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“CONFIDENT OF BETTER THINGS”:  
ASSURANCE OF SALVATION IN  
THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
Christopher Wade Cowan

December 2012

**APPROVAL SHEET**

“CONFIDENT OF BETTER THINGS”:  
ASSURANCE OF SALVATION IN  
THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

Christopher Wade Cowan

Read and Approved by:

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Thomas R. Schreiner (Chair)

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Robert L. Plummer

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Stephen J. Wellum

Date \_\_\_\_\_

To Dawn,  
my friend, my love, and  
my coheir of the grace of life (1 Pet 3:7)

To Zachary, Maggie, Molly Jane, and Jack Henry,  
may you approach the throne of grace with boldness (Heb 4:16)  
and run to win the prize (1 Cor 9:24)

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
<i>AUSS</i>	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BDAG	Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, <i>A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , ed. 3 <sup>rd</sup> ed.
BDF	F. Blass, A. Debrunner, Robert W. Funk, <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>EDNT</i>	<i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
NAC	New American Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
<i>RTR</i>	<i>The Reformed Theological Review</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>



## PREFACE

This work started and reached completion through the influence and support of many. My interest in Hebrews began with a class on the letter with George H. Guthrie in 2002 and was nourished when I served as his assistant for the same class in 2004. My desire to study the specific topics of warnings and assurance in Hebrews was fed by the writings of my doctoral supervisor, Thomas R. Schreiner. The ways he has influenced and encouraged me are numerous. Through his writings and classroom instruction, he has both taught and modeled for me careful, rigorous exegesis as the foundation for interpreting texts and building a New Testament theology. As my pastor, he preached the Scriptures with humility, conviction, and clarity, and I am a grateful recipient of his pastoral counsel and compassion. As my doctoral supervisor, he has shown me abundant patience, guided me with wise feedback, and encouraged my perseverance to the end. I could not have run the race without him.

I am also grateful for Professors Robert Plummer, Brian Vickers, and Stephen Wellum, teachers and friends whose instruction and conversations have helped shape my thinking on New Testament Greek, hermeneutics, and biblical theology, and whose encouragement has kept me going.

I cannot express high enough praise and thanks to my wife, Dawn. For nearly all of our thirteen years of marriage, I have been a graduate student. In that time, I have worked multiple jobs, we have gained four beautiful children, and the length of my graduate studies has grown. Through it all, her love and support have never failed. She has been tirelessly devoted to our family, and I cannot imagine life without her. Thanks are also due to our children, Zachary, Maggie, Molly Jane, and Jack Henry, for their love and patience. Dad's dissertation is finally finished.

“Now to Him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us—to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Eph 3:20, HCSB).

Christopher W. Cowan

Louisville, Kentucky

December 2012

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

From early church history, the strong warning passages against apostasy in the Letter to the Hebrews (2:1-4; 3:12-4:13; 6:4-8; 10:26-31; 12:12-29)<sup>1</sup> have prompted heated controversy.<sup>2</sup> Luther described the difficulty raised by the passages as “a hard knot,”<sup>3</sup> and, judging by the volume of modern-day literature debating the texts, one must conclude that his appraisal is justified.<sup>4</sup> Some scholars have even credited the warnings as

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<sup>1</sup>Though scholars have differed over where exactly each warning begins and ends, there is general agreement in identifying some portion of these five passages as warnings.

<sup>2</sup>The Western church resisted acceptance of the letter because it seemed to support the teachings of the Montanists (who permitted no second repentance for serious sins after baptism) and the Novatians (who permitted no restoration for those who lapsed under persecution). See Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 23, 25; Hans von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 232, also n. 120; Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origins, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 105.

<sup>3</sup>Martin Luther, “Preface to the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *Word and Sacrament*, vol. 35 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. E. Theodore Bachman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1960), 394.

<sup>4</sup>See, e.g., J. Cruvellier, “Impossible de ramener à la repentance! (à propos de deux passages difficiles de l’Épître aux Hébreux),” *Études Evangéliques* 12 (1952): 135-40; Ceslas Spicq, “La penitencia imposible,” *Ciencia Tomista* 244 (1952): 353-68; Charles Edwin Carlston, “Eschatology and Repentance in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 78 (1959): 296-302; P. E. Hughes, “Heb 6:4-6 and the Peril of Apostasy,” *WTJ* 35 (1972-73): 137-55; J. C. McCullough, “The Impossibility of a Second Repentance in Hebrews” *Biblical Theology* 20 (1974): 1-7; Roger Nicole, “Some Comments on Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Doctrine of the Perseverance of God with the Saints,” in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation*, ed. G. F. Hawthorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 355-64; Leopold Sabourin, “‘Crucifying Afresh for One’s Repentance’ (Heb 6:4-6),” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 6 (1976): 264-71; David G. Peterson, “The Situation of the ‘Hebrews’ (5:11-6:12),” *RTR* 35 (1976): 14-21; Noel Weeks, “Admonition and Error in Hebrews,” *WTJ* 39 (1976): 72-80; J. K. Elliott, “Is Post-Baptismal Sin Forgivable?” *Biblical Theology* 28 (1977): 330-32; Verlyn Verbrugge, “Towards a New Interpretation of Hebrews 6:4-6,” *Calvin Theological Review* 15 (1980): 61-73; Stanley D. Toussaint, “The Eschatology of the Warning Passages in the Book of Hebrews,” *Grace Theological Journal* 3 (1982): 67-80; A. Mugridge, “Warnings in the Epistle to the Hebrews: An Exegetical and Theological Study,” *RTR* 46 (1987): 74-82; Thomas Kem Oberholtzer, “The Warning Passages in Hebrews Part 1: The Eschatological Salvation of Hebrews 1:5-2:5,” *BSac* 145 (1988): 83-97; idem, “The Warning Passages in Hebrews Part 2: The Kingdom Rest in Hebrews 3:1-4:13,” *BSac* 145 (1988): 185-96; idem, “The Warning Passages in Hebrews Part 3: The Thorn-Infested Ground in Hebrews 6:4-12,” *BSac* 145 (1988): 319-28; idem, “The Warning Passages in Hebrews Part 4: The Danger of Willful Sin in Hebrews 10:26-39,” *BSac* 145 (1988): 410-19; idem, “The Warning Passages in Hebrews Part 5: The Failure to Heed His Speaking in Hebrews 12:25-29,”

the primary cause for necessitating them to rethink their position on apostasy and finally accept the view that genuine believers can apostatize.<sup>5</sup>

Given this focus on the “rigorism” of Hebrews, one finds few works examining assurance of salvation in the letter.<sup>6</sup> However, given the author’s confidence in his recipients and his discussion of themes related to what Christ’s sacrifice has accomplished for believers, it seems that many interpreters may have underestimated this topic in Hebrews. Most scholars agree that the sin the author wants the recipients to avoid

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*BSac* 146 (1989): 67-75; Scot McKnight, “The Warning Passages of Hebrews: A Formal Analysis and Theological Conclusions,” *Trinity Journal* 13 NS (1992): 21-59; Wayne Grudem, “Perseverance of the Saints: A Case Study from Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Other Warning Passages in Hebrews,” in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will: Historical and Theological Perspectives on Calvinism*, ed. T. R. Schreiner and B. A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 133-82; Bruce Compton, “Persevering and Falling Away: A Reexamination of Hebrews 6:4-6,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 1 (1996): 135-67; Randall C. Gleason, “The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8,” *BSac* 155 (1998): 62-91; idem, “The Old Testament Background of Rest in Hebrews 3:7-4:11,” *BSac* 157 (2000): 281-303; idem, “The Eschatology of the Warning in Hebrews 10:26-31” *TynBul* 53 (2002): 97-120; David A. deSilva, “Hebrews 6:4-8: A Socio-Rhetorical Investigation (Parts 1),” *TynBul* 50 (1999): 33-57; idem, “Hebrews 6:4-8: A Socio-Rhetorical Investigation (Parts 2),” *TynBul* 50 (1999): 225-40; Andries H. Snyman, “Hebrews 6.4-6: From a Semiotic Discourse Perspective” in *Discourse Analysis and the New Testament: Approaches and Results*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Jeffrey T. Reed (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1999), 354-68; M. Emmrich, “Hebrews 6:4-6 Again! (A Pneumatological Inquiry),” *WTJ* 65 (2003): 83-95; Casey W. Davis, “Hebrews 6:4-6 from an Oral Critical Perspective,” *JETS* 51 (2008): 753-67; C. Adrian Thomas, *A Case for Mixed-Audience with Reference to the Warning Passages in the Book of Hebrews* (New York, Peter Lang, 2008); and the contributions of Gareth L. Cockerill, Buist M. Fanning, Randall C. Gleason, and Grant R. Osborne in Herbert W. Bateman IV, ed., *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007).

The warning passages have also been the subject of numerous dissertations and theses. Examples include D. A. Dunham, “An Exegetical Examination of the Warnings in the Epistle to the Hebrews” (Ph.D. diss., Grace Theological Seminary and College, 1974); Andy Prince, “An Investigation into the Importance of Perseverance in the Christian Life as Presented in Five Warning Passages in Hebrews” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1980); Ronald Clements Sauer, “A Critical and Exegetical Reexamination of Hebrews 5:11 to 6:8” (Ph.D. diss., University of Manchester, 1981); Fred von Kamecke, “Implications for the Rendering of ‘parapesontas’ in Hebrews 6:4-6” (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2004); Nicholas J. Ellis, “Hebrews 6:4-6 and Divine Repentance: Is God the Object of *Anakainizein eis Metanoian*?” (M.A. thesis, Trinity Western University, 2006).

<sup>5</sup>See Clark H. Pinnock, “From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology,” in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1989), 17; Scot McKnight, “Why I Kissed Calvinism Good-bye,” <http://blog.beliefnet.com/jesuscreed/2006/08/why-i-kissed-calvinism-goodbye.html> (accessed December 23, 2009).

<sup>6</sup>Though “assurance” (*πληροφορία*) and “salvation” (*σωτηρία*) are biblical terms, the specific phrase “assurance of salvation” is not. Yet, it is arguably a concept derived from biblical texts (see, e.g., John 6:37-40; 10:26-29; Rom 8:28-39; Eph 1:13-14; 1 John 5:13).

is apostasy<sup>7</sup>—an abandonment of trust in Christ’s sacrifice for their sins and consequent disobedience.<sup>8</sup> So, most argue, according to Hebrews, genuine believers in Christ can commit apostasy. As a result, the author’s statements of confidence and his exposition of themes that would seemingly promote assurance are mitigated by the warnings against apostasy. Assurance of salvation is ruled out as a matter of course.

Other interpreters, convinced by an exegetical consideration of NT texts that genuine Christians cannot commit apostasy, argue that the warnings in Hebrews must be understood in a manner that is compatible with this. Many conclude either that the warnings are aimed at and describe false believers or that the author warns genuine believers to avoid a sin that is not actually apostasy. Yet, in either case, what seems to be the most natural reading of the warnings (i.e., that they are directed to believers and speak of apostasy from God) is seemingly mitigated by a view of Christian perseverance. Moreover, while some of these latter interpreters emphasize assurance in Hebrews, little has been explored in this regard.

### **Thesis**

It seems, then, that a monograph on assurance of salvation in Hebrews is needed. I will argue that interpreters have underestimated assurance of salvation in the letter and the author’s confidence in his recipients’ salvation. I will consider several relevant texts and themes, including the perfection of believers, Jeremiah’s new covenant promises, and Hebrews 6:9-20 which speaks of the author’s confidence, God’s promise, and the believer’s hope. A tension certainly exists within the letter. The warnings seem to

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<sup>7</sup>While a variety of hypotheses have been offered to account for the occasion of the letter (see George H. Guthrie, “Hebrews in Its First-Century Contexts: Recent Research,” in *The Face of New Testament Studies*, ed. S. McKnight and G. R. Osborne [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004], 440-41), it is generally accepted that the recipients are experiencing some form of struggle, causing them to waver in their Christian commitment. Therefore, the author exhorts them to persevere in faith, warning them of the consequences of failure to persevere.

<sup>8</sup>See the helpful synthetic examination of the author’s description of the sin in the warning passages in McKnight, “The Warning Passages of Hebrews,” 36-43.

exhort Christians not to commit apostasy and must be taken seriously. Yet the letter's description of the effects of Christ's new covenant sacrifice—e.g., the law written on the heart (8:10; 10:16), the divine promise not to remember sins (8:12; 10:17), the “perfection” of believers (10:14)—and the author's assertion that he is “confident of better things” (6:9) suggest that assurance of salvation has perhaps not been adequately considered. Therefore, I will defend my thesis by developing the topic in relation to the above-mentioned themes and offer an explanation for the warnings against apostasy.

### History of Research

D. A. Carson observes that though Christian assurance was once “a question of pressing pastoral importance” and “in certain respects a test of theological systems” it has not received in recent decades the attention it deserves.<sup>9</sup> Christian assurance has been discussed in articles and monographs—most frequently in studies in historical theology.<sup>10</sup> But it has rarely received focused attention in biblical studies.<sup>11</sup> This is certainly the case

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<sup>9</sup>D. A. Carson, “Reflections on Christian Assurance,” *WTJ* 54 (1992): 1.

<sup>10</sup>See, e.g., Louis Berkhof, *The Assurance of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Smitten, 1928); John F. Walvoord, “The Doctrine of Assurance in Contemporary Theology,” *BSac* 116 (1959): 195-204; M. Knoll, “John Wesley and the Doctrine of Assurance,” *BSac* 132 (1975): 161-77; A. N. S. Lane, “Calvin's Doctrine of Assurance,” *Vox Evangelica* 11 (1979): 32-54; Bruce A. Demarest, “Assurance,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 91-92; C. M. Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1985); R. W. A. Letham, “Assurance,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair Ferguson (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1988); R. M. Hawkes, “The Logic of Assurance in English Puritan Theology,” *WTJ* 52 (1990): 247-61; Joel R. Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 1991; Robert A. Peterson, “Christian Assurance: Its Possibility and Foundations,” *Presbyterion* 18 (1992): 10-24; Randall C. Zachman, *The Assurance of Faith: Conscience in the Theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); R. W. A. Letham, “Faith and Assurance in Early Calvinism: A Model of Continuity and Diversity,” in *Later Calvinism: International Perspectives*, ed. W. F. Graham (Kirksville, MO: Northeast Missouri State University, 1994), 355-84; M. P. Winship, “Weak Christians, Backsliders, and Carnal Gospelers: Assurance of Salvation and the Pastoral Origins of Puritan Practical Divinity in the 1580s,” *Church History* 70 (2001): 462-81; Norman Pettit, *The Heart Renewed: Assurance of Salvation in New England Spiritual Life* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2004).

<sup>11</sup>Some notable exceptions that engage in an inductive study of biblical texts include Gerald L. Borchert, *Assurance and Warning* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987); D. A. Carson, “Johannine Perspectives on the Doctrine of Assurance,” *Explorations* 10 (1996): 59-97; Thomas R. Schreiner and Ardel B. Caneday, *The Race Set before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001); Christopher D. Bass, *That You May Know: Assurance of Salvation in 1 John* (Nashville: B&H, 2008).

with Hebrews. The first half of the following history of research examines five recent commentators. The first three (William L. Lane, David A. deSilva, and Craig R. Koester) believe Hebrews directs warnings against apostasy to believers, with the implication that it is possible for them to renounce faith in Christ<sup>12</sup>—the majority view among commentators.<sup>13</sup> The other two (F. F. Bruce and Donald A. Hagner) affirm Christian perseverance, though they differ regarding whom the warnings describe. Special attention is given to their understanding of the author’s confidence and God’s promise to Abraham in 6:9-20, the perfection of believers, and the new covenant promises. The latter half of the history of research will consider additional relevant studies.

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<sup>12</sup>The warnings, according to Lane, are addressed to those who have experienced God’s saving work, and they imply potential apostasy. For example, regarding the descriptive terms in 6:4-6, Lane writes, “God’s presence and salvation are the undoubted reality of their lives” (William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, WBC [Dallas: Word, 1991], 145). If the recipients’ flagging commitment were not checked, “they might flagrantly and contemptuously reject the efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ” (146). “An act of deliberate apostasy would result in their permanent loss of all the benefits obtained for them by Christ” (145).

DeSilva plainly states that apostasy is possible for those who have fully experienced God’s gifts: “The text [Heb 6:4-8] assumes the possibility that a person can fall away after receiving God’s gifts, and after participating as fully as anyone can in what blessings of the next age are open for our experience in this age” (David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle “to the Hebrews”* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 244).

Koester clearly views the warnings as directed to the believing community and as implying potential apostasy. See, e.g., Koester, *Hebrews*, 265, 321-22. He writes, “This section [6:4-8] refers to an authentic experience of God’s manifold grace” (321). “The author offers no clear criteria by which a person can determine when [a repudiation of what God has done] has happened, but assumes that God must discern when a person has ended a relationship with him” (322).

<sup>13</sup>Most modern commentaries on Hebrews fall into this category. In addition to those mentioned above, see, e.g., Franz. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1871), 1:287; Marcus Dods, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, in vol. 4 of *The Expositor’s Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 296-98; James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ICC (New York: Scriber, 1924), 76-79; Ceslas Spicq, *L’Épître aux Hébreux* (Paris: Gabalda, 1953), 2:149-54; Hugh Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1964), 108-10; Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 166-72; Erich Grässer, *An die Hebräer*, Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament (Zürich: Benzinger, 1990-97), 1:347-57; Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 75; Marie E. Isaacs, *Reading Hebrews and James: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 2002), 84-86; Edgar McKnight, *Hebrews-James* (Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 2004), 138-40; Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 2006), 160-64; Alan C. Mitchell, *Hebrews*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press: 2007), 128-29, 220-21; Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 184-85, 268-79.

## **William L. Lane**

According to William L. Lane, the author is confident concerning the congregation (6:9) because he is convinced that they have manifested God's blessing among them. This is evident due to their past conduct and service to the saints (6:10).<sup>14</sup> The author's exposition of God's promise to Abraham in 6:13-15 offers a biblical basis for the recipients to imitate Abraham's patient endurance "in the certain expectation that they will receive what God has promised to them." That God swore by himself in his promise to Abraham (6:13-14) "signifies that he is bound to his word by his character." The oath "affirms the abiding validity of the promise."<sup>15</sup> This is relevant for the recipients of the letter, for the "sworn assurance of God is extended to them," and his purpose for them is likewise "unalterable." The oath sworn to Abraham is proof that "God is absolutely trustworthy," and his "unchanging purpose" offers a strong reason to imitate Abraham's faith.<sup>16</sup> Thus, after warning them of the danger of spiritual immaturity (5:11-6:12), the author affirms his optimism for them, which is "established upon the word of God as promise and oath." God's oath confirms he will fulfill his promise. The author presents Abraham as a paradigm of trust and endurance, but he does more than this, Lane contends. The promised blessing to Abraham is "a prefiguration of the salvation that God has given to the new people in Jesus." The promised salvation that Jesus has secured in his high priestly ministry "is certain because it is guaranteed by God."<sup>17</sup> This provides powerful encouragement "for resisting all assaults and temptations to waver in confidence."<sup>18</sup>

Addressing Christ's high priestly work, Lane claims Hebrews 10:14

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<sup>14</sup>Lane, *Hebrews*, 143-44.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 151

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 153.



underscores the “decisive character” of Christ’s finished work. When the author says Christ “decisively purged [believers] forever,” Lane contends the use of the perfect *τετελείωκεν* combined with the temporal expression *εἰς τὸ διηνεκές* “emphasizes the permanent result of Christ’s offering.”<sup>19</sup> This consecration of the community as indicated in 10:10, 14 validates that the promised new relationship foretold in Jeremiah 31:31-34 (Heb 10:16-17), involving God’s writing of his laws upon their hearts, “has actually been realized.”<sup>20</sup> The result of Christ’s sacrifice was “the definitive consecration of the redeemed community to the service of God” so that “every obstacle to fellowship with God has been effectively removed.”<sup>21</sup> By his one sacrifice, Christ has decisively purged their consciences and consecrated the new covenant people “in the qualitatively new relationship of heart-obedience proclaimed in the prophecy.” The task of the recipients now “is to appropriate this truth and to act upon it in obedience.”<sup>22</sup>

In light of Lane’s observations, it is surprising that he does not acknowledge a tension between the letter’s presentation of what God has promised and accomplished in Christ on the one hand and the peril facing the recipients on the other. Concerning the warning in 10:29, Lane says, “[T]hose who once were cleansed and consecrated to God become reinfected with a permanent defilement that cannot be purged.”<sup>23</sup> However, though the warnings must be taken seriously and understood in their own right, how is this “reinfection” with a “permanent defilement” of those “who once were cleansed” to be reconciled with the fact that new covenant members have been “decisively purged forever,” brought into a “new relationship of heart-obedience,” and become recipients of

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<sup>19</sup>William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1991), 267.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 270.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 295.

a promised salvation that “is certain because it is guaranteed by God.” Lane does not offer an answer nor acknowledge the apparent disparity.

### **David A. deSilva**

David A. deSilva claims that in 6:9-12 the author is restoring the sense of goodwill between himself and his audience by effectively alternating between an appeal to fear (6:4-8) and an appeal to confidence (6:9-12). The reason the author has confidence in his audience is their service to the saints in God’s name (6:9-10).<sup>24</sup> His praise for past actions is a means of maintaining good will and serves as “palliation” after “frank speech.” In addition, their service for one another “is that which gives them a claim on God (perhaps better, their assurance of God’s ongoing favor as opposed to being excluded from favor) . . . . God regards their acts of love and service toward one another as virtuous, meriting remembrance and reward (6:10).”<sup>25</sup> “By such a course the hearers would preserve God’s recognition of their worthy reception of his benefits and thus stimulate him to continue to benefit them. This course would preserve existing good things . . . and eventually help the hearers attain greater goods (entry into glory, rest, an abiding city, and a homeland).”<sup>26</sup>

In Hebrews 6:13-20, deSilva judges that the author’s “cardinal point” is to impress upon the recipients the reliability of the message and the mediator. Both God’s promise and oath stand behind the mediation of Christ and guarantees his priestly efficacy “to secure God’s favor and benefactions for the clients.”<sup>27</sup> The author grounds

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<sup>24</sup>DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 245.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 246.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 247.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 248. Writing a “socio-rhetorical commentary,” deSilva considers Hebrews in light of the social institution of reciprocity, “the mutual expectations and obligations of patrons and clients,” that was a “mainstay of first-century life” in both Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures (ibid., 59). He especially looks to the contemporary writings of Seneca and Dio Chrysostom as resources on patronage in the ancient world. See also his published dissertation: David A. deSilva, *Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series

their hope in God’s truthfulness. This is intended to encourage the audience to continue, “knowing that the ground will not fall out from under them, that they will not be, at the last, disappointed and put to shame.” To respond otherwise would suggest God is untrue and dishonor him.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the hearers must trust the divine patron “who has committed his own honor” to bring the promised salvation “to those who remain faithful clients and persevere in the household of God.” DeSilva claims the author’s imagery of an “anchor” to express the significance of their hope (6:19) “invites the addressees to regard the assurance of a heavenly homeland as the fixed point in their lives”—that “which keeps them from ‘drifting’ into danger.”<sup>29</sup> “[A]s long as the believer holds onto that hope,” he writes, “he or she holds onto the lifeline by which to enter.”<sup>30</sup>

In light of the warnings of the letter, deSilva cautions against a focus on the doctrine of “eternal security,” arguing that contemporary debates on this subject were far from the author’s mind. Moreover, when “modern theological topics such as ‘losing salvation’ and ‘eternal security’ determine our reading or dominate our discussion,” the author’s intended impact “is pushed out of central focus.”<sup>31</sup> The author wants the recipients to respond honorably and return fully to God, grateful for the benefits he has granted them and convinced that a violation of “the beauty of reciprocity between God and human beings” is unthinkable.<sup>32</sup>

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152 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1995). Idem, “Exchanging Favor for Wrath: Apostasy in Hebrews and Patron-Client Relationships,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115 (1996): 91-116. For a critique of deSilva’s view of Hebrews in light of ancient reciprocity systems, see Jason A. Whitlark, *Enabling Fidelity to God: Perseverance in Hebrews in Light of the Reciprocity Systems of the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008).

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 250.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 251.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 252.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 256. See also his excursus, “Patronage, Eternal Security, and Second Repentance” (240-45).

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 256.

What advice would the author give to those “who seek ‘security’ in their hope of salvation”? DeSilva argues that Hebrews offers the addressees, “not the assurance of Romans 8:38-39,” but points instead to their own work and love serving the saints in God’s name (6:10). This is not, though, “salvation by means of works.” He explains that the author

. . . is pointing to a different source for the believer’s sense of “security” than the doctrinal, intellectual, noetic dimension so often elevated by Protestant Christians. He suggests that confidence comes from acting as noble clients of the just God, rendering to God an appropriate return for God’s gifts to us. Clients who respond to their patron with loyalty, respect, and obedient service as the patron directs have every confidence that the grace relationship will continue secure and that the flow of benefits from the patron will be untrammelled.<sup>33</sup>

What, then, for those who become engrossed in questions like “How much is enough?” “When have I responded gratefully?” and “Have I returned enough for the gift?” To do so is to “fall afoul of the ethos of reciprocity.” DeSilva points to the writings of the philosopher Seneca, a contemporary of the author of Hebrews, who knew that a client need not match the patron’s gift but rather “match the patron’s ‘grace,’” with an appropriate response to generosity. This is no “burden placed on the conscience” or something to be done “slavishly.” Rather, it involves keeping God’s gracious gifts and favor before one’s eyes, so that clients may take up their obligations joyfully, knowing that receiving God’s benefactions and responding concretely in gratitude will continue in a never-ending cycle.<sup>34</sup>

In an excursus on “Perfection in Hebrews,” deSilva argues that the perfecting of believers involves both cleansing from the defilements of sin (9:9, 14) and sanctification—moving one to the state of being holy (10:10, 29).<sup>35</sup> Moreover, perfection includes “the erasure of the defiling memory of sin” (10:14-18). Awareness of sins is

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 258.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 200-02.

removed from not only the worshipper's conscience but also from the memory of God. However, deSilva notes other texts in Hebrews (10:14; 11:39-40) that "suggest that the perfecting of the believer is not merely a cultic *fait accompli*." In another sense, perfection still awaits. "The author carefully balances present accomplishment with future accomplishment—both aspects of which should impel the hearers on to the full realization of the goal, the τέλος, of their Christian pilgrimage."<sup>36</sup>

For deSilva, the author's affirmation in 6:9 appears to be not so much an expression of genuine confidence in the congregation as it is a rhetorical device to spur them on. While I do not deny that the author's expression of confidence is rhetorical, one must ask, is it *merely* that? Moreover, is deSilva justified in viewing their perseverance in good works as that which will "stimulate [God] to continue to benefit them" and "eventually help the hearers attain greater goods (entry into glory, rest, an abiding city, and a homeland)"? Though, according to Hebrews, perseverance is certainly necessary, deSilva's explanation seems to make final salvation a reward for obedience and dependent on the believer, despite his denials of advocating "salvation by means of works."

