 2, where he argues that Jesus had to share flesh and blood and become like his sisters and brothers in every respect, including suffering and being tempted like them, in order to be able to help them (2:10, 14-18). In this case, Jesus had to learn to obey God as a human being of flesh and blood, especially in the midst of suffering and death, so that he might help his sisters and brothers remain obedient when they face suffering. As the author has stated in 4:15, part of Jesus' activity as high priest involves sympathizing with the weaknesses of others. They know that he is able to do so because he endured the same trials that they do.[51]

For the author, the fact that Jesus himself learned to be obedient through suffering may be related to his being made perfect so as to become the "source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (5:9). The author has already stated that it was fitting that God should make the originator of the salvation of his children perfect through sufferings (2:10). The perfecting of Jesus to which the author refers in 5:9, therefore, probably involves being perfected in his obedience so that he might then bring about in others the same obedience and thereby lead them to the promised salvation as their *archēgos* (2:10).[52]

In Heb. 4:14—5:10, then, the author regards Jesus' suffering and death as the means by which he became high priest on behalf of others. In part, this is

50. Commenting on Heb. 5:8, Attridge notes that suffering was seen as educative in ancient Jewish thought, so that the author's purpose in that verse is primarily paraenetic. Jesus is seen as "one who 'learns obedience' (*hupokoēn*) in the midst of suffering because that is what the addressees are called upon to do. Hence, speculation on the sense in which Jesus may be said to learn obedience can be misdirected. A fundamental affirmation of Hebrews is that Jesus was obedient to God's will from the start of his earthly career (10:5-10). Thus, he can learn obedience only in the sense that he comes to appreciate fully what conformity to God's will means" (*Hebrews*, 153).

51. David R. Anderson writes with regard to Heb. 5:7, "Like any great leader, the Son did not ask his followers to do anything he was not willing to do" (*The King-Priest of Psalm 110 in Hebrews*; StBL 21; New York: Peter Lang, 2001, 215).

52. Most commentators would agree with Ellingworth that the perfection of Jesus in Heb. 5:9 refers to "the passion and exaltation of Jesus, considered as a single event" (*Hebrews*, 294). However, on the basis of the comparison between Jesus and Aaron in Heb. 5:4-6, Lane argues that, for the author of Hebrews, this perfection also has to do with Jesus' consecration as a high priest: Jesus "has been pronounced 'qualified' to come before God in a high priestly relation" (*Hebrews*, 123-24).

due to the fact that God raised and exalted Jesus as a result of his offering up his life, seeking not only that God grant others salvation and forgiveness but that he be exalted so that he might become the source of salvation for others as he fulfills the tasks of a high priest. These tasks include not only interceding for them but also bringing about in them the obedience that serves as the basis for his intercession on their behalf. Now that he has been exalted as high priest, he is able to help them in time of need so that they may not fall into disobedience, and also is able to serve as the mediator through whom they can approach God boldly, without fearing that God will reject them. His sufferings and death thus benefit believers in that, as the ultimate expression of his love for all people, they resulted in his being exalted to God's side on their behalf; from there he is able to bring about in them the obedience necessary for them to attain salvation and at the same obtain from God the forgiveness of their sins. Jesus is able to do these things for them now precisely because he went to his death asking that God enable him to become the author and source of the salvation of others and God responded favorably to that petition. Thus the readers do not require any other high priest or any other temple where they might offer up sacrifices and prayers. What Jesus is able to do for believers is far greater than any high priest of Israel could do previously under the Mosaic covenant.

HEBREWS 6-8

After reproaching the readers for their lack of understanding and maturity and exhorting them to proceed on to perfection so as to go beyond the basic teachings that they originally received (5:11—6:3), the author continues: "For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, and 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, and then have fallen away, thus crucifying anew the Son of God and exposing him to public ridicule" (6:4-6). As virtually all interpreters recognize, this is a difficult passage, most of all because it seems to affirm unequivocally that those who fall away from the faith can never be restored again through repentance.[53]

There is no need to address that difficulty here in order to grasp what the author means when he speaks of those who have fallen away "recrucifying" Christ for themselves and exposing him to contempt and ridicule. It should be obvious that the author did not intend his words to be read in a literal or ontological sense. Rather, the meaning is clearly metaphorical. Those who fall away can be said to crucify Christ anew in the sense that that they reject him and the claim that he is God's Son and Messiah in the same way that those

53. For most commentators, the impossibility of repentance mentioned in Heb. 6:4-6 has to do with the exclusion of those who have committed apostasy (see, for example, Attridge, *Hebrews*, 167-72). As Salevao observes, these verses also seem to allude to the rite of baptism, which cannot be repeated (*Legitimation*, 273-78).

who originally had Christ crucified did.[54] When the author speaks of their exposing Christ to public ridicule, he probably has in mind the notion that, when those who do not belong to the community of Jesus' followers observe those who formerly professed Christ as God's Son and Lord now rejecting him, they mock not only those who have fallen away but also Christ himself. This is because those who fall away serve to validate and bolster the claim of unbelievers that, instead of being God's Son and the one through whom salvation comes, Jesus was an impostor and lawbreaker who deserved to be crucified. The allusion to Jesus being "exposed publicly" points back to the way in which he was humiliated by being hung on a cross. In this case, however, it is the ones who fall away who humiliate Jesus publicly by leading others to regard him with contempt.

There is no reason to affirm that in this passage the author is claiming that, in some way, those who fall away invalidate for themselves the salvific effects of Jesus' death or render Jesus' death for their sins ineffective. Such a claim responds to the traditional views of Jesus' death that I have criticized extensively and is foreign to the author's thought. The idea is not that the original event of Jesus' crucifixion together with its benefits is somehow reversed or negated but rather that Jesus is metaphorically crucified anew.

After exhorting the readers to remain diligent and assuring them that if they do so, they will obtain God's promises (6:7-18), the author adds: "We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner part of the sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (6:19-20). Here the allusion to Jesus' death is implicit. In the context of what we have seen above, the affirmation that Jesus has entered into the inner part of the sanctuary behind the curtain must be understood as referring to the idea that he offered up his life to God and was subsequently received by God into heaven. His death was therefore the means by which he entered into God's presence, symbolized by the inner part of the sanctuary. The reason he was received by God into his presence is not merely that he died but that he offered himself up for others. It is possible, of course, that the author of Hebrews had in mind here the rending of the temple veil that appears in the Synoptic accounts.

The notion that Jesus died "for others" is implicit as well in the author's allusion to Jesus as the "forerunner on our behalf" (*prodromos huper hēmōn*, 6:20). Just as entering implies leaving one place to go into another, so also running involves movement. In this case, that movement is from earth to heaven through Jesus' death and exaltation. The use of the language of running, however, also points to the idea of perseverance. Jesus was able to enter

54. Hughes understands the idea of recrucifying Christ in Heb. 6:6 in terms of taking a stand alongside those who were responsible for Christ's crucifixion: "they show that their true place is with those rejecters who display their hatred by crucifying him" (*Hebrews*, 221). Attridge, however, understands the phrase *anastaurountas heautois* in terms of apostates crucifying Jesus for themselves rather than recrucifying Jesus himself (*Hebrews*, 171).

into heaven not merely because he died but because he persevered and was faithful to the task given him by his Father, not only at the moment of his death but also throughout the ministry of service that led to his death. The use of the prefix *pro-* in the word *prodromos* points as well to the idea that others will follow on the same path that Jesus ran. Thus his goal was not merely to be received into heaven but also to make it possible for others to follow after him.

It is significant, however, that the author does not simply call Jesus "our forerunner" but rather refers to him as the "forerunner on our behalf." The phrase *huper hēmōn*, used so frequently in the formulaic allusions to Jesus' death throughout the New Testament, points not only to Jesus entering into God's presence ahead of others who will follow him but also to the activity on behalf of others that he carries out at present from heaven as high priest. The idea is similar to that of Jesus being the *archēgos*, the "pioneer," "leader," or "originator" of the salvation of others (2:10), as well as the source of salvation of others (5:9). Jesus sought to enter into his present position of power and glory at God's right hand so that from there he might carry out the high priestly activities mentioned previously, helping believers to remain obedient and overcome temptation at the same time that he intercedes to God on their behalf. Thus Jesus' purpose in "running" was not merely to enable others to follow him into heaven, as if their task now were simply that of imitating him, but also to attain a position from which he might help them attain the same goal. Because there is no question that Jesus will continue to seek the salvation of others and ultimately make that salvation a full reality now that he has entered into God's presence, the author refers to the hope that "enters the inner part of the sanctuary behind the curtain" as "a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul."

Once again, this is one of the primary ways in which Jesus' death is "for others" in both Hebrews and the rest of the New Testament. He died for others in the sense that he sought to be exalted to God's side so that he might consummate the salvation of others, a salvation to which he had dedicated himself fully in life and death. What ensures that he will continue to be active until that salvation comes fully to pass is not merely that he is now in a position of power and authority at God's side but also that he gave up his life seeking the salvation of all. In other words, if he was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice of enduring an extremely painful and humiliating death on the cross due to his commitment to the salvation of others rather than attempting to save his life or avoid death, there can be no doubt that, now that he has been exalted, he will continue to pursue that same end.

Throughout the first part of chapter 7, the author of Hebrews argues that the order of Melchizedek is superior to that of Aaron and therefore, even though during his life on earth Jesus was not actually a high priest, he now exercises a priesthood that is greater than that carried out by Aaron and his successors in accordance with the Mosaic law. Toward the end of chapter 7

and into chapter 8, the author alludes once more to Jesus' death and relates it to both his past and present activity on behalf of others as high priest:

> 7:22 Accordingly Jesus has also become the guarantee of a better covenant. 23 Furthermore, the former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; 24 but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. 25 Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.
>
> 26 For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. 27 Unlike the other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered himself. 28 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.
>
> 8:1 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, 2 a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent that the Lord, and not any mortal, has set up. 3 For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer.
>
> 4 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. 5 They offer worship in a sanctuary that is a sketch and shadow of the heavenly one; for Moses, when he was about to erect the tent, was warned, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain." 6 But 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 (7:22—8:6).

Here again, the author contrasts Jesus' high priesthood with the high priesthood of those who served under the Mosaic law. Unlike the other high priests, who were mortal and thus could only remain in office for a certain period of time, Jesus "holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever" (7:24). As a result of this, "he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (7:25). Here again, what is salvific for believers is the intercession that Jesus carries out on their behalf as high priest in heaven. Although the author does not state explicitly the content of this intercession, it is likely that it should be understood as including the petition that God accept believers favorably and forgive them their sins.[55] Because believers can be sure that God will grant Jesus' petition on their behalf, they can now approach God confidently through him as their mediator.

As we have noted previously, this ongoing heavenly intercession to God on behalf of believers must not be seen in isolation from the intercession that Jesus was believed to have made on their behalf as he went to his death.

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55. Koester is probably correct in affirming that the intercession of Christ in Heb. 7:25 "first means requesting help for those who are being tested, and second it involves petitions for forgiveness...." (*Hebrews*, 371). Ellingworth points to Rom. 8:34 as parallel to Heb. 7:25 and writes, "In both these passages the language is too general to determine whether prayer for help or for forgiveness is intended" (*Hebrews*, 392).

Jesus' past intercession was thought to include not only a petition that God exalt him so that he might complete the task given him of bringing about the salvation of others by enabling them to live in conformity with God's will as members of God's people, but also the petition that God graciously accept with favor all those who would come to live under Jesus in faith, in spite of their sins. Just as there can be no going back on Jesus' exaltation now that God has raised him to his right hand of power, so also there can be no going back on God's favorable response to Jesus' petition that God enable Jesus to consummate his work of saving others. Nor can there be any going back on God's response to Jesus' petition that God forgive all those who would come to live under Jesus as his followers. Thus, when God raised Jesus and received him into heaven at his side, God not only granted "once for all" Jesus' petition that God exalt him so that he might consummate the salvation of others, but God also responded affirmatively "once for all" to Jesus' petition that God graciously accept and forgive all those who would live under Jesus. He did so, of course, because Jesus' faithfulness unto death to the task of bringing others into conformity with his will ensures that, now exalted, those living under Jesus will indeed come to live in obedience to him for their own good. This obedience was what God desired from the beginning and thus constitutes the basis upon which God granted Jesus' petition to forgive the sins of those who would live under him. In the language of Hebrews, this means that believers have full assurance both of divine forgiveness and their salvation.

These ideas form the backdrop for what the author affirms in 7:27 as well as later on in the epistle. In contrast to the other high priests who had to "offer sacrifices day after day," first for their own sins and then for those of the people, Jesus offered himself up to God once and for all in his death. This self-offering was akin to a sacrifice for sins in that it constituted a petition that God forgive the sins of those on whose behalf that offering was made. Of course, both in the case of the other high priests and that of Jesus, the petition made on behalf of others involved presenting an offering.[56] This was not because it was impossible for God to forgive sins without a sacrificial offering. Rather, the offering was a concrete and visible expression of the repentance and commitment to obedience of those who presented it.

In the case of Jesus, of course, his offering of himself was not an expression of his own repentance or the repentance of others. He did not have sins of which he needed to repent and he was not offered up to God by others as an offering for their sins. Rather, it was Jesus who had offered up himself on behalf of others. Nevertheless, Jesus' offering up of himself in death could be seen as "necessary" or "fitting" in that it was the concrete and visible expression of his commitment not only to be obedient to God in all things personally, but also to bring about in others that same type of obedience. In principle, during

56. It is important to note, as Godfrey Ashby does, that central to the thought of Hebrews is the notion that "Christ is both sacrificer and sacrificed, priest and offering" (*Sacrifice: Its Nature and Purpose*; London: SCM, 1988, 66).

his lifetime Jesus might have simply prayed to God to forgive the sins of his people definitively without offering his life up to God and perhaps might have obtained a favorable response from God to that petition. In that case, however, God would not have had full assurance that those whose forgiveness Jesus sought would be brought into conformity with his will. Because Jesus would not yet have shown even himself to be fully committed to obeying God's will, no matter what the cost or consequences, God would not yet have had any basis upon which to be certain that Jesus would bring about the same type of obedience in those on whose behalf he made intercession and thus no basis upon which to grant them forgiveness definitively, since the condition for divine forgiveness is a full commitment to obeying God's will.

For this reason, just as it was not fitting or acceptable for a high priest to offer up a petition that God forgive his people without offering up a sacrifice as a concrete expression of the people's repentance and commitment to obedience, so also it was not fitting or acceptable for Jesus to offer up a petition that God forgive his followers without offering up himself to God. In the thought of the author of Hebrews, only in this way could God be assured that those followers would be brought to repentance and commit themselves to obedience under Jesus' governance as their high priest. Yet it was not only what Jesus did when he offered himself up to God for others that gave God this assurance, but also the fact that God responded by making Jesus "perfect forever" (7:28). Now perfected, there can be no doubt that he will bring about what God desired and commanded in all of those who submit to him through faith so as to receive not only a new life but also the forgiveness of sins.

Throughout chapters 7 and 8, the author of Hebrews argues not only that Jesus' high priesthood is superior to that of the high priests serving under the Mosaic law, but also that it was anticipated and foretold in the ordinances regarding sacrificial worship given through Moses. For this reason, in 8:2 he contrasts the sanctuary that God ordered the Israelites to construct with "the true tent that the Lord, and not any mortal, has set up."[57] In the following verses, he also notes that if Jesus were on earth he would not be a priest, since the priesthood exercised on earth is that which God originally commanded under Moses in the law (8:3-4). The sanctuary in which Israel's priests were ordered to serve is only a "sketch and shadow of the heavenly one" (8:5), where Jesus serves as the true high priest.

While the author does not explicitly mention Jesus' offering of himself in 8:3, he clearly alludes to it when he writes: "For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary for this priest [Jesus] also to have something to offer." Obviously, that "something" is Jesus himself or his own body, soul, and spirit (see 10:5-10). This makes Jesus' ministry "more excellent" and the covenant mediated through him superior, not only

57. Vanhoye notes that the "true tent" mentioned in Heb. 8:2 (cf. 9:7, 11) has been interpreted in a variety of ways, yet argues that it should be understood as referring to the risen and glorified body of Christ (*Hebrews*, 143-47).

because Jesus' offering was greater than that offered by the other priests and because the sacrificial worship prescribed in Moses' day pointed forward to what would take place through Jesus, but also because this covenant has been "enacted through better promises" (8:6). In addition, the fact that Jesus "holds his priesthood permanently" and has been "made perfect forever" makes him the "guarantee of a better covenant" (7:22, 24, 28).

The author concludes chapter 8 with the quotation from Jer. 31:31-34 in which the prophet speaks of a new covenant (8:8-12). According to the author, the fact that God has established a new or second covenant through Jesus in fulfillment of his promises demonstrates that the first covenant was faulty and is now obsolete (8:7, 13).[58] For this reason, it is soon to disappear (8:13).

HEBREWS 9

The author of Hebrews begins chapter 9 by describing the regulations for worship and for the sanctuary given under the Mosaic law or "first covenant" (9:1-7). These had to do with the various objects in the Holy place and the Holy of holies. According to the author, the fact that the high priest went into the Holy of holies with sacrificial blood only once a year, in contrast to the other priests who entered the Holy place continually to carry out the prescribed rites there, means that "the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed as long as the first tent is still standing" (9:8). In other words, the realities to which all of these places and objects associated with Israel's sacrificial worship pointed as antitypes and symbols had not been revealed prior to Christ's coming and death. The fact that the author regards sacrificial blood as something offered to God is evident from his affirmation that the high priest enters into the Holy of holies once a year "not without taking the blood that he offers for himself (*prospherei huper heautou*) and for the sins committed unintentionally by the people" (9:7). The author then continues:

> 9 This is a symbol (*parabolē*) of the present time, during which gifts and sacrifices
> are offered that cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, 10 but deal only
> with food and drink and various baptisms, regulations for the flesh imposed until
> the time for a new order has arrived. 11 But when Christ came as a high priest of
> the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent
> (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), 12 he entered once for all into
> the Holy Place, not through the blood of goats and calves, but through his own
> blood, having obtained an eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and
> bulls and the sprinkled ashes of a heifer sanctify those who have been defiled for
> the purification of their flesh, 14 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!

Here the author is not only contrasting the rites of the first covenant with what has taken place now in Christ, but he is also claiming that those rites

58. In order to avoid supersessionism, Johnson understands the affirmation that the first covenant is "obsolete" in Heb. 8:13 in the sense that it is "aging to the point of destruction" and "insufficient" (*Hebrews*, 204, 211).

were symbols or figures that pointed forward to the way in which Christ would redeem others and purify their consciences. Because they were symbolic and figurative, those rites were not actually able to "make the worshiper perfect in conscience" (*teleiōsai kata suneidēsin*).

Precisely what the author means by the last phrase is difficult to determine.[59] The author uses the noun *suneidēsis* five times in the epistle, two of which appear in this passage (vv. 9, 14). In 10:2, he speaks of the "consciousness of sins" that those worshiping God with sacrifices have, and in 10:22 he refers to the hearts of believers being "sprinkled clean from an evil conscience." In the closing section of the epistle, the author says that he and those with him "have a good conscience" and desire to act honorably in all things (13:8). For the author, the word *suneidēsis* can thus refer both to one's consciousness of something as well as one's conscience or moral consciousness.

When the author states that the gifts and sacrifices offered according to the first covenant "cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience," therefore, he seems to be arguing that they cannot completely rid those who present them of their consciousness of sin, or at least cannot do so definitively.[60] His affirmation that the sacrificial rites carried out according to the Mosaic law are merely "regulations for the flesh" (9:10) serves to contrast the flesh or body with the *suneidēsis*. In principle, this may be taken in the sense that those who participate in the sacrificial worship ordained in the Mosaic law are never fully able to regard themselves as entirely clean or pure on the inside, since that worship deals primarily with fleshly or bodily purity and must constantly be repeated. However, the author's words could instead be understood as affirming that, just as the "earthly" realities mentioned in 9:1 were "symbols" of the sacrificial worship that was to take place in the heavenly realm through Christ (9:9), so also the purification rites carried out under the Mosaic law were symbols that pointed ahead to the purification of the inner conscience of believers through Christ's sacrifice of himself. In either case, the author claims that the sacrificial prescriptions given through Moses were designed to fulfill a temporary purpose that would either change or come to an end when the "new order" (*diorthōsis*) arrived. For this reason, the author may also be affirming that the perfection of the conscience that believers now receive as a result of Christ's offering of himself is permanent, "once for all," since it is not something that must be repeated regularly, in contrast to the fleshly purification rites of the first covenant.

For the author, the promised new order has now arrived through Christ as "high priest of the good things that have come" (9:11). Similar to the way in which the high priests entered into the tabernacle under the first covenant,

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59. William Lane notes that in Hebrews the term *suneidēsis* "has deeply religious overtones: the 'conscience' is directed toward God and embraces the whole person in his relation to God...." (*Hebrews 9-13*; WBC 47B; Dallas, TX: Word, 1991, 225).

60. Gordon comments: "The crux of the matter was that the ceremonial law could not deal with the bedrock problem of a human conscience suffering under the awareness of defects more fundamental than any breach of ritual requirements (cf. 9.14; 10.2, 22)" (*Hebrews*, 98).

Christ has passed through the "greater and more perfect tent" in order to enter into the Holy place (vv. 11-12). Clearly the allusion is to the heavenly reality to which the tent and Holy place pointed as symbols or figures.[61] In contrast to the high priests of the first covenant, who entered into the Holy place once a year with the blood of sacrificial animals, Christ entered into the heavenly Holy place once for all with or by means of his own blood (*dia tou idiou haimatos*). This imagery enables the author to argue for the superiority of Christ's offering on behalf of others, since he did not offer to God the blood of sacrificial animals, but instead offered up his own blood, that is, himself or his own life.

The author affirms that in this way Christ obtained an "eternal redemption" or deliverance (*aiōnian lutrosin heuramenos*). In principle, the aorist participle *heuramenos* can be taken in a temporal sense as referring to something that took place *before* Christ entered (*eisēlthen*) into the Holy place with or through his blood (v. 12). On this basis, scholars who look to the idea of penal substitution to interpret passages from Hebrews such as this one have often claimed that Christ's atoning work was fully completed when he died, *before* he entered into heaven. F. F. Bruce, for example, argues against the idea that "the expiatory work of Christ was not completed on the cross—not completed, indeed, until he ascended from earth and 'made atonement "for us" in the heavenly holy of holies by the presentation of his efficacious blood.'"[62] Other scholars such as Harold Attridge, however, have affirmed that the "aorist tense of the participle should not be forced to imply that the decisive event occurs only prior to Christ's entry. This is another case of a 'coincident' aorist, and at least on the level of the basic image, the decisive atoning act is the sprinkling of the blood within."[63] Luke Timothy Johnson similarly comments that the "aorist tense of the participle does not designate time but the kind of action, here punctiliar rather than continuous ('once for all')…. The circumstantial participle can… express purpose, and translating it as purpose here brings it into accord with the phrase *eis apolytrōsin* ('for the redemption') in 9:15."[64] While Attridge and Johnson are probably correct in their analysis, even if *heuramenos* is taken in a temporal sense, the author's idea would be that once Christ had offered himself up on the cross seeking redemption for others, at the moment that he died that redemption became a certainty, since there could be no doubt that God would respond to Christ's faithfulness to the end by raising him and receiving him into heaven so that he might make that redemption a reality. Ultimately, then, whether or not *heuramenos*

61. As Schenck observes, the Greek preposition *dia* (which modifies the tent, *skēnēs*) can be understood either instrumentally—that Christ entered *through* the greater tent—or locally, in which case the allusions are to a "multilayered heaven" or "the outer tent of a real heavenly tabernacle" (*Cosmology*, 156). In either case, however, Jesus' death is the *means* by which he enters into God's presence by passing *through* the heavenly tent to penetrate into the Holy place.

62. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed. (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 213. The quote cited by Bruce is from K. M. Monroe, "Time Element in the Atonement," *EvQ* 5 (1933): 404.

63. Attridge, *Hebrews*, 248-49.

64. Johnson, *Hebrews*, 236-37.

is understood in a temporal sense, the author's idea is that by means of his self-offering on behalf of others and God's acceptance of that self-offering in Jesus' resurrection and exaltation, the "eternal redemption" that both Jesus and God sought to bring about has been attained in the sense that it is now certain to become a reality through Jesus. This is because, as a result of his self-offering for others, Jesus has been "crowned with glory and honor" (2:9) not only so that he may "appear a second time... to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (9:28), but also so that he may remain active both in relation to believers and in relation to God on their behalf until that time comes.

While most English versions of the Bible translate the phrase *dia tou idiou haimatos* in 9:12 as "with his blood," a literal translation would be "through his blood." Although the affirmation that Christ entered the Holy place "with his blood" may sound more natural in English, the author's idea may instead be that Christ's blood is the *means* by which he entered into the Holy place. In this case, the author has changed the imagery somewhat from that which was normally associated with the sacrificial offerings in Jewish thought. Unlike the priests under the Mosaic covenant, Christ would be presented, not as taking blood into the Holy place to sprinkle it there, but as being received favorably into God's presence in the Holy place *by means of* his blood or death when he "offered himself without blemish to God" (9:14).[65] While 9:13 alludes to the sprinkling of blood as a means of purification under the first covenant, 9:14 does not explicitly affirm that Christ sprinkled his blood in the true "Holy place" in heaven when he entered there, though this idea may be seen as implicit.

The phrase "eternal redemption" (*aiōnian lutrōsin*) in 9:12 is quite ambiguous and does not appear elsewhere in the epistle. This makes it difficult to determine its precise meaning.[66] The closest the author comes to such language is in 9:15, where he speaks of Christ's death having taken place for the redemption from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. Here he uses the composite noun *apolutrōsis*, which appears only one other time in the epistle, where it refers to release from prison (11:35).

On this basis, the redemption to which the author refers in 9:12 can be interpreted in terms of the forgiveness of sins, liberation from some evil power such as sin or the devil, or in an eschatological sense. In the case of this last possibility, the author would have had in mind the final redemption of God's people that many Jews longed for, which would unquestionably come to pass through Jesus now that he had been exalted into heaven so that he might return in power and glory to save God's people. Given the context, it is most likely that the author had the first of these three ideas in mind, though the other two are closely related to it. Just as Israel's priests obtained forgiveness

65. Johnson combines these two ideas by observing, "When Hebrews speaks of Christ entering the sanctuary with his own blood, it means that Christ's entry into God's presence was through the violent and bloody death on the cross" (*Hebrews*, 237).