Regarding 6:13-20, it is clear that deSilva understands the passage in light of the warnings. These verses emphasize the trustworthiness and reliability of God to stand true to his promises—provided the recipients hold tight to the anchor. The intention of the promise is to assure them that, as quoted above, "they will not be, at the last, disappointed and put to shame." In other words, when they reach the end, God will not waffle or renege on his promise to save. Thus, the promise does not assure them of reaching the end, but of not being disappointed if they reach it. DeSilva is right to emphasize what Hebrews emphasizes—perseverance in faithfulness is necessary. There is no blanket assurance of "eternal security" apart from it. But is assurance in Hebrews

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 202. See further pp. 202-04.

found only in the encouragement to look subjectively to one's loving service to fellow believers? Though the final goal, the *τέλος*, is yet to be reached, can those who have experienced the "cleansing of the conscience" and "the erasure of the defiling memory of sin" fail to obtain that goal?

### **Craig R. Koester**

Like deSilva, Craig R. Koester emphasizes the rhetorical function of the author's expression of confidence in 6:9. It was understood "that listeners are more likely to persevere (6:12) when convinced that the speaker himself is confident." The author's confidence is based in the truth the God is just (6:10): "If God punishes sinners, he should also reward the righteous (10:35; 11:6, 26)." For the readers to persevere in faith, showing love in God's name, they must have confidence that God is just and "will keep his promise of blessing (10:23)."<sup>37</sup>

Commenting on God's promise to Abraham in 6:13-20, Koester observes that, though Hebrews cites Abraham as an example of faith and perseverance in light of the promise, the focus is in fact on God, who swore by himself that he would surely bless and multiply the patriarch. Thus, Hebrews emphasizes that "God binds himself to keep his promise." Since God's honor is at stake, Koester writes, "Listeners can be assured that he will keep his word."<sup>38</sup> The author's assurance to his listeners is informed by two assumptions: (1) God's oath to Abraham promising blessing also applies to them, and (2) the force of an oath ensures them "that God would not renege on his commitment."<sup>39</sup> God's blessing to Abraham involved a great name, descendants, and prosperity; to the listeners, it involved the favorable judgment of God and the good things belonging to

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<sup>37</sup>Koester, *Hebrews*, 324.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 332.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 334.

salvation (6:7, 9).<sup>40</sup> When Hebrews likens their hope to “a sure and steadfast anchor for the soul” (6:19), Koester claims the imagery “suggests that the listeners’ hope has already been secured at their port of destination.” Nevertheless, Koester argues, they have not yet “disembarked at God’s rest (4:1-11) in the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22-24).” Though the anchor has been planted to prevent them being tossed about, they must hold fast given the danger of drifting from their moorings (2:1).<sup>41</sup>

Regarding the concept of “perfection,” Koester maintains that “completion” is a fitting word to use to speak of the realization of God’s purposes, “since words based on the root *tel-* have to do with reaching a goal.” To complete God’s purposes, sin and death must be overcome, and this comes through Christ’s sacrifice for sin. In Hebrews completion is spoken of “as a present reality for those whose consciences have been cleansed by Christ’s self-offering (10:14).”<sup>42</sup> To speak here of “those who are sanctified” as “made complete” (τετελείωκεν) in the perfect tense is appropriate, Koester argues, insofar as the sacrifice of Christ is the “complete and definitive” offering for sin. The perfect tense is “less suitable for the actual state of the listeners,” though, given that they will struggle with sin until the consummation of God’s purposes in the heavenly Jerusalem (3:14; 12:1, 23).<sup>43</sup> Koester concludes that the people can “lose their holiness” through a rejection of Christ’s work “and persistently embracing sin,” inviting God’s wrath (10:29).<sup>44</sup>

Turning to the new covenant promises in Jeremiah (Heb 8:8-12), Koester points to the promise of the law written on the heart (8:10) as God’s means of

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 332-33.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 334.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 122-23. He rightly ties this to the new covenant promise of the law written on the heart (123).

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 440.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 121.

overcoming human unfaithfulness. The new covenant brings both forgiveness of sins and a change of heart and mind “so that people no longer fall into sin.”<sup>45</sup> It also promises that God will no longer remember their sins, which is fulfilled in the atoning death of Christ and his intercession for his people. Yet, Koester claims, complete fulfillment of the new covenant promises has not yet come. The promise that God’s people will not need to teach one another since all will “know the Lord” (8:11) is unfulfilled, since they must still exhort one another (3:13) and need teaching (5:12).<sup>46</sup> Not only this, but also the prospect of being infected by an evil heart (3:12) “indicates that the new covenant is not yet fully in place.”<sup>47</sup> He concludes,

The shift from the old to the new covenant (8:6) has begun, but is not complete since a change has occurred, but the promises have not been fully realized. Under the new covenant, God deals decisively with sin through the death of Christ (7:27; 10:12-18), yet unbelief remains an unsettling possibility (3:7-4:10). God promised to write his will on human hearts, yet the wayward heart persists (3:12). God promised that people would no longer need instruction, yet they continue to need teaching and exhortation (3:13; 5:12; 13:22). God promised to keep for himself a people, yet some were drifting away (10:25).<sup>48</sup>

It seems clear that Koester interprets these texts and themes in light of the warnings in particular and the letter’s eschatology in general. Warnings not to fall away and exhortations to enter God’s rest imply that the listeners may reject Christ and “lose their holiness.” For Koester, the new covenant promises and the “completion” or “perfection” of believers brought through Christ are mitigated by the future orientation of the exhortatory material. In saying this, I do not deny the future dimension of salvation in Hebrews. Clearly, the salvation that Christ brings is not yet consummated and lies in the future (e.g., 1:14; 9:28; 13:14). Rather, the question is this: Does the future dimension of

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 391.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 392. The offering of teaching and exhortation to the listeners “shows that these aspects of the new covenant still await complete fulfillment” (112).

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 265.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 392.



salvation “override” the present dimension, so that those who have begun to experience the promises can fail to experience their fulfillment? Presumably, Koester would say “yes,” due to the warnings and exhortation of the letter. But does the author’s exposition of God’s promise, the perfection of believers, and the new covenant permit this? Koester seems to acknowledge a tension in Hebrews between what God has promised and accomplished through Christ on the one hand and the need to heed the warnings on the other, given his quote above.<sup>49</sup> But his statement seems to imply that fulfillment of God’s promises is contingent on human obedience. However, without denying that Hebrews requires the perseverance of the recipients, is it appropriate to resolve the tension in favor of the warnings to persevere?<sup>50</sup>

### **F. F. Bruce**

In contrast to the previous commentators, F. F. Bruce does not think Hebrews suggests that believers can apostatize. For example, Hebrews 6:4-6 describes, not Christians, but those who have shared in the covenant privileges of God’s people, have clearly seen where the truth lies, and conformed to that truth for a period.<sup>51</sup> However,

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<sup>49</sup>Note Graham Hughes’s observation: “[I]n the theologically oriented passages (‘realized’ eschatology) the discontinuity with the old covenant is written large; in the exhortatory passages (‘futurist’ eschatology) the continuity between old and new covenants is such that one might almost think the Christian era had never dawned” (*Hebrews and Hermeneutics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979], 70).

<sup>50</sup>Cf. Craig R. Koester “God’s Purposes and Christ’s Saving Work according to Hebrews,” in *Salvation in the New Testament: Perspectives in Soteriology*, ed. J. G. van der Watt (Leiden: Brill, 2005), esp. 374-75 on the new covenant. In another section (“Losing and Obtaining Salvation”), Koester argues that the warnings and promises of the letter have different functions but serve the same end—“that the readers might persevere in faith” (376). He writes, “The readers must persevere in faith because the threat of divine judgment is real, but they *can* persevere because the promise of divine salvation is also real” (379, [emphasis in original]). Though his observations are helpful, he still seems to make fulfillment of the promises *ultimately* conditioned on the recipients’ response. But does Hebrews justify this inference?

<sup>51</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 144. This understanding of 6:4-6 as describing false believers who have experienced something of God’s goodness is seen in John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and the First and Second Epistles of Peter*, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, trans. William B. Johnston, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 76; and in John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews with Preliminary Exercitations*, ed. William H. Goold (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 5:84.

they are not genuine, for “once more our author emphasizes that continuance is the test of reality.”<sup>52</sup> The “once more” refers the reader back to Bruce’s discussion of the conditional sentences of 3:6 and 14. Perseverance in faith is evidence that one is part of God’s household and a partaker of Christ. Individuals are God’s household, “if only we are fearless and keep our hope high” (3:6). Thus, “the saints are the people who persevere to the end.”<sup>53</sup> Bruce understands 3:14 similarly: “only if they kept their original confidence firm to the end could they be truly called partners of Christ.”<sup>54</sup>

Assurance is demonstrated by the new covenant promise of the law written on the heart (Jer 31:33; Heb 8:10). This promise means much more than the memorizing of the law. For memorization does not guarantee its performance. Rather, “Jeremiah’s words imply the receiving of a new heart by the people.” They needed a “new nature”—a heart that had the power to do God’s will.<sup>55</sup> This is made possible by the sacrifice of Christ. Commenting on the perfection and sanctification of the people in 10:10 and 14, Bruce writes, “The sanctification which his people receive in consequence is their inward cleaning from sin . . . . It is a sanctification which has taken place once for all; in this sense it is as unrepeatable as the sacrifice which effects it” (10:10).<sup>56</sup> Christ’s sacrifice purified his people from their moral defilement and “assured them of permanent maintenance in a right relation with God” (10:14). Thus, “those who have been cleansed and ‘perfected’ are now eternally constituted God’s holy people.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid. See further pp. 145-49. He writes, “In these verses he is not questioning the perseverance of the saints; we might say that rather he is insisting that those who persevere are the true saints” (144).

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 94. Bruce quotes the NEB.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 101.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 190.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 243.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 247.

Clearly Bruce views Christ's sacrifice as having a more permanent and effective result in the people than the previous commentators. A new heart enables one to do God's will, and their inward cleansing constitutes them eternally as God's people. This change brought about in believers would seem to make it impossible for them to apostatize. Bruce also differs in his understanding of the warnings. Hebrews 6:4-6 describes those who have experienced blessings associated with the covenant community, but they are not genuine converts. This is clearly not the majority view, nor does it appear to be the most natural reading. But Bruce defends his view by interpreting the conditional sentences in 3:6, 14 to affirm perseverance in faith (the protasis) as the evidence of being a part of God's people (the apodosis). Subsequent commentators who, like Bruce, view the subjects in 6:4-6 as false converts have taken up a similar understanding of these conditionals, including Philip Edgcumbe Hughes,<sup>58</sup> Leon Morris,<sup>59</sup> and George H. Guthrie.<sup>60</sup> Other interpreters have viewed the conditional sentences in this manner as well.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>“The sin of apostasy, then,” Philip Edgcumbe Hughes writes, “is a grim . . . possibility for persons who through identification with the people of God have been brought within the sphere of the divine blessing.” (*A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977], 216). By turning their backs on the gospel and repudiating their profession of Christ, they show that they are not genuine believers. Those “who are genuinely Christ’s do not fall away into apostasy” (221). Regarding the conditional sentence in 3:6, Hughes quotes from Bruce’s commentary (138) and clearly understands the verse in the same manner: “Seriousness in believing should manifest itself in seriousness concerning doctrine and conduct” (139). Cf. on 3:14 (151).

<sup>59</sup>Leon Morris views the warning of 6:4-6 as describing those who have experienced something of the Christian faith but have not truly been converted. The author of Hebrews does not “closely define” the descriptive clauses, so it hard to be precise with their meaning (see Leon Morris *Hebrews*, in vol. 12 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 55). Morris offers several views of the passage that have been advocated. He claims that to understand the passage to teach that genuine Christians can fall away would contradict other NT passages. He seems to favor the view that “the writer is talking about what looks very much like the real thing but lacks something” (56). He also appears to follow Bruce (whom he quotes) in understanding the conditional sentence in 3:6 to indicate that “Perseverance is one of the marks of being a Christian . . . . To be God’s house, then, means to persevere in quiet confidence” (33).

<sup>60</sup>According to George H. Guthrie, the clauses in 6:4-6 describe “phenomenological unbelievers”—“the ambiguous language suggests participation in the things of God,” but they “have not experienced true faith” (*Hebrews*, NIVAC [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998], 230). In a discussion of how to interpret the conditional clauses in 3:6 and 14 (134-36), Guthrie writes, “The inner reality of one’s relationship with God is manifested in outward action and gives assurance” (136). He notes the perfect

## Donald A. Hagner

In his works on the letter, Donald A. Hagner claims that the author follows up his warning against apostasy in 6:4-8 with “a very strong emphasis on security.”<sup>62</sup> Hebrews 6:19-20 presents the “confidence and security that we have in Christ” because, through Christ, we have a sure hope and enter the very presence of God.<sup>63</sup> The Christian hope is “nothing other than what God promised to Abraham” (6:13-14), and “our realization of that hope is finally as certain as God’s word and his oath” (6:16-18).<sup>64</sup>

Hagner recognizes the tension present in Hebrews. Regarding the warning of Hebrews 6:4-6, he differs from Bruce by noting that the clauses “seem to refer to the reality of conversion.”<sup>65</sup> “Certainly,” he contends, “those described in verses 4 and 5 are Christians.”<sup>66</sup> Does this mean Christians can apostatize? Hagner argues that the answer “consists of a yes and a no”:

If they can abandon their faith, then the warning is not merely hypothetical and empty, but real (cf. 10:26-31). Christians can apostatize (cf. 2 Pet. 2:20-22). Yet paradoxically, if they become true apostates, they show that they were not authentic Christians (cf. 3:14) . . . . Concerning both the readers of Hebrews and all Christians, it must be said that they are Christians thus far. In the last analysis only

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tense in the phrase “we have come (*γεγόναμεν*) to share in Christ” (3:14) and interprets it as “focusing on a present state of being.” The condition placed on that designation indicates that “real Christian experience contains the quality of durability” (130).

<sup>61</sup>D. A. Carson understands 3:6 and 14 similarly to Bruce, primarily due to the perfect tense “we have become” (*γεγόναμεν*) in 3:14: “It follows from this verse that although perseverance is mandated, it is also the evidence of what has taken place in the past” (*Exegetical Fallacies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996], 84-85). Cf. Carson, “Reflections on Christian Assurance,” 20: “Hebrews virtually *defines* true believers as those who hold firmly to the end the confidence they had at first (3:6, 14).” In his examination of the warnings in Hebrews, Wayne Grudem follows Carson (Grudem, “Perseverance of the Saints,” 175). In his recent major commentary, Peter T. O’Brien also follows Carson (*The Letter to the Hebrews*, PNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010], 136).

<sup>62</sup>Donald A. Hagner, *Encountering the Book of Hebrews*, Encountering Biblical Studies (Baker, Grand Rapids, 2002), 94.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>64</sup>Donald A. Hagner, *Hebrews*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 98.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 90-91.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 92. Cf. Hagner, *Encountering the Book of Hebrews*, 90.

perseverance can demonstrate the reality of Christian faith . . . . True Christian faith . . . is manifested when apostasy does not occur. True Christians do not (i.e., cannot) apostatize.<sup>67</sup>

Hagner appears to view the conditional sentence in 3:14 similarly to Bruce. Though he does not discuss this in detail, references to the verse (including the one in the quote above) make this apparent: “We may safely say, however, that *perseverance is what finally demonstrates the reality of Christian faith* (see 3:14, 6:11).<sup>68</sup> So, Christians cannot fall away, but the warnings in 6:4-6 and 10:19-39 are genuinely delivered to believers, for these passages “presuppose the possibility that true Christians can fall into apostasy. The readers confronted that actual temptation.”<sup>69</sup> Hagner cautions, “We do well to limit ourselves to the full scope of the specific statements of Scripture, the raw data of biblical theology, and to preserve the tensions we encounter . . . . Scripture provides us assurance of our security, and at the same time warns us.”<sup>70</sup>

Though not detailed, Hagner’s interpretation of the new covenant promises and the perfection of believers demonstrates that he views Hebrews as justifying assurance. Commenting on 8:8-12, he notes that the chief problem with the old covenant and the reason the new will be unlike it is because the members of the old covenant did not remain faithful to it. However, the new covenant will accomplish what the old could not: “it will produce true righteousness.”<sup>71</sup> This new covenant is established through Christ’s offering of himself. Through his work, Christ has “perfected” believers (10:14), which means he has “brought [them] to the fullness of salvation.”<sup>72</sup> To experience the benefits

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<sup>67</sup>Hagner, *Hebrews*, 92-93.

<sup>68</sup>Hagner *Encountering the Book of Hebrews*, 92 (emphasis in original).

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup>Hagner, *Hebrews*, 122-23.

<sup>72</sup>Hagner *Encountering the Book of Hebrews*, 131.

of this sacrifice is “to arrive at the goal anticipated from the beginning of God’s gracious activity among his people.”<sup>73</sup>

Hagner’s work is noteworthy since he affirms that the warnings against apostasy are directed toward genuine believers (6:4-6) but is not compelled as a result to conclude that this implies Christian apostasy, since perseverance indicates the reality of Christian faith (3:14). One must not allow one’s theological system to cancel out one side of the biblical tension.<sup>74</sup> Having now considered five recent commentators, the remaining history of research will examine several monographs and essays relevant to the topic.

### **Gerald L. Borchert**

In *Assurance and Warning*, Gerald L. Borchert examines the combined presence of these two concepts in the NT. His method for study is to consider the perspectives of three different genre: an epistle (1 Corinthians), a Gospel (John), and a sermon (Hebrews). Regarding Hebrews, Borchert finds a “sensitive balance” of both assurance and warning.<sup>75</sup> When it comes to the warning of Hebrews 6:4-6, he declares these clauses provide the “*finest brief definition of what is normally understood to be a Christian found anywhere in the New Testament!*”<sup>76</sup> Borchert adds that whether or not those so described who subsequently “fall away” are actually Christians is not the issue. The preacher addressed his message to those who regarded themselves and who were considered by others to be Christians.<sup>77</sup> Thus, it would seem that while 6:4-6 may describe someone who, in the end, was not actually a Christian, Borchert does not follow interpreters who believe the text intentionally describes a false convert.

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<sup>73</sup>Hagner, *Hebrews*, 160.

<sup>74</sup>Hagner *Encountering the Book of Hebrews*, 91.

<sup>75</sup>Borchert, *Assurance and Warning*, 160. “The balance between assurance and warning in Hebrews is very delicate” (194).

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 172 (emphasis in original).

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 173.

When he discusses assurance in Hebrews, though, it does not seem that he has in mind *assurance of ultimate salvation*.<sup>78</sup> One can find “assurance” in one’s own perseverance,<sup>79</sup> in the absolutely sufficient provision of Christ’s sacrifice to forgive sin,<sup>80</sup> in the preacher’s conviction that believers would not shrink back,<sup>81</sup> and in the power of God to help believers persevere.<sup>82</sup> But due to the tension with the warnings of the letter, Borchert apparently does not see assurance of ultimate salvation as grounded in Hebrews.<sup>83</sup>

### **Randall C. Gleason**

Randall C. Gleason has written several articles on the warning passages and contributed to *Four Views of the Warning Passages in Hebrews*.<sup>84</sup> He resolves the tension between warning and assurance in Hebrews through his understanding of the sin the readers were in danger of committing. He believes those described in 6:4-6 were believers in danger of “falling away.”<sup>85</sup> However, this is not “absolute apostasy” but “a

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<sup>78</sup>In the end, Borchert does not think true believers can lose their salvation. According to Thomas R. Schreiner, “Borchert has indicated in a private conversation that it was not his intention to resolve the tension between assurance and warnings in his book, and that ultimately true believers cannot lose their salvation” (“Perseverance and Assurance: A Survey and Proposal,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of the Theology* 2 [Spring 1998]: 60 n. 56).

<sup>79</sup>Borchert, *Assurance and Warning*, 174.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 182.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 185.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 195. Borchert claims the initial reference in Hebrews to Jesus as High Priest “points to the basis for a Christian’s assurance.” However, he explains this assurance as “a very practical promise of assistance to those undergoing temptation” (164).

<sup>83</sup>Borchert, commenting on 6:13-20, notes that God is the “basis for Abraham’s assurance,” but he does not seem to see God’s promise (or Christ’s high priestly work), in itself, as assuring salvation. For “assurance is not something external and automatic. Both parties to this divine-human relationship are very important” (ibid, 175).

<sup>84</sup>Gleason, “The Old Testament Background of Rest in Hebrews 3:7-4:11”; “The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8”; “The Eschatology of the Warning in Hebrews 10:26-31”; “A Moderate Reformed View,” in *Four Views of the Warning Passages*, 336-429.

<sup>85</sup>Gleason, “Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8,” 75-78.

permanent state of immaturity.”<sup>86</sup> He argues this by looking to what he believes is the OT background of the warning—the Exodus generation.<sup>87</sup> The people of Israel fell into immaturity by their idolatry and grumbling but did not commit absolute apostasy.<sup>88</sup> Likewise, the readers were in danger of making a “decisive refusal to mature.”<sup>89</sup> Gleason argues that the judgment they face is “forfeiture of divine blessing and the experience of temporal discipline rather than eternal destruction.”<sup>90</sup>

Gleason also affirms the letter provides assurance.<sup>91</sup> Among the texts and themes he believes justify this, two are relevant: (1) The new covenant provides for “absolute forgiveness” (8:8-10). The cleansing/perfecting made possible through Christ’s new covenant sacrifice “extends to all sins ‘for all time’” (10:14) and, thus, includes all past, present, and future sins. The permanence of the cleansing suggests it is “irreversible.”<sup>92</sup> (2) Closely related to this is the “permanent and complete” perfection of believers. This is suggested by the perfect *τετελείωκεν* in 10:14 and its link to the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ in 10:10-12. As Christ’s sacrifice was a once-for-all event, “so

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 79.

<sup>87</sup>Specifically the Kadesh-barnea incident (as it serves as the background of the warning in 3:7-4:13) (Gleason, “Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8,” 72-74).

<sup>88</sup>See *ibid.*, 75, 80.

<sup>89</sup>Their resultant “falling away” denotes “a general state of spiritual retrogression” (*ibid.*, 81).

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, 86-87. For those with a similar view, see, e.g., Zane Hodges, “Hebrews,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983), 787-89; R. T. Kendall, *Once Saved, Always Saved* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1983), 107-11; J. Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man*, 2d ed. (Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle, 1992), 433-55; Michael Eaton, *No Condemnation: A New Theology of Assurance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 212-17; and the articles cited earlier by Oberholtzer. In addition, a recent major commentary following this interpretation is David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, NAC (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 377-93. See Gleason, “A Moderate Reformed View,” 360-67, for his defense of the view that the judgment in question is the impending destruction of Jerusalem.

<sup>91</sup>Gleason, “A Moderate Reformed View,” 367. He expresses surprise that few studies have given attention to this theme.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*, 372-74.



too was the believer's perfection accomplished through it."<sup>93</sup>

Like Bruce and others, Gleason is convinced that believers cannot commit apostasy. However, he is equally convinced that the warnings are directed to the readers as believers. Thus, the sin of the readers is a "decisive refusal to mature" and the resulting judgment is "temporal discipline." Space does not permit a detailed response to Gleason's view at this point; however, it is questionable that his interpretation accurately reflects the danger confronting the recipients of the letter.<sup>94</sup> In chapter 4 of this dissertation, I will further consider Gleason's view. For now, it is significant simply to note that those who argue that Christians cannot commit apostasy do not all agree about whom the warnings address. What is "ambiguous" to some (6:4-6)<sup>95</sup> clearly describes believers to others. Regarding assurance in Hebrews, Gleason notes the significance of the sacrifice of Christ as it relates to the perfection/cleaning of believers and the fulfillment of the new covenant promises. Yet, since his primary purpose is to interpret the warning passages, his argument for assurance is too brief and not sufficiently developed.

### **Thomas R. Schreiner and Ardel B. Caneday**

A recent attempt to understand the warnings of the NT in general and Hebrews

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 374. Like others, Gleason also points to the conditional sentences in 3:6, 14. However, consistent with his overall thesis concerning the danger confronting the readers, he insists that these conditional clauses "do not disqualify *all* who lack firmness of *any* assurance." Rather, the author's point is that the conditional sentences "*may* indicate in some cases—but not in every case—that one is not truly a partaker of Christ" (376).

<sup>94</sup>Would the author really label "spiritual immaturity" as "crucifying the Son of God" (6:6) and "trampling under foot the Son of God" (10:29)? Can the "terrifying expectation of judgment" (10:26) be limited to temporal discipline? One is left wondering what sort of language, for Gleason, *would* constitute a description of apostasy. See the responses to Gleason by G. R. Osborne, B. M. Fanning, and G. L. Cockerill in *Four Views of the Warning Passages*, 378-429. For an evaluation of the nature of the sin threatening the readers, see Thomas (*A Case for Mixed-Audience with Reference to the Warning Passages in the Book of Hebrews*, 97-178) who argues that the sin is "a total renunciation of everything that is distinctively Christian" and that the consequence for the sin is "eternal damnation" (179).

<sup>95</sup>E.g., Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 230; Morris, *Hebrews*, 55.

in particular is *The Race Set before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance*, in which Thomas R. Schreiner and Ardel B. Caneday argue that the warnings are God's means of salvation. The NT teaches that believers "can have a firm confidence and assurance in [their] final salvation."<sup>96</sup> Genuine believers will never apostatize.<sup>97</sup> However, they critique those who claim 6:4-6 is describing false converts rather than genuine believers.<sup>98</sup> Schreiner and Caneday believe this passage and the others should be viewed as "prospective warnings" against apostasy. In their view, some have made the error of (1) turning the warnings into "retrospective" calls to examine the genuineness of one's conversion and (2) understanding the warnings to reveal that those who apostatize were never genuine Christians. While Schreiner and Caneday agree that these two themes (self-examination and apostasy as revealing false converts) are found in the NT, they do not think this accurately interprets the warnings in Hebrews.<sup>99</sup> For, salvation in Hebrews is "fundamentally future oriented" and not yet fully realized.<sup>100</sup> Yet they also disagree with those who turn "conditional warnings into declarative announcements of possible apostasy" on the part of believers.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, they reject the view that takes the conditionals in 3:6, 14 as exhortations to persevere in order to demonstrate that one is already "God's house" and a "partaker in Christ." Instead, they believe these verses, like the other warnings, have a future orientation calling for faithful endurance, for salvation

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<sup>96</sup>Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*, 269. See also Schreiner, "Perseverance and Assurance"; and idem, *Run to Win the Prize: Perseverance in the New Testament* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2009).