66. According to Attridge, "The whole phrase 'eternal redemption' is found in Jewish sources and may have been a part of the author's liturgical tradition" (*Hebrews*, 249).

for God's people when they approached God on behalf of the people with sacrificial blood and prayers of repentance, so also Christ obtained forgiveness for those who would live under him in the new covenant when he offered up his life to God on their behalf, asking that God receive them favorably and overlook their sins. Nevertheless, while the forgiveness that Israel's priests obtained was only temporary, as is evidenced by the fact that the sacrifices for sins they presented were made repeatedly, the forgiveness Christ obtained for all who would come to live obediently under him was definitive and irreversible. In that sense, it was an "eternal redemption."

The author continues the contrast between the sacrificial rites carried out by Israel's priests under the first covenant and Christ's sacrificial death in 9:13-14, where he argues that the blood of Christ accomplishes something that the blood of sacrificial animals could not. Whereas "the blood of goats and calves and the sprinkled ashes of a heifer sanctify those who have been defiled for the purification of their flesh," the blood of Christ purifies the conscience of believers "from dead works to worship the living God." Here again we find the contrast between the purification of the flesh under the old covenant and that of the conscience under the new.

The author's affirmation regarding the blood of goats and calves and the sprinkled ashes of a heifer is somewhat problematic in that it is not entirely clear which blood he has in mind.[67] The feminine present participle *rantizousa* must be seen as referring only to the ashes (*hē spodos*) and not to the blood (*to haima*), since the latter would require a neuter participle. The sprinkling of ashes must refer to the purification rite with the ashes of a red heifer described in Numbers 19.[68] The ashes were mixed with water and sprinkled on those who had become impure due to contact or proximity with a corpse in order to purify them (Num. 19:11-19). The sacrifice for sin described in Leviticus 5 was to be performed for someone who had become unclean, yet the blood was sprinkled on the side of the altar and poured out at its base (Lev. 5:2-3, 9). As we noted when considering 1 Pet. 1:2, in the Pentateuch only two passages speak of sacrificial blood being sprinkled on people: Exod. 24:3-8, where Moses sprinkles blood on the Israelites in order to ratify the covenant with them, and Lev. 8:30, where Moses consecrates Aaron, Aaron's garments, and his sons by sprinkling oil and blood on them. In both of these cases, those upon whom the blood was sprinkled were not defiled but in a state of purity and therefore no purification of their flesh was involved (Exod. 19:10; Lev. 8:6, 10, 12). In the other sacrificial rites with blood, it was sprinkled toward the temple veil or on sacred objects, poured out at the base of the altar, or

67. The best solution to the question of why the author of Hebrews relates a number of sacrificial rituals with the Day of Atonement that are unrelated to that day in the Hebrew Scriptures and ancient Jewish literature may be that of Gordon, who writes with regard to Heb. 9:13-14: "It is possible that 'the blood of goats and bulls' is a generalizing reference to the Israelites' sacrificial system, but the Day of Atonement is probably still uppermost in the writer's mind" (*Hebrews*, 100).

68. Gordon notes that the fact that "the red heifer is designated as a sin-offering (or 'purification-offering') in Num. 19.9, 17 may also have contributed to its association here with the sin offerings of the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev. 16.3, 5, 6, 9, 11, 15, 25, 27)" (*Hebrews*, 101).

smeared on the altar or sacred objects. In Lev. 14:14, the rite for purifying lepers is said to involve applying the blood of a guilt offering to the lobe of the right ear, the thumb of the right hand, and the big toe of the right foot of the one being cleansed, yet this involves smearing sacrificial blood rather than sprinkling it.

These observations are important for considering the question of how Christ's blood can be said to purify the conscience of believers. Although later on in the chapter the author will allude to the manner in which Moses sprinkled blood on the Israelites to ratify the covenant with them (9:18-21), here in 9:13-14 the allusion is to the purification of the conscience of believers "from dead works" in order that they may serve God. If the author has in mind the idea of Christ sprinkling sacrificial blood toward the veil in the Holy place, it is not clear how the sprinkling of ashes on those who have become defiled in order to purify their flesh relates to Christ's blood. The only point of comparison seems to be the contrast between the purification of the flesh under the first covenant and the purification of the conscience of believers under the second.

In the sacrificial rites for sin described in Leviticus 4–5 and the Day of Atonement rites prescribed in Leviticus 16, the end result is said to be the forgiveness of sins or, in the case of the latter, purification from sin (Lev. 16:30; cf. Lev. 4:20; 5:10, 13, 16). In each of these cases, the people on whose behalf the sacrifices were offered did not actually perform any of the rites with the blood (unless they were priests themselves, of course), but instead participated by identifying themselves with the rites that the priest was performing for them. The priest was offering the blood to God together with prayers on their behalf, and therefore in a sense the people were also participating in the rites, which depended not only on the priest but on the sincere repentance and commitment to obeying God of which those rites were to be an expression. In fact, it could be said that the people themselves were offering the blood to God along with prayers for forgiveness *through* and *with* the priest, since they were the ones who provided the animals for sacrifice and thereby offered them to God.

For all of these reasons, it seems likely that for the author of Hebrews the way in which Christ's blood purifies the conscience of believers is that they *identify* with that blood and in that sense make Christ's offering their own. For the author, Christ's blood refers metaphorically to Christ's offering his life up to God on behalf of others in accordance with God's will. The author's idea is therefore not that Christ's blood had some effect either upon God or upon believers but rather that, as believers not only identify themselves as those *on whose behalf* Christ had offered himself up but also identify with *the way* in which Christ had offered himself up, their conscience is cleansed from dead works to worship God in the manner that he desires.

If the author does have in mind the imagery of believers themselves being sprinkled with Christ's blood in 9:13-14, the fact that the people had to draw

near to the one who was sprinkling the blood in order that it might fall on them would also be seen as the expression of their desire to participate in the rite and thereby to be consecrated and purified as part of God's people. In this case, to be sprinkled with Christ's blood once again would involve identifying oneself with the people on whose behalf he offered up his life sacrificially and drawing near to God on that basis.[69] The sprinkling of Christ's blood upon believers might also be understood in a spiritual sense: Christ brought them to share in the same spirit in which he had offered himself up to God and thus in a sense "sprinkled" them with that spirit or Spirit. Once again, the blood of Christ would purify the conscience of believers since through faith they identify with Christ and his self-offering to God. Through Christ and his Spirit they are brought to offer themselves up to God like Christ and together with him, thereby putting aside their dead works in order to worship the living God. And just as God received favorably Christ's self-offering on behalf of believers, so also he now receives favorably those believers who identify themselves as those on whose behalf Christ offered up his life and offer up their own lives to God in the same spirit that Christ did, in solidarity with him and the self-offering he presented to God out of love for others.

This interpretation is consistent with the author's affirmation that Christ "offered himself without blemish to God through the eternal Spirit," which he inserts between his allusions to the blood of Christ and the purification of the conscience of believers.[70] The author has already alluded twice to the readers' reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit (2:4; 6:4). He may therefore have mentioned the Spirit's role in Christ's offering up of himself to remind the readers that the same Spirit also impels and empowers them to offer their lives up to God as Christ did and together with Christ. Although the readers are not able to offer themselves up to God "without blemish" as Christ did, they can nevertheless identify with Christ's self-offering in that, as they offer their lives up to God, they desire to be pure as Christ was and thus can be confident that they will be accepted by God as pure on that basis through Christ their mediator. If they call Christ their forerunner and the originator of their salvation, it can only be because they are committed to running on the same path that Christ did and recognize that their own salvation is inseparable from offering up their lives to God as Christ did. Christ's blood, therefore, purifies the conscience of believers from dead works and brings them to offer themselves up to God for the same reason that no one can truly call Jesus

69. According to Cynthia Long Westfall, in Hebrews association with Jesus' blood constitutes believers not only as the new people of God but also as part of a new priesthood. Commenting on Heb. 9:14, she writes: "if the sacrifice of animals made defiled people ceremonially clean, how much more will the blood of Christ cleanse believers internally? The purpose of the cleansing is in order to serve the living God. The force of the contrast would indicate that the way into the Holy of Holies is now open for the believer to serve God as a priest.... The effect of Jesus' blood on believers is that they are enabled and qualified to serve God in the capacity as priests" (*Discourse Analysis of the Letter to the Hebrews: The Relationship between Form and Meaning*; LNTS 297; London: T & T Clark, 2005, 199-200).

70. Koester notes the different possibilities of meaning of the phrase "through the eternal Spirit" in Heb. 9:14 (*Hebrews*, 410-11). Interpreters generally take the phrase as referring to the Holy Spirit.

Lord without obeying him, since that would be a contradiction in terms. By definition, to identify with Christ's blood is to identify with his offering up of his life to God in order to do God's will.

Beginning in 9:15, the author turns to a different idea in order to continue to develop his argument that the new covenant established through Christ fulfills the first covenant, which pointed forward to it. The fact that the Greek noun *diathēkē* refers both to a covenant and to a last will or testament allows the author to claim that, by definition, the death of the one establishing the covenant or testament was necessary for it to go into effect:

> 9:15 For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called might receive the promise of an eternal inheritance once a death had taken place for the redemption from the transgressions of the first covenant. 16 Where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. 17 For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. 18 Hence not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. 19 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, 20 saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God has ordained for you. 21 And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. 22 Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (9:15-22).

Here, for the second time in the letter, the author calls Christ the "mediator of a new covenant" (9:15). In 8:6, he has already stated 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." This occurs in the context of his affirmations that believers have a high priest seated at God's right hand (8:1), that the Letivical priests "offer worship in a sanctuary that is a sketch and shadow of the heavenly one" (8:5), and that a new covenant was necessary because the previous one had not been faultless (8:7). As the author has stated previously, the problem with the old covenant is that it could not lead believers to perfection (7:11) and could not fully and definitively cleanse the conscience of believers (9:9-10, 13-14). Further on he will make a similar affirmation: "Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who approach" (10:1). The *reason* why a new covenant was necessary, therefore, was that the previous one had contained only "shadows" and "sketches" of the covenant to come and could not actually accomplish that to which it pointed. Because the author has just mentioned that Christ's blood purifies the conscience of believers and that Christ has obtained for them an eternal redemption (9:9-14), the *dia touto* ("for this reason") at the beginning of 9:15 should be seen as referring to the need for Christ to mediate a covenant that was superior to the first one.

The author's use of the present tense in 9:15, where he speaks of Christ as the mediator of a new covenant (*diathēkes kainēs mesitēs estin*), raises the

question of whether the mediation of a new covenant is something Christ did only in the past or something he continues to do in the present. In 8:6, the author has also used the present tense to refer to Christ as the mediator of a better covenant (*kreittonos estin diathēkēs mesitēs*) after affirming that "Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry." This suggests that Christ's serving as mediator of a new covenant is not limited to the past but continues into the present. He has not merely founded or established a new covenant but is the one through whom the mediation between God and those living under the new covenant takes place.

In 9:15, the author states explicitly the purpose of Christ's mediating a new covenant: so that those who are called may receive the promise of an eternal inheritance. This is clearly related to the "better promises" that the author mentions with regard to the new covenant in 8:6. The idea seems to be that believers have only attained the *promise* of an eternal inheritance by being constituted heirs of what is to come, yet they have not actually attained the promised inheritance itself. The author's statements elsewhere bear out this interpretation (6:11-12; 10:23, 36; 11:13, 39-40).

It is important to keep all of these points in mind when seeking to understand the author's allusion to Christ's death in 9:15, where he writes that "a death had taken place for the redemption from the transgressions of the first covenant." Several of the Greek phrases found v. 15 make it difficult to translate into English. The Greek phrase *thanatou genomenou* in 9:15 is a genitive absolute, which when translated literally should be rendered "when" or "after a death had occurred."[71] Obviously, the allusion is to the death of Christ. This stands in relation to Christ's being mediator of a new covenant so that believers might obtain the promise of an eternal inheritance, which must therefore be seen as something that has taken place subsequent to Christ's death. The author's idea may be that God granted that promise to believers when he responded to Christ's self-offering on their behalf by exalting him to heaven.

The phrase immediately following, *eis apolutrōsin tōn epi tē protē diathēkē parabaseōn*, indicates the purpose or goal of Christ's death: a redemption from the transgressions associated with the first covenant. It should be stressed that the author does not speak of Christ's death as effecting redemption from transgressions in and of itself, as if it had some redemptive effect. The idea is instead that Christ died in order to deliver others from the transgressions associated with the Mosaic covenant. In other words, it is Christ himself who brings about that redemption or deliverance and not his death per se.

The phrase *epi tē protē diathēkē*, which appears in the middle of the longer phrase just considered, is also difficult to translate into English, in large part because it is ambiguous. One possible translation is "at the time of the first covenant." In this case, the allusion would be to the transgressions committed under the first covenant while it was in force. Although the preposition *epi* may be used in this way, in 8:13 the author has stated that the first covenant

71. On this point, see Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 460.

has been made "old" or "obsolete" and that what has become old or aged is "close to disappearing." This implies that the first covenant has not yet passed away, which makes the translation "at the time of the first covenant" problematic. If such a translation is preferred, however, the transgressions of which the author speaks would include those committed over a series of many generations since the time when that covenant was first established, and perhaps the sins still being committed under that covenant as well. A second possibility is to translate the Greek phrase "on the basis of the first covenant." According to this translation, the transgressions involved would be those actions that the first covenant defined as contrary to God's will.[72] A third possibility would be to understand the phrase somewhat more loosely as referring to the transgressions committed according to the first covenant or in association with it, without defining precisely the relation between those transgressions and the first covenant.

Those who have interpreted 9:15 on the basis of a penal substitution view regard Christ's death as redeeming others from the transgressions committed in association with the first covenant in that in his death he takes upon himself the penalty or punishment for those transgressions in the stead of others, thereby freeing them from that punishment.[73] There are many good reasons to reject such a view. In this context and elsewhere in the epistle, the author does not define the plight to which Christ and his death respond in terms of God's people needing deliverance from the penalty to which they are subject due to their sins. Rather, as just noted above, the problem is that prior to Christ a covenant had not been established that was capable of bringing God's people to perfection and cleansing their conscience. Undoubtedly, they were in need of a forgiveness that they could not obtain, yet the reason that they could not obtain it was not that God's justice prevented him from granting that forgiveness, but that the previous covenant only pointed forward to the new covenant and thus did not provide any means for true purification from one's sins.

For these reasons, 9:15 should be read as affirming that only those living under the new covenant under Christ have been redeemed by him from the trespasses associated with the first covenant in the sense that they now have a way to obtain forgiveness for their sins, whereas previously they did not. Under the new covenant, they are forgiven and purified as they approach God through Christ rather than through the sacrificial offerings ordained in the first covenant, which could not truly obtain redemption for

72. On this interpretation, see Johnson, who writes: "The prepositional phrase *epi* ... *diathēkē* means literally 'on the basis of ... covenant' (as in 8:6); here the sense is close to the *ep' autēs* used of the Letivical priesthood in 7:11 (see also 9:10, 17). The redemption is from the transgressions committed against or with respect to the commandments spelled out in the Sinai covenant" (*Hebrews*, 239). See also Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 461.

73. Scott W. Hahn, for example, reads back into Heb. 9:15-22 the idea that in ancient Hebrew thought the sacrifice of animals involved inflicting a curse on them and that, for the author of Hebrews, Christ underwent the covenant curse of death in the place of others, since covenant-breaking requires the curse of death ("Covenant, Cult, and the Curse-of-Death: *Diathēkē* in Heb. 9:15-22," in *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods, New Insights*; ed. Gabriella Gelardini; BIS 75; Leiden: Brill, 2005, 75-83).

the trespasses committed. As we have noted elsewhere, believers now have access to God and his forgiveness by virtue of what Christ did in the past, when he offered himself up to God seeking that God forgive and accept all who would live under him in the new covenant, as well as what Christ does in the present as their mediator in heaven. This includes not only interceding for them but also purifying their conscience from dead works and bringing them to live in conformity with God's will on the basis of what he did during his time on earth and what he continues to do in the present from heaven. The problem with the first covenant was not simply that those living under that covenant could not truly obtain forgiveness and access to God, but that they were unable to be purified in their interior and become obedient in the way God desires in order to obtain that forgiveness and access. For the author, this occurs only as believers identify with Christ in his death and follow Christ as their high priest, forerunner, and leader (*archēgos*), and the originator of their salvation.

As just noted, in 9:15 the author seems to refer not only to Christ's death but also to his ongoing role as mediator of the new covenant. Even if the author has both of these ideas in mind, he refers to Christ's death explicitly in this verse because he wishes to develop the idea that a will or testament (*diathēkē*) requires the death of the one who made it before it can go into effect. For the author, then, through his death Christ redeemed believers from the trespasses associated with the first covenant by establishing a different basis upon which they might obtain forgiveness for their trespasses, namely, his self-offering on their behalf in the past and his ongoing intercession for them in the present.

It is also possible that in 9:15 the author has in mind the idea that, by virtue of Christ's death and the new covenant established through his death, God's will has been redefined. Through Christ, God has not only established a new way to approach him that is truly effective, but has also redefined the way in which obedience to him is to be understood. The obedience God desires and commands no longer involves merely following the rites and commandments given under the first covenant, but submitting to Christ as one's leader (*archēgos*) in order to obey Christ by living as he did and looking to him for guidance, assistance, and salvation (2:18; 4:15; 5:8-10). Therefore, through Christ's death believers have been redeemed from the transgressions associated with the old covenant in the sense that they now live under the stipulations of the new covenant and thus are not required to observe what was ordained in the old covenant, particularly with regard to the sacrificial means of atonement that it prescribed. In this case, they can also be said to have been redeemed or delivered from the problem they had of constantly committing transgressions for which they could not obtain forgiveness fully and definitively, not only because through Christ and his death they now have a way to obtain such a forgiveness but also because, now that God's will has been redefined through Christ, as they identify with him and his sacrifice they are

no longer regarded by God as transgressing his law in the way that they were in the past under the old covenant.

The author continues his argument in 9:16-17 by affirming that Christ's death was necessary (*anagkē*) because a *diathēkē*, understood as a will or testament, takes effect only when the one making it has died. This necessity, however, has nothing to do with the satisfaction of divine justice in Christ's death. Instead, it derives from the nature of a will or testament and, in this case, a covenant as well, since for the author a testament and covenant are identical in that both are a *diathēkē*.[74] To understand the author's argument here, however, it is important to distinguish between a will going into effect and the reception by those named in the will of the inheritance that the will assigns to them. For the author of Hebrews, only the first of these two things has taken place through Christ's death. Prior to the death of one who makes a will, it does not go into effect because that person can still alter it. In other words, during that person's lifetime, the will or testament made is not yet a final, definitive document or a final, definitive expression of the will or wishes of that person, since that will or those wishes may still change. Once that person has died, however, the will becomes final and goes into effect. Following this, those who are named in the will receive what the person who made it assigned to them in the will.[75] The author's thought here is similar to that which we find in Gal. 3:15—4:7, which also speaks of the ratification of a testament that contains promises that the children must wait to inherit.

Thus although the new covenant or testament (*diathēkē*) went into effect when Christ died in the sense that it was ratified or finalized, those whom it names as heirs have not yet received the inheritance that the will assigns or promises to them. The author makes this clear in the previous verse, where he affirms that those who have been called have received, not an eternal inheritance, but only the *promise* of an eternal inheritance (*tēn epaggelian... tēs aiōniou klēronomias*, 9:15). Earlier in the letter, the author affirms that the angels are "sent to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit the salvation soon to come" (*dia tous mellontas klēronomein sōtērian*, 1:14). Here, while some are now regarded as heirs of salvation, which is their inheritance, that salvation has not yet come. Likewise, in 6:11-18, the author presents Abraham as an example of "those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." In the case of Abraham, his own faith and patience allowed him to receive the inheritance God had promised him when God told him: "I will surely bless

74. Most commentators affirm that *diathēkē* in 9:16-17 refers to both a covenant and a testament. Some commentators have questioned this, however (see, for example, Scott W. Hahn, "A Broken Covenant and the Curse of Death: A Study of Hebrews 9:15-22," *CBQ* 66 [2004]: 416-36). Schenck argues that even though some interpreters have questioned the claim that *diathēkē* in 9:15 refers to a testament rather than a covenant, there are good reasons to uphold that claim (*Cosmology*, 100-102).

75. According to Koester, "In common practice giving an inheritance occurs in two stages. First, the heirs are given the promise that they will receive something in the future. Second, the heirs later come into full possession of their inheritance, usually after the testator's death (9:16-17). The language suits the situation of those addressed by Hebrews, for they have received the promise of salvation from God, but have not yet received their inheritance in its entirety...." ("God's Purposes," 364).

you and multiply you." The author goes on to say that "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" (*emesiteusen orkō*, 6:17). Here the oath *guarantees* that God will fulfill his promises in the future. Following this affirmation, the author exhorts his readers to be "strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us," since "it is impossible that God would prove false." In this passage it is clear that the hope, which according to 6:19-20 has entered behind the veil with Jesus and is thus "sure and steadfast," involves the future reception of a salvation that believers have not yet received. The same ideas are affirmed further on in the epistle (10:36; 11:13, 39-40).

In 9:15-17, therefore, the author is affirming that the new covenant or testament (*diathēkē*) has gone into effect by virtue of Christ's death, even though believers have not yet attained what that new covenant or testament promises. Although these verses can be interpreted in the sense that Christ's death was necessary merely because by nature a testament requires the death of the one making it to become valid, the following verses suggest that the author may have something more in mind. In 9:18-22, he affirms that "not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood" and then recalls how Moses, after reading the commandments to the Israelites, took the blood of sacrificial animals and sprinkled both the scroll and the people, as well as the tent and the vessels used in worship.[76]

On this basis, it appears that Christ's death was necessary, not merely because a testament can go into effect only when the one making it has died, but also because the rites performed under the old covenant anticipated what would take place under the new covenant when it was established. In other words, the shadows, symbols, and figures of the old covenant that pointed forward to the new had to be fulfilled.

It is likely, however, that for the author this fulfillment involved more than a similarity between the manner in which Moses used sacrificial blood to establish the first covenant and the fact that Christ's blood was shed when he died. As the author mentions, Moses carried out the rites with blood after the commandments of the first covenant had been read to the people and, when sprinkling the blood on the people, told them, "This is the blood of the covenant that God has ordained for you" (9:20). In the original account in Exod. 24:3-8, after Moses reads the commandments to the people, the people respond by affirming not once but twice that they will obey all of the commandments God has given them. Although the author of Hebrews does not mention this in these verses, he may suppose that the readers are aware that the Israelites' promise to obey God's commandments was an essential and indispensable condition for the establishment of the first covenant. Furthermore, the fact that the author mentions Moses sprinkling blood not

76. James Swetnam sees in Heb. 9:20 an allusion to the Eucharist and the words of institution, which are similar to the citation from Exod. 24:8 ("Christology and the Eucharist in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Biblica* 70 [1989]: 84). He also finds allusions to the Eucharist in Heb. 6:4, 10:20, and 13:10 (89-90).

only on the people but also on the scroll upon which Moses had written the commandments and on the tent and the vessels for worship as well suggests that he understood the blood rite as symbolizing the consecration of the people to God along with the other objects sprinkled with blood. Because the blood used to sprinkle both the people and the various sacred objects was the same, the author may also have regarded the rite as establishing some kind of symbolic union between the people and the objects that would be used for the worship of God.

Even though the author of Hebrews does not mention Christ's blood explicitly in the immediate context of this passage, his affirmation that "not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood" contains an implicit allusion to Christ's blood, since the idea is that the second covenant was inaugurated with blood as the first was. Because for the author Christ's blood represents more than his death in a physical or a biological sense, he may have in mind the idea that Christ's death inaugurates the new covenant because it involved the offering up of himself to God on behalf of others in order to consecrate to God a people who would live in obedience to his will. Although in the case of the new or second covenant those who would live in this covenant promised to obey God *after* Christ had shed his blood on their behalf, the fact that they would come to identify themselves with Christ and his blood, which represented his self-offering to God for them in his death, meant that the inauguration of the new covenant also involved an implicit commitment to serve and obey God on the part of those who would live under that covenant. In this case, Christ's death or blood was necessary to establish a new covenant because it served as the means by which those living under that covenant would be consecrated to God and brought into conformity with his will.

Although we have previously examined Heb. 9:22 in Chapter 9 of this work, due to the importance of this verse for many of the traditional views regarding the salvific significance of Christ's death, it is important to look at it again here in the context of the epistle's argument. When the author affirms that "under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness," he is not claiming that it was impossible for God to forgive sins without Christ's death and the shedding of his blood. Rather, he is developing the idea that he has just mentioned in the preceding verses and leading into what he will affirm in the following verses. In 9:19-21, he has recalled the way in which Moses "took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the scroll itself and all the people," and then in the same way "sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship."[77]

77. As deSilva observes, "The author of Hebrews adds details to the Exodus episode: the water, scarlet thread, and hyssop are absent from Exodus 24, as is mention of the sprinkling of 'the tent and all the liturgical vessels'" (*Perseverance*, 310). Similarly, Gordon points out: "There are details in the summary of Exod. 24.3-8 given in v. 19 that are not found in the Old Testament passage," such as the aspersion of the blood of goats and "the mention of water, scarlet wool and hyssop, which may represent an intentional fusing with other Old Testament rituals...." (*Hebrews*, 104).

This latter affirmation appears immediately before 9:22. When the author states there that "under the law almost everything is purified with blood," he therefore has in mind the way in which the law ordained blood to be sprinkled or smeared not only on the tent and the vessels used in worship but also on other things, such as the altar, including its side and its horns, the altar of incense, the mercy seat, the high priestly vestments, the floor of the sanctuary, the ground around the altar, and people's houses.[78] As noted above, he may also have been referring to the way in which Aaron and his sons were consecrated for the priesthood as well as to the way in which lepers who had been cleansed of their disease were also purified through rites involving the use of blood. Of course, according to the law, some things were purified in other ways through the use of things such as oil and water, which at times was combined with hyssop and a piece of scarlet wool (Lev. 14:4, 6, 49-52; cf. Num. 19:6), as Heb. 9:19 mentions, or with the ashes of the red heifer. Thus, as the author observes, not everything but *almost* everything is purified with blood under the Mosaic law.[79]

Like the affirmation that almost everything is purified with blood under the law, the affirmation that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" is an *observation* on the part of the author regarding what the law prescribed. The author is therefore not referring to some universal truth regarding divine forgiveness. Nor does he state that without the shedding of blood there *can be* no forgiveness. Rather, he is simply noting that the rites commanded in the Mosaic law for making atonement and obtaining the forgiveness of sins involve the use of blood in some way. This is true of the sin offerings prescribed in Leviticus 4, the guilt offerings prescribed in Leviticus 5, and the prescriptions regarding the Day of Atonement rites in Leviticus 16. In fact, these are the only sacrificial rites that the Mosaic law relates to the forgiveness of sins.