<sup>97</sup>Schreiner, "Perseverance and Assurance," 52.

<sup>98</sup>Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*, 195-98.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 198.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 198-99.

<sup>101</sup>Rather than indicating possible failure, the warnings appeal to the readers "to conceive or imagine the invariable consequences" that come upon any who pursues apostasy (ibid, 199).

is a consequence of perseverance and belongs to those who hold fast to the end.<sup>102</sup>

The warnings and promises of Hebrews are a God-given means to ensure a believer's perseverance. The author of the letter clearly warns believers of damnation if they do not persevere in faith,<sup>103</sup> but he also exhorts them to bold confidence. For, Abraham's heirs "have God's promise and oath to assure us that the promised salvation is a sure hope" (6:17-19).<sup>104</sup> Therefore, the warnings and promises work together to secure the salvation of believers.<sup>105</sup> Adherence to the warnings "is the means by which salvation is obtained on the final day."<sup>106</sup>

Schreiner and Caneday offer a distinctive view of warning and assurance in Hebrews. Their interpretation of the warnings is clearly consistent with the majority of interpreters: the author warns believers not to commit apostasy, or they will experience eternal judgment. Yet this does not negate assurance, since the warnings are the means God uses to ensure the salvation of his people. In the end, those who do fall away prove that they never belonged to Christ. Such a proposal offers a means of taking the warnings at face value without using them to mitigate assurance in Hebrews. Surprisingly, few recent Hebrews interpreters have interacted with their view.<sup>107</sup> Contrary to others who

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<sup>102</sup>See *ibid.*, 200-02.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>104</sup>*Ibid.*, 202-03.

<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>106</sup>Schreiner, "Perseverance and Assurance," 53. He credits G. C. Berkouwer (*ibid.*, 57) with previously defending this view in *Faith and Perseverance*, trans. Robert D. Knudsen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958). See also the references to Berkouwer throughout Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*. Of the warning in 6:4-6, Berkouwer writes, "This is not a disturbing and threatening of the assurance of salvation by setting the Hebrews over the abyss of an uncertain choice between alternatives. It is an admonition, whose purpose is to lead them to a more secure walk in the way of salvation" (*Faith and Perseverance*, 119). "This passage from Hebrews 6 lets us see especially clearly how far the Scriptures are removed from every view of the Church which would eliminate the tension of faith and admonition" (120). "[T]he Epistle to the Hebrews is full of admonition and consolation because it is in this way that the preservation of the Church is accomplished" (121).

<sup>107</sup>For example, in Robert A. Peterson's work, *Our Secure Salvation: Preservation and Apostasy* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), Peterson does not interact with the thesis of Schreiner and

similarly believe Christians cannot commit apostasy, Schreiner and Caneday understand 3:6 and 14 to be future conditionals indicating that being a “partaker of Christ” is a result of perseverance. While they affirm assurance of salvation, they do little to develop this in Hebrews, since their primary focus is on explaining the warnings of the letter.<sup>108</sup>

### **Buist M. Fanning**

Buist M. Fanning has contributed an essay on the theology of Hebrews and a chapter in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*.<sup>109</sup> He is frank in admitting that, when the relevant elements in Hebrews are synthesized, “there is an unavoidable tension in putting these elements together” that “seems to yield incompatible results.”<sup>110</sup> After considering both the author’s warnings and encouragement, Fanning writes, “The passages seem to say that genuine Christians should persevere in faithfulness but may instead repudiate Christ and so fall into eternal condemnation, but Christ’s work in and for them will absolutely not fail to bring them through to eternal salvation!” This apparent contradiction leads him to conclude that his reading of one or more of the

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Caneday, though he cites their work (see 36, 46, 132). There is also little to no interaction from the contributors in the 2007 collection, *Four Views on the Warning Passages*. In his contribution to *Four Views*, Fanning objects to Schreiner and Caneday’s interpretation of the conditionals in 3:6 and 14 (Fanning, “A Classical Reformed View,” 208-09); however, he does not challenge their “means of salvation” view. Neither P. T. O’Brien’s 2010 PNTC commentary nor Gareth Cockerill’s 2012 NICNT commentary makes any mention of *The Race Set before Us*, nor is the book listed in either bibliography.

Recent works that *do* critique Schreiner and Caneday include the dissertation by C. Adrian Thomas, published in 2008 as *A Case for Mixed-Audience with Reference to the Warning Passages in the Book of Hebrews* (a dissertation that Fanning supervised); Kenneth Keathley’s monograph, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville: B&H, 2010); and the 2010 NAC commentary by David L. Allen (*Hebrews*, 373-76).

<sup>108</sup> However, in a later chapter on assurance, they contend that, according to Hebrews 11, saving faith includes assurance of receiving God’s promises (Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*, 272). They also note that there is an objective foundation of assurance: the definitive cleansing of sins through Jesus’ blood (Heb 9:15-10:18) (279-80).

<sup>109</sup> Buist M. Fanning, “A Theology of Hebrews,” in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 369-415; idem, “A Classical Reformed View,” in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, 172-256.

<sup>110</sup> Fanning, “A Classical Reformed View,” 176.

themes “obviously needs to be adjusted.”<sup>111</sup>

Fanning believes the author provides a “framework of thought” that makes sense of the warnings. His interpretive paradigm is based on the conditionals in 3:6, 14, which indicate not “what *will* be true if [the readers] hold on, but what *is already* true of them, if in fact they endure.”<sup>112</sup> Most interpreters assume a cause and effect relationship between the protasis and apodosis of each condition. However, Fanning believes the logical connection of protasis to apodosis in 3:6, 14 is best understood as evidence-to-inference.<sup>113</sup> On this reading, “the author’s underlying structure of thought” is revealed, making “an implicit distinction between true and false faith.”<sup>114</sup> Though he believes this makes the best sense overall, Fanning admits that 6:4-5 and 10:29 are still problematic, since they seem to describe genuine Christian experience. His answer is to understand the writer as “portraying the *phenomena* of their conversion, what their Christian experience

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 205.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., 207. Cf. Fanning, “A Theology of Hebrews,” 410-11. Fanning points to others (Bruce, Carson, Grudem, and Guthrie) who have similarly viewed the conditional sentences as “a significant interpretive key,” but notes that no one has developed this in detail (“A Classical Reformed View,” 207).

<sup>113</sup>Fanning, “A Classical Reformed View,” 207-15. Fanning defines an evidence-to-inference conditional as “(1) a proposed situation (the protasis) that is known to be the effect or evidence of (2) a prior condition that causes it and so can be inferred from it (the apodosis)” (210). Upon analyzing some example (third class) conditionals in the LXX and NT, Fanning proposes that (1) “when the protasis refers to a contextually specific event, conditionals seem to display [cause-to-effect] relation (and the apodosis refers to something future from that event and caused by it)” (211); and (2) “when the protasis refers to a contextually general situation (a customary condition or broadly characteristic action), conditionals seem to display [evidence-to-inference] relation (and the apodosis refers to a state or condition already existing at the time of that situation and evidenced by it)” (212). “It should be noted,” Fanning writes, “that the characteristics of these patterns are focused primarily on aspectual usage in the protasis, combined with contextual features” (212-13). He believes Heb 3:6 and 14 are best understood as evidence-to-inference conditionals, since the protases “involve a broad, characteristic reference, not a specific event” (214). Fanning is convinced that a temporal view of Greek tenses “strengthens the case” for this reading of 3:6 and 14 (215).

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 215. Thomas’s work follows, and to some extent furthers, Fanning’s argument regarding the conditionals (*A Case for Mixed-Audience with Reference to the Warning Passages in the Book of Hebrews*). Thomas argues that the author of Hebrews has a “mixed-audience” in view. “That is, the author of Hebrews writes under the assumption that his community, like any other New Testament community, is a community of professing believers in which profession must be tested.” The author “understands that not every person in his congregation is necessarily genuinely saved” (15). Thomas bases his case upon (1) “several grammatical/exegetical considerations found throughout the paranetic sections of Hebrews” and (2) the author’s portrayal of genuine faith over against its counterfeit (181).

looks like outwardly,” in order “to emphasize how close they have been to the faith and what they are rejecting if they depart.”<sup>115</sup> Thus, 6:4-5 and 10:29 describe false believers.

Fanning also addresses passages that highlight God’s faithfulness and justify assurance. While Abraham is a prime example of faith to be imitated, Hebrews 6:13-20 focuses more on “God’s absolute fidelity than on Abraham’s persevering faith.”<sup>116</sup> The basis of Christian assurance, though, is found in the high priestly ministry of Jesus. One feature of his priesthood is its abiding nature, since he is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (7:16-17). As a result, in a “very significant statement,” the author claims Jesus “is able to save completely those who come to God through him” (7:25).<sup>117</sup> A second feature of his high priesthood involves the eternal forgiveness his sacrifice secures. Fanning notes the new covenant promise that God will remember his people’s sins no more (Heb 8:12) and the related assertion that Christ has “perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (10:14). Can the recipients of these benefits ultimately fail to receive them?<sup>118</sup> He critiques those who would answer “yes” based on the warning passages, since the former verses add no limitations to “God’s purpose, calling, and promises or to Christ’s saving power or intercessory effectiveness.” Any limitation must be implied from elsewhere.<sup>119</sup> Fanning also critiques “the frequent observation that salvation in Hebrews is predominantly future-oriented.” The question is not whether

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<sup>115</sup>Fanning, “A Classical Reformed View,” 217.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 193-94.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 197-98. Fanning asks, “What obstacle could prevent their salvation from coming to complete fulfillment if he is ever vigilant to intercede for them at God’s right hand?”

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., 197-99. In Fanning’s words, “What could cause God to call to mind again what he has pledged never to remember? . . . What could sully a holiness that is perfected for all time?” (199).

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., 199. This is precisely the reaction of Grant Osborne in his response to Fanning in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*. Osborne claims the security of the believer in 7:25 is conditional “in light of the strong warning passages throughout” (“Classical Arminian Response,” 226). God’s promise in 6:13-20 is “not a guaranteed promise,” since the “entire tone of the chapter is that of warning, and that dare not be softened” (228).

salvation awaits a future consummation. It does. “Instead, the question is whether in Hebrews those who have already entered into the past and present realities of God’s saving work can fail to come through to its future consummation.”<sup>120</sup>

While the author does not explicitly develop the idea of heart transformation associated with the new covenant, Fanning believes this may be “the theological foundation for the reassurance” offered in 6:9-10 and 10:32-34 “based on the readers’ past and present obedience.” In other words, “It seems to be that the author’s expectation that those who have begun to experience the transforming power of this new covenant mediated by Jesus’ high priesthood will continue to show the persevering faith that is needed, based not on changeable human ability but on the sustaining power of God at work within them.”<sup>121</sup>

Several observations should be noted regarding Fanning’s work. (1) The primary contribution of his essay is its development of the view of previous commentators concerning the conditional statements in 3:6 and 14. His work and that of C. Adrian Thomas<sup>122</sup> will need to be assessed. (2) Fanning observes that interpreters limit texts that appear to promote assurance based on the warning passages. Is this mitigation of assurance justified, or does it too quickly resolve the tension in favor of the warnings?<sup>123</sup> (3) Though Fanning points to texts and themes in Hebrews that would give

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<sup>120</sup>Fanning, “A Classical Reformed View,” 200-01.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., 204-05.

<sup>122</sup>Thomas, *A Case for Mixed-Audience with Reference to the Warning Passages in the Book of Hebrews*, 182-96.

<sup>123</sup>Gareth L. Cockerill claims that the supposed tension Fanning finds in Hebrews is artificial (“Wesleyan Arminian Response,” in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, 234). While a straightforward reading of the warnings teaches apostasy, the discussions of God’s faithfulness and Christ’s adequacy “do not imply perseverance in anything like such a straightforward manner” (234-35). Cockerill contends that a “guarantee” of perseverance is a deduction that *Fanning* makes from these themes—not a deduction that *Hebrews* makes from them (237-39). But Cockerill assumes that the author of Hebrews must make assurance of salvation an *explicit* deduction from his discussion of the new covenant promises and the perfection of believers. In light of the danger facing the readers, it would defeat the author’s purposes to tell them, “Fear not! Because you have been perfected and had the law written on your hearts, you are incapable of rejecting Christ.” Rather, he must warn them to hold fast lest they drift away. However, this

evidence for assurance of salvation, this is not developed or argued in a detailed manner. However, his observation that the heart-transforming power of the new covenant may be “the theological foundation for the reassurance” in 6:9-10 is significant. (4) Finally, his comment regarding the future orientation of salvation in Hebrews is helpful. Though most would agree that the consummation of salvation in Hebrews lies in the future, can the past and present effects on believers of Christ’s new covenant sacrifice be undone?

### Conclusion

This history of research demonstrates the following: (1) A number of interpreters have observed a tension in the letter between warnings against apostasy and texts speaking of the lasting effects of Christ’s new covenant sacrifice. Usually, the tension is resolved in favor of the warnings, negating assurance of salvation. (2) A number of interpreters who reject that Christians can apostatize argue that the warnings are describing false believers. Either the descriptions in 6:4-6 are too ambiguous, or they only describe conversion phenomenologically. However, this seems to discount the most straightforward reading of the texts.<sup>124</sup> (3) Others who also reject Christian apostasy as

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does not tell us what the author may be *implying* about a believer’s salvation through his discussion of these themes.

<sup>124</sup>Another view is that of R. L. Pratt Jr. (“Infant Baptism in the New Testament” in *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, ed. G. Strawbridge [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003], 156-74). He interprets Jer 31:31-34 (Heb 8:8-12) in light of the fact that Christ’s kingdom is inaugurated but not yet consummated. He makes three arguments: (1) Though Jeremiah claims the new covenant will not be broken, this is not the case prior to the consummation. For according to the warning in Heb 10:28-31, covenant breaking and judgment are possible under the new covenant. (2) In the new creation, God’s people will have the law written on their hearts (Jer 31:33; Heb 8:10), but presently this is only partially fulfilled. Hearts and minds have been renewed, but scriptural guidance and watchfulness are still necessary. (3) Prior to the consummation, the new covenant is not restricted to believers. According to Hebrews 10:28-31, there are some who, though not believers, are “sanctified”—that is, they have experienced an external sanctification through association, similar to OT consecration, but the new covenant has not been internalized (*ibid.*, 169-74). Cf. Gregg Strawbridge who argues that the warning passages of Hebrews (such as 10:29-31) serve as evidence that there are unregenerate members of the new covenant. Such passages “teach that there are people *set apart* in the new covenant (without the full blessings of salvation) who indeed fall away” (“The Polemics of Anabaptism from the Reformation Onward,” in *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism* 280-81, [emphasis in original]). Other paedobaptist interpreters who argue similarly regarding the new covenant promises and the warning passages in Hebrews include Jeffrey D. Neill (“The Newness of the New Covenant,” in *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, 153 n. 37) and Douglas Wilson (*To a Thousand Generations. Infant Baptism: Covenant Mercy for the People of God*



biblically grounded are just as convinced the warnings address believers. Some let the tension stand (e.g., Hagner). Others interpret the sin as less than apostasy (e.g., Gleason). However, Schreiner and Caneday's view that the warnings are a means of salvation offers an approach with which few interpreters have interacted. (4) While some scholars argue for assurance of salvation in Hebrews, this has not been the primary focus of their work, and, so, they have not engaged in a detailed defense. Thus, themes such as the perfection of believers and the new covenant promises remain mostly unexplored in relation to Christian assurance.<sup>125</sup>

I will proceed in the following chapters by first examining in chapter 2 the author's concept of perfection in the letter and its relationship to the new covenant promises. In chapter 3, I will consider the author's declaration of confidence in his

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[Moscow, ID: Canon, 1996], 82-83). For a critique of the covenantal argument for infant baptism—including a response to Pratt, Neill, and others, see Stephen J. Wellum, "Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants" in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 97-161, esp. 137-53.

<sup>125</sup>In his study of perfection in Hebrews, David Peterson claims that the perfection spoken of in Hebrews 10:14 indicates that Christ's sacrifice "has a permanent result for believers" (*Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the 'Epistle to the Hebrews'* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982], 149). Based on the following verses (10:15-18), it is clear that the focus of this perfecting is on the "accomplishment of the relationship with God foretold in the oracle of Jeremiah" (152). Peterson claims the author's use of perfection terminology stresses "the realized aspect of Christian salvation." This perfection "brings about a *definitive consecration of man to God in the present*" (153, [emphasis in original]). In light of this, when he discusses the problem of the warning passages, Peterson seems to conclude that there are false believers in the community's midst. The author's use of phrases like "each of you" (6:11) and other suggestions indicate that "the mighty confirmation of the gospel in their midst (2:4) had not touched each of them with the same conviction." Peterson views the "better things" in 6:9 as a reference back to the two kinds of soil (fruitful and useless) in 6:7-8 and writes, "[The author] must certainly classify them as a group in the first category. He provides no middle ground for the sluggish and disobedient. But surely the point of 6:4-8; 10:26-31 and 12:15-17 is that one who *appears* to be in the first category can drift into the second" (183, [emphasis added]). Cf. David G. Peterson, "The Situation of the 'Hebrews' (5:11-6:12)," *RTR* 35 (1976): 20-21.

Regarding the new covenant promises, Susanne Lehne's work (*The New Covenant in Hebrews*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 44 [Sheffield: JSOT, 1990]) is mostly unhelpful. She argues that the author has formulated a conception of Christian identity that is both independent and highly original (15). His presentation of Jesus as high priest of a new covenant is a "reformulation of the Christian story" for the sake of his audience's needs and the specific problems they are facing (17). Her chapter on the function of the new covenant concept in Hebrews (93-118) offers no discussion of the writing of the law upon the heart in 8:10 and 10:16 except for a brief comment that this transformation is brought about by Christ's blood (115).

readers, his use of God's promise to Abraham, and his discussion of the believer's "anchor of hope" in 6:9-20. Having considered these texts and themes and their impact on assurance in Hebrews, I will then, in chapter 4, offer an interpretation for understanding the warning passages. Finally, I will present a conclusion and synthesis in chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 2

### PERFECTION AND THE NEW COVENANT PROMISES

#### Introduction

The concept of “perfection” has attracted much attention and debate in studies of Hebrews.<sup>1</sup> The terminology found in the letter contributing to this concept includes the verb *τελειόω* (2:10; 5:9; 7:19, 28; 9:9; 10:1, 14; 11:40; 12:23), the adjective *τέλειος* (5:14; 9:11), the noun *τελειότης* (6:1), the noun *τελείωσις* (7:11), and the noun *τελειωτής* (12:2). The author speaks of both the perfection of Christ (2:10; 5:9; 7:28) and the perfection of believers (10:14; 11:40; 12:23). Through Christ’s perfection, he became the source of

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<sup>1</sup>See, e.g., Julius Kögel, “Der Begriff *τελειούω* im Hebräerbrief im Zusammenhang mit dem neutestamentlichen Sprachgebrauch” in *Theologische Studien für Martin Kahler*, ed. Friedrich Giesebrecht (Leipzig: Deichert, 1905), 37-68; Th. Häring, “Über einige Grundgedanken des Hebräerbriefes,” *Monatschrift für Pastoraltheologie* 17 (1920-21): 260-76; Eduard Riggenbach, “Der Begriff der *τελείωσις* im Hebräerbrief. Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach der Einwirkung der Mysterienreligion auf Sprache und Gedankenwelt des Neuen Testaments,” *Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift* 34 (1923): 184-95; Otto Michel, “Die Lehre von der christlichen Vollkommenheit nach der Anschauung des Hebräerbriefes,” *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 106 (1934-35): 333-35; Alvin A. Ahern, “The Perfect Concept in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *Journal of Bible and Religion* 14 (1946): 164-67; B. Rigaux, “Révélation des mystères et perfection à Qumrân et dans le Nouveau Testament,” *NTS* 4 (1957-58): 237-62; A. Wikgren, “Patterns of Perfection in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *NTS* 6 (1959-60): 159-67; G. B. Caird, “Just Men Made Perfect,” *London Quarterly and Holborn Review* 191 (1966): 89-98; Anthony A. Hoekema, “The Perfection of Christ in Hebrews,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 9 (1974): 31-37; L. K. K. Dey, *The Intermediary World and Patterns of Perfection in Philo and Hebrews* (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1975); W. J. Dumbrell, “The Spirits of Just Men Made Perfect,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 48 (1976): 154-59; Moises Silva, “Perfection and Eschatology in Hebrews,” *WTJ* 39 (1976): 60-71; Charles Carlston, “The Vocabulary of Perfection in Philo and Hebrews,” in *Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology: Essays in Honor of George E. Ladd*, ed. Robert A. Guelich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 133-6; David Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the ‘Epistle to the Hebrews’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Pamela Eisenbaum, “The Virtue of Suffering, the Necessity of Discipline, and the Pursuit of Perfection in Hebrews,” in *Asceticism and the New Testament*, ed. Leif E. Vaage and Vincent L. Wimbush (New York: Routledge, 1999), 331-53; Kevin B. McCrudden, *Solidarity Perfected: Beneficent Christology in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008); idem, “Christ’s Perfection in Hebrews: Divine Beneficence as an Exegetical Key to Hebrews 2:10,” *Biblical Research* 47 (2002): 40-62.

Note also the discussions of Hebrews in works examining perfection: R. Newton Flew, *The Idea of Christian Perfection: An Historical Study of the Christian Ideal for the Present Life* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 73-91; Paul Johannes Du Plessis, *TEΛΕΙΩΣΙΣ: The Idea of Perfection in the New Testament* (Kampen: Kok, 1959), 206-33; John R. Walters, *Perfection in New Testament Theology: Ethics and Eschatology in Relational Dynamic* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1995), 83-153.

eternal salvation for his followers (5:9). Through his once-and-for-all sacrifice, he has perfected his people for all time (10:14)—something unattainable under the old covenant (7:11, 19; 9:9; 10:1). In light of these verses in a letter in which the author goes to great lengths to explicate the superiority of Christ’s high priesthood and the saving power of his definitive offering for sin, the concept of perfection obviously plays a vital role. While it is difficult to single out any one theme in Hebrews as the most significant, perhaps Otto Michel is right in emphasizing the importance—even the centrality—of understanding Christian perfection for interpreting the letter.<sup>2</sup>

In the history of interpretation of Hebrews, a variety of possible (and mostly unsuccessful) conceptual backgrounds have been suggested as having influenced the letter, to include Gnosticism, *Merkabah* mysticism, Philo, and Qumran.<sup>3</sup> Discussions of perfection, likewise, have frequently focused on identifying the linguistic background to the use of the terminology in Hebrews. The *τελει-* word group appears widely in Greek literature (particularly in philosophical and religious contexts), in extrabiblical Hellenistic Jewish texts such as Philo and the Dead Sea Scrolls, and in the Septuagint.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of this attention given to the concept of perfection in Hebrews, though, one wonders if interpreters have actually underestimated its significance, in light of the author’s urgent warnings against apostasy. The present chapter examines the concept of perfection and specifically considers its relationship to the promises of the new covenant

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<sup>2</sup>Michel, “Die Lehre von der christlichen Vollkommenheit,” 333.

<sup>3</sup>See George H. Guthrie, “Hebrews in Its First-Century Contexts: Recent Research,” in *The Face of New Testament Studies*, ed. Scot McKnight and Grant R. Osborne (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 425-29. Note the analysis of the various background proposals and conclusions in L. D. Hurst, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: Its Background of Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>4</sup>See the surveys of the terms in Gerhard Delling, “*τελειόω*,” in *TDNT*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972); R. Schippers, “*τέλος*, et al.,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Hans Hübner, “*τελειόω*,” in *EDNT*, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993). Note also the discussions in Du Plessis, *TEAEIOS*, 36-121; Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 21-48; Harold Attridge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 83-87.

as prophesied in Jeremiah 31 (LXX Jer 38) that are quoted in Hebrews 8:8-12 and 10:16-17. Before addressing the perfection of believers, I will begin with a consideration of the perfection of Christ in Hebrews. A thorough examination of the linguistic background and all possible usages of the “perfection” terminology has been accomplished adequately elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, I will consider the most influential understandings of Christ’s perfection. I will then analyze several texts relevant to the study of the perfection of believers and the new covenant promises: 3:7-4:13; 7:11-28; 8:1-13; 9:1-10; 10:1-18, 22; 11:39-40; 12:18-24; and 13:20-21. In the process, I will examine the relationship between the perfection of believers and Christ’s perfection. I will especially focus on understanding the perfection of believers in relation to the new covenant—specifically, the need for the new covenant and the promises it entails.

### **The Perfection of Christ**

Given the prominence of the language of perfection in the Letter to the Hebrews, any analysis of the perfection of believers must include a prior discussion of the perfection of Christ. The most influential interpretations of Christ’s perfection include the moral, cultic, heavenly exaltation, and vocational views.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Moral View**

Arguably the most controversial understanding of perfection in Hebrews—specifically as it relates to the perfection of Christ—is the “moral” or “ethical” view. How can the one who is said to be sinless (4:15; 7:26; 9:14) become *morally* perfected? Some interpreters, indeed, argue that the author’s description of Jesus as “without sin”

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<sup>5</sup>See especially Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 21-48.

<sup>6</sup>It should be noted that some interpreters see more than one of the following understandings of perfection (i.e., moral, cultic, vocational, etc.) standing behind the usage in Hebrews. A good example of this is Du Plessis who—though cited as advocating the cultic view—actually sees several motifs present with respect to Jesus’ perfection, including cultic, vocational, and moral motifs (*TEAEIOS*, 212-17).