What the author is saying in the second part of 9:22, then, is merely that blood was used in the sacrificial rites prescribed in the Mosaic law for making atonement for sins and obtaining divine forgiveness. He is not, however, affirming that throughout Israel's history, from the time that the law was given through Moses, God had never been able to forgive the sins of anyone unless blood had been shed. The Hebrew Scriptures provide numerous examples of God forgiving sins independently of the presentation of sacrificial offerings.[80] Obviously, for example, God had forgiven the sins of the Israelites deported to Babylon following the destruction of the first temple, even though they had not offered any of the sacrifices that the Mosaic law prescribed during their years of exile, before the second temple was constructed. Of course, because on the annual Day of Atonement God was believed to forgive all of the sins

78. Michael Kibbe, "Is it Finished? When Did it Start? Hebrews, Priesthood, and Atonement in Biblical, Systematic, and Historical Perspective," *JTS* 65 (2014): 34-35.

79. On the exceptions to the rule that everything was purified with blood in the Hebrew Scriptures, see Hughes, *Hebrews*, 378.

80. See, for example, Neh. 9:16-17; Ps. 32:1, 5; 65:3; Isa. 27:9; 33:24; 55:6-7; Jer. 31:34; 33:8; 36:3; 50:20.

that his people had committed over the course of the previous year, in a sense it might be said that divine forgiveness was tied to the blood rites performed on that day. Nevertheless, in order to obtain forgiveness, it was necessary for the people to participate in those rites, whether in Jerusalem or from afar, with a sincere and repentant heart. This meant that even on the Day of Atonement forgiveness was tied not to the blood shed but to repentance and a commitment to obedience, since without the latter the blood rites accomplished nothing. And if for some reason the Day of Atonement rites with blood could not be performed, God's people could still obtain forgiveness on that day and others through their repentance and recommitment to obeying God.

The only necessity to which the author refers in the immediate context of 9:22 appears in the following verse. In 9:23, he writes: "Thus it was necessary (*anagkē*) for the sketches of the things in the heavens to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves need better sacrifices than these." For the author, the "sketches" or "copies" (*hupodeigmata*) of the heavenly things are things such as those mentioned in 9:21: the tent and the vessels for worship, as well as other objects such as the altar and the sacred spaces where worship was carried out.[81] For the author, all of these sacred objects and spaces in the earthly sanctuary had their heavenly counterpart and thus were merely sketches or copies of what was found in the heavenly sanctuary. The author also mentions a number of sacred objects in 9:1-5, including the lampstand, the table, and the showbread in the Holy place, the golden altar of incense, and the ark of the covenant, together with its contents and its cover, the mercy seat. In that passage, the author does not enter into a discussion regarding what heavenly realities these various objects symbolized but merely affirms, "Of these things we cannot speak now in detail" (9:5). In 9:24, however, he states that "Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy (*antitupa*) of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself."[82] Here he makes it clear that the earthly sanctuary that God had ordered Moses to construct was merely a copy or figure of its counterpart in heaven. The author has already developed this idea in 8:1-5, where he speaks of the sanctuary in which the Israelites worshiped as "a sketch and shadow of the heavenly one," that is, "the true tent that the Lord, and not any mortal, has set up."

According to 9:23, therefore, what was necessary was that the heavenly realities to which the earthly realities pointed be purified by rites that were similar to the earthly rites prescribed under Moses, but at the same time were

81. Lincoln D. Hurst affirms that "the context of 9:23 is not the annual Day of Atonement ritual but the initial purification of the newly built tabernacle at the inauguration of the first covenant" ("Eschatology and 'Platonism' in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *SBLSP* 23 [1984]: 65).

82. Schenck points out that the phrase "into heaven itself" has been understood in three different ways: "as an identification of this holy of holies with heaven as a whole, as an identification of it with the highest heaven, or as a synecdoche in which the whole (heaven) is substituted for its part (the tabernacle in heaven)" (*Cosmology*, 165). In any case, Christ's entering into heaven is seen as the fulfillment of Moses' and the high priests' entering into the tabernacle and the Holy of holies.

superior to those rites.[83] This was because God had prescribed the earthly rites in Moses' day in order to serve as antitypes, symbols, shadows, or sketches of what would some day take place in Christ.[84] For the author, Christ's sacrifice was superior or better than the sacrifices of the old covenant in various ways. As he has already argued, Christ's high priesthood "according to the order of Melchizedek" is superior to the Levitical priesthood; this makes him the guarantor of a "better covenant" (5:10; 6:19—7:22; 8:6). While Christ is similar to the Levitical priests in that he is one with his brothers and sisters and has shared in all the things that they have, except for sin, the fact that he has been "made perfect" makes him superior to them (2:11-18; 4:15; 5:9-10). Unlike those priests, who were mortal, he "remains forever" and had no need to offer sacrifices for his own sins (7:23-28). Because he is now at God's right hand, he provides access to God in a way that the Levitical priests could not (4:14-16; 6:19-20; 7:25-26; 8:1-2). As noted above, in 9:9-14 the author has also argued for the superiority of Christ's sacrifice, which serves as the means by which believers obtain an "eternal redemption" and are able to have their consciences perfected.

In 9:23-28, therefore, the author is continuing to develop this argument. The heavenly realities needed to be purified with sacrifices that were better than those performed in the earthly sketches, copies, or antitypes (9:23).[85] Christ has also entered into the heavenly sanctuary permanently rather than entering into the earthly sketch or copy of that sanctuary to appear before God personally (9:24; cf. 6:19). Rather than having to offer up many sacrifices continually with the blood of animals and enter repeatedly into the Holy place, as the Levitical priests did, Christ "has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by his sacrifice" (9:25-26).

The author clearly refers to Christ's death both in this last phrase in 9:26 and also in 9:28, where he affirms that Christ was "offered once to bear the sins of many." The two phrases are somewhat distinct in that in the former Christ is said to have appeared "for the removal of sin through his sacrifice" (*eis athetēsin hamartias dia tēs thusias autou*), whereas in the latter he is said to have borne the sins of many. The Greek phrase used in 9:28 to refer to Christ bearing sins is *anenegkein hamartias*. The verb *anapherein* used here as well as

83. Westfall rightly notes that the thought of the author of Hebrews in Heb. 9:23 is that "it was necessary for the heavenly things that correspond to the earthly things connected to the first covenant to be cleansed with better sacrifices. This verse applies the principle that the 'things' associated with the heavenly covenant had to be cleansed in the same way as the things associated with the first covenant" (*Discourse Analysis*, 211).

84. As R. B. Jamieson argues, "Hebrews does not begin with the purportedly non-cultic 'facts' of Christ's death, resurrection and exaltation and then interpret these through metaphorical use of Levitical rites, as some scholars imply. Instead, Hebrews' logic is precisely the reverse: Jesus is the true priest and true sacrifice, and the Levitical sacrifices were patterned in advance on Christ's eschatological achievement" ("Hebrews 9.23: Cult Inauguration, Yom Kippur and the Cleansing of the Heavenly Tabernacle," *NTS* 62 [2016]: 582-83). For our purposes here, it is not necessary to address the question of why and from what the "heavenly realities" (*ta epourania*) mentioned in 9:23 needed to be purified.

85. According to Attridge, the author uses the plural "sacrifices" in Heb. 9:23 "because he is stating a general principle" rather than affirming that "many sacrifices are required 'in heaven'," and therefore is not denying the uniqueness of Jesus' death here (*Hebrews*, 261).

in 1 Pet 2:24, which also speaks of Christ bearing sins, literally means "to take up" or "bring up."[86] While it is regularly used in the Septuagint in relation to sacrificial rites, there it appears almost exclusively in conjunction with the phrase *epi to thusiastērion* to refer to placing what is sacrificed upon the altar.[87] The same verb is used repeatedly throughout the Septuagint in conjunction with sacrificial offerings, especially holocausts, in the sense of "to offer up." However, it is never used anywhere in the Septuagint in conjunction with *hamartia* or a similar term such as *anomia* or *adikia* to refer to bearing sin.

Those who interpret Heb. 9:28 on the basis of ideas associated with the penal substitution views of sacrifice and Christ's death generally understand the allusion to Christ's bearing sins in the sense that he bore the punishment for the sins of others.[88] Although the Septuagint often speaks of the priests or other persons bearing the guilt, sin, or iniquities of others, as we noted in Chapter 3 of this work, it never uses the verb *anapherein* in that regard but instead always employs the verb *lambanein*.[89] Furthermore, this bearing of guilt, sin, and iniquities involves bearing the *responsibility* for carrying out the sacrificial rites that the law prescribes for the removal of that guilt and sin or those iniquities. Outside of the Pentateuch, the only book that speaks of bearing the sin of others is Ezekiel. The author of this book, however, rejects outright the idea that one might bear the punishment of another (Ezek. 14:10; 18:19-20; 23:35; 44:10). In all of these passages, the verb *lambanein* is used. It is also worth noting that in the prescriptions for the Day of Atonement, the verb used to speak of the goat for Azazel bearing the iniquities of the people out into the desert is also *lambanein* (Lev. 16:22). For these reasons and others we have seen repeatedly in this study, there is no basis for understanding the allusion to Christ's bearing the sins of many in Heb. 9:28 in the sense of his bearing the punishment or penalty for their sins.

Both 9:26 and 9:28 should therefore be interpreted on the basis of the ideas we have seen repeatedly. Like the priests who went into the sanctuary with the blood of sacrificial victims, in his death Christ offered himself up to God asking that God forgive and overlook the sins of those who would live under the new covenant as members of his people. In this sense, Christ "bore their sins" once and for all when he died (9:28). The sin of believers was removed from God's sight forever (9:26) when God responded favorably

86. Sam K. Williams sees an allusion to Isaiah 53 in Heb. 9:28, yet argues that Isaiah 53 was not central to the thought of the author of Hebrews; instead, he makes use of "an interpretation of Jesus' death that was already formulated before Paul" in this verse (*Jesus' Death as Saving Event: The Background and Origin of a Concept*; HDR 2; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975, 227-28). Ellingworth also notes that *anapherein* should generally be understood in the sense of taking something on oneself rather than taking something away (*Hebrews*, 487). In this case, Christ takes upon himself the responsibility of delivering God's people from their sins.

87. At times a variant of *epi ton thusiastērion* is used in the Septuagint, such as *epi tou thusiastēriou* or *pros ton thusiastērion*; see Exod. 29:18, 25; 30:20; Lev. 3:5, 11, 14, 16; 4:10, 19, 26, 31; 6:8 (MT 6:15); 7:5 (MT 6:35), 7:31 (MT 7:21); 8:16, 19-20, 26-27; 9:10, 20; 14:20; 16:25; 17:5-6; Deut. 12:27; cf. Lev. 2:16; Num. 18:17.

88. For an example of the penal substitution interpretation of Heb. 9:26, see Hughes, *Hebrews*, 385-86.

89. See Lev. 5:1, 17; 7:18; 17:16; 19:8; 22:9; 24:15; Num. 5:31; 9:13; 14:34; 18:1, 22-23.

to Christ's petition by raising him and exalting him to his right hand, from where Christ continues his activity as mediator on behalf of believers. In the words of the author of Hebrews, "he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf" (9:24). In other words, Christ continues to intercede to God on behalf of believers, asking God to continue to strengthen and accept favorably those whose sins he has forgiven, in spite of the fact that they do not always live faithfully under the new covenant and often fall back into sin.[90] Yet while Christ is still active from heaven, because God has already given his definitive response to the petition Christ made on behalf of believers in his death, it is not necessary for Christ to offer himself more than once (9:25-28). The next time Christ comes, he will do so not to obtain forgiveness of sins for others but to "save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (9:28).

HEBREWS 10

The author continues to develop his argument regarding the superiority of Christ's priesthood and his sacrifice at the outset of chapter 10:

> 10:1 Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who approach. 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased being offered, since the worshipers, cleansed once for all, would no longer have any consciousness of sin? 3 But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year. 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.
>
> 5 Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; 6 in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. 7 Then I said, 'See, God, I have come to do your will, O God' (in the scroll of the book it is written of me)." 8 When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), 9 then he added, "See, I have come to do your will." He abolishes the first in order to establish the second.
>
> 10 And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. 11 And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. 12 But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, "he sat down at the right hand of God," 13 and since then has been waiting "until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet." 14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.
>
> 15 And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying, 16 "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds," 17 he also adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more." 18 Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin (10:1-18).

90. Vanhoye rightly questions the idea that the exalted Christ offers up his blood to God in heaven, as if constantly to remind God of the sacrifice he made on the cross: "It is not with a heavenly ceremony that Christ replaced the former rites, but with terribly real events," his passion and death on a cross (*Hebrews*, 143).

Here the author argues that, because "the law has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the true form of these realities," it cannot "make perfect those who approach" or actually "take away sins." Perfection is defined in terms of arriving at the desired goal of being "purified once for all." All that the law can do is constantly remind those who present sacrifices of their sins. For this reason, those sacrifices are "continually offered year after year" (10:1-2, 4).[91]

In 10:5-7, the author looks to Psalm 40, which is said to be a Psalm of David, in order to present Christ as fulfilling vv. 6-8 of that Psalm. His use of the variant *sōma* in v. 5, "body," rather than the LXX *ōtia*, "ears," enables him to argue that the passage refers to Christ offering up to God his own body rather than the sacrifices prescribed by the Mosaic law.[92] Christ's sacrifice is superior not only because it was an offering of his own life or self but also because it involved a total commitment to God's will. For this reason, it replaces that which God had first ordained (*to prōton*) in order to establish something else (*to deuteron*, v. 9).

The author then continues by affirming that in or through that will (*en hō thelēmati*), "we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (10:10). The author's use of the perfect tense of *hagiazein* implies that believers are now in a condition in which they are and remain sanctified (*hēgiasmenoi esmen*). Precisely what this sanctification involves is not stated here or elsewhere. There can be no doubt that it has a forensic aspect in that believers are now accepted by God as holy in spite of their sin, yet it may have to do with a new, sanctified life on their part as well. As in Jewish and biblical thought, these two aspects cannot be separated from one another. Nevertheless, the fact that the author states elsewhere in the epistle that Christ continues to intercede on behalf of believers means that, even if he does have in mind the idea that believers now live a new, sanctified life, he also recognizes that they continue to fall into sin, since they have not yet been perfected.

The word *ephapax* can be read as referring to Christ's offering of his body "once for all" but perhaps to the sanctification of believers as well.[93] The perfect tense *hēgiasmenoi* suggests this latter reading, since just as Christ offered up his body once for all, believers can be said to have entered into a condition in which they are now sanctified once for all. If the *ephapax* is understood

91. As Gordon observes, "Far from banishing sin from the consciousness of the community, the ritual of the Day of Atonement, as v. 3 points out, involved the calling of sins to remembrance: the high priest confessed over the head of the 'scapegoat' all the sins of the people of Israel (cf. Lev. 16.21)" (*Hebrews*, 109).

92. DeSilva notes that the Psalmist's confession, "'ears you have dug for me,' suggests that obedience to Torah (the provision of ears to hear and heed God's commandments) is to replace the transgression of the Torah" (*Perseverance*, 320). Then, after noting the Septuagint's change from "ears" to "body," deSilva continues: "It is impossible to enter into the mind of the translator, but this change might have been introduced as a more aesthetically pleasing image, the 'digging of ears' being a potentially ugly image. Whatever the rationale, the MT and the LXX represent precisely the same meaning—obedience to Torah (being given a body with which to perform God's covenant stipulations) pleases God...." (320).

93. Most interpreters see the *ephapax* as referring to Christ's death; see, for example, Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 266; Bruce, *Hebrews*, 243.

in this way, then the sanctification of believers should be taken in a forensic sense: God has accepted them as holy in definitive fashion.

Whichever of these interpretations is preferred, it is important to grasp the way in which Christ's offering of his body leads to the present sanctified condition of believers. As we have seen repeatedly above, the idea that Christ's death was an offering of himself to God on behalf of believers implies that he offered himself up to God asking that God accept them and forgive them their sins. The grounds for Christ's petition, as well as God's acceptance of that petition, was that those for whom Christ died would come to live in obedience to God and to Christ himself (5:9). This obedience would be defined, not on the basis of the Mosaic law alone, as it previously had been under the first covenant, but on the basis of the word God had now communicated through Christ (1:2), as well as Christ's own obedience in offering up to God his life (5:8; 10:5-9). Those living under the new covenant established through Christ's death would live in the way God desired, offering themselves up to God as Christ did and together with Christ.

Because Christ has been exalted to God's right hand in definitive fashion as a result of the total commitment to God's will that he demonstrated in his death on behalf of others, all those who now live under that new covenant and look to Christ as their Lord, high priest, forerunner, and leader (*archēgos*) know that, as long as they remain in that new covenant through faith, they will continue to be accepted and forgiven by God. In this sense, their sanctification can be said to be definitive and irreversible, just as Christ's exaltation was. Of course, if they abandon the faith and the new covenant under which they now live, they will no longer be regarded by God as holy. Since the author is addressing himself to believers, however, the idea is that they, like believers of all times and places, can be certain of their acceptance by God. Through his death, then, Christ sanctified definitively all who had become and would become believers, since through their faith Christ is able to bring about in them the obedience God desires and commands for the good of all.

If the sanctification of believers is seen as involving not merely their acceptance before God as holy in a forensic sense but their new, sanctified way of life as well, this sanctification can also be regarded as something that is now definitive and "once and for all." This is not because they have attained the perfection God desires for them but rather because, as long as they live under the new covenant, looking to Christ in faith, they will never cease to be committed to living in accordance with God's will. Thus, while the life of believers is still not perfect in holiness, their living in holiness is now definitive and irreversible, as long as they continue to include themselves as members of the people for whom Christ died.

The author returns to the idea that Christ's self-offering to God on behalf of others is superior to the sacrifices offered by the Levitical priests in 10:11-14. While those priests stand day after day in God's service "offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins," Christ has "offered for

all time a single sacrifice for sins" and as a result is now at God's right hand, waiting until his enemies are made a footstool for this feet (10:11-13).[94] The author immediately adds: "For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (*mia prosphora teteleiōken eis to diēnekes tous hagiazomenous*, 10:14). The author's use of the perfect tense *teteleiōken* together with the phrase *eis to diēnekes*, generally translated "forever" or "for all time," can be read as implying that believers have already been perfected definitively. Curiously, in the same verse, the author uses the present participle *hagiazomenous* to refer to believers as "those who are being sanctified." This implies a process that has begun but is not yet completed.[95] In 10:10, however, he has just used the perfect participle *hēgiasmenoi* to refer to believers as those who have already been sanctified and remain so. One solution to this apparent contradiction is to affirm that in 10:14 he is referring to the ongoing sanctification of the life and conduct of believers, while in 10:10 he has in mind their forensic standing before God.

While this reading is possible, as we have seen above, one can also understand the perfect participle *hēgiasmenoi* in the sense that, while believers have not yet become completely holy in their conduct, the fact that they live under Christ in the new covenant makes it certain that they will continue to be sanctified in their conduct and ultimately will be perfected in holiness. They can thus be said to have been fully sanctified *proleptically*. This interpretation would resolve the difficulty involved in the author's use of both the present participle *hagiazomenous* and the perfect participle *hēgiasmenoi* in the same immediate context. It would also make it possible to understand the perfect tense *teteleiōken* in the same way. Because Christ has entered into heaven and is at God's right side subjecting all things to himself, there can now be no doubt that he will bring to perfection those who live under him in the new covenant. Thus, while in a sense they have not yet been perfected, in a proleptic sense this has already happened because it is certain to occur in the future.

The author of Hebrews never affirms explicitly elsewhere in the epistle that believers either have been perfected or will be perfected. In 5:14, he writes that "solid food is for the mature" or "perfect" (*teleiōn*) and in 6:1 urges the readers to "press on to maturity" or "perfection" (*epi tēn teleiotēta*). In these passages, however, it is not clear whether he is using the words *teleios* and *teleiotēs* in the same sense that he does elsewhere in the epistle.[96] Because in

94. I would question Jewett's affirmation that the "enemies" mentioned in Heb. 10:13 refer primarily to "the disobedient cosmic forces that were thought to cause the bloodshed and depravity of earthly life and were expected to hinder the passage of the elect to the heavenly presence," that is, "malevolent cosmic forces" (*Letter to Pilgrims*, 166-67). Although the term *enemies* is taken from Ps. 110:1, it would more naturally be understood as referring to human powers and authorities that stand in opposition to Christ, especially when read in the context of the persecution that the addressees of Hebrews were experiencing, which is mentioned in 10:32-34.

95. Ellingworth discusses the various explanations given by commentators with respect to the use of the perfect tense of *hagiazein* in 10:10 and the use of the present participle of that verb in 10:14 (*Hebrews*, 511).

96. With regard to the use of *teleioun* here and elsewhere in Hebrews, Scholer comments: "The cultic occurrences of the verbs *teleioun*, *proserchesthai*, and *eiserchesthai* do not therefore indicate the actual presence of the 'rest.' Rather they anticipate the End of Time that is yet to come" (*Proleptic Priests*, 202).

5:11—6:3 he is reproaching those believers who are "dull of hearing" and thus like "infants," he may simply be contrasting some members of the community with others who have matured more in the faith. Elsewhere, besides speaking of Christ's perfection and the inability of the law to perfect those who worship according to its regulations, the author refers to the perfection of believers in only three passages: here in 10:14; in 11:39-40, where he writes that God did not intend all those who had faith in previous generations to be made perfect by God "apart from us"; and in 12:23, where he alludes 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. These last two passages seem to point to the perfection of believers as something yet to take place or as something that one attains following death.

Because there seems to be no sense in which believers can be said to have been perfected already with regard to their conduct and they still await the eschatological perfection that will take place at the resurrection, it may seem preferable to understand the verb *teteleiōken* in 10:14 solely in a forensic sense. In this case, the author means that God now accepts believers as perfect as a result of Christ's death on their behalf. The problem with this interpretation is that it is not clear that the verb *teleioun* and its cognates are intended in a strictly forensic sense elsewhere in the epistle. The closest the author comes to such a meaning is in the two passages in which he denies that the sacrifices presented according to the Mosaic law can make those who offer them perfect (9:9; 10:1). If such an interpretation is preferred, it must be emphasized that, if God accepts believers as perfect or fully righteous, it is not because he imputes Christ's perfection or righteousness to them or because Christ has taken away their sins in God's sight by enduring the penalty they deserved in their place. Rather, according to the logic of Hebrews, the basis for God's acceptance of sinful believers is that they are being brought into conformity with God's will through Christ and that Christ continues to intercede on their behalf before God.

A purely forensic interpretation of the perfection of believers, however, seems to be ruled out by the following verses in which the author cites Jer. 31:33-34. While this passage ends with God affirming that he will no longer remember their sins and iniquities, this affirmation follows upon God's promise that he will put his laws in their hearts and write those laws on their minds (10:16-17). This makes it clear that, both for Jeremiah and the author of Hebrews, God's forgiveness of the people's sins is the consequence of the new obedience that he brings about in them.

If viewed in the light of Jer. 31:33-34, then, in 10:14 the author would be affirming that, by means of a single offering, Christ has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified in the sense that he has ensured that all those who live under him in the new covenant established through his death will be brought into conformity with God's will and therefore that their sins will also be forgiven. Although it is not clear whether the author of Hebrews

regards this writing of the law on the hearts and minds of believers and the subsequent forgiveness of sins as something that has already taken place in the present world or as something to take place only in the world to come, in either case these things are the result of Christ's death in that it constitutes the means by which God has brought into existence a people committed to living according to his will as defined through Christ and the new covenant of which he is the mediator (9:15). While this commitment will inevitably lead believers to live in the way God desires to a great extent in the present world, only in the world to come will they be perfected in their obedience. Even now, however, by virtue of Christ's self-offering on their behalf and the fact that God accepted that self-offering favorably when he exalted Christ to his right side, believers know that God has forgiven their sins and that, as long as they continue to look to Christ in faith, that forgiveness is theirs definitively. For this reason, as the author affirms in 10:18, where there is forgiveness of sins, "there is no longer any offering for sin," since it is now unnecessary.

The conclusion to this section of the author's argument comes in the remaining verses of chapter 10, where he exhorts the readers to remain steadfast in their faith and conduct. He alludes to Jesus' death or blood in two passages, the first of which is 10:19-23:

> 10:19 Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 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. 23 Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful.

The allusions to "entering the sanctuary" in 10:18 and "approaching" in 10:22 clearly refer to drawing near to God in prayer and obedience. The author insists that believers can now enter into God's presence with "confidence" or "boldness" (*parrēsian*, 10:19) and "with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (10:22). The basis upon which believers can approach God confidently is once again both what Christ did in the past and what he continues to do in the present. The idea that believers can enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus points to Jesus' own entry into God's presence with his blood in the same way that the Levitical high priests entered into the holy place, offering sacrificial blood to God together with prayers on behalf of the people, asking God to accept them and forgive them their sins. Believers can therefore draw near to God, not because they are worthy or sinless or because they have any merits of their own, but because through faith they identify themselves as those on whose behalf Christ offered up to God his life. They know that God accepted Christ's self-offering on their behalf and thus has granted all those who live under Christ as their high priest access to God and to his grace, mercy, and

forgiveness once and for all. It is in this sense that they enter the sanctuary by the blood of Christ.[97]

In 10:20, the author speaks of the "new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh)." Although the author identifies the curtain in the sanctuary with Christ's flesh, the imagery is not entirely clear.[98] It may refer to the way in which Christ offered up his flesh as the means by which he entered into God's presence. The author does not mention the rending of the temple curtain but if he has this in mind, he could be referring to the way Jesus' flesh was torn when he was crucified and died. In 5:7, the author has affirmed that Jesus offered up "prayers and supplications" to God, with "loud cries and tears," "in the days of his flesh." In this way he was "made perfect" and designated "high priest," thereby becoming "the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (5:9-10). Here Jesus' flesh refers to his earthly existence. It is possible, therefore, that the author associates Jesus' flesh with the curtain in the sense that, just as the curtain was the dividing line between the earthly world and God, who dwelled in the sanctuary, so Jesus' flesh was the means by which he offered himself up to God and thereby opened up access to those on earth so that through him they might enter into God's presence.