(4:15) does not imply his sinlessness throughout his life.<sup>7</sup> However, most who contend for a moral understanding of the perfection of Christ are thinking in terms of a moral development in his humanity—that is, Jesus grew and matured as a human person (cf. Luke 2:52).<sup>8</sup> Such a view need not be inconsistent with affirmations of Christ’s sinlessness.<sup>9</sup>

Many others have rejected this view—including several recent major commentators.<sup>10</sup> The perfection of Christ in Hebrews is not, they argue, a reference to moral development. As evidence, they note (1) the emphasis in Hebrews on the sinlessness of Jesus, (2) the use of the passive voice (Christ is *perfected*; it is God who performs the action), and (3) the need for consistency between Christ’s perfection and

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<sup>7</sup>Ronald Williamson (“Hebrews 4:15 and the Sinlessness of Jesus,” *Expository Times* 86 [1974]: 5) suggests that 4:15 may actually mean—not that Jesus was perpetually sinless—but that he achieved sinlessness “only after a struggle in which it is not inconceivable that he actually sinned.” Williamson follows George Wesley Buchanan (*To the Hebrews: Translation, Comment and Conclusions*, AB [New York: Doubleday, 1972], 130-31) who argues that Jesus’ sacrifice was offered for his own sins and for those of the people (7:27). Thus, 4:15 “may be understood in reference to the crucifixion alone, and not to Jesus’ entire life” (130). See the reply to Williamson and Buchanan in Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 188-90.

<sup>8</sup>According to Brooke Foss Westcott, “The conception of *τελειῶσαι* is that of bringing Christ to the full moral perfection of His humanity” (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. [New York: Macmillan and Co., 1920], 49-50). See also, e.g., Marcus Dods, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, in vol. 4 of *The Expositor’s Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d), 265; Hugh Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1964), 61; Albert Vanhoye, *Situation du Christ: Hébreux 1-2* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1969), 321; Hoekema, “The Perfection of Christ in Hebrews,” 35-36; Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 187.

<sup>9</sup>Hughes writes, “[Christ’s] perfection consisted in the retention of his integrity, in the face of every kind of assault on his integrity, and thereby the establishment of his integrity . . . . What was essential was that, starting, like Adam, with a pure human nature, he should succeed where Adam had failed. His sufferings both tested . . . and attested his perfection, free from failure and defeat (*Hebrews*, 187-88).

<sup>10</sup>See, e.g., Kögel, “Der Begriff *τελειοῦν*,” 41; 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), 139-40; Donald A. Hagner, *Hebrews*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1983), 50; Barnabas Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 45; John M. Scholer, *Proleptic Priests: Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 187-88; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 86; David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle “to the Hebrews”* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 198 n. 50; Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 124; Ben III Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Hebrews, James and Jude* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 150.

that of believers (there is no moral/ethical content to the perfection of believers in Hebrews; Christ perfects them).

Regarding the first objection, I have already noted above that an affirmation of moral development in Jesus' humanity need not necessarily conflict with an affirmation of his sinlessness. One must be careful to understand what an interpreter means by Christ's "moral" development. The other two objections, however, are weightier.

Arguing for a form of the moral development view, Pamela Eisenbaum tries to account for the use of the passive voice—that Jesus is perfected *by God*—by arguing that Jesus “*earned* his perfection.” He withstood tremendous turmoil and testing “to achieve perfection.”<sup>11</sup> Yet, while perfection results from Jesus' obedience through suffering (2:10; 5:9), it is still a status granted by God. Jesus suffers and obeys. God perfects. Whatever moral development Jesus underwent in submitting to the will of God, this development itself is not perfection but a *means* to perfection.<sup>12</sup> Regarding the perfection of believers (considered in detail below), it is sufficient for the moment to note that—consistent with Christ—believers are *perfected*. It is not something they attain but something accomplished by Christ, and it does not involve a process of moral improvement.<sup>13</sup>

David Peterson rightly observes that one must not minimize the development of Jesus' humanity and how his experiences prepared him for his high-priestly role. However, he questions interpreters who understand the *perfecting* of Christ essentially

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<sup>11</sup>Pamela Eisenbaum, “The Virtue of Suffering,” 344 (emphasis in original); see also 347.

<sup>12</sup>A similar problem arises when Eisenbaum discusses the perfection of believers, which is analogous to the perfection of Christ: “On the one hand believers are perfected vicariously through Christ's perfection . . . . On the other hand, the author of Hebrews implies that perfection requires a conscious effort, which will necessarily involve trials and tribulations on the part of the believer” (ibid., 344-45). But perfection in Hebrews is always something that happens to believers (10:14; 11:40; 12:23). It is something Christ has done for them, not something that they attain. Clearly, according to the author, believers must “run with endurance.” But their perfection is never said to be a *result* of their endurance.

<sup>13</sup>Though the author *does* see perfection as having implications for heart-obedience in the life of believers (10:14-16). See further below.

“in terms of his moral development.”<sup>14</sup> Jesus’ life of learning obedience and devoting himself to the will of God is emphasized in 5:7-9 and 10:5-10. But in these passages, “the focus is on the *death* of Christ as the means by which the salvation of men is achieved.” In 2:5-18 and 4:14-5:10, Peterson argues, “His incarnate experience and development as a man is presented . . . particularly as a vital preparation and qualification for his redemptive role.” Thus, “to give primary emphasis to the perfecting of Christ as *man*, rather than as Saviour, is to obscure the real focus of our writer in favour of a subsidiary theme.”<sup>15</sup>

### Cultic View

Another common understanding of Christ’s perfection is the “cultic” view, which derives from a special usage in the LXX. In seven passages in the Pentateuch, the LXX renders the Hebrew phrase מלא היד, “to fill the hands,” used in connection with the installation of the Levitical priests, as τελειοῦν τὰς χεῖρας (Exod 29:9, 29, 33, 35; Lev 8:33; 16:32; Num 3:3).<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the phrase is translated in Leviticus 21:10 with the participle (τετελειωμένος) alone and without τὰς χεῖρας. At other times, both inside and outside the Pentateuch, the translators render the Hebrew with the more literal expressions ἐμπιπλάναι τὰς χεῖρας and πληροῦν τὰς χεῖρας.<sup>17</sup> Thus, some argue, the verb τελειόω alone has acquired a technical cultic usage (“to consecrate”) that has been employed in Hebrews.<sup>18</sup> However, it seems unlikely that Leviticus 21:10 alone could

<sup>14</sup>Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 100.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 101 (emphasis in original).

<sup>16</sup>In addition, the translators have added ὁ τετελειωμένος τὰς χεῖρας in Lev 4:5, where the MT has only הַכֹּהֵן הַשֵּׂשִׁי הַיְחָד.

<sup>17</sup>For references, see Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 202 n. 42.

<sup>18</sup>For advocates of this view, see, e.g., Ceslas Spicq, *L’Épître aux Hébreux* (Paris: Gabalda, 1953), 2:221; Du Plessis, *TEAEIOS*, 212-14; Dellings, “τελειόω,” 82; Silva, “Perfection and Eschatology in Hebrews,” 61-62; William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1991), 57; Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 96.



have this kind of influence on the author of Hebrews, or that the readers would have understood the usage of the verb in light of this occurrence in the LXX.<sup>19</sup>

### Heavenly Exaltation View

Some have argued that Christ's perfection in Hebrews is to be equated with his glorification or heavenly exaltation. For example, according to Ernst Käsemann, Christ's experience of *τελειωθείς* refers to his reaching a "renewed, qualitative alteration of existence" after his earthly humiliation. "That one is made complete who is returned to heaven, just as he comes from heaven."<sup>20</sup> Käsemann's overall understanding of Hebrews, of course, is grounded in the Gnostic myth of the "redeemed Redeemer."<sup>21</sup> Yet others have advocated the heavenly exaltation view apart from any underlying Gnostic tradition. David A. deSilva sees the perfecting of Christ as signifying "chiefly his arrival at his heavenly destiny,"<sup>22</sup> and John M. Scholer understands his perfection "as his 'glorification' or 'entry' into the heavenly holy of holies."<sup>23</sup> However, though Christ's perfection includes his heavenly exaltation, it is much more than this. I will interact

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<sup>19</sup>Interpreters arguing against the cultic view include William R. G. Loader, *Sohn und Hoherpriester: Eine traditions-geschichtliche Untersuchung zur Christologie des Hebräerbriefes* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981), 40-47; Scholer, *Proleptic Priests*, 188-93; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 85; Koester, *Hebrews*, 123 n. 256. See especially the detailed discussion in Peterson, (*Hebrews and Perfection*, 26-30), who writes, "[S]uch an obscure and singular example can scarcely indicate the development of a significant new linguistic usage" (29). The first to advance the cultic interpretation appears to be Th. Häring, who noted the use of *τελεῖν* for priestly consecration in the Mystery religions ("Über einige Grundgedanken des Hebräerbriefes," 260-76). Though he acknowledges that *τελειοῦν* is not similarly used in extra-biblical literature, he believes the latter is used as a synonym for the former in the LXX (266-67).

<sup>20</sup>Käsemann, *Wandering People of God*, 139-40.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 87-96, 174-82. Käsemann writes, "[B]oth the drafting of the entire theme and the Christology of the letter were possible only on soil made ready by Gnosticism (174).

<sup>22</sup>DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 199. With regard to the "vocational" view of perfection to be discussed below, deSilva does not rule out that "vocational issues" are present, since the path Jesus takes towards his heavenly destiny certainly fits him for the ministry he performs there. However, he denies that such vocational issues are necessarily attached to the term "to perfect" (ibid., 198-99).

<sup>23</sup>Scholer, *Proleptic Priests*, 196.

further with this view below when I consider Scholer’s and deSilva’s objections to the “vocational” view and their exegetical support for their own position.<sup>24</sup>

### **Vocational View**

In his important work, *Hebrews and Perfection*, David Peterson argues for a “vocational” understanding of Christ’s perfection in Hebrews. In the background literature (as well as in the NT), he finds that the “formal” use of the verb *τελειόω* predominates. That is, it means to “make perfect, complete, accomplish, fulfill”—with the material sense in which something is made perfect or complete (i.e., moral, cultic, physical, etc.) being determined by the context.<sup>25</sup> Peterson takes this as his method of approach to interpreting the usage in Hebrews: “Only the context in general and the object of the verb in particular can indicate the particular sense on each occasion.”<sup>26</sup> Upon examining the context of Christ’s perfection in Hebrews, Peterson concludes that a vocational reading of *τελειόω* best accounts for the author’s presentation. Thus, the verb may be rendered “to qualify” or “to make completely adequate.”<sup>27</sup> The perfecting of

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<sup>24</sup>Charles Carlston is another who views Jesus’ perfection as being “translated into the heavenly realm” (“The Vocabulary of Perfection in Philo and Hebrews,” 146). Acknowledging that the meaning of *τελειόω* in all its occurrences in Hebrews is “not immediately clear,” he suggests we should “assume . . . that the one clear passage (12:23) provides the key to the others” (ibid.). However, Carlston makes no attempt to exegete 12:23. Apparently, describing it as “clear” is argument enough. He merely assumes this meaning and claims all the other texts “may be fitted easily into the same framework.” However, the texts do not fit as easily as he claims, as the following chapter seeks to demonstrate. Carlston’s “rapid survey of the vocabulary of perfection in Hebrews” (147), as he calls it, is insufficient.

<sup>25</sup>Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 46. This formal understanding of the verb was originally argued by Kögel (“Der Begriff *τελειοῦν*,” 37-68). Arguing similarly is Attridge who writes, “The verb *τελειοῦν* is factitive, meaning to make something complete, whole, or adequate. The material sense in which something is *τέλειος* depends on context” (*Hebrews*, 83-84). See also A. B. Davidson, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1882; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1950), 207; Scholer, *Proleptic Priests*, 190-91.

<sup>26</sup>Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 47.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 73. Peterson finds this vocational sense for *τελειόω* in literature prior to Hebrews. See 22-23; also 66 n. 114. Commentators before and after Peterson have interpreted Christ’s perfection vocationally—in terms of being “qualified,” “made completely adequate,” “fit,” or “equipped” for his office/role. See, e.g., Davidson, *Hebrews*, 208; William Manson, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1951), 101, 110; James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ICC (New York: Scriber, 1924), 31-32; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*,

Christ is a process in which he is qualified for his high priestly ministry. “That perfecting involved a whole sequence of events: his proving in suffering, his redemptive death to fulfil the divine requirements for the perfect expiation of sins and his exaltation to glory and honor.”<sup>28</sup> A brief consideration of the three relevant passages in Hebrews will demonstrate the strength of Peterson’s thesis.

**Hebrews 2:5-18.** In 2:5-18 the author of Hebrews discusses the humiliation of the Son so that he might become a high priest, in order to save his people. Note the statements of purpose throughout. We see that Jesus fulfills Psalm 8, “being made a little lower than the angels,” and the purpose of his humiliation is “so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” (2:9).<sup>29</sup> Jesus partook of humanity “so that through death he might destroy the one who had the power of death” and free those subject to slavery (2:14-15). He became like his brothers in all things, “so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest . . . to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (2:17). To help sinful humanity, then, the Son had to experience being human and being subject to human suffering. Therefore, it was “fitting” for God, in bringing many sons to glory, “to perfect the founder of their salvation through sufferings” (2:10). It is as the ἀρχηγὸν τῆς σωτηρίας αὐτῶν (“the founder of their salvation”) that Jesus is perfected.<sup>30</sup>

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rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 132; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 86; Koester, *Hebrews*, 124; Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 107.

<sup>28</sup>Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 73.

<sup>29</sup>On the purpose clause of v. 9, see Bruce, *Hebrews*, 76; Paul Ellingworth, *Commentary on Hebrews*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 155; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 76; Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 54-55.

<sup>30</sup>Much debate surrounds the meaning of ἀρχηγός in 2:10 (cf. 12:2). Many commentators opt for the meaning “leader” or “pioneer” because of its association in the verse with the participle ἀγαγόντα (“leading”) and its use in the LXX to translate words for leadership. See, e.g., the discussions in Westcott, *Hebrews*, 49; Moffatt, *Hebrews*, 31; Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, 12<sup>th</sup> ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 144; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 160-61. Note also the focused studies of the word in Paul-Gerhard Müller, *ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΡΧΗΓΟΣ: Der religionsgeschichtliche und theologische Hintergrund einer neutestamentlichen Christusprädikation* (Bern: Lang, 1973); George Johnston, “Christ as Archegos,” *NTS* 27 (1981): 381-85. For the translation “champion,” see Lane *Hebrews 1-8*, 56-57, who follows W. L. Knox, “The Divine Hero Christology of the New Testament,” *Harvard Theological Review*

His solidarity with humanity and experience of sufferings,<sup>31</sup> culminating in his unique death, has qualified him—made him fit—to be the one to bring them salvation. That he was perfected “through sufferings” indicates a process. Moreover, it is “because of the suffering of death” that he has been “crowned with glory and honor,” referring to his ascension and eternal enthronement. Since his ability to save is tied to the fact that he “always lives to make intercession” for his people (7:25), the Son’s perfection must also include his exaltation.<sup>32</sup>

**Hebrews 5:1-10.** In 5:1-10, the author begins to describe the high priesthood of Jesus. The discussion is interrupted by the warning and exhortation of 5:11-6:20, before being taken up again in 7:1-28. High priests do not apply for their office, but are “appointed” by God (5:1). Just as the Levitical high priests did not take this honor upon themselves, so also Christ did not glorify himself to become a high priest (5:4-5). Rather, according to the author, in Psalm 110 God proclaimed Jesus to be a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (5:6). In addition, a high priest is able “to deal gently” (μετριοπαθεῖν)<sup>33</sup> with the ignorant and wayward since he himself is also subject to weakness (5:2). The author has already mentioned Christ’s ability to sympathize with his

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41 (1948): 229-49.

It seems best, though, to see the word in Hebrews as communicating the concepts of both “leader” and “originator/founder” (with Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 57-58). Jesus fulfills Psalm 8 for humanity, being “crowned with glory and honor” (2:9), and he accomplishes God’s plan, “leading many sons to glory” (2:10). Having suffered in temptation, “he is able to help those who are tempted” (2:18). He is rightly their “leader” or “pioneer”—their “forerunner” who leads the way (6:20). But he is the ἀρχηγός “of their salvation.” It is the salvation of the sons that he accomplishes, not his own. It is their sins for which he makes propitiation (2:17). He tasted death “for all” (2:9) to destroy the devil’s power and to set them free (2:14-15). He is the “source of eternal salvation” for those who obey him (5:9). Thus, Jesus is no mere “leader” or “pioneer” in bringing about salvation from sin, as if it were a road he himself had to travel. He is the “originator” or “founder” of their salvation.

<sup>31</sup>Peterson rightly understands “sufferings” in 2:10 to include “the whole experience of suffering associated with and leading up to the death of Jesus” (*Hebrews and Perfection*, 69).

<sup>32</sup>See *ibid.*, 67. On Christ’s perfection in 2:10, see *ibid.*, 66-73.

<sup>33</sup>The verb implies a sense of moderated emotion, particularly anger (Attridge, *Hebrews*, 143-44). See also Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 83; Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 116-17; Koester, *Hebrews*, 286.

people’s weakness in light of the temptations he experienced (4:15). He has affirmed that Christ was perfected through sufferings and temptations (2:10, 17), which involved taking on the limitations of humanity (2:14, 17), so that he might help those who are tempted (2:17). Now, in 5:7-8, stress is again laid on Christ’s suffering in the weakness of his humanity (“in the days of his flesh,” v. 7). Of course, since Christ is without sin (4:15) and undefiled (7:26), he has no need to offer sacrifice for himself (7:27)—unlike the earthly high priests (5:3). “Nevertheless,” Peterson writes, “his involvement in human affairs . . . was an involvement with human weakness, providing him with the necessary qualification for effective priesthood.”<sup>34</sup> His human experience enables him to deal gently with his people.

Verses 7-8 have offered commentators several difficult questions for debate. However, it is not necessary to reach unanimity on all of these topics—such as whether 5:7 is an allusion to Gethsemane<sup>35</sup>—to understand how Christ was “made perfect” (τελειωθείς) in 5:9. Although rendered as several sentences in most translations, verses 7-10 is a lengthy relative clause whose antecedent is “Christ” in verse 5. The main verbs, ἔμαθεν and ἐγένετο, are modified by several participles: προσενέγκας, εἰσακουσθείς, and ὢν modifying the former and τελειωθείς and προσαγορευθείς modifying the latter. The author argues that “although he was [ὢν] a Son”—reminding the readers of God’s declaration

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<sup>34</sup>Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 83.

<sup>35</sup>Seeing 5:7 as an allusion to Gethsemane is much debated. Some argue that “the days of his flesh” implies that the verse be taken more broadly to refer to Jesus incarnate experience. Moreover, the Gospels do not specifically mention “loud cries and tears,” nor can it be said that Jesus’ “let this cup pass” prayer “was heard.” While there are difficulties, a reference to Jesus’ testing at Gethsemane seems most likely. See the discussion in *ibid.*, 86-94. For the suggestion that 5:7-8 refers not to Gethsemane but to Jesus’ sufferings at Golgotha, see Christopher Richardson, “The Passion: Reconsidering Hebrews 5.7-8” in *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in its Ancient Contexts*, ed. Richard Bauckham, et al. (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 51-67.

On other debated exegetical questions (In what sense were Christ’s prayers “heard”? What exactly do the phrases ἐκ θανάτου and ἀπὸ τῆς εὐλαβείας mean?) that do not ultimately affect the interpretation of Christ’s perfection, see esp. Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 86-96; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 147-54; Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 119-22; Koester, *Hebrews*, 288-91; Bruce L. McCormack, “‘With Loud Cries and Tears’: The Humanity of the Son in the Epistle to the Hebrews” in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham, et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 64-66.

from Psalm 110 (5:5; cf. 1:2, 5-9) and Christ’s exalted status—Christ “learned” (ἐμαθεν) obedience from what he suffered (v. 8).<sup>36</sup> This learning through suffering involved offering (προσενέγκας) “prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death” (v. 7). Of course, Jesus was always obedient to God and lived in conformity to his will, as Hebrews makes clear (10:5-10). But, it was through his human sufferings that he came to learn and fully appreciate, in practice, what obedience to God involved.<sup>37</sup>

To understand how Christ “learned from what he suffered,” both Bruce and Peterson point to the OT precedent of the suffering of a mediator, expressed in Isa 50:4-9.<sup>38</sup> The Suffering Servant accepts the ridicule and affliction he endures as inseparable from obedience to God and the completion of his ministry: “The Lord has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I did not turn back. I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard. I did not hide my face from disgrace and spitting” (Isa 50:5). Jesus’ sufferings were “the necessary price of obedience” and “the very means by which he fulfilled the will of God.”<sup>39</sup> Though in anguish over his impending death (Heb 5:7), Jesus willingly submits to his Father’s plan “in order to become the unique

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<sup>36</sup>DeSilva believes taking the concessive participle phrase “although he was a son” with what follows (“he learned obedience”) is too difficult, because the author is at pains in 12:5-11 to stress that experiencing hardship and being God’s child are not contradictory. He prefers to take the clause with what precedes, clarifying the reason Jesus’ prayer was heard. That is, Jesus was heard—not due to his filial relationship to God—but due to his own piety (*Perseverance in Gratitude*, 192-93). While it seems deSilva’s reading is possible, I find it unlikely. After all, the reader of the letter has not yet reached the discussion in 12:5-11. Thus, any potential concerns they may have in reconciling suffering and their status as God’s children have not yet been clearly addressed. DeSilva is concerned that advocates of the other view must read the clause as pointing to the unique quality of *this* Son: “*even so great a Son* learned obedience.” If this were the author’s intention, deSilva believes he could have expressed it more clearly (ibid., 193). Yet, it seems that it is precisely against the backdrop of the affirmation of sonship uttered by God in Psalm 110 and quoted by the author *in the immediate context* (5:5) that this concessive statement is made. That is, “although he was a son—the one to whom I just said God uniquely declared, ‘You are my Son’—he learned obedience.”

<sup>37</sup>Bruce, *Hebrews*, 131; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 153.

<sup>38</sup>Bruce, *Hebrews*, 131; Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 94.

<sup>39</sup>Bruce, *Hebrews*, 131.

source of eternal salvation” (5:9).<sup>40</sup> Thus, the result of Jesus’ suffering and learned obedience (vv. 7-8) is τελειωθείς—perfection (v. 9). “And having been made perfect” (causal participle), “he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” (v. 9). Christ’s perfection is, therefore, vocational; his obedient suffering *qualified* him to serve as the one to bring salvation to his people.

**Hebrews 7:26-28.** I will deal with 7:11-25 in more detail below in connection with the perfection of believers and the failure of the law to bring about perfection (7:11, 19). In 7:28 the author concludes his exposition of Christ’s Melchizedekian high priesthood (7:1-28). In light of his reflections on Genesis 14:18-20, he establishes that Melchizedek was greater than Levi (7:1-10) and then demonstrates, in light of Ps 110:4, that Christ’s Melchizedekian priesthood accomplished what the Levitical priesthood could not (7:11-28). The author presents two contrasts in 7:28.<sup>41</sup> The first contrast is between the law, which appointed men as priests, and the word of the oath, which appoints a Son—both of which have been expounded in the preceding context. The second contrast is between the weakness of the men appointed as high priests and the perfection of the Son, who has been “made perfect forever” (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τετελειωμένον).

In the two previous passages that mention Christ’s perfection (2:5-18; 5:1-10), the author has emphasized that Jesus himself experienced fully the weakness of humanity—though without sin (4:15; 7:26)—thus enabling him to sympathize with our weakness (4:15). Now, in 7:28, the emphasis is on his perfection. Clearly, this has reference to his heavenly exaltation, for verse 26 explicitly says that he is “exalted above the heavens.” But, it is more than that. The author argues that it is “fitting” that we have such a high priest, who is “holy, innocent, and unstained” (v. 26). Peterson rightly notes

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<sup>40</sup>Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 94.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 117.

that these terms are not “static moral qualities,” but—understood in light of earlier passages—descriptions of “one who remained obedient to God through great testing.”<sup>42</sup> Having perfectly withstood temptation and learned obedience, he accomplished that which resulted in his exaltation: “he offered up himself [for sins]” (v. 27). By the perfecting of Christ, then, the author means “*his proving in temptation, his death as a sacrifice for sins and his heavenly exaltation.*”<sup>43</sup> He is, thus, qualified to “save completely/eternally those who approach God through him” (v. 25).

**Objections to the Vocational View.** The vocational understanding of Christ’s perfection is not, however, without its detractors. Two recent interpreters in particular critique this view, while defending the view that Christ’s perfection refers to his entrance into the heavenly realm. Scholer faults Peterson for viewing Jesus “as incrementally or progressively qualifying himself for that which he did not already possess, i.e. the high priesthood . . . . [T]his presumes that Jesus was not a high priest already on earth.”<sup>44</sup> Scholer contends that the use of *προσφέρειν* in 5:7 in particular shows that Jesus was already performing priestly functions on earth. His “offering” of loud cries and tears is parallel to the “offering” (*προσφέρειν*) made by the old covenant high priest in 5:1.<sup>45</sup> For Scholer, Christ’s perfection is his “glorification” or his “entry” into the heavenly holy of holies. This is seen in the parallel between 2:9 and 2:10. In 2:10 Jesus’ perfection “appears as the direct consequence of his suffering and death.” In 2:9 Jesus’ being “crowned with glory and honor” corresponds to his being made perfect (2:10), and the

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 116.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 118 (emphasis in original).

<sup>44</sup>Scholer, *Proleptic Priests*, 193-94.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 86-87, 194.



context indicates that this “crowning” refers to “entering into the heavenly holy of holies, that is, the place of divine glory to which Jesus was promoted after his death.”<sup>46</sup>

DeSilva similarly sees a parallel between Jesus’ crowning with glory and honor (2:9) and his perfection after sufferings (2:10). Perfection is, thus, a parallel expression for his “exaltation after death.” Jesus passed “through sufferings” on his way to his exaltation. DeSilva takes the preposition *διὰ* in 2:10 (*διὰ παθημάτων*) “in its spatial sense ‘by way of’ rather than its instrumental sense ‘by means of’.” This sense is reinforced, he argues, by the context, “which speaks of a pioneer leading others along a path to a destination—the sense of ‘motion’ that tends to favor a spatial reading of *διὰ*.”<sup>47</sup> DeSilva rejects an instrumental reading of the phrase, arguing that “God may have used sufferings to develop certain qualities in Jesus without using sufferings to ‘perfect’ him per se . . . . Vocational issues are indeed present, but they are not necessarily attached to the term ‘to perfect.’”<sup>48</sup> For both Scholer and deSilva, 5:9 and 7:28 are read in a manner consistent with 2:10.

I will consider these two arguments in turn. Although a number of interpreters, like Scholer, view Christ’s “offering” of prayers and supplications (5:7) as parallel to the offerings made by the Levitical high priest (5:1, 3)—and thus “priestly”<sup>49</sup>—it is unlikely that *προσφέρω* should be understood in this technical sense here for several reasons. (1) When Hebrews repeatedly uses *προσφέρω* to speak of Christ’s high priestly act of offering, he himself is the object of the verb (9:14, 25, 28; 10:12). Given the letter’s great stress on *this* as the non-repeatable, once-for-all, all-sufficient sacrifice, it would seem

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 195-96.

<sup>47</sup>DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 197.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 198.

<sup>49</sup>E.g., Albert Vanhoye, “L’oblation sacerdotale du Christ dans l’épître aux Hébreux,” *Didaskalia* 14 (1984): 13-14; Lane, *Hebrews* 1-8, 119; Koester, *Hebrews*, 298-99; Johnson, *Hebrews*, 145-46; R. T. France, *Hebrews*, in vol. 13 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 78.

odd for the author also to speak of *other* high-priestly offerings made by Christ. (2) Jesus offers the “prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears” (5:7) on his own behalf. Yet, unlike the high priest who offers sacrifices for his own sins (5:3; 7:27), Jesus is without sin (4:16). So, viewing his “offering” in 5:7 as priestly would seem to conflict with the fact that Jesus has no need to make priestly offerings for himself.<sup>50</sup> (3) Josephus similarly uses προσφέρω to say that he “offered up a silent prayer to God” (*J.W.* 3.8.3 § 353).<sup>51</sup> Thus, a priestly reading of this idiom is not required.<sup>52</sup>

Regarding 2:9-10, Scholer and deSilva make too much of what they believe to be parallel expressions. The *διά παθημάτων* in 2:10 is not simply synonymous with the *διά τὸ πάθημα τοῦ θανάτου* in 2:9. Peterson rightly observes, “The use of *διά* with the accusative in verse 9 stresses that the suffering of death was the *ground* of Christ’s exaltation, whereas the genitive with the preposition in verse 10 stresses that suffering was something *through* which Christ had to pass.” Christ’s suffering in verse 10 “was *part of the process by which he was perfected*.”<sup>53</sup> DeSilva’s attempt to understand *διά* in verse 10 in a spatial sense (“by way of”) rather than an instrumental sense (“by means of”) is unlikely. When *διά* is used as a “marker of extension through an area or object,” it

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<sup>50</sup>While some (such as Buchanan, *Hebrews*, 130; Williamson, “Hebrews 4:15 and the Sinlessness of Jesus,” 6) interpret 7:27 as indicating that Christ *did* sacrifice for his own sins, this is not the route followed by Scholer, nor the view of most modern commentators.

<sup>51</sup>Cited in Attridge, *Hebrews*, 149. Lane (*Hebrews 1-8*, 119) also cites *T. Levi* 3:8 and *T. Gad* 7:2 as using the verb “in connection with prayer and praise.”

<sup>52</sup>Those rejecting a priestly understanding of Jesus in 5:7 include Moffatt, *Hebrews*, 64-65; Bruce, *Hebrews*, 126 n. 43; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 149. Scholer insists that Hebrews presents Jesus functioning as a high priest even before his death on the cross (*Proleptic Priests*, 85-87). However, Peterson’s assessment seems more sober: “If we ask, then, *when* Christ became high priest, we have to admit that our author gives us no clearcut answers” (*Hebrews and Perfection*, 193). He approvingly quotes (194) Davidson who writes, “The Son exhibited and authenticated Himself as a priest in the performance of His priestly functions” (*Hebrews*, 151). Peterson concludes, “Christ was consecrated to his priesthood in the very act of offering himself as a sacrifice” (*Hebrews and Perfection*, 195). Thus, Jesus’ earthly life of obedience should not be viewed as priestly ministry. “The obedience is viewed as a preparation for the priesthood, not as a priestly ministry in itself” (Geerhardus Vos, “The Priesthood of Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *Princeton Theological Review* 5 [1907]: 599).

<sup>53</sup>Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 195 (emphasis in original).

occurs with verbs that include motion.<sup>54</sup> DeSilva believes this sense of *διά* is justified in 2:10 by the context, “which speaks of a pioneer leading others along a path to a destination—the sense of ‘motion’ that tends to favor a spatial reading of *διά*.”<sup>55</sup> But even if deSilva’s exegesis of the participle *ἀγαγόντα* is accepted (that it describes Christ’s action instead of God’s),<sup>56</sup> *διὰ παθημάτων* in 2:10 still modifies *τελειῶσαι* (“to perfect”)—not *ἀγαγόντα*. To accept a spatial reading of *διά*, the motion must be implied by the verb with which the preposition occurs. While a “sense of motion” in the context may influence how one interprets *τελειῶω*,<sup>57</sup> the verb itself does not convey a sense of motion.

Another criticism of the vocational view comes from Kevin B. McCrudden in his work on Christ’s perfection.<sup>58</sup> After evaluating the common views, McCrudden acknowledges Peterson’s proposal as a “more promising interpretation” than the others and affirms that it “has a great deal to commend it.” However, since the vocational view requires “some degree or notion of the necessity for Christ’s development, if only in the sense of Christ having to prove himself,” McCrudden believes it is open to the same criticism he leveled against the “moral/ethical model.”<sup>59</sup> He asks, “How can a notion of development, whether conceived along moral or vocational lines, rest harmoniously alongside those passages in the epistle that emphasize such qualities as Christ’s

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<sup>54</sup>See BDAG, s.v. “*διά*,” A.1.a and b.

<sup>55</sup>DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 197 n. 45.

<sup>56</sup>See *ibid.*, 112 n. 56. He takes it as an adverbial participle, speaking of attendant circumstance, modifying *ἀρχηγόν*.

<sup>57</sup>See, e.g., Ellingworth who argues concerning the meaning of *τελειῶσαι* in 2:10 that “the telic aspect [bringing something to its goal] is suggested by expressions implying movement (*ἀγαγόντα*, *ἀρχηγόν*)” (*Hebrews*, 162).

<sup>58</sup>See McCrudden, *Solidarity Perfected*, 20-24.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 20, 21.

sinlessness (Heb 4:15) or ‘undefiled’ character (Heb 7:26)?”<sup>60</sup> Yet, it is difficult to feel the force of McCrudden’s objection. Christ was qualified for his role as high priest through sharing in human weakness, learning obedience, and suffering unto death on behalf of sinners. How exactly does this process of Christ proving himself and being qualified as a perfect savior challenge the author’s contention that he was, at the same time, sinless and undefiled? In his criticism of the “moral/ethical” view,<sup>61</sup> McCrudden also critiques the view described above—that an affirmation of moral development in Jesus’ humanity (maturity as a human person) need not necessarily conflict with an affirmation of his sinlessness. Thus, he appears to understand *any* notion of development as incompatible with Hebrews 4:15 and 7:28. Yet, I maintain (along with the interpreters cited above) that there is no real contradiction between these concepts.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 18-20.

<sup>62</sup>McCrudden claims the “real value and insight of Peterson’s vocational model” lies in its applicability—not to Jesus—but “to the recipient of the letter” (ibid., 21). This is because Heb 12:7-11 shows that “the sufferings of the faithful are meant to serve as the discipline that trains or qualifies them for participation in the divine holiness” (22). The perfection of believers is, of course, the focus of the remainder of this chapter. In anticipation of my exegesis, though, I contend that McCrudden is wrong in seeing the divine discipline of believers as “qualifying” them, in the sense of their “perfection.” Believers are perfected (vocationally)—not through receiving God’s discipline—but through Christ’s sacrificial offering for their sins to make them worshippers (10:14). McCrudden offers no discussion of the perfection of believers in his study. His own proposal for Christ’s perfection is that it “functions as a Christological grammar for reflecting upon the character of Christ,” which is characterized by “divine beneficence and *philanthropia*” (139). “Christ’s perfection,” he contends, “is ultimately revelatory . . . of Christ’s character as a loving and beneficent savior for his people” (68). McCrudden considers the use of *τελειῶν* in the nonliterary papyri in official, public documents to denote the “execution” of a contract or payment—a concept he describes as “definitive attestation” (see 26-37). He believes Hebrews has adopted this technical usage. The papyri use the term to reveal legal content; Hebrews uses it to reveal theological content about Christ’s character (see 37-44). His solidarity and intimacy with the faithful attests to his beneficent character. “Perfection . . . comments upon the extent of Christ’s participation in the human sphere” (114). While I commend McCrudden’s consideration of *τελειῶν* in the nonliterary papyri, I do not find his proposal for Christ’s perfection satisfying for at least the following reasons. First, McCrudden himself acknowledges the difficulty in applying such a usage to Christ: “[I]t might be argued that there exists a certain implausibility in the claim that the author of Hebrews would apply a technical term typically reserved for legal or business transactions to the person of Christ” (37). The examples he cites refer to the execution of *documents*. In only one instance does *τελειῶν* apply to a person—speaking of the “registration” of a slave. He provides no examples in which it is used as an attestation of someone’s *character*. Second, as noted above, McCrudden does not address the perfection of believers in Hebrews. As I will argue, though the perfection of Christ and the perfection of believers are not identical, they are analogous in Hebrews. But it is difficult to see how such perfection in the sense of a revelatory attestation

The vocational understanding of Christ's perfection, then, seems to account best for the author's presentation. Jesus has been made perfect: he has been qualified, made perfectly adequate, to serve as the "founder of their salvation," the "source of eternal salvation," and "a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." But what relationship does Christ's perfection have to the perfection of believers in Hebrews? Given the importance of these concepts in the letter, one would expect that they would be related in some way.<sup>63</sup> It remains, though, to determine the exact similarities and differences. I will return to this question in the course of the next section.

### **The Perfection of Believers**

The author speaks of the perfection of believers in 10:14, 11:40, and 12:23. The first text is situated in an important passage that relates the perfecting of believers to the promises of the new covenant (10:14-17). However, to comprehend fully the significance of the perfection of the new covenant members, it is necessary to understand why a new covenant and its concomitant perfection were needed in the first place. Therefore, before examining the above passages, I will proceed through the letter and consider texts that speak of the inadequacies of the old covenant. It is well known that the great central section of the letter (7:1-10:18) demonstrates the old covenant's inferiority. Therefore, it will be necessary to examine what the author says here regarding the inability of the old covenant system to bring about perfection (7:11, 19; 9:9; 10:1) and the need for a new covenant (8:1ff.). Intertwined with this, I will begin to unpack what it means for believers to be perfected as the author addresses the concept. Consideration of these relevant texts is preceded, though, by a passage that implicitly highlights the need for a new covenant.

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of one's character could pertain to believers.

<sup>63</sup>So Wikgren, "Patterns of Perfection," 161; Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 126; deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 197.

### Hebrews 3:7–4:13

Though Hebrews 3:7-4:13 is not usually discussed in connection with perfection,<sup>64</sup> nevertheless, it is very important to an assessment of the need for a new covenant. As George Caird has shown, this is one of several passages in Hebrews in which an OT text itself confesses the “inadequacy of the old order.”<sup>65</sup> Similar to Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:1-13, the author points to OT Israel and warns his readers to avoid their example. Hebrews accomplishes this, though, by meditating on Psalm 95 which itself recalls the narrative of Israel’s rebellion at Kadesh in the wilderness and takes “the significant step of assuming that what happened in the wilderness can serve as a model for a later generation.”<sup>66</sup>

Usually considered the second “warning passage” of the letter, Hebrews 3:7-4:13 highlights the deficiencies in the old covenant members themselves—and provides a key element as to why perfection is necessary. The *διό* in 3:7 (“therefore”) introducing

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<sup>64</sup>For example, in his exhaustive study, Peterson does not address 3:7-4:13 with respect to the perfection of believers, even though he relates perfection and the new covenant (see *Hebrews and Perfection*, 126-67). As will be seen, 3:7-4:13 anticipates the need for the new covenant and perfection.

<sup>65</sup>George B. Caird, “The Exegetical Method of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *Canadian Journal of Theology* 5 (1959): 47. As Guthrie affirms, “There is perhaps no topic more important to Hebrews’s interpretation than the book’s use of the OT” (“Hebrews in Its First-Century Contexts,” 430). No NT document cites the OT more extensively than Hebrews (see George H. Guthrie, “Old Testament in Hebrews,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997], 841-42). Significant works addressing the use of the OT in Hebrews include Caird, “The Exegetical Method of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” 44-51; Kenneth J. Thomas, “The Old Testament Citations in Hebrews,” *NTS* 11 (1964-65): 303-25; J. C. McCullough, “The Old Testament Quotations in Hebrews,” *NTS* 26 (1979-80): 363-79; Ronald E. Clements, “The Use of the Old Testament in Hebrews,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 28 (1985): 36-45; A.T. Hanson, “Hebrews,” in *It is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture. Essays in Honor of Barnabas Lindars*, ed. D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 292-302; R. T. France, “The Writer of Hebrews as a Biblical Expositor,” *TynBul* 47 (1996): 245-76; Radu Gheorghita, *The Role of the Septuagint in Hebrews: An Investigation of Its Influence with Special Consideration to the Use of Hab 2:3-4 in Heb 10:37-38*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 160 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); George H. Guthrie, “Hebrews,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 919-95.

<sup>66</sup>France, “The Writer of Hebrews as a Biblical Expositor,” 269. Bruce argues that a primitive Christian typological interpretation of Christ’s redemptive work as a “new Exodus,” to which the NT writings bear witness, was familiar to and used by Hebrews here (*Hebrews*, 96-97).

the psalm’s opening warning carries forward the conditional clause in 3:6.<sup>67</sup> But it also carries forward the author’s warning to his readers in 3:12.<sup>68</sup> Immediately after his quotation of the psalm (3:7-11), the author exhorts the readers to beware lest they have an “evil heart of unbelief” and “fall away from the living God” (3:12). The warning against sin in terms of the “heart” arises directly from the psalm itself, in which God commands the reader, “do not harden your heart” (μὴ σκληρύνητε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν), as the wilderness generation did (3:8). It is further said of the wilderness generation in 3:10, “they always go astray in their heart” (ἀεὶ πλανῶνται τῇ καρδίᾳ), and “they did not know my ways.” Thus, the psalm describes Israel’s disobedience, which provoked God’s anger, in terms of the condition of their heart.<sup>69</sup>

In his exhortation and comments following the quotation, the author of Hebrews interprets Israel’s disobedient heart in terms of “unbelief.” The word ἀπιστία (“unbelief”)—appearing nowhere else in Hebrews—is found at the beginning and end of 3:12-19, forming an inclusio.<sup>70</sup> As noted above, the author warns his readers in 3:12 to take care lest they have “an evil heart of unbelief” (καρδία πονηρὰ ἀπιστίας). Unbelief

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<sup>67</sup>Rightly, Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 84; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 114.

<sup>68</sup>“If not syntactically,” writes Graham Hughes, “at least in the thrust of the argument the διό of 3.7 connects with the βλέπετε of 3.12” (*Hebrews and Hermeneutics*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 36 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979], 11). Thus Simon Kistemaker is right to see a connection between the διό of 3.7 and the βλέπετε of 3.12, in that the author carries forward the psalm’s warning. It seems overstated, though, for him to conclude that the psalm citation in vv. 7-11 is “a parenthetical thought” (*The Psalm Citations in the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Amsterdam: Van Soest, 1961], 85).

<sup>69</sup>Some seem to make too much of the variations between the LXX of Ps 95 and the quotation in Hebrews. See, e.g., Thomas, “The Old Testament Citations in Hebrews,” 307; and Peter Enns, “The Interpretation of Psalm 95 in Hebrews 3:1-4:13,” in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals*, ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1997), 353-59. Guthrie, however, is more reserved and convincing in his analysis. He judges the change from ἐδοκίμασαν (LXX) to ἐν δοκιμασίᾳ (Hebrews) in v. 9 and the change from ταύτη (LXX) to ἐκεῖνη (Hebrews) in v. 10 likely to be stylistic. The insertion of διό in v. 10 in Hebrews may simply “highlight the causal relationship between disobedience and God’s wrath” (“Hebrews,” 954-55).

<sup>70</sup>Albert Vanhoye, *La structure littéraire de l’Épître aux Hébreux* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1963), 94-95. He also notes the presence of βλέπω in vv. 12 and 19.

and disobedience are then brought together at the end of the passage. Those to whom God swore, “they shall not enter my rest” (3:11), are called “those who were disobedient” (τοῖς ἀπειθήσασιν, 3:18), and the reason they were unable to enter was “because of unbelief” (δι’ ἀπιστίαν, 3:19).<sup>71</sup> The connection between disobedience and unbelief is made again in 4:1-13. Even though the wilderness generation had good news proclaimed to them, the message did not profit them because of their lack of “faith” (4:2).<sup>72</sup> Then, in 4:6, the author claims that those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter God’s rest “because of disobedience” (δι’ ἀπειθειαν). It is this “example of disobedience” (4:11) about which he warns his readers. For it is only those who have faith (οἱ πιστεύσαντες)<sup>73</sup> who enter God’s rest (4:3).<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>Many interpreters observe the juxtaposition of (and, thus, the close association between) disobedience and unbelief in the passage. Attridge (*Hebrews*, 121) cites NT passages to demonstrate that the association of the two terms was traditional. Verbal and nominal cognates are used in the LXX account of the rebellion of Kadesh. In Num 14:11, God asks, “How long will they not believe in me? [οὐ πιστεύουσιν μοι]” and, in Num 14:43, Moses tells the people, “you turned away from the Lord in disobedience [ἀπειθοῦντες].” See Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 86, 89; deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 143.

<sup>72</sup>The textual problem in 4:2 is difficult. The accusative plural συγκεκρασμένους (agreeing with ἐκείνους) has early and diverse support from Alexandrian and Western witnesses. This is the reading adopted by recent commentators: Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 93; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 122; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 242; Koester, *Hebrews*, 270. The nominative singular συγκεκρασμένος (agreeing with λόγος) has less support but seems to make the most sense. Many earlier modern commentators adopted this reading: E.g., Moffatt, *Hebrews*, 51; Montefiore, *Hebrews*, 82-83; Hughes, *Hebrews*, 157 n. 62; Bruce, *Hebrews*, 103 n. 4. As Hughes notes, the plural reading requires the noun τῆς ἀκοῆς and the participle τοῖς ἀκούσασιν to convey two different meanings in the same verse: “But the message they *heard* did not profit them because they were not united by faith with those who *listened* [i.e., obeyed]” (the latter presumably referring to Caleb and Joshua). Regardless of the reading, though, Bruce is correct: “[T]he sense is plain enough; the good news had to be appropriated or assimilated by faith if it was to bring any benefit to the hearers” (*Hebrews*, 103 n. 4).

<sup>73</sup>On the portrayal of faith in Hebrews, see Dennis Hamm, “Faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews: The Jesus Factor,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52 (1990): 270-91. Significant previous works have denied any christological component to faith in Hebrews. See, e.g., Erich Grässer, *Der Glaube im Hebräerbrief* (Marburg, Germany: N. G. Elwert), 1965; and Von Gerhard Dautzenberg, “Der Glaube im Hebräerbrief,” *Biblische Zeitschrift* 17 (1973): 161-77, who, though critiquing Grässer, writes, “Obwohl der Hebr unzweifelhaft eine urchristliche Schrift ist, hat sein Glaubensbegriff keine eindeutig christlichen Züge” (171). Hamm, on the other hand, argues that the notion of faith in Hebrews is profoundly christological—portraying Jesus “as a model and enabler of Christian faith and, in some ways, even as object of faith” (“Faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” 272). Victor (Sung-Yul) Rhee agrees on the christological nature of faith in Hebrews, but believes Hamm does not properly emphasize the latter point (*Faith in Hebrews: Analysis within the Context of Christology, Eschatology, and Ethics*, Studies in Biblical Literature 19 [New York: Peter Lang, 2001], 56). Rhee’s monograph argues that Jesus is not only the model of faith “but also the content and the object of faith for believers” (63). Taking a different route, Dennis R. Lindsay suggests



Concluding the entire section, the author again returns to the “heart.” The word *καρδία* occurs in the psalm quotation (3:8, 10), in the author’s warning (3:12), and in two quotations of the psalm’s admonition not to “harden your heart” (3:15; 4:7). Finally, in 4:12-13, the author reminds the readers of the probing sharpness of the word of God, which is able to judge “the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (4:12). Few interpreters relate the occurrence of *καρδία* in 4:12 to its appearances throughout the passage. But this seems clearly to be the background for the use of the word here.<sup>75</sup>

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looking to the broader canonical context in assessing the concept of faith in Hebrews. He concludes that it is not significantly different from the concept of faith elsewhere in the Bible, by arguing that the NT writers in general and the author of Hebrews in particular drew upon a common set of “faith texts” in the Septuagint (“*Pistis* and ‘*Emunah*: The Nature of Faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *A Cloud of Witnesses*, 158-69).

<sup>74</sup>Attridge writes, “The imagery of rest is best understood as a complex symbol for the whole soteriological process that Hebrews never fully articulates, but which involves both personal and corporate dimensions” (*Hebrews*, 128). For a helpful survey of the history of investigation of the concept of “rest” (*κατάπαυσις*) in Hebrews, see George H. Guthrie, “Strive to Enter—What?: Hebrews’ Appropriation of the ‘Entering Rest’ Motif” (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature; Atlanta, GA, November 2003), 2-10. Many interpreters argue that this “entry” into the divine rest reflects an inaugurated eschatology with both present and future aspects. See, e.g., C. K. Barrett, “The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology*, ed. W. D. Davies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 372; A. T. Lincoln, “Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament,” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 212; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 126; Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 99. However, this is disputed. Under debate is how to understand *εἰσερχόμεθα* in 4:3. Interpreters like Lincoln argue that the emphasis on “today” in the present passage and the “structure of the writer’s thought throughout the letter” indicate that *εἰσερχόμεθα* is a “true present” and that “this rest has already become a reality for those who believe” (“Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology,” 210, 212). Others see it as a “futuristic present.” See Moffatt, *Hebrews*, 51; Jon Laansma, *I Will Give You Rest’: The Rest Motif in the New Testament with Special Reference to Mt 11 and Heb 3-4* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 306; and O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 165-66, who summarizes seven arguments in favor of this view. Offering yet another reading is deSilva who views Hebrews as consistently placing its hearers “at the *threshold* of entering their great reward” (*Perseverance in Gratitude*, 156 [emphasis added]). That is, while the author assures them of the “present *reality*” of the reward, he does not assure them of its “present availability” or “present enjoyment,” except as they “continue to move forward in their commitment to Jesus.” He translates the verb as indicating progressive or continuous aspect: believers “are entering” that rest. They are “crossing that threshold” and exhorted not to “fall short at the very threshold” (*ibid.*, 155-56, also n. 44 [emphasis in original]).

<sup>75</sup>“The warning to the community to avoid ‘an evil unbelieving heart’ (3:12) is the background for the author’s reflection [in 4:12]” (James W. Thompson, *Hebrews* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008], 97). Also commenting on 4:12, Attridge observes that *καρδία* “alludes to a major motif of Ps 95” (*Hebrews*, 136).

Israel’s disobedience—which provoked God’s judgment forbidding them from entering his rest—was the product of an evil and unbelieving *heart*. God’s covenant people are internally flawed. The next time the author uses *καρδία*, it will be in connection with Jeremiah’s new covenant (8:10)—which promises to address the very problem of covenant disloyalty by transforming the heart.<sup>76</sup>

### **Hebrews 7:11–28**

Following his expressions of warning and confidence in 5:11-6:20, the author returns to the topic he raised in 5:5-10—that is, Christ’s designation as a priest according to the order of Melchizedek (citing Ps 110:4). In 7:1-28 he argues for the superiority of Christ’s Melchizedekian priesthood over the Levitical priesthood. He does this by establishing, in light of his reflections on Genesis 14:18-20, that Melchizedek was greater than Levi (7:1-10), and then by demonstrating, in light of Psalm 110:4, that Christ’s priesthood—according to the order of Melchizedek—accomplished what the Levitical priesthood could not (7:11-28).

The latter portion of chapter 7 can be divided into two halves. The first half, 7:11-19, is bracketed by an inclusio using perfection terminology in verses 11 and 19.<sup>77</sup> The emphasis in these verses is on the failure of the Levitical priesthood and the law to bring about perfection. With his rhetorical question in 7:11, the author argues that another priest according to the order of Melchizedek was needed (Ps 110:4) because perfection (*τελείωσις*)<sup>78</sup> was not possible through the Levitical priesthood. Given the relationship

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<sup>76</sup>Hamm relates the lack of faith and hardness of heart in Psalm 95 to the “heart-obedience” inaugurated by Jesus in the new covenant of Jeremiah 31 (“Faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” 289). Cf. Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 183.

<sup>77</sup>Vanhoye, *La structure littéraire*, 129. He argues the inclusion is reinforced by the mention in both verses of the law—*νενομοθέτηται* (v. 11) and *νόμος* (v. 19) (*ibid.*).

<sup>78</sup>The only use of the noun in Hebrews.

between the Levitical priesthood and the law,<sup>79</sup> a change in priesthood necessitates a change (μετάθεσις) in the law (7:12).<sup>80</sup> This change has to do with the priestly requirement of physical descent, as 7:13-17 makes clear. Jesus hails from the tribe of Judah, a tribe that never officiated at the altar and about which Moses said nothing concerning priests (7:13-14). Rather, Jesus has been appointed as a Melchizedekian priest (7:15), based—not on a law of physical requirement (“law of fleshly commandment”)—but on the power of an indestructible life (7:16), as Psalm 110:4 testifies (7:17).

In 7:18-19, the author highlights the negative and the positive aspects of this change: the annulment of a former commandment (on the one hand) and the bringing in of a better hope through which we draw near to God (on the other hand). The “annulment” (ἀθέτησις) of the former commandment (ἐντολῆς)—the physical requirement mentioned in verse 16—is because of its weakness and uselessness (7:18). As the following verses make clear, this is due to the weakness of the priests (7:28) since death prevented them from continuing in their priesthood (7:23), and they had to offer up sacrifices for their own sins (7:27). In contrast, Christ holds a permanent priesthood since he lives forever (7:24), and he has no need to offer sacrifices for himself because of his sinlessness (7:26-27).

This charge of weakness and uselessness is also grounded in the author’s parenthetical comment: “For the law made nothing perfect [ἐτελείωσεν]” (7:19). Not only were the priests weak, but also their priestly ministry did not bring about perfection—the

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<sup>79</sup>On translating the parenthetical statement ὁ λαὸς γὰρ ἐπ’ αὐτῆς νενομοθέτηται in v. 11, see, e.g., Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 174; Hans-Friederich Weiss, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 395; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 371-72; Koester, *Hebrews*, 353. While I prefer the translation “for concerning it (the Levitical priesthood) the people received regulations,” accepting the alternative common rendering—“for on the basis of it (the Levitical priesthood) the people received the law”—has little impact on the following exegesis.

<sup>80</sup>On the relationship between the change in the law and the writing of the law on the heart in Hebrews, see Barry C. Joslin, *Hebrews, Christ, and the Law: The Theology of the Mosaic Law in Hebrews 7:1-10:18* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2008).

verb here obviously being related to the cognate noun in verse 11.<sup>81</sup> For the first time in Hebrews, the concept of perfection is applied to the people instead of to Christ.<sup>82</sup> A fuller understanding of what it means for believers to be perfected will become evident as the author picks up the concept in subsequent chapters. In the present passage, though, it is clear that this inability of the Levitical priesthood to bring about perfection—its weakness and uselessness—is contrasted to the “bringing in of a better hope through which we draw near to God (7:19).” Thus, the perfection of the people has to do with drawing near to God,<sup>83</sup> though the two are not simply to be equated.<sup>84</sup> As Peterson observes, it is through “the better hope” that believers draw near to God—a better hope that is due to “the better covenant” of which Jesus is the guarantor (7:22) and mediator (8:6; 12:24) and which is enacted on “better promises” (8:6).<sup>85</sup> The content of these better promises will be examined in the next section.

In 7:20-21, the author lays emphasis on the divine oath of Psalm 110:4: “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind.” Though the Levitical priests were not instated with an oath, God swore that Jesus is a priest “forever.” Thus, he is a guarantor who assures the effectiveness of this better covenant (7:22).<sup>86</sup> Because he continues forever—unlike the former priests who died (7:23)—he holds a priesthood that is “permanent” (7:24).<sup>87</sup> “Therefore” (ὁθεν), the author logically infers from verses 23-24,<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 127; Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 185.

<sup>82</sup>Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 108; Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 180.

<sup>83</sup>Moffatt, *Hebrews*, 98; Manson, *Hebrews*, 115; DuPlessis, *TEAEIOS*, 230; Hughes, *Hebrews*, 265; Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 185; Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 128; Weiss, *die Hebräer*, 401.

<sup>84</sup>Perfection and approach/access to God are not simply alternative expressions: “Those who drew near to God under the Old Covenant were *not* perfected (10:1). Those who draw near on the basis of Christ’s sacrifice *are* perfected (10:14, cf. 7:25; 9:14)” (Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 254 n. 17 [emphasis in original]).

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>86</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 186.

<sup>87</sup>This is the only biblical appearance of ἀπαράβατος. Earlier interpreters frequently understood

Jesus is able to save “eternally/forever” (εἰς τὸ παντελές) those who draw near to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them (7:25). Clearly, this eternal saving work of Christ described in verse 25 is also related to the perfection of believers. For, as noted above on 7:19, perfection has to do with the better hope through which we “draw near to God.” In 7:25, Christ is able to save eternally those who “draw near to God” through him.<sup>89</sup>

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it in the sense of “non-transferable” or “without successor.” But this meaning is not attested in Greek literature. Rather, it means “unchangeable,” “permanent,” “inviolable.” See J. Schneider, “ἀπαράβατον,” in *TDNT*, 5:742-43; Gareth Lee Cockerill, “The Melchizedek Christology in Heb. 7:1-28” (Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1976), 133-34. A. T. Robinson (*A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in Light of Historical Research* [Nashville: Broadman, 1934], 789); and C. F. D. Moule (*An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963], 109) argue that since it appears here in the predicate adjective position, the effect is equivalent to a relative clause. Thus, “a priesthood that is permanent.”

<sup>88</sup>Cockerill, “Melchizedek Christology,” 134; Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 113; Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 189.

<sup>89</sup>The author uses προσέρχομαι (4:16; 7:25; 10:1, 22; 11:6; 12:18, 22) and ἐγγίζω (7:19) to speak of “drawing near to” or “approaching” God. It is frequently noted that, in the LXX, these same verbs are used of the priests who “approach” God, as well as for others who “approach” God in worship. Scholer argues that, while Hebrews never explicitly designates the readers as “priests,” its application of cultic language (to include προσέρχομαι, εἰσέρχομαι, and τελειοῦν) to them indicates an implicit assertion (*Proleptic Priests*, 10). He maintains that all uses of προσέρχομαι in Hebrews are cultic, being set within a cultic context (11). These “cultic” usages reflect the LXX pattern describing the cultic function of both priests and people: the priests draw near to minister, sacrifice, and offer; the people draw near to God’s presence, to worship, or to pray (91-94). The latter are “sacerdotal circumstances” (94).

Two responses are necessary: (1) Responding to some who argue similarly, Peterson rightly warns against seeing every use of προσέρχομαι in Hebrews in purely cultic terms—particularly in light of its use in Heb 11:6, where it seems “to describe a relationship with God in a more general and non-cultic sense” (*Hebrews and Perfection*, 79; see also 230 n. 34). Scholer’s attempt to find a cultic meaning for προσέρχομαι in 11:6 is forced and unconvincing (see *Proleptic Priests*, 133-37). (2) Even if one grants Scholer’s designation of the use of προσέρχομαι for believers in other passages in Hebrews as “cultic/sacerdotal,” it does not necessarily follow that the author is viewing the reader’s as “priests.” It is one thing to note that believers have obtained the right to enter God’s presence that was previously reserved for the Levitical priests. It is another to say that this makes them priests. Cockerill helpfully observes that the essence of priesthood in Hebrews is not merely access to God’s presence, “but also the right of *mediatorship* (Heb. 5:1-3).” For Hebrews, believers are not priests or high priests “because they are not mediators—Christ *is* the final and complete *mediator*” (“Melchizedek Christology,” 120 n. 325 [emphasis in original]). Thus, when Hebrews speaks of believers “drawing near” to God, it is analogous to believers under the old covenant drawing near. As Peterson notes, “drawing near to God was not a complete impossibility for people under the Old Covenant” (*Hebrews and Perfection*, 129). The problem was that those who drew near under the old covenant could not be perfected by the same sacrifices offered year after year (10:1). But new covenant believers who draw near through Christ’s sacrifice *are* perfected (10:14) (see *ibid.*, 254 n. 17).

Debate among interpreters regarding how to translate the phrase εἰς τὸ παντελής (occurring in the NT only here and in Luke 13:11) reflects disagreement present among the ancient versions<sup>90</sup> and the fact that both a modal sense, “completely,” and a temporal sense, “eternally/forever” are found in ancient sources.<sup>91</sup> Many interpreters see both ideas expressed by the phrase in the context, or they believe the overall sense is the same either way.<sup>92</sup> If one is to opt for one sense over the other, though, Ellingworth is probably right that the emphasis on the temporal element in the context favors the temporal meaning.<sup>93</sup>

Grant Osborne agrees that εἰς τὸ παντελής should be understood both modally and temporally. Yet he argues that this security offered the believer is conditional for two reasons:

(1) the two terms for “always” (παντελής, πάντοτε) have the idea more of “continual” than “eternal”; (2) the condition for experiencing the efficacy of Jesus’ powerful salvation is “coming to God through him.” Many would deny this a condition, but in light of the strong warning passages throughout, there has to be great emphasis on the necessity of perseverance in “coming to” (present tense προσερχομένους) God.<sup>94</sup>

However, Osborne seems to overstate his case for the following reasons. First, while πάντοτε is certainly used in general, and in verse 25, in the sense of “always” or “continually,” lexical studies do not support this assertion for παντελής.<sup>95</sup> When used

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<sup>90</sup>See Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 176.

<sup>91</sup>See Attridge, *Hebrews*, 210 ns. 57, 58.

<sup>92</sup>E.g., Michel, *die Hebräer*, 276 n. 2; Hughes, *Hebrews*, 269 n. 35; Cockerill, “Melchizedek Christology,” 135-36; idem, *Hebrews*, 335; Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 114; Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 176; Attridge, *Hebrews* 210; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 274; David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, NAC (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 429. Koester writes, “The salvation provided by Christ is everlasting precisely because it is complete” (*Hebrews*, 371).

<sup>93</sup>Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 391. See also Scholer, *Proleptic Priests*, 121.

<sup>94</sup>Grant R. Osborne, “Classical Arminian Response,” in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 226. This essay is Osborne’s response to Buist Fanning’s “A Classical Reformed View.”

<sup>95</sup>See BDAG, s.v. “παντελής”; Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, with rev. supplement (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), s.v. “παντελής”; G. Delling, “παντελής,” in

temporally, the term παντελής and the phrase εἰς τὸ παντελές mean “forever,” “for all time,” or “eternally.”<sup>96</sup>

Second, it is not required that the two terms be synonymous in the context. That Christ is able to save εἰς τὸ παντελές is an inference grounded<sup>97</sup> in the fact that Christ “continually/always” (πάντοτε) lives to intercede. The meaning “continually/always” for εἰς τὸ παντελές would certainly fit the context: He is *continually* able to save, since he *continually* lives to intercede. But, clearly, the meaning “forever/eternally” fits as well: Since he *continually* lives to intercede, he is able to save *eternally*.

Third, though it is difficult to be certain, Osborne’s reading seems to be based on taking εἰς τὸ παντελές with δύναται rather than with σώζειν. Thus, because Christ always lives, he is “continually” *able* to save. This reading fits with Osborne’s contention that the phrase supports a “conditional” view of the security of believers: Christ’s continual *ability* to save would not necessarily prevent their apostasy. But it seems the most natural reading of the syntax of the passage (σώζειν εἰς τὸ παντελές δύναται)<sup>98</sup> is to take εἰς τὸ παντελές with σώζειν: “he is able to save eternally [or completely].”<sup>99</sup> If the *saving work* of Christ (rather than his *ability* to save) is eternal/complete (or even “continual”), it is hard to see how this would support seeing the believer’s security in verse 25 as conditional.

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TDNT, 8:66-67.

<sup>96</sup>If taken temporally, Moule suggests “for good and all” or “in perpetuum” (*Idiom Book*, 165)

<sup>97</sup>Taking the participle ζῶν (with most commentators) as causal: “since/because he lives.”

<sup>98</sup>Similar to Heb 7:25, the phrase appears in its only other NT occurrence, Luke 13:11, with δύναμαι and an infinitive. There, the phrase follows the infinitive as well: μὴ δυναμένη ἀνακύψαι εἰς τὸ παντελές.

<sup>99</sup>Peterson considers taking εἰς τὸ παντελές with δύναται to be the “less natural” reading (*Hebrews and Perfection*, 114). Similarly, while comparing the meanings attributed to εἰς τὸ παντελές in several translations, Ellingworth observes that J. B. Phillips “*unusually* takes εἰς τὸ παντελές with δύναται” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 391 [emphasis added]).

Fourth, that the salvation itself—and not just Christ’s ability to save—is eternal is supported by 5:9. As a result of Christ’s perfection, he became the source of “eternal salvation” (σωτηρίας αἰωνίου) for those who obey him.<sup>100</sup> Osborne would likely see the reference to “those who obey him” in 5:9 as support for his affirmation of conditional security. That is, Christ is the source of eternal salvation only inasmuch as a person continues to obey him. On the one hand, this is certainly true. According to Hebrews 3:4, 16, perseverance to the end is required of God’s people (see chapter 4). However, perseverance is not in view in 5:9. The author is simply making clear who the beneficiaries of Christ’s eternal salvation are: those who obey him. In light of 3:7–4:13 (see above), it is clear that to obey Jesus is to believe in him—and these are matters of the heart addressed by the new covenant (8:10; 10:16). Moreover, the reference in 9:12 to Christ obtaining “eternal redemption” (αἰώνιαν λύτρωσιν) is without qualification.

Fifth, Osborne takes the participle προσερχομένους in 7:25 as indicating “a condition for experiencing the efficacy of Jesus’ powerful salvation.” It is “those who draw near” to God through Jesus who are saved. Osborne is right that “many would deny this is a condition,” since there appears to be no intent by the author to make it a condition in the immediate context. Thus, he points to the “strong warning passages throughout” as support for his view. But, though perseverance is necessary according to the author and the warning passages must be taken seriously (see chapter 4 of this dissertation), nothing in the context of verse 25 indicates a limitation placed on Christ’s saving work.<sup>101</sup> Neither does the fact that the participle is present tense demand that one understand it as communicating a condition. Substantival present participles are often

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<sup>100</sup>The only other biblical occurrence of the phrase is Isa 45:17 (LXX): “Israel is saved by the Lord with an eternal salvation.” John Oswalt describes Isaiah’s promises here as “put in the most absolutistic terms” (*The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 217).

<sup>101</sup>Cf. Buist M. Fanning, “Classical Reformed Response,” in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, 311.



used in a generic, gnomic, or timeless manner.<sup>102</sup> Thus, the present tense does not demand reading *προσερχομένους* as “those who are continually drawing near,” but can simply be “those who draw near.”

So Christ is able to save eternally those who draw near to God through him (7:25), and believers draw near to God through the better hope that is related to perfection (7:19). The author now moves on in Hebrews 8:1-13 to describe this better hope in terms of the better promises of the better covenant of which this high priest serves as mediator.

### **Hebrews 8:1-13**

Though Hebrews 8 contains the fewest verses of any chapter in the letter, verses 8-12 include the longest quotation of an OT passage in the NT: the Lord’s promise from Jeremiah 31:31-34 (LXX 38:31-34) to establish a “new covenant” (v. 8) with his people.<sup>103</sup> Having explained the Son’s appointment as a superior high priest in 5:1-7:28,

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<sup>102</sup>See discussion and examples in Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 615-16, 620-21; Stanley E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament with Reference to Tense and Mood* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 378-79; Buist M. Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 411-12.

<sup>103</sup>The form of the quotation in Hebrews follows the LXX in general, but there are a few variations. Assuming the author introduced these divergences (and they were not found in his Vorlage), it is likely he did so for stylistic reasons. Several interpreters argue as much; contra Thomas, “The Old Testament Citations in Hebrews,” 310-11. For discussion, see Kistemaker, *The Psalm Citations*, 40-42; McCullough, “The Old Testament Quotations in Hebrews,” 364-67; Fred Anderson Malone, “A Critical Evaluation of the Use of Jeremiah 31:31-34 in the Letter to the Hebrews” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989), 170-72; Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 209; Koester, *Hebrews*, 385-84; Guthrie, “Hebrews,” 972.

References to Jeremiah’s “new covenant” are sparse in Jewish sources. Susanne Lehne argues that the few Second Temple texts that speak of a change of heart and an “eternal covenant” are unlikely to be echoes of Jeremiah. Rather, they envision a revival of human obedience and renewal of God’s blessing under the former covenant. The Hebrew phrase “new covenant” does occur in the Dead Sea Scrolls, but Jer 31:31-34 is never quoted there. For the Qumran community, the “new covenant” is essentially the Sinai covenant, but containing an element of new revelation given to the community and a partial fulfillment of the covenant’s eschatological promises in the community (*The New Covenant in Hebrews*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 44 [Sheffield: JSOT, 1990], 35-59). See also Guthrie, “Hebrews,” 971-72; Malone, “Critical Evaluation,” 108-10.

the author now turns to discuss the superior ministry and offering of this priest in 8:1-10:18.<sup>104</sup>

The author begins in 8:1 by highlighting the central idea of the prior exposition of Christ's superior high priesthood. His "main point"<sup>105</sup> is that we have such a high priest—one who has taken his seat at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens (v. 1) and who is a minister of the true tabernacle pitched by the Lord (v. 2).<sup>106</sup> Psalm 110 was clearly an important text for the writers of the NT,<sup>107</sup> and this is certainly true for the author of Hebrews.<sup>108</sup> The allusion to Psalm 110:1 in Hebrews 8:1 with mention that Christ's session is "in the heavens" shifts the focus of Christ's ministry to the heavenly realm.<sup>109</sup> Though he has been appointed—like every other high priest—to offer sacrifice (8:3), he does not minister on the earth. If he were on the earth, he would not even be a priest, since there are those who serve in this way according to the law (8:4). But these priests serve an outline and shadow of the heavenly things—an earthly tabernacle erected according to the pattern Moses was shown (8:5).<sup>110</sup> As the author elaborates later, Christ

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<sup>104</sup>See George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 144. Cf. idem, *Hebrews*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 278. Guthrie identifies the transition at 8:1-2 as the midpoint of the great central section of the letter, 5:1-10:18 (*The Structure of Hebrews*, 106).

<sup>105</sup>On understanding κεφάλαιον as "main point" rather than "crowning affirmation" or "summary," see Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 400; Koester, *Hebrews*, 374-75; O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 287-88 n. 5.

<sup>106</sup>Whether or not τῶν ἀγίων and τῆς σκηνῆς τῆς ἀληθινῆς in v. 2 are to be taken as two distinct parts of the heavenly sanctuary or synonyms connected by an exegetical/explanatory καί seems to have no significant bearing on the following discussion. For opposing arguments, see, e.g., Attridge, *Hebrews*, 218; Koester, *Hebrews*, 375-76

<sup>107</sup>On which, see David M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973).

<sup>108</sup>See, e.g., Simon Kistemaker, *The Psalm Citations*, 37; Harold W. Attridge, "The Psalms in Hebrews," in *The Psalms in the New Testament*, ed. Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 197. The author has alluded to and quoted Psalm 110:1 and 4 at several significant points throughout the letter to further his argument: 1:3, 13; 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:3, 8, 11, 15-17, 21, 24-25, 28. See Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand*, 163-66.

<sup>109</sup>Guthrie, "Hebrews," 968.

<sup>110</sup>The author's language (e.g., ὑπόδειγμα) and use of Exod 25:40 to distinguish between

did not enter a holy place made by hands, but into heaven itself—the very presence of God—to cleanse the heavenly things by his sacrifice (9:23-24). Thus, he has obtained a “more excellent” ministry, corresponding to the “better” covenant which he mediates and which is enacted on “better” promises (8:6).<sup>111</sup>

This “new” and “better” covenant (cf. 8:6 and 12:24) is necessary because the first covenant was not “faultless”—*ἄμεμπτος* (8:7). This observation is consistent with the author’s earlier criticisms of the law and the Levitical priesthood—which could not bring about perfection (7:11, 19)—and acts as a transition to his quotation from LXX Jeremiah 38:31-34. Once again, Hebrews directs attention to the “self-confessed inadequacy” and “avowed incompleteness” of the old order.<sup>112</sup> Jeremiah’s prophecy becomes crucial to the author’s argument that follows in Hebrews 8-10.<sup>113</sup>

The introduction to the quotation in verse 8 repeats the language of “fault” from verse 7: “For finding fault with them, he says” (*μεμφόμενος γὰρ αὐτοὺς λέγει*). However, the verse includes a debated variant. The evidence is divided between the accusative *αὐτούς* (ⲛ\* A D\* I K P et al.) and the dative *αὐτοῖς* (P<sup>46</sup> ⲛ<sup>2</sup> B D<sup>2</sup> et al.). If read

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earthly and heavenly tabernacles was frequently thought to point to Philonic influence (e.g., Spicq, *L’Épître aux Hébreux*, 1:72-75). Ronald Williamson, however, demonstrates that, while the language in Heb 8:5 is comparable to Philonic Platonism, there is no trace of “the fundamental attitudes or convictions” of Platonism, and Hebrews does not use the terminology “in anything approaching a rigorously philosophical way” (*Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970], 557). For his examination of the use of Exod 25:40 in Hebrews, see 557-70. L. D. Hurst, though agreeing with Williamson’s assessment of Philonic influence on Hebrews, faults him for omitting study of the important term *ὑπόδειγμα* from 8:5. Not only is the word *not* characteristic of Philo, it is incorrectly, Hurst argues, translated as “copy” in many translations. This meaning is found nowhere in Greek literature. It is a “sample,” “outline,” or “pattern”—a basis for later imitation (*The Epistle to the Hebrews: Its Background of Thought* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990], 13; see further 13-17). BDAG lists Heb 8:5 under the meaning “outline,” “sketch,” “symbol” (s.v. “ὑπόδειγμα”).

<sup>111</sup>Hebrews 8:6 includes three comparative adjectives, and all are emphatic, preceding the nouns they modify (Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Jesus, the Mediator of a ‘Better Covenant’: Comparatives in the Book of Hebrews,” *Faith & Mission* 21, no. 2 [2004]: 36).

<sup>112</sup>Caird, “The Exegetical Method of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” 47-49.

<sup>113</sup>David Peterson, “Biblical Theology and the Argument of Hebrews,” in *In the Fullness of Time: Biblical Studies in Honor of Archbishop Donald Robinson*, ed. David Peterson and John Pryor (Homebush West, Australia: Lancer, 1992), 230; Guthrie, “Hebrews,” 970.

as a dative, the pronoun could be the indirect object of λέγει: “he says to them.” Adopting this reading, several interpreters argue that it makes the connection with the preceding verse more natural and logical, since verse 7 faults the first covenant, not the people. Thus, the understood object of the participle would be the old covenant: “For finding fault [with the old covenant], he says to them.”<sup>114</sup> However, the accusative should not be so easily dismissed: (1) The use of the dative with λέγω (or other verb of speech) when quoting Scripture is inconsistent with the writer’s style elsewhere in the letter. Routinely, the author uses either no indirect object after the verb or employs a prepositional phrase (e.g., λέγοντος πρὸς αὐτόν in 7:21).<sup>115</sup> (2) While verse 7 does imply that the covenant is flawed, Jeremiah’s prophecy places blame on the people (8:9). It is not “either/or.” As will be seen, the problem with the old covenant is that it was unable to secure the obedience of its members. The author has already argued (7:11, 19) that the weakness and failure of the law and the priesthood is seen in their inability to bring about the perfection of the people.<sup>116</sup> Thus, a fundamental aspect of the new covenant includes the divine placement and writing of the law on the minds and hearts of the people (8:10). For these reasons, the accusative αὐτούς should be accepted.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>See Hughes, *Hebrews*, 298, also n. 19; Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 202; Guthrie, “Hebrews,” 971.

<sup>115</sup>No indirect object: 1:6; 2:6, 12; 3:7, 15; 4:3, 7; 5:6; 6:14; 9:20; 10:5, 8, 9, 15, 30; 12:5, 26; 13:5, 6; prepositional phrase: 1:7, 8, 13; 5:5; 7:21. The only possible exception is 1:5: Τίτι γὰρ εἶπέν ποτε τῶν ἀγγέλων. Koester (*Hebrews*, 385) argues similarly. The idiomatic tendency to take the dative with λέγω could have influenced scribes to prefer αὐτοῖς. See Attridge, *Hebrews*, 225; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 415; Bruce M. Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1994), 597. In addition, μέμφομαι can take the dative as well as the accusative. According to Ellingworth, the few instances of μέμφομαι in the Greek Bible are either absolute or used with the dative; both the accusative and the dative appear with the verb in classical Greek; and the accusative is used in the papyri (*Hebrews*, 415). So, even if the dative is original, it could still be construed with μεμφόμενος. See Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 597; Moffatt, *Hebrews*, 108-09; France, *Hebrews*, 111.

<sup>116</sup>“[I]t is precisely the failure of the people to keep it that reveals the inadequacy of the first covenant. Why? Here we again see the author’s conviction that the worth of a covenant is measured by its efficacy in perfecting persons. Their failure to be perfected is a failure of the covenant as such” (Johnson, *Hebrews*, 205).

<sup>117</sup>Several interpreters opt for αὐτούς and maintain that the author is faulting *both* the covenant *and* the people: Silva, “Perfection and Eschatology in Hebrews,” 284; Hagner, *Hebrews*, 122; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984); Malone, “Critical

The oracle proclaims a time when the Lord will establish a new covenant with Israel and Judah (8:8).<sup>118</sup> However, it will be unlike the covenant made with their fathers when God lead them out of Egypt.<sup>119</sup> The reason (ὅτι) for this is that the people “did not continue” (οὐκ ἐνέμειναν) in that covenant. Therefore, the Lord showed no concern for them (8:9). Instead, the Lord declares in 8:10, “this is the covenant I will make.” What follows are the “better promises” upon which the covenant has been established (8:6): (1) “I will put my laws into their minds, and I will write them upon their hearts” (8:10a). (2) “I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (8:10b). (3) “They shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all

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Evaluation,” 177; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 226-27. DeSilva writes, “The oracle from Jeremiah becomes a witness to the failure of the first covenant *due to the lack of commitment and fidelity of those with whom it was made*” (*Perseverance in Gratitude*, 284 [emphasis added]). See also the discussion in Richard B. Hays, “‘Here We Have No Lasting City’: New Covenantalism in Hebrews” in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, 160.

J. L. P. Wolmarans (“The Text and Translation of Hebrews 8:8” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 75 [1984]: 139-44), who contends for the originality of αὐτοῖς grouped with λέγει, errs at several points as he argues from the logical structure of the author’s argument and the author’s method of exegesis: (1) He observes that v. 8 supplies the reason (γάρ) for v. 7—which states that the *first covenant* was at fault. To read v. 8, then, as stating that the imperfection of *the people* is the reason for v. 7, he believes, is highly improbable. He also notes that the adjective ἄμεμπτος and the participle μεμφόμενος are derived from the same root—and the former clearly describes the first covenant in v. 7. Therefore, one expects the first covenant to be the object of the participle in v. 8 (ibid., 142). But the logic of Wolmarans’s arguments suggests that he is unable to see or has not considered the possibility of a relationship between the failure of the covenant and the failure of the people. In other words, the *old covenant* is flawed because the *people* are flawed—and the old covenant can do nothing about it. Thus, for the author to point to the defectiveness of the people as the reason for the defectiveness of the first covenant is perfectly logical—and consistent with his argument elsewhere (7:11, 19). (2) Wolmarans claims that the author compares the old and new covenants within a Neo-Platonic framework of “copy” and “reality.” The old covenant is an imperfect copy of the coming perfect one. Therefore, within this “dualistic” approach, “there can be no question about a perfect first covenant . . . as the reading αὐτούς, or the reading αὐτοῖς, grouped with μεμφόμενος would suggest” (ibid., 143). Quite apart from his ascribing to the author a Neo-Platonic framework of thought (on which, see the works cited earlier by Williamson and Hurst), Wolmarans assumes for himself an “either/or” framework of thought in interpreting the letter. Understanding the people (αὐτούς) as the object of μεμφόμενος does not require that the first covenant is perfect. Again, both the covenant and the people are flawed. As Thompson observes, “One cannot separate the people from the covenant” (*Hebrews*, 176).

<sup>118</sup>Koester writes, “God’s words concern ‘the house of Israel’ and ‘the house of Judah,’ but Hebrews brings the oracle to bear on the listeners’ situation, since they belong to God’s ‘house’ (Heb 3:6)” (*Hebrews*, 389).

<sup>119</sup>Though the covenant was made at Sinai, Koester rightly observes that the exodus from Egypt is “the presupposition for the commandments in the Mosaic covenant (Exod 20:2)” (ibid., 386).

know me, from the least to the greatest of them” (8:11). (4) “For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will no longer remember their sins” (8:12). After the quotation, the author offers a concluding commentary in 8:13. In declaring this covenant “new” (*καινήν*), the prophecy makes the first covenant obsolete, and that which is obsolete and old is near to destruction.<sup>120</sup>

Some interpreters claim the quotation serves a fundamentally negative purpose—to critique the old covenant and expose its defective character. This observation is driven by the criticism of the old covenant in verses 7 and 13 and the lack of immediate exposition regarding the “better promises” of verses 10-12, which are not explicitly mentioned again until 10:15-18.<sup>121</sup> Yet, the prophecy not only critiques the first covenant, it “fleshes out” what those “better promises” of verse 6 entail.<sup>122</sup> Granted, the author does not explicate the better promises in the immediate context. But this is because he must first explain how these promises are brought to fruition, and this he does in 9:1-10:18. The old cult, with its priests and sacrifices, must be replaced by another, in order for the new covenant to be realized. The prophecy says nothing about priesthood

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<sup>120</sup>On whether 8:13 indicates that the first covenant is fading away or facing imminent destruction, see Scott D. Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 78-81. Though most English translations render ἀφανισμοῦ as “disappearing” or “vanishing,” BDAG has “destruction” (s.v. “ἀφανισμός”). Cf. Randall C. Gleason, who argues that this word (a NT *hapaxlegomena*) is used 56 times in the LXX to refer to the physical destruction of Israel, Jerusalem, and the temple. “It is never used to denote a gradual disappearance” (“The Eschatology of the Warning in Hebrews 10:26-31” *TynBul* 53 [2002]: 108).

<sup>121</sup>See Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 132; Lehne, *The New Covenant in Hebrews*, 31; Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 208. Both Peterson and Lane cite Vanhoye who observes the focus on the first covenant through the repetition of *πρῶτη* in vv. 7 and 13 and who argues that the primary goal of 8:7-13 is to stress the imperfect and provisional character of the old covenant (*La structure littéraire*, 143-44). Michel Gourgès, however, critiques Vanhoye for focusing on vv. 7 and 13 and neglecting v. 6: “Pour intituler viii, 7-13 ‘la première alliance, imparfaite et provisoire’, il faut centrer toute l’attention sur les versets 7 et 13 et supposer que le sens général de la citation de Jér. est résumé par le v. 7 plutôt que par le v. 6 qui est pourtant le premier à mentionner l’idée d’alliance” (“Remarques sur la ‘structure central’ de l’épître aux Hébreux,” *Revue biblique* 84 [1977]: 26-37).

<sup>122</sup>So Attridge, *Hebrews*, 226. See also, Koester, *Hebrews*, 389; Hagner, *Hebrews*, 123; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 295.

and sacrifice, but the promise of sins forgiven (8:12; 10:17) provides the necessary link between these themes and the new covenant.<sup>123</sup> Complete forgiveness of sins—and perfection—comes through Christ’s new covenant sacrifice (10:11-18).<sup>124</sup> Thus, the quotation sets up the argument that follows.<sup>125</sup>

Elaboration on the connection between the new covenant, the forgiveness of sins, and perfection must await consideration of 9:1-14 and 10:1-18 below. At this point, several observations pertaining to this passage are needed.

First, the new covenant is a response, not only to the defectiveness of the old covenant, but to the disobedience of the covenant members. In fact, the disobedience of the people is the reason the old covenant was not faultless. The old covenant could not produce obedience in them.<sup>126</sup> As noted earlier, this is consistent with the author’s appraisal of the old order in 7:11, 19—it was unable to bring about perfection in the people. But the new covenant will accomplish what the old could not (8:10-12). Therefore, even before one examines Hebrews 9-10, it is evident that perfection must be related to the promises of the new covenant.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup>Attridge, *Hebrews*, 226.

<sup>124</sup>Ellingworth observes that after 10:16-17, “the new covenant is never mentioned without an explicit reference to the blood of Christ’s sacrifice (10:29; 12:24; 13:20)” (*Hebrews*, 413).

<sup>125</sup>Richard Longenecker rightly affirms that Jeremiah’s prophecy “serves as the basis for the whole discussion in Heb 8:1-10:39” (*Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 164). So also, France, “The Writer of Hebrews as a Biblical Expositor,” 265; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 226. Though they believe the function of Jer 31:31-34 in Hebrews 8 is fundamentally negative, Peterson (*Hebrews and Perfection*, 132) and Lane (Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 208) do see the oracle as vital to the writer’s exposition in 9:1-10:18. Thus, their stance is *considerably* different from that of Erich Grässer who claims the author quotes Jeremiah with the “*einen Ziel*” of reaching the statement in v. 13, which states that the first covenant is obsolete since the second covenant is called “new” (*An die Hebräer*, Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament [Zürich: Benzinger, 1990-97], 2:101 [emphasis in original]).

<sup>126</sup>Hagner, *Hebrews*, 123.

<sup>127</sup>In light of how clearly the author describes the inadequacy of the old covenant and the superior benefits of the new covenant, Michael D. Morrison’s comments are puzzling: “The primary argument in *favor* of the new covenant is simply that the old is obsolete. It is sufficient for the author’s purpose to simply note that a new covenant was predicted, and that God therefore deemed the old one inadequate” (*Who Needs a New Covenant? Rhetorical Function of the Covenant Motif in the Argument of*

Second, it is necessary to be more specific concerning the failure of the people to whom Jeremiah’s prophecy refers. It is no mere act of disobedience that leads God to establish a new covenant. The problem is that they “did not continue/remain [οὐκ ἐνέμειναν] in my covenant” (8:9)—that is, they committed *apostasy*. This censure of those whom God led out of Egypt recalls the earlier criticism of the wilderness generation in the author’s exposition of Psalm 95 in 3:7–4:13. In light of Israel’s faithless disobedience, the author exhorts the recipients in 3:12 to take care that they not have an evil, unbelieving heart and “fall away” (ἀποστῆναι) from the living God.<sup>128</sup> In 4:11, he urges them to be diligent so that they may not fall through the same kind of disobedience. In other words, the author grounds his warnings *against apostasy* in the reality of the wilderness generation’s *example of apostasy*.<sup>129</sup> If this is what the new covenant is intended to remedy, as 8:9 seems to indicate, then perhaps interpreters who deny Christian assurance in Hebrews (in light of the warning passages in the letter) have underestimated the new covenant promises. This leads to the next observation.

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*Hebrews* [Eugene: Oregon, 2008], 60). Such a conclusion seems to reflect a failure to see the relationship between perfection and new covenant fulfillment.

<sup>128</sup>On the use of the verb ἀφίστημι for “apostasy” from God in the LXX and the NT, see Heinrich Schlier, “ἀφίστημι, et al.,” in *TDNT*, 1:512-13; Ulrich Kellermann, “ἀφίστημι,” in *EDNT*, 1:183. Both Schlier and Kellermann recognize that the verb has become a technical term for “apostasy” in the LXX. As he considers the use of the term in 3:12, Allen argues that, since the author “used the verb *aphistēmi* only once in this passage and did not use it again in any of the other warning passages,” this “argues against understanding his meaning as ‘apostasy’ in the traditional sense of that term” (*Hebrews*, 262). However, it is the *context* in which the term is use—not its singular usage—that should be the deciding factor in its meaning. A more detailed interaction with Allen’s view of the warning passages must await chap. 4 of this dissertation.

<sup>129</sup>The only commentator I have encountered who describes Israel’s failure to “continue” or “remain” in the covenant in 8:9 as “apostasy” is Robert Jewett, *Letter to Pilgrims: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1981), 136-37. However, this is clearly an appropriate description, especially in light of how the wilderness generation is viewed in Heb 3:7–4:13, as noted above. (This, of course, assumes that the sin against which the author is warning his recipients is apostasy—rejection of Christ and his sacrificial death on their behalf. Defense of this position must await the analysis of the warning passages in chap. 4 of this dissertation.) Several commentators observe that 8:9 recalls the faithlessness of Israel described in Heb 3:7–4:13: Buchanan, *Hebrews*, 138; Jewett, *Letter to Pilgrims*, 136; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 227; Grässer, *Hebräer*, 2:100; deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 285; Koester, *Hebrews*, 386; Gerd Schunack, *Der Hebräerbrief*, Zürcher Bibelkommentare (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2002), 113; Thompson, *Hebrews*, 176; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 297 n. 61; Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 367.



Third, under the new covenant, God promises an internal change—to put his laws into the minds of his people and write them on their hearts.<sup>130</sup> The solution to the people’s failure to continue in the covenant is to transform their hearts and minds so that they are capable of truly obeying him. The connection between the Jeremiah passage and 3:7–4:13 is further strengthened by the reference to the “heart” (*καρδία*) in both.<sup>131</sup> In the discussion of the latter passage above, we saw that Israel’s disobedience and unbelief (two sides of the same coin) were described in terms of an evil heart. *Καρδία* appears ten times in Hebrews. The first six are found in 3:7–4:13 (3:8, 10, 12, 15; 4:7, 12) with its exposition and exhortation based on Psalm 95. The next two occurrences are 8:10 and 10:16, quoting Jeremiah’s new covenant promises. The final two instances of *καρδία* are found in 10:22 and 13:9. Having completed his teaching on the superior priesthood and sacrifice of Christ at 10:18, the author encourages his recipients to draw near to God with “a true heart [*ἀληθινῆς καρδίας*] in full assurance of faith” (10:22). In 13:9, he warns them not to be carried away by strange teachings, for “it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace.” I will have more to say on 10:22 below in connection with 10:1–10. For now, it is sufficient to draw attention to the author’s significant use of *καρδία* to tie together *problem*, *promise*, and *fulfillment*. The OT passage promising the law written on hearts to resolve covenant infidelity (LXX Jer 38:31–34) is matched by an OT passage

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<sup>130</sup>On the law being written on the heart, see Joslin, *Hebrews, Christ, and the Law*, 173–223. Cf. Barry C. Joslin, “Hebrews 7–10 and the Transformation of the Law” in *A Cloud of Witnesses*, 100–17. Contra Attridge (*Hebrews*, 227), the content of the “laws” being written on the heart refers to the “Torah” and not merely to an ambiguous, interior conformity to God’s will. For the argument that these laws have been both internalized and fulfilled in Christ—so that believers no longer keep the cultic laws (since Christ’s sacrifice has rendered them obsolete)—see Joslin, *Hebrews, Christ, and the Law*, 210–23. For the view that the “law” on the heart refers to the Decalogue, see Malone, “Critical Evaluation,” 186.

<sup>131</sup>Scholars who observe that the transformation of the “heart” in 8:10 addresses the problem of the evil “heart” in 3:7–4:13 include Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 135; Lehne, *The New Covenant in Hebrews*, 115; Koester, *Hebrews*, 391; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 299. On *καρδία* in Hebrews, see also Richard W. Johnson, *Going outside the Camp: The Sociological Function of the Levitical Critique in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 209 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 2001), 104.

confirming that wayward hearts are indeed the problem (Ps 95:7-11).<sup>132</sup> Thus, God's new covenant remedies the very condition that characterized those who broke the first covenant.

Fourth, the new covenant depends on the work of God; he will ensure it is established and kept. Note the use of the first person: "I will put my laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts" (8:10). "I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will no longer remember their sins" (8:12). In light of the failure of those under the old covenant, God sovereignly acts under the new covenant to guarantee fidelity.<sup>133</sup>

Fifth, the persons to whom these blessings are applied is coterminous with membership in the new covenant: "For they shall all know<sup>134</sup> me, from the least of them to the greatest" (8:11). The new covenant is superior to the old because *all* of its members know the Lord.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup>According to Attridge, "heart" is a major theme of Psalm 95 (*Hebrews*, 136). Of course, other OT texts besides Psalm 95 could have been chosen to highlight Israel's evil heart. The book of Jeremiah itself declares, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick. Who can understand it?" (Jer 17:9), and repeatedly speaks of Israel's sin and covenant breaking in terms of the condition of their hearts: e.g., 3:17; 4:14; 5:23; 7:24; 9:14; 11:8; 16:12; 17:1, 5; 18:12; 22:17; 23:17, 26.

The relationship between Ps 95:7-11 and LXX Jer 38:31-34 seems to go even further. In addition to speaking of Israel's straying heart, Ps 95:10 adds, "They did not know [the Lord's] ways" (Heb 3:10). To this problem, Jeremiah's prophecy also speaks: "I will put my laws into their minds," and "all will know me" (Heb 8:10, 11). Koester writes, "All God's people will know him (8:11). Hebrews recalls that the works that God performed for Moses' generation (3:9) displayed God's power, yet the people did not know God's ways (3:10)" (*Hebrews*, 392).

<sup>133</sup>"Die Kluft zwischen Gottes Gebot und dem Wollen des menschlichen Herzens wird von Gott selbst geschlossen werden" (Grässer, *Hebräer*, 2:100). Cf. Hughes, *Hebrews*, 300; Koester, *Hebrews*, 391. R. Martin-Achard observes the theocentric character of the new covenant due to the unilateral initiative taken by the Lord to link Israel definitively to him. "L'alliance jérémienne repose de bout en bout sur Dieu" ("Quelques remarques sur la nouvelle alliance chez Jérémie (Jérémie 31,31-34)," in *Questions disputées D'Ancien Testament: méthode et théologie*, ed. C. Brekelmans, rev. M. Vervenne [Louvain, Belgium: Leuven University, 1989], 154).

<sup>134</sup>To "know" God, of course, means to obey him—not merely to believe in his existence (cf. Bruce, *Hebrews*, 191, also n. 57; Koester, *Hebrews*, 387). It involves trust (Ps 9:10); practicing of justice and righteousness (Jer 22:15-16); and loyalty (Hos 6:6). Those unfaithful under the old covenant did not "know" God (Heb 3:10).

<sup>135</sup>Malone, "Critical Evaluation," 189.

The new covenant, then, was intended to remedy apostasy—the covenant infidelity of those under the first covenant—and this was accomplished by a unilateral work of God in writing his law on the heart of his people so that all members of the new covenant know the Lord. If this is so, it seems that interpreters who deny Christian assurance in Hebrews—in light of the warning passages in the letter—have underestimated the significance of the new covenant promises. The warnings are integral to the author’s purpose and must not be discounted or diminished (see chapter 4 of this dissertation), but the same is true of the “better promises” of the new covenant. At the very least, one would expect scholars who believe that Hebrews affirms Christian apostasy to acknowledge a “tension” between promise and warning. Since recognition of the magnitude of the new covenant promises is crucial, I want to consider four objections to this line of thought that I am presenting before continuing.

First, Jeffrey Niell denies that internal “heart” religion is new to the new covenant and suggests that what is written on the heart of God’s people is the *ceremonial law*.<sup>136</sup> But his thesis is unsatisfying in terms of scholarly support, faithfulness to the immediate context, and understanding of the letter’s argument.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup>Jeffrey D. Niell, “The Newness of the New Covenant,” in *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, ed. Gregg Strawbridge (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 133, 141-47.

<sup>137</sup>Robert R. Booth similarly argues, “These ceremonial laws are still valid, but they have now been written on the hearts of believers (Heb. 8:10), and they find their fulfillment in Christ” (*Children of the Promise: The Biblical Case for Infant Baptism* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995], 64). However, his explanation of this is no more satisfying than Niell’s. In response to Niell, (1) I am aware of no Hebrews commentator or major interpreter who argues that the νόμος written on the heart in 8:10 refers to the old covenant ceremonial laws. For a detailed discussion of how Hebrews scholarship has understood the “laws” written on the heart in 8:10, see Joslin, *Hebrews, Christ, and the Law*, 208-17. (2) Niell tries to argue that having the law internalized is nothing new because old covenant believers were regenerate, received the Spirit, and exercised faith (“Newness,” 133-36). On the one hand, the author of Hebrews would agree that Moses (3:5) and a host of OT saints (11:4-40) exercised faith. On the other hand, clearly this was not true of *all* old covenant members, as Hebrews explicitly argues (3:7-11; 8:9). Thus, in the new covenant, it is promised that “*all* will know me” (8:11). The failure of many (most?) old covenant members is the problem that Hebrews addresses. Regarding the reception of the Spirit by old covenant believers, this is disputed. See James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 9-24. (3) Niell’s interpretation does not fit the context, in spite of his appeals. He argues that the surrounding context is concerned with the “ceremonial aspects of the law” and claims that this is what 8:13 refers to when it says the “first” covenant is “becoming obsolete” and “ready to disappear.” “The one covenant of grace is simply administered differently in the new covenant

Second, writing in the same collection of essays, Richard L. Pratt Jr. claims that—contrary to Niell—the promise of the law being written on the heart *does* involve God giving his people hearts that love and obey his law.<sup>138</sup> However, Pratt reminds that, in the perspective of the NT writers, the OT prophecies of Israel’s restoration are not fulfilled completely and all at once. Rather, the new covenant is *inaugurated* but not yet *consummated*. Failure to realize this leads some interpreters mistakenly to assume that the new covenant was realized in its fullness.<sup>139</sup> But Jeremiah’s new covenant promises will be fully realized only when Christ returns.

Pratt offers three arguments: (1) Though Jeremiah claims the new covenant will not be broken, this is not the case prior to the consummation. For according to the warning in Hebrews 10:28-31, covenant breaking is possible under the new covenant. (2) In the new creation, God’s people will have the law written on their hearts, but presently this is only partially fulfilled. Hearts and minds have been renewed, but scriptural guidance and watchfulness are still necessary. Pratt points to Hebrews 10:29 as support for the view that one can be “sanctified” through mere external association with the new

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than in the old” (145, 146). But this interpretation is forced on the text. Hebrews clearly speaks of a new covenant replacing the old (8:13), not simply being “administered differently.” There is continuity, yes, but the discontinuity is unmistakable. In the immediate context, it is clear that the promises in 8:10-12 are intended as remedies for the disobedience in 8:9. (4) What does it mean to have the ceremonial laws *written on the heart*? It is one thing to argue that the “ceremonial laws” or “cultic laws” are *fulfilled* in Christ’s sacrifice (see, again, Joslin, *Hebrews, Christ, and the Law*, 220-22). But Niell says the “new relationship” of the people of God to the ceremonies is what Hebrews describes as the law being “written on their heart.” Previously, they had to obey the ceremonies; with the coming of Christ, the ceremonies are no longer in effect (“Newness,” 147). However, it is hard to see the meaning of the metaphor in Niell’s interpretation. Why speak of ceremonial laws that are no longer required as being *written on the heart*? Niell provides no answer. (5) Niell argues that 8:11 refers to the removal of the Levitical priests—“an office that was especially engaged in teaching and representing the knowledge of the Lord.” Moreover, he claims that the knowledge spoken of in 8:11 is not “saving knowledge” but “the knowledge that is possessed and published by the priests” (153, also n. 37). Yet, if this is the content of the promise in 8:11, it would seem to be quite anticlimactic. In the end, I conclude that Niell sees much more continuity between the old and new covenants than the author of Hebrews does.

<sup>138</sup>Richard L. Pratt Jr., “Infant Baptism in the New Covenant,” in *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, 163-64.

<sup>139</sup>*Ibid.*, 168-69.

covenant. (3) Prior to the consummation, the new covenant is not restricted to believers. Again, according to Hebrews 10:28-31, there are some members of the new covenant community who, though not believers, have been “sanctified.” This mixture of believers and unbelievers will continue until Christ returns and separates the just from the unjust.<sup>140</sup>

I want to treat Pratt’s argument separate from that of Koester below. Though both appeal to the partial realization of the new covenant, Koester concludes that believers can commit apostasy. On my reading, Pratt does not. Those members of the new covenant who break the covenant “have never been regenerated.”<sup>141</sup> But herein lies the main problem with Pratt’s view. In Pratt’s understanding of the inauguration of the new covenant, Jeremiah’s promises have not actually been partially realized *in the unbelieving covenant members*. The partial realization occurs not primarily at the *individual* level but at the *community* level—that is, the problem for Pratt is not that the new covenant is partially realized in believers but that it is partially realized in the covenant community as a whole.<sup>142</sup> Pratt claims the new covenant can be broken and the new covenant community includes unbelievers. Actually, these observations are two sides of the same coin: the new covenant can be broken *because* the new covenant community consists of unbelievers who prove to be unregenerate. However, one is left asking, then, what is it that makes them covenant members in the first place? According to Jeremiah’s promises, the following will be true of new covenant members: they will have God’s law written on their hearts, God will acknowledge that they are his people, all of them will know the Lord, and their sins will be forgiven. These are the distinguishing

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<sup>140</sup>See *ibid.*, 169-73.

<sup>141</sup>*Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>142</sup>Pratt does, of course, acknowledge partial fulfillment in the lives of believers when he claims “the internalization of the law of God has begun with believers” but “it has not yet been completed” (171). However, his chief argument is to show that the new covenant community consists of *unbelievers*—not imperfect believers. Thus, at the level of the community as a whole, in Pratt’s view, the new covenant promises are only partially realized.

features of the new covenant—*none* of which are true of unbelievers, not even in a *partial* sense. It is one thing to claim that, until the consummation, unbelievers sometimes associate with (and are accepted into) new covenant communities. But it is entirely another thing to claim that the very presence of unbelievers among a community of believers is a sign that Jeremiah’s new covenant promises are only partially realized. Such a conclusion runs contrary to the need for the new covenant: there were old covenant members who failed to continue in it (Heb 8:9).<sup>143</sup>

A repeated and significant piece of evidence to which Pratt points is the warning in Hebrews 10:28-31 and the description in 10:29 of one who was “sanctified.” At this point, two brief responses must suffice: First, It will not do to claim that 10:29 refers to one who has been sanctified “externally” as Pratt suggests. Such a reading does not fit with the use of the verb “sanctify” in the argument of Hebrews, in general, or 10:29, in particular.<sup>144</sup> Second, Pratt asserts that the warning of Hebrews 10:28-31 “makes it plain that until Christ returns, it is possible for the new covenant to be broken.”<sup>145</sup> However, this is required only if one assumes a particular reading of the warnings—the discussion of which must be reserved for chapter 4 of this dissertation. Thus, Pratt’s argument is found wanting.

The third objection to which I want to respond is articulated by Gareth Cockerill. Regarding the promise of the law written on the heart, he claims, “The engraving of God’s laws on the hearts and minds of his people does not mean that they can’t fall away any more than it means they can no longer sin. If the new heart does not eliminate the possibility of sin, why should it eliminate the possibility of apostasy?”<sup>146</sup> Of

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<sup>143</sup>For a critique of both Pratt and Neill, see Stephen J. Wellum, “Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants,” in *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 137-53.

<sup>144</sup>On the use of ἀγιάζω in Hebrews, see the discussion below on Heb 10:1-18, 22.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid., 170.

<sup>146</sup>Gareth Lee Cockerill, “Wesleyan Arminian Response,” in *Four Views of the Warning*

course, no interpreter of whom I am aware claims that the promise of a changed heart prevents a new covenant member from sinning, and it seems clear that the author of the letter understood the reality of sin, even in the lives of new covenant members.<sup>147</sup> But whether or not new covenant members can commit *apostasy* is another question entirely. It will not do merely to say that, if sin is possible, apostasy is possible as well. Sin is inconsistent with the life of a believer and must be cast off; Hebrews makes this clear. But apostasy, understood as the failure to continue in the new covenant by willfully rejecting and renouncing Christ's sacrifice for oneself, is the *exact* sin that the new covenant promises are intended to remedy. Cockerill's argument fails to account for the need for the new covenant in the first place. The new covenant is "not like" the first covenant, *because* (ὅτι) those under it "did not continue" in it (8:9). But if the new covenant does not, in Cockerill's view, eliminate the possibility of apostasy, how is it "not like" the first one? How is it "better" than the first one? This leads to the fourth objection.

Fourth, for those interpreters who do recognize the implicit tension, the solution is an eschatological one. Introducing his comments on the new covenant (8:10-13), Craig Koester writes, "God promised a new covenant because he was not willing to let human faithlessness be the final word in his relationship with his people."<sup>148</sup> By putting his law on their hearts, "God overcomes the tendency of human hearts to be unfaithful (3:12)."<sup>149</sup> However, the promises have "not been fully realized":

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*Passages in Hebrews*, 240. This essay is Cockerill's response to Buist Fanning's view.

<sup>147</sup>The author exhorts them to encourage one another daily so as not to be hardened by sin's deceitfulness (3:13) and to lay aside the sin that clings and entangles (12:1), and he reminds them of their "striving against sin" (12:4). Thus, believers are not sinless. But their hearts have been changed so that they are enabled to "continue" in the covenant. Again, this is a work of God, who equips them in every good thing to do his will (13:20-21). See also Joslin, *Hebrews, Christ, and the Law*, 221.

<sup>148</sup>Koester, *Hebrews*, 391.

<sup>149</sup>*Ibid.*

The shift from the old to the new covenant (8:6) has begun, but is not complete since a change has occurred, but the promises have not been fully realized. Under the new covenant, God deals decisively with sin through the death of Christ (7:27; 10:12-18), yet unbelief remains an unsettling possibility (3:7-4:10). God promised to write his will on human hearts, yet the wayward heart persists (3:12). God promised that people would no longer need instruction, yet they continue to need teaching and exhortation (3:13; 5:12; 13:22). God promised to keep for himself a people, yet some were drifting away (10:25).<sup>150</sup>

As noted previously, few commentators acknowledge any tension in Hebrews between promises and warning. Any assurance of salvation that might be implied by the new covenant promises and the effects of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice are overshadowed, for most, by the author's warnings not to fall away. Koester's statement, though it does not use the word "tension," clearly grants as much and stands in contrast to most commentators. He resolves the conflict between promise and warning by arguing that the shift to the new covenant is "not complete" and the promises "have not been fully realized." In no way do I wish to deny the "inaugurated" eschatology of Hebrews and the future dimension of salvation that it advocates.<sup>151</sup> Yet, Koester's argument that the promises are unfulfilled does not seem to solve the dilemma.<sup>152</sup>

Koester observes a lack of fulfillment in God's promises in each case due primarily to the warning passages.<sup>153</sup> But what does it mean for this promise to be only

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<sup>150</sup>Ibid., 392. On 3:12-19, Koester contends, "The author will argue that Christ's death established the new covenant (10:12-18), yet the ongoing need for mutual exhortation and the prospect that people might be infected by an evil heart indicates that the new covenant is not yet fully in place" (ibid., 265).

<sup>151</sup>Hebrews clearly displays the "already/not yet" understanding of inaugurated eschatology in the way that it characterizes salvation. The "last days" (1:2) have come, and the Son of God reigns—though all his enemies are not yet under his feet (1:13). Christ has sacrificed himself for sin once for all at the end of the ages (9:26; cf. 10:10, 12). By his work, believers have been sanctified and perfected (10:10, 14), sprinkled and washed (10:22). Yet the salvation that Christ brings is not yet *consummated* and lies in the future: believers will yet inherit salvation (1:14), eagerly await Christ (9:28), and seek a city that is to come (13:14). On the present and future aspects of eschatology in Hebrews, see Barrett, "The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews," 363-93; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 76-77; Koester, *Hebrews*, 100-04; Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation*, 6.

<sup>152</sup>Mackie similarly argues for the lack of fulfillment of 8:10-11 because of the warnings, in light of the letter's eschatology (*Eschatology and Exhortation*, 81-82).

<sup>153</sup>I say *primarily* because Koester also claims, "God promised that people would no longer need instruction, yet they continue to need teaching and exhortation (3:13; 5:12; 13:22)." That is, since the author is obliged to teach and exhort them, the promise of 8:11 that they will have no need to teach one



partially realized? Again, if, according to Jeremiah’s prophecy, the new covenant is established to overcome the people’s failure to continue in the covenant, how does a *partial* fulfillment address this? Yes, the ultimate realization and consummation of God’s promises await a future fulfillment (e.g., 1:14; 9:28; 13:14). It is not a question of whether believers will continue to strive against sin until the final realization of the promises (12:4). Rather, the question is “whether in Hebrews those who have already entered into the past and present realities of God’s saving work can fail to come through to its future consummation.”<sup>154</sup> To answer “yes” to this question in light of the warning passages is to *qualify* the new covenant promises as articulated in the letter—not based on the author’s exposition of those promises and the work of Christ, but based on the author’s admonitions to his readers not to forsake the promises. Discussion of how to understand the warning passages of Hebrews, again, must await chapter 4 of this dissertation. For now it is significant to observe that the author does not claim the new covenant and its promises are unrealized. In fact, as the analysis of the next two passages (9:6-14; 10:1-18) will demonstrate, one would presume the exact opposite.<sup>155</sup>

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another since “all will know me” remains unrealized. Elsewhere, he writes, “By offering instruction and exhortation to the listeners, however, Hebrews shows that these aspects of the new covenant still await complete fulfillment” (Hebrews, 112). Cf. Lehne (*The New Covenant in Hebrews*, 30) and Mackie (*Eschatology and Exhortation*, 81-82). Clearly, the author’s warnings and exhortations indicate that his recipients’ perseverance is necessary and that their salvation is not yet complete. But their need for teaching and exhortation should not be taken to mean that 8:11 is unrealized. The promises in 8:10-12 have to do with true communion with God—sins forgiven, a heart inclined to obey, and genuine knowledge of the Lord—not a need for mutual exhortation and religious instruction. Under the old covenant it was necessary for some members to teach others to know the Lord because many under the old covenant *did not* know the Lord (3:10). Under the new covenant, “all” know the Lord, even if some are immature and need remedial instruction (5:12-14). See also Malone, “Critical Evaluation,” 189f; deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 286.

<sup>154</sup>Fanning, “A Classical Reformed View,” 201.

<sup>155</sup>“There is no awaiting a ‘true’ fulfillment by limiting its application to a partial fulfillment in the present. The sacrifice of Christ which inaugurates and seals the new covenant (Heb. 9:15) has come ἐπὶ συντελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων (9:26), and so has the new covenant itself” (Malone, “Critical Evaluation,” 176).

## Hebrews 9:6-14

Introducing the topics of regulations for worship and earthly tabernacle in 9:1, the author deals with them in reverse order in 9:2-5 and 9:6-10.<sup>156</sup> After a brief description of the tabernacle, stressing its division into two sections (vv. 2-5), the author moves on to contrast the religious duties of the priests and the high priest (vv. 6-7). Though the priests continually minister in the first section (v. 6), the high priest alone, once a year, enters the second section—the “Holy of Holies” (cf. v. 3)—to offer blood for his own sins and for those of the people (v. 7). By this arrangement, according to the author, the Holy Spirit is indicating that access to the presence of God is not yet available while the first tabernacle<sup>157</sup> remains normative (v. 8).<sup>158</sup> Thus, not only do the Scriptures confess the inadequacy of the old order (as noted earlier) but so does the very structure of the earthly tabernacle.<sup>159</sup> This, Hebrews says, is a symbol for the present time (v. 9)—that

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<sup>156</sup>See Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 132; William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1991), 217.

<sup>157</sup>Commentators are divided between taking *πρώτης σκηνης* (“the first tent”) in 9:8 to refer to the tabernacle as a whole, including both the outer and inner sanctuaries (e.g., Bruce, *Hebrews*, 208; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 438; Koester, *Hebrews*, 405), and taking *πρώτης σκηνης* to refer solely to the outer section of the tabernacle (e.g., Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 223; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 241; Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 299-300). The latter view seems on the surface more consistent with vv. 2 and 6 where *πρώτης* and *πρώτης σκηνης* refer to the outer tent/sanctuary (the Holy Place). However, it is difficult to see how the “cult conducted in the outer sanctuary” blocked “the way to the true inner sanctuary” (so Attridge, *Hebrews*, 241). The way into the inner sanctuary was not blocked—the high priest had access (albeit once a year) (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 438). Moreover, it is the whole cult, in general, and the need, in particular, for the high priest annually to enter the inner sanctuary to offer blood sacrifice that erects a barrier to the divine presence. In the end, though, these interpreters arrive at essentially the same result. As Lane writes, “The front compartment (ἡ πρώτη σκηνή) becomes a spatial metaphor for the time when the ‘first covenant’ . . . was in force . . . It symbolizes the total first covenant order with its daily and annual cultic ritual” (*Hebrews 9-13*, 224).

<sup>158</sup>*Ἐχούσης στάσιν* (“has standing”) does not refer to the mere physical existence of the first tabernacle, but to its “sanctuary status” (Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 257, v. 45), “cultic status” (Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 223), “normative status” (Attridge, *Hebrews*, 240), or “normative ‘standing’” (Koester, *Hebrews*, 397).

<sup>159</sup>“The arrangements of the old cult signify ultimately its own inadequacy” (Attridge, *Hebrews*, 240).

is, the spatial imagery of the tabernacle is symbolic of the present age.<sup>160</sup> It is an age governed by the old covenant order, which is near destruction (8:13).

In accordance with this old order, gifts and sacrifices are offered; however, they are unable *κατὰ συνείδησιν τελειῶσαι τὸν λατρεύοντα*—“to perfect the worshipper with respect to the conscience” (v. 9). This failure is explained in verse 10 “in terms of the external operation of the cultus.”<sup>161</sup> These “regulations for the flesh” (v. 10) cannot produce an internal change—in contrast to the new covenant. They were part of a temporary administration until the “time of reformation” (v. 10). Just as the law and the priesthood could not achieve perfection (7:11, 19), neither could the regulations of the first covenant. The added dimension in 9:9 to the letter’s understanding of the believer’s perfection is *κατὰ συνείδησιν*. The old covenant could not perfect the worshipper “with respect to the conscience.” Thus, “the perfecting so vaguely specified in the context of 7:11, 19,” Peterson observes, “is here defined as having special regard to the conscience of mankind.”<sup>162</sup> I will return to the word *συνείδησις* and its usage in verse 9 when it reoccurs in verse 14 below.

The “time of reformation” (v. 10) arrived when Christ appeared as a high priest “of the good things that have come”<sup>163</sup> and entered the holy places (*τὰ ἅγια*)—the very

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<sup>160</sup> Ἡτις in v. 9 most likely refers to the *πρώτης σκηῆς* of the preceding verse. The “present time” (*τὸν καιρὸν τὸν ἐνεστηκότα*) is the old age being superseded by the “time of correction/reformation” (*καιροῦ διορθώσεως*) in v. 10. Again, Hebrews reflects the Jewish apocalyptic doctrine of the two overlapping ages—the new age having been inaugurated through Christ’s sacrifice. On the debated grammatical and interpretive issues in 9:9, see Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 223-24; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 240-42; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 439-41; Koester, *Hebrews*, 398.

<sup>161</sup> Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 134.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> *Γενομένων* is probably to be preferred over *μελλόντων*. While the majority of witnesses testify to the latter, the former has witnesses that are early and of diverse textual type. The latter perhaps representing copyists’ attempts to assimilate to the reading in 10:1 (*τῶν μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν*). So Metzger (*Textual Commentary*, 598) and most modern commentators, including Hughes, *Hebrews*, 327 n. 81; Bruce, *Hebrews*, 211; Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 229; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 244; Koester, *Hebrews*, 407-08; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 319 n. 77. Those in favor of *μελλόντων* as original include Moffatt, *Hebrews*, 120; Montefiore, *Hebrews*, 151; Michel, *Hebräer*, 310.

presence of God<sup>164</sup>—“through<sup>165</sup> the greater and more perfect (τελειοτέρας)<sup>166</sup> tabernacle” (v. 11-12). He did not do this “by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood” (v. 12). In doing so, he has obtained “eternal redemption” (αἰωνίαν<sup>167</sup> λύτρωσιν<sup>168</sup>), which, in context, refers to deliverance from and forgiveness of sins. Verse

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<sup>164</sup>See Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 137.

<sup>165</sup>Interpreters are divided on how to take the διά prior to τῆς μείζονος καὶ τελειοτέρας σκηνῆς: either spatially (e.g., Bruce, *Hebrews*, 212; Scholer, *Proleptic Priests*, 163; Marie E. Isaacs, *Sacred Space: An Approach to the Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 73 [Sheffield: Academic Press, 1992], 210; Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 229-30; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 246; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 450; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 320; Allen, *Hebrews*, 470) or instrumentally (e.g., Westcott, *Hebrews*, 258; Montefiore, *Hebrews*, 151-53; A. Vanhoye, “Par la tente plus grande et plus parfaite . . .” (He 9,11),” *Biblica* 46 [1965]: 1-28; Norman H. Young, “The Gospel according to Hebrews 9,” *NTS* 27 [1980-81]: 202-05; Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*, 94; Koester, *Hebrews*, 408-09). While both seem plausible, the latter view should not be so easily dismissed as many have done. To affirm an instrumental use of διά in 9:11, one need not ascribe to the view that “the greater and more perfect tabernacle” refers to Christ’s incarnate body (so several patristic writers) or his resurrection body (so Vanhoye, “Par la tente,” 1-28) or the church (so Westcott, *Hebrews*, 258-60). (See the excurses responding to these proposals in Hughes, *Hebrews*, 283-90; Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 140-43.) Nor need one argue that, since διά is instrumental in its two other occurrences in the immediate context (9:12), it must, therefore, be taken in the same way in 9:11.

The author has just identified the first tabernacle (πρώτης σκηνῆς) as a symbol for the present time (9:8-9). As Lane argues, πρώτης σκηνῆς in 9:8 “symbolizes the total first covenant order with its daily and annual cultic ritual” (*Hebrews 9-13*, 224). Thus, the “greater and more perfect” σκηνῆς in 9:11, likewise, may be seen as symbolically referring to the new covenant order. Young writes, “By means of the new order, not by means of animal sacrifices (as in the old order), but by means of his own blood (as in the new order) he entered into the Holy of Holies (i.e. heaven itself, the presence of God, 9.24) . . . The ‘greater and more perfect tent’ symbolizes the eschatologically new cultic means of access; the ἄγια is the ultimate goal of that access—the presence of God in heaven. Christ can be spoken of as having entered the heavenly ἄγια by means of ‘the greater and more perfect tent’ precisely because the latter stands for the new covenant arrangement by which sin is radically purged and access to God is made universally available” (“The Gospel according to Hebrews 9,” 204-05). Thus, the author contrasts the first, “earthly” tabernacle with the greater and more perfect tabernacle, which is “not of this creation.” The first is symbolic of the old covenant order, which cannot perfect the worshipper with respect to their conscience. However, the second is symbolic of the new covenant order, which—through Christ’s own blood—obtains eternal redemption (9:12).

<sup>166</sup>The author’s use of the adjective τελειοτέρας (“more perfect”) to describe the tabernacle continues his use of comparative adjectives to highlight the superiority of the new covenant order (see Attridge, *Hebrews*, 247; Köstenberger, “Comparatives in the Book of Hebrews,” 36). However, the word may also have been chosen because this “more perfect” tabernacle was an effective means of bringing about the “perfection” of believers (see Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 450).

<sup>167</sup>The “eternal” character of this redemption recalls the “eternal salvation” of which Christ is the source (5:9). His sacrifice is offered through the “eternal Spirit” (9:14) and results in believers receiving the promised “eternal inheritance” (9:15). Later, the author prays that God will equip his readers in every good thing to do his will, by the blood of the “eternal covenant” (13:20).

<sup>168</sup>On the λύτρον word group in the New Testament, see Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching*

15 indicates that, as mediator of the new covenant, Christ's death secures "redemption [ἀπολύτρωσιν] from transgressions." His work as a high priest (v. 11) is compared to that of the old covenant high priest on the Day of Atonement (v. 7), when atonement for sins was annually made (Lev 16:30, 34). Forgiveness of sins is not possible without the shedding of blood (9:22). Christ's sacrificial death was intended to "bear the sins of many" (9:28) and "put away sin" (9:26). Thus, through his sacrificial offering as mediator of a new covenant, Christ realizes Jeremiah's new covenant promise of everlasting forgiveness: "I will no longer remember their sins" (8:12).<sup>169</sup> Yet, as will be seen, forgiveness is not the only new covenant promise that has been fulfilled.

The author employs the *a fortiori* argument of verses 13-14, arguing from the lesser to the greater, to again contend for the superiority of Christ's sacrifice in comparison to those of the old covenant. Verse 13 assumes that animal sacrifices<sup>170</sup> "sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh" (ἀγιάζει πρὸς τὴν τῆς σαρκὸς). Consistent with his earlier comment concerning "regulations for the flesh" (v. 10), the author claims that the cleansing these offerings achieve is *external*.<sup>171</sup> A merely outward purity is attained. Through these rituals, transgressors "could be restored to fellowship with God in the sense that they were enabled to participate again in the worship of the community."<sup>172</sup> But no inward change results. As declared in verse 9, they cannot "make the worshipper

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*of the Cross*, 3<sup>rd</sup> rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 29-53.

<sup>169</sup>See David Peterson, "The Prophecy of the New Covenant in the Argument of Hebrews," *RTR* 38 (1979): 77.

<sup>170</sup>The author mentions "the blood of goats and bulls" and "the ashes of a heifer" (v. 13). The latter refers to the rite found in Numbers 19. It is described as a "sin offering" (19:9), and the ashes were combined with water for use in purification from defilement (19:9-22). On the possible association of this rite, the high priest, and the Day of Atonement in Jewish traditions, see Bruce, *Hebrews*, 215-16; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 249.

<sup>171</sup>"The writer implies that all the sacrifices of the old covenant were able to provide merely an external and symbolic removal of defilement" (Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 239).

<sup>172</sup>David Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 37.

perfect with respect to conscience.” If this is the case, the author reasons, how much more will the blood of Christ—who offered himself without blemish to God through the eternal Spirit—“cleans[e] our<sup>173</sup> conscience” (καθαριεῖ τὴν συνείδησιν ἡμῶν) from dead works to serve the living God (v. 14).

The noun συνείδησις came into common use in Hellenistic literature in the first century B.C. and was used in both a non-moral sense (e.g., “awareness,” “self-consciousness”) and a moral sense (awareness of one’s deeds—normally evil ones).<sup>174</sup> The term occurs only three times in the LXX.<sup>175</sup> However, the concept of an accusing and guilty conscience is present in the OT—in part through reference to the smiting or staggering *heart*.<sup>176</sup> Christian Maurer writes, “For the later development of the idea of conscience it is of [great] importance that the OT speaks of a purifying and renewing of the heart of man. Decisive here is the prayer of Ps. 51:10: ‘Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.’ In the background are the promises of the new covenant in Jer. 31:31 ff.”<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>173</sup>Given the even division of witnesses for ἡμῶν and ὑμῶν, it is difficult to choose between the two. Attridge rightly observes, “Either reading yields an acceptable sense” (*Hebrews*, 244)

<sup>174</sup>See Christian Maurer, “συννοῖδα, συνείδησις,” in *TDNT*, 7:899-907. The moral sense of conscience developed secondarily in the history of the term. The moral conscience is primarily concerned “with assessing and condemning acts already committed”—not with “preparation for approaching decisions” (ibid., 904). Cf. C. A. Pierce, *Conscience in the New Testament* (Chicago: Alec R. Allenson, 1955), 21-39.

<sup>175</sup>Ecc 10:20; Sir 42:18 (variant reading); Wis 17:10. Note also the verbal expression συννοῖδα ἐμαυτῶ in Job 27:6.

<sup>176</sup>David’s heart strikes him when he cuts the corner of Saul’s robe and when he numbers the people (1 Sam 24:5; 2 Sam 24:10). Abigail persuades David not to shed blood without cause, so that he will not have a staggering or stumbling heart (1 Sam 25:31). Note also Ps 51:5-13. See the discussion in Maurer, “συννοῖδα, συνείδησις,” 908-10. Thus, the absence of a particular *word* does not imply the absence of the *concept* related to that word. This must be kept in mind when Pierce writes, “*Conscience* is one of the few important Greek words of the N.T. that have not had imported into them, through use by the LXX, a colouring from the Hebrew experience and outlook of the O.T.” (*Conscience in the New Testament*, 60). Rightly, Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 135.

<sup>177</sup>Maurer, “συννοῖδα, συνείδησις,” 908. One need not assume that Psalm 51 is post-exilic, as Maurer’s comment seems to imply. Of course, the background to Jeremiah 31 is Deuteronomy: “And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart” (Deut 6:6); “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart” (Deut 10:16); “You shall therefore put these words of mine in your heart” (Deut 11:18).

In the NT *συνείδησις* is found thirty-one times, five of which are in Hebrews (9:9, 9:14; 10:2, 22; 13:18).<sup>178</sup> The first four occurrences in Hebrews make clear that the author has in mind a *guilty* conscience that is aware of personal sin.<sup>179</sup> The old covenant regulations could not make the worshippers perfect with respect to their conscience (9:9). This inability of the law to perfect those who drew near is due to the fact that its prescribed sacrifices could not cleanse and remove *συνείδησιν ἁμαρτιῶν*—“consciousness of sins” (10:1-2). Christ’s sacrifice, though, cleanses the conscience from “dead works”—deeds leading to death—that is, sin (9:14).<sup>180</sup> In the fourth occurrence (10:22), the author explicitly connects the “conscience” to the “heart.” Through Christ’s new covenant sacrifice, believers may now draw near to God “with a true heart” (*μετὰ ἀληθινῆς καρδίας*), in full assurance of faith, since their “hearts have been sprinkled clean from an evil conscience” (*ῥεραντισμένοι τὰς καρδίας ἀπὸ συνειδήσεως πονηρᾶς*). I will comment further on 10:1-2 and 22 in the next section below. For now, it is important to note the relationship between the conscience and the heart.<sup>181</sup> “Just as the OT speaks of the burdened, smiting heart . . . so our writer speaks of a heart with ‘an evil conscience’,

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According to Jack Lundbom, prior “heart talk” in Deuteronomy and Jeremiah “is background for and determines the articulation of the new covenant promise” in Jeremiah 31 (*Jeremiah 21-36: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB [New York: Doubleday, 2004], 468).

<sup>178</sup>On the NT distribution and usage, see Maurer, “*συνοῖδα, συνείδησις*,” 914-19. See also Johannes Stelzenberger, *Syneidesis im Neuen Testament* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1961); Robert Jewett, *Paul’s Anthropological Terms: A Study of their Use in Conflict Settings* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 402-46.

<sup>179</sup>The author can also speak of a “good conscience” that is aware of right conduct (13:18), but in chaps. 9-10 his concern is with an evil conscience—or, as Peterson says, an “accusing conscience”—that bears witness to one’s guilt before God (*Hebrews and Perfection*, 135). Cf. Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*, 88.

<sup>180</sup>The same phrase occurs in 6:1 as part of the elementary and foundational Christian teaching, which includes “repentance from” *νεκρῶν ἔργων*.

<sup>181</sup>Peterson is right that, though clearly related, “there is no simple equation of heart and conscience here” (*Hebrews and Perfection*, 135).

meaning a heart that is aware of God's command and authority and of having offended against these."<sup>182</sup>

Clearly, the cleansing of sin from a guilty conscience describes the forgiveness that Christ's sacrifice brings. But it also brings about an internal change that affects one's relationship with God. For a cleansed conscience (9:14; 10:22) makes it possible for one to "draw near with a true heart" (10:22) and "serve the living God" (9:14). To perfect the believer with respect to the conscience, then, includes conscience cleansing *and* subsequent heart renewal toward God. One must be careful not simply to equate "perfect" and "cleanse" in 9:9 and 14.<sup>183</sup> To "perfect the worshipper" *κατὰ συνείδησιν* is not merely to "cleanse" *τὴν συνείδησιν*. As noted regarding 7:19, the perfection of believers has to do with their being enabled to draw near to God. Peterson aptly observes that the true parallel with the perfection of the worshipper *κατὰ συνείδησιν* in 9:9 is the *full statement* of 9:14: the worshipper's conscience is cleaned from dead works so that he might "serve the living God."<sup>184</sup> To perfect the worshipper with respect to the conscience is to cleanse the conscience and bring about a true relationship with God that results in heart-felt service to him. In other words, this perfection of believers fulfills the new covenant promise to write God's laws on their hearts.<sup>185</sup>

This conclusion is further justified in 9:15. For, immediately after speaking of the cleansing of the defiled conscience to evoke true service to God (9:14), thus resulting

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<sup>182</sup>Ibid.

<sup>183</sup>This has happened in the NIV, which translates the phrase in Heb 9:9 as "clear the conscience of the worshipper."

<sup>184</sup>"The conscience must be cleansed in order that one might serve God effectively" (Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 259 n. 69). "In 9:9, it is not strictly the conscience that is perfected. Man viewed in his role as 'worshipper' (*τὸν λατρεύοντα*), that is one who would draw near to God, is perfected 'in relation to conscience' (*κατὰ συνείδησιν*) . . . . Perfection in this context certainly involves purification and forgiveness, but the overall usage of *τελειοῦν* in relation to believers suggests that the term has a broader meaning than this . . . . Perfection is not synonymous with cleaning but involves the latter as a most significant element" (136).

<sup>185</sup>Ibid, 135, 136; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 242.



in the perfection of the worshipper with respect to the conscience (9:9), the author declares that it is “for this reason” (διὰ τοῦτο) that Christ “is the mediator of a new covenant” (9:15)—clearly recalling the just-cited quotation from Jeremiah. This better covenant of which he is a mediator is enacted on better promises (8:6)—to include God’s promise to write his laws on their hearts and minds (8:8). According to the author, this new covenant promise is fulfilled through Christ’s mediatorial work of cleansing their consciences by his sacrificial death.<sup>186</sup>

The purpose of this conscience cleansing work is that believers might “serve the living God”—εἰς τὸ λατρεύειν θεῶν ζῶντι (9:14). One begins to discern, then, just how the perfection of believers relates to the perfection of Christ. Of course, the perfection of Christ and believers are distinct, in that a believer’s perfection necessitates an inward cleansing and change that is not required of Christ. However, there appears to be a clear parallel. As argued above, Christ’s perfection is vocational, qualifying him to serve as high priest and savior of his people. Similarly, the perfection of believers should also be seen as vocational, fitting them for a relationship with God and qualifying them for his service. According to 7:19, the law could not bring about “perfection”—which has to do with “drawing near” to God, that is, being brought into a right relationship to him.<sup>187</sup> The old covenant sacrifices could not perfect man in his role as “worshipper” (9:9), as one who “draws near” (10:1).<sup>188</sup> Man’s conscience must first be cleansed, which is achieved

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<sup>186</sup>“The ‘days’ of which Jeremiah spoke [8:8] must be a reality now, since Jesus by his death is the ‘mediator of a new covenant’ (9:15)” (Peterson, “The Prophecy of the New Covenant,” 77). According to 9:15, Christ has this mediatorial role, so that “those who are called (οἱ κεκλημένοι) might receive the eternal inheritance.” Jason A. Whitlark considers this one of several “election motifs” in Hebrews, which show how the “durable personal relationship” implied by the covenant metaphor of the letter begins and is sustained (*Enabling Fidelity to God: Perseverance in Hebrews in Light of the Reciprocity Systems of the Ancient Mediterranean World* [Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008], 148-52).

<sup>187</sup>See Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 128.

<sup>188</sup>*Ibid.*, 136. Peterson argues, “The object of the verb in 9:9 and 10:1 suggests that τελειοῦν was being applied to believers in a ‘vocational’ sense” (166).

through Christ's sacrifice (9:14). Believers are, thus, perfected in their vocation as "would-be worshippers," so that they may "serve the living God" (9:14).<sup>189</sup>

By arguing that the perfection of believers is vocational and does not involve an ethical development—i.e., moral perfection—it does not follow that there are no implications in terms of obedience to God. After all, perfection qualifies the believer to draw near and serve God. "Clearly, the power of the defiled conscience to keep a person

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<sup>189</sup>Ibid. Cf. Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 36. "To perfect . . . is to put the People into the true covenant relation of worshippers of the Lord" (Davidson, *Hebrews*, 208). DeSilva rejects Peterson's vocational view of the perfection of believers. He argues that, while the specific meaning of "perfection" shifts throughout the letter depending on the context, the "general sense" involves "arriving at one's proper, completed, finished state" (*Perseverance in Gratitude*, 197). As noted above in the discussion of Christ's perfection, deSilva claims that the perfecting of Christ "signifies chiefly his arrival at his heavenly destiny" (199). For believers, perfection "refers to the cultic process by which a person is enabled to draw near to God" (200) and "is the completion of a salvation-historical process of bringing humanity back to its proper, divinely appointed state of . . . fellowship with God" (202). In objecting to Peterson, deSilva claims that the vocational reading of 9:9 and 10:1 "ignores the author's clue that 'perfection' is to be read as 'cleaning' (specifically from defilement) in these passages, hence within the framework of cultic rituals designed to move persons or objects across a boundary to their ritually appointed end" (200-01 n. 52).

While deSilva's reading is possible, I think his rejection of the vocational view is unwarranted for the following reasons: (1) As argued above, the vocational view of *Christ's* perfection seems most likely. DeSilva's interpretation was found wanting