The affirmation that Christ opened up a "new and living way" through his flesh as the curtain may also allude to the idea that he entered into God's presence as a human being, thereby opening up the way for other human beings.[99] Because of his solidarity with believers by virtue of the fact that he came to share in their same "flesh and blood" (2:14) and became like them "in every respect" (2:17), God's acceptance of Jesus into his presence as a human being gives them confidence that God will accept them as well.

The phrase "a new and living way" should probably be understood in close connection with 10:21, where the author writes that "we have a great priest over the house of God." Here the imagery is that of the risen, exalted Christ carrying out his priestly activities on behalf of believers from heaven at God's side. Thus, just as Christ's self-offering in the past enables them to draw near to God, so also the fact that he now appears before God on behalf of believers as a result of that self-offering gives them confidence to approach God without fear. The imagery in 10:19-21 therefore reflects the same basic ideas that the author has already mentioned in 4:14-16, 6:19-20, and 7:25-28.

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97. As Ellingworth notes, the preposition *en* in the phrase *en tō haimati* in 10:19 should be understood as instrumental (*Hebrews*, 518).

98. For Bruce, the veil mentioned in Heb. 10:20 refers to "our Lord's human life, presented to God when he 'suffered for sins once for all the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God (1 Pet 3:18)'" (*Hebrews*, 253). Following other interpreters, Koester writes: "The parallel between the 'blood of Jesus' and 'his flesh' should be taken instrumentally. To indicate this we can translate: 'through the curtain, that is, [by means] of his flesh'.... 'Flesh,' like 'body' (10:5, 10), can be taken positively as the means by which Jesus accomplishes salvation...." (*Hebrews*, 444). Rivka Nir argues that, in contrast to the earthly temple, whose curtain was rent at Jesus' death, "the heavenly temple will contain the new veil, the flesh of the Messiah, opening to the believer a new way for identification with his body (Heb. 10:20)" (*The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Idea of Redemption in the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch*; EJL 20; Leiden: Brill, 2003, 46).

99. According to Attridge, in Heb. 10:20, "this road is 'living' because it leads to the imperishable life" (*Hebrews*, 285).

In spite of the author's affirmation that the readers can now approach God confidently through Christ as their mediator, in 10:22-23 he also insists on the need for them to cleanse themselves and hold fast to their faith as they draw near to 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." This makes it clear that through his death Christ gained access to God and the forgiveness of sins, not for all people, but only for those who look to Christ as mediator and live in faith under him in the new covenant. Of course, Christ died for all in the sense that, in his death, he sought that all might come to faith in order to live under him and approach God through him, but only those who actually do so can be confident of their acceptance by God and the forgiveness of sins.

This does not mean, of course, that believers need to be fully pure in order to approach God. In that case, they would have no need of Christ as mediator. The author has just stated the basis on which believers can approach God: it is because "they have a great priest over the house of God" (v. 21). The same idea is repeated elsewhere in the epistle. In 4:14-16 believers can "approach the throne of grace with boldness" to receive mercy and grace because they "have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens." Likewise, in 7:24-25 the author affirms that, because Christ "holds his priesthood permanently," "he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (cf. 7:19). Therefore, believers always approach God only through Christ as their mediator.

Nevertheless, in order to do so, they must have a "true heart" that is "sprinkled clean from an evil conscience" as well as "full assurance of faith" (10:22). The author has already stated several times that the readers are not to harden their hearts or have an "evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God" (3:8, 15; 4:7), since God's living word "is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Here the idea is that believers are not to reject God's grace and mercy through unbelief but instead turn away from evil, which in Jewish thought involves repentance. In other words, believers are not told to purify themselves but to repent and look to God and Christ in faith. God looks at the "thoughts and intentions" of the heart and expects that those who approach him be sincere in that faith and repentance. This enables their heart to be "sprinkled clean from an evil conscience," not only because they renounce sin and evil but also because they look to Christ and his blood in order to cleanse their conscience, as the author has stated in 9:14. The author has also recalled twice the promise God made to write the law upon his people's hearts (8:10; 10:16). This means that the obedience of believers is not something they produce on their own but is the result of God's activity in them as through faith they live under the new covenant promised by God in Jer. 31:31-34.

The author's affirmation that the believers are to have their "bodies washed with pure water" in 10:22 is probably an allusion to baptism.[100] There is no evidence that Jesus' first followers continued to carry out purification rites with water as a condition for participating in the worship of God. The only rite with water for believers that is mentioned in the New Testament is baptism, which is related to the ideas we have just seen: repenting and turning away from evil while at the same time looking to God and Christ in faith so as to be graciously given a new, purified way of life.

All of this means that, for the author of Hebrews, both Christ's mediating activity as high priest as well as the faith and repentance of believers are necessary for one to approach God with boldness and confidence. While in a sense believers make themselves pure by recognizing their sin and approaching God in faith with a sincere, repentant heart, in another sense it is Christ who makes believers pure before God both through his past work and his ongoing activity at God's side. Although undoubtedly there is a forensic aspect to Christ's purifying activity, it also involves bringing about in believers a new way of living and thinking. As their high priest, he encourages them to look to him for help in time of need. Because believers also identify with Christ and with his blood, they see themselves not only as those on whose behalf Christ died but also as those who offer themselves up to God as Christ did and together with him. Their purification is thus the work of Christ, who transforms their way of life and on that basis obtains God's acceptance and forgiveness for them.

The other allusion to Christ's death in Hebrews 10 occurs in the context of the author's exhortation to the readers to "provoke one another to love and good deeds," continue to meet together, and encourage one another (10:24-25). In 10:26-29, he warns the readers against abandoning these things:

> 10:26 For if we willfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. 28 Anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy "on the testimony of two or three witnesses." 29 How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace?

This passage is similar to 6:4-6, already considered above, where the author claims that those once enlightened who have shared in the Holy Spirit and tasted the goodness of God's word but then have fallen away cannot be restored to repentance, "since they are crucifying again the Son of God and are holding him up to contempt." In 10:26, however, it is important to stress that the author is speaking of those who "willfully persist in sin" rather than those believers who are committed to living under the new covenant but inevitably sin in their daily life. It might be said that the latter sin to some extent against their own will, since their desire is to draw near to God through Christ so as

100. Ellingworth, for example, sees in 10:22 an allusion to baptism (*Hebrews*, 523-24).

to live as God commands out of love for him and others. Those who willfully persist in sin are those who have fallen away from the faith and have thus "spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace" (10:29). This involves rejecting Christ as their mediator before God and refusing to continue to identify themselves as those who are sanctified through Christ and his death on their behalf. Strictly speaking, of course, what brings God's judgment and outrages the Spirit of grace is not simply their rejection of Christ but their falling back into sin and injustice and standing against God as his adversaries (10:26-27). In other words, just as intentionally and persistently refusing to do God's will brings God's wrath, what brings salvation is one's commitment to living according to God's will. For the author, however, to live according to God's will is to identify with Christ and approach him through Christ. Those who do so receive the Spirit and are empowered to live in obedience to God for their own good and that of others. This is what God ultimately desires. Faith is therefore not an *end* but a *means* to the life of justice and obedience God wills for all.

This passage demonstrates once more that, for the author, the "sacrifice for sins" that Christ offered up involved a petition for the forgiveness of all who would live in the new covenant under Christ. The idea that the author wishes to communicate is that, because Christ's self-offering on behalf of others obtained God's forgiveness definitively and is now the means by which God wishes to be approached, those who dissociate themselves from Christ also dissociate themselves from the sacrifice of himself that he made on their behalf. They therefore cannot offer up some other sacrifice for sins to obtain forgiveness independently of Christ. If Hebrews was written before the destruction of the second temple, the author may be affirming that those who have rejected Christ cannot obtain divine forgiveness through the sacrifices offered there, since those sacrifices pointed to Christ as their fulfillment. Therefore, without Christ they cannot truly take away sins (see 10:1, 4). If Hebrews was written after the destruction of the temple, perhaps the author is referring to some other rites of repentance through which one might wish to approach God for forgiveness. In either case, it is not entirely clear whether this means that once they have rejected Christ it is impossible for them to be saved, or simply that they can only hope to be reinstated to the community if they approach God once more through the sacrifice for sins offered by Christ.

The author seems to have the same basic ideas in mind when he affirms that those who have spurned Christ as God's Son have "profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified" (10:29). Through his blood or self-offering in death, Christ sought to establish a new covenant and bring others to live in that covenant so that God might accept them as holy as they identified with Christ and his self-offering by offering themselves up to God as well. By refusing to live in that covenant or consider it holy, they profane the blood by which they were sanctified in the sense that they no longer see

Christ and his death as the means by which they may approach God and live as his people. Whereas formerly they identified themselves as members of the people whose sanctification Christ sought as he gave up his life, they now disparage both Christ and the offering of himself that he made on their behalf. For the author, this makes it impossible for them to live in the way God desires and thus brings them under God's wrath and judgment, which are reserved not simply for sinners but rather for sinners who have been called repeatedly to turn back to God, yet refuse to do so.

HEBREWS 11-13

Throughout chapter 11, the author of Hebrews points to many of the great figures of Israel's history to argue that they all acted out of faith, trusting that God would fulfill the promises he had made. It is significant that in each case the author describes concrete actions carried out by the various figures that demonstrated their faith in God. According to the author, these various figures "died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them" (11:13). At the end of the chapter, after observing the great things that many of these figures accomplished through their faith, the author stresses particularly the ways in which they remained faithful in the midst of great hardships and extreme sufferings (11:35-38). He then concludes by affirming: "Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect" (11:39-40). Clearly, the author's intention is to exhort the readers to remain steadfast in their faith, trusting fully in God as all of the figures he mentions did, even though none of them actually attained all that God had promised and were not "made perfect." The new world has not yet been brought about definitively, but will be established only at the end of history. The author's implication is that God has delayed bringing about those promises and that perfection so that the readers and others might be included among those to obtain what had been promised, including the perfection that constitutes the goal.

Having recalled the faith of figures from Israel's past, the author then points to Jesus and his death in order to exhort the readers to "run with perseverance the race" set before them. He exhorts them to look "to Jesus the pioneer (*archēgos*) and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy 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. Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart" (12:1-3). Here Jesus is the example *par excellence* of the one who persevered in faith, in spite of the suffering and shame he endured, and on that account has come to be seated at God's right hand. Yet while Jesus serves as the one whom believers are to imitate, he is much more than this as the *archēgos* and perfecter of the faith of others. For the author, Jesus saves believers not only by serving as an example to imitate but by acting as

the leader whom they are to follow and by bringing them to be perfected in their faith and love.[101] This seems to be something that he accomplishes at present from God's right hand, since he is the one to whom believers are exhorted to look in the midst of their own hardships. The author probably has in mind the same ideas he has stated previously: the exalted Jesus is now able to help those who are going through trials (2:18), sympathize with their weaknessses (4:15), and offer them the mercy and grace that they require in times of need (4:16; cf. 5:2). In this way, Jesus acts to guide and strengthen them as well as to perfect them as "the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (5:9).

When the author speaks of Jesus enduring the cross and disregarding its shame "for the sake of the joy that was set before him," he must be referring not only to Jesus' own exaltation at God's right hand but also to the joy Jesus experiences by acting to bring others to the desired goal by working to perfect them as he himself has been perfected (5:9).[102] This points back once more to the idea that, when Jesus offered up "prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears" (5:7), imploring God to save him from death and exalt him to his right hand, he sought this *not for himself alone but especially for others*. As he offered himself up in death, what he sought from God and subsequently received from God was that he might continue to serve as God's instrument to bring about the salvation of others as the one who leads and perfects believers in their faith (*ton tēs pisteōs archēgon kai teleiōtēn*). Both what he did in his death and what he continues to do from heaven enable him to fulfill this role. This constitutes a source of great joy for Jesus, who lived and died precisely so that he might bring others to the promised salvation.

The author mentions the joy that Jesus has attained as the result of his faithful suffering in order to exhort the readers also to persevere in the course set before them, struggling against sin and disregarding the shame and humiliation they experience as they follow Jesus. If they endure faithfully, they will also attain the joy of being perfected and seeing others perfected through their faithfulness as well.

The author then continues, "Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding

101. Both Lane (*Hebrews 9-13*, 411-12) and Attridge (*Hebrews*, 356), for example, understand *archēgos* as referring to Christ's past work, which he accomplished through his life, death, resurrection, and exaltation.

102. DeSilva understands the joy that Jesus anticipated mentioned in Heb. 12:2 as the "reward that God had set for the faithful one" (*Perseverance*, 436), as if Jesus' own resurrection and exaltation were the source of his joy (cf. Attridge, *Hebrews*, 357). Lane sees this joy as the ongoing life that Jesus could have had if he had not chosen the path of the cross (*Hebrews*, 413). For Clayton N. Croy, the joy is similar to that of an athlete who runs toward the goal and completes the race (*Endurance in Suffering: Hebrews 12.1–13 in its Rhetorical, Religious, and Philosophical Context*; SNTSMS 98; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 190, 192). Vanhoye notes that 12:3 can be "understood that instead of accepting joy, Jesus endured the cross or, on the contrary, that in order to have the joy, Jesus endured the cross" (*Hebrews*, 197). The problem with all of these interpretations is that they do not see Jesus' immense love for others as the source of Jesus' joy, but instead present that joy as motivated by something that he desired or attained for himself personally. For the author of Hebrews, what gives Jesus joy is the salvation of others.

your blood" (12:3-4).[103] Here the author continues to encourage the readers to remain faithful in the midst of the hostility they face from others, following the example of Jesus. Nevertheless, unlike Jesus, in their struggle against sin, they have not yet reached the point of shedding their blood. These words are highly significant in that they state clearly by implication the reason why Jesus himself shed his blood: it was due to his own struggle against sin and the resistance he demonstrated against those who were hostile to him. In light of the previous verses, it is clear that Jesus engaged in this struggle against sin and stood firm in the face of hostility, not for his own sake, but for the sake of others in whom he sought to bring about the same type of faith and faithfulness to God. In other words, when the author of Hebrews mentions Jesus' blood, he has in mind the *reasons* why Jesus' blood was shed: he actively opposed sin in all its forms and resisted those who were hostile to him because they had aligned themselves with the sinful structures and systems of this world. Believers are therefore to follow Jesus their crucified Lord in struggling against sin and being willing to endure the hostility of those who align themselves with those sinful structures and systems, even if this ultimately requires that they shed their blood as he did. As they do so, of course, they are to keep their gaze fixed on Jesus so that he may guide, strengthen, and empower them.

The author alludes once more to Jesus' blood toward the end of chapter 12, where he contrasts the fear that Moses and the Israelites experienced as they stood at the foot of Mount Sinai with the manner in which believers approach the heavenly city where God dwells:

> 12:22 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, 23 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, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. 25 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!

In this passage and the following verses, the author stresses that the approach of believers to God and the heavenly realities is a motive for joy and thanksgiving, while also warning that those who reject God and his word will not escape from the purification of the earth and the heavens through judgment and God's "consuming fire" (12:25-29). These verses imply that God's purpose is to establish God's kingdom in definitive fashion, in a way that "cannot be shaken" (12:28). Thus the shaking of the earth and the heavens has the purpose of ridding the world from sin and evil so that God's reign may prevail. The readers must therefore align themselves with God's reign so that they are not among those to be destroyed in judgment.

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103. Croy observes that this is the only passage in the New Testament where Jesus is said to have "'endured' (*hypemeinen*) the cross" (*Endurance*, 185-86). This verb becomes quite common in the Christian writings of the second century, which often speak of Jesus "enduring" suffering, death, and the cross.

Although the scene that the author presents in this passage is a "festal gathering" characterized by joyful worship, it is also one that promotes "reverence and awe," as the author states in 12:28. This probably lies behind his allusion to Jesus being "the mediator of a new covenant" as well as to "the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel." As the Israelites experienced fear when standing at the foot of the mountain where Moses was receiving the law according to the first covenant, even though God's intention was to bless them, so also the readers may experience fear as they visualize their appearance not only before God but before the vast heavenly assembly of the firstborn and the spirits of the righteous made perfect. However, because they look to Jesus as the mediator of the new covenant under which they live, they need not be afraid. It is likely that the author has in mind not only Jesus' ongoing activity in heaven on behalf of believers when he speaks of Jesus as the mediator of the new covenant, but his death as well. If so, the confidence and assurance with which believers can approach God and stand in the presence of the heavenly assembly is not only that Jesus remains permanently in heaven in order to assist them and intercede for them, but also that he gave up his life so that they might be incorporated into that covenant and obtain the "better promises" and the "inheritance" associated with it. It is therefore God's once-for-all acceptance of Jesus' self-offering on their behalf in Jesus' resurrection that enables them to approach God, not with fear, but with confidence and joy.

The author's allusion to the blood of Abel here in 12:24 must be seen as relating in some way to what the author has said about Abel in 11:4, the first individual mentioned in the author's list of those who had faith. There the author writes: "By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain's. Through this he received approval as righteous, God himself giving approval to his gifts; he died, but through his faith he still speaks." According to Genesis, Abel was the first human being to die when Cain killed him violently. While his blood was shed, it was not sprinkled on others or thought to sanctify anything. The author's affirmation that Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to God and led God to regard him as righteous perhaps involves some type of comparison with Jesus' sacrificial death, although the points of comparison are not readily evident. Abel's sacrifice might be regarded as acceptable to God in that it was a concrete expression of the offering of himself to God, just as Jesus' death was, though Abel was not offering himself up on behalf of others. As the first human being to die, Abel might also be seen as the first of the "firstborn" as well as the first of the "spirits of the righteous made perfect" mentioned in 12:23, although the author has stated that God had determined that the figures he has named in chapter 11 would not be made perfect without believers such as the readers. The affirmation that the faith of Abel "still speaks" may be related to the notion that Abel's blood speaks in 12:24, though the precise connection is not clear. In 11:4, Abel's faith seems to speak in the sense that the author regards him as the prototype of the righteous person

who offers sacrifices to God that are acceptable to him. As such, what he did continues to indicate to others how true righteousness and sacrifice are to be understood.

In any case, the contrast between the blood of Christ and that of Abel seems to be based on the idea that, whereas Abel's blood was said to cry out to God for justice or retribution (Gen. 4:10), when Jesus offered up his life or blood to God on the cross, he implored God to forgive others, namely, those who would be "sprinkled" with his blood.[104] As noted previously, to be sprinkled with Christ's blood would be understood in terms of being identified as a member of the people on whose behalf Christ had offered himself up to God asking that God accept and save them, namely, those who would live under the new covenant mediated through him. One could also be said to be sprinkled with Christ's same obedience and Spirit so as to be able to live righteously under him as high priest. The "word" that Christ's sprinkled blood is said to speak must be understood as a petition for God's gracious acceptance of those who identify with Christ and his self-offering on behalf of others so as to make it their own.

The final two allusions to Christ's death or blood in Hebrews occur in chapter 13. In 13:10-13, the author writes:

> 13:10 We have an altar from which those who officiate in the tent have no right to eat. 11 For 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. 12 Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. 13 Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured.

Scholars have debated whether the reference to the "altar from which those who officiate in the tent have no right to eat" is an allusion to the Lord's Supper.[105] This seems likely, though it is not clear to whom "those who officiate in the tent" would refer. According to Lev. 6:24-27, only the priests could eat the meat of the sin-offerings, although those who offered up a peace offering could eat of the meat of the animal victim (Lev. 7:15-21). It is possible that the author has in mind all those who live under the old covenant that is soon to disappear (8:13). He does not say explicitly that believers eat from the altar, however, but only affirms that those who officiate in the tent cannot. Rather than alluding to the Lord's Supper, he may therefore be associating

104. Lane notes that the idea that "the blood of Abel cries out to God for the avenging of his murder... was frequently echoed in the later Jewish tradition...." (*Hebrews 9-13*, 473). However, Vanhoye argues that "the Greek text means 'which speaks *louder* than Abel,' and the context shows that the author wishes to speak here, as in Heb. 10:29, about a terrible threat of punishment for those who, with the voluntary and obstinate sins, would 'trample on the Son of God and profane the blood of the covenant'" (*Hebrews*, 214).

105. While some scholars have seen an allusion to the Eucharist in Heb. 13:10, Bruce claims that there is no direct connection whatsoever between this passage and the Eucharist (*Hebrews*, 379). This posture is assumed by many interpreters today (see, for example, Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 538-39). While Ellingworth notes that there is "no explicit reference to the eucharist, either here or elsewhere in Hebrews," he insists that there is "a certain ambivalence in the text itself" that can lead to "polysemous interpretations" that allow for a "flexible understanding of *thusiastērion*" (*Hebrews*, 712). For a survey of different proposals regarding the interpretation of this verse, see Koester, *Hebrews*, 568-70.

Christ with the altar and claiming that those who remain solely under the old covenant cannot partake of Christ.

The parallels that the author draws between the sin offerings and Jesus' death seem somewhat confused in that, according to Lev. 4:11-12, the animal victims were slain at the doorway of the tent before their blood was extracted and subsequently brought into the sanctuary; only then were their corpses taken out and burned. In Jesus' case, however, he "suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood" (13:12). Here Jesus dies outside of the city rather than at the doorway of the sanctuary and there is no allusion to him taking his own blood into the sanctuary. This difficulty may be the result of attempting to push the analogy too far, however.

The important point in 13:12 is that Jesus is said to have suffered "in order to sanctify the people through his own blood." The phrase *dia tou idiou haimatos* does not seem to evoke any imagery of Jesus' blood being sprinkled on the people themselves or being brought into contact with them. Rather, Jesus sanctifies them by offering up his blood to God on their behalf. Once again, this should be understood in the sense of Jesus offering up his life to God with a petition that God forgive and accept as holy all those who would identify with Jesus' self-offering. This identification would involve not merely including oneself as a member of the people on whose behalf Jesus offered up to God his life but also offering up one's life to God together with Jesus and through him, just as those who offered sacrifices for sin under the Levitical system understood those sacrifices as expressing the offering of themselves to God. In this way, they were sanctified both in a forensic sense and in the sense that they manifested their inclusion among God's people who were holy in that they were dedicated to living in obedience to him. By identifying with the one who was crucified due to his commitment to the salvation of others and calling him Lord, believers become consecrated to God in and with Christ and are thus accepted by God as holy on the basis of their dedication to doing God's will as Christ did.

The affirmation that Jesus suffered "outside of the city gates" and the exhortation to believers to "go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured" seems clearly to allude to his crucifixion outside of the city walls of Jerusalem.[106] This involved enduring abuse, shame, and humiliation. For the author, to identify with Jesus' self-offering by including oneself among those on whose behalf he suffered and died is to be willing to endure the same things he endured without being concerned for how one might be regarded or treated by others. The author seems to have in mind some type of persecution of believers at the hands of non-believers and thus to be stressing that believ-

106. On this point, see Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 715-16; Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 541. George J. Brooke has noted the parallels between Heb. 13:6-16 and the parable of the wicked tenants in the Synoptics. These include the use of Psalm 118 in both passages, the idea that Jesus and the prophets who prepared the way for him are expelled from the city or the vineyard, the relation between Jesus' death in the Synoptics and Jesus' sacrificial blood in Hebrews, and the hope for the "city that is to come," which parallels the reception of the kingdom by Jesus' followers in the Synoptic accounts (*The Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament*; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005, 258).

ers should be willing to confess their faith openly and publicly in spite of any persecution they may endure as a result.[107]

Near the end of the epistle, the author pronounces a blessing on the readers in which he alludes once more to Christ's blood: "Now may the God of peace, who brought back from among the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever" (13:20-21). In spite of the word order, the phrase "by the blood of the covenant" seems to go together with the activity God is said to carry out in believers in 13:21 rather than God's act of raising Jesus from the dead. There the allusion is not to divine forgiveness but to the transformation God brings about in the conduct of believers through Christ, who enables them to do God's will. [108]

There may be several reasons why the author chose to allude to the "blood of the eternal covenant" in this context. Because Jesus gave up his life in order to establish a new covenant in which others might live obediently as members of God's people, it is Jesus' blood or his self-offering on behalf of others that defines the covenant and the conduct of those who live under that covenant. If the author has in mind the idea that believers are sprinkled with Christ's blood in the way Moses sprinkled blood on the Israelites when the first covenant was established, then he might be referring to the inclusion of believers as members of God's new covenant people who are committed to living as Christ did. This sprinkling could involve God enabling believers to live according to his will and do what is pleasing to him through Christ. If the author is alluding only to Jesus' self-offering on behalf of others and not any idea of sprinkling with Christ's blood, the idea may simply be that through Jesus and his death believers have been brought into a new covenant relationship with God in which God can transform them in the ways that the author mentions here and elsewhere in the epistle.[109]

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107. With regard to Heb. 13:12, Attridge writes: "The character of the realm 'outside' is its shamefulness, where carcasses were disposed and criminals were executed. The Christian addressees then are called upon to do what exemplars of faith such as Moses (11:26) and Christ himself (12:2) did. In this equivalent of the call to take up the cross, Hebrews suggests where it is that true participation in the Christian altar is to be found—in accepting the 'reproach of Christ'" (*Hebrews*, 399). Alternatively, Young proposes that the exhortation to "go outside the gate" is an attempt to convince the readers "to sever the ties with Jerusalem, that is, to make a clean break from Judaism both in understanding and in practice. Such a parting may bring abuse, but this is only to follow the way of Jesus" ("'Bearing His Reproach'," 243).

108. Lane argues that the phrase *en haimati diathēkēs aiōniou* "does not mean 'with the blood of the eternal covenant,' but rather 'by virtue of the blood of the eternal covenant'" (*Hebrews 9-13*, 563).

109. On the basis of what we have seen in this chapter, it would be a mistake to claim that the author of Hebrews thought in terms of the "everlasting validity" of Jesus' death, believed in the "efficacy of his self-offering," and taught that "Jesus' death was an expiatory sacrifice which dealt with the effects of sin" (so, for example, David M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity*; SBLMS 18; Nashville: Abingdon, 1973, 150; Morna D. Hooker, *Not Ashamed of the Gospel: New Testament Interpretations of the Death of Christ*; DL; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994, 124). Rather, for the author of Hebrews, Jesus' death was sacrificial and salvific because he offered up his life seeking salvation for others, and God granted Jesus' petition when he exalted him to his side so that he might make that salvation a reality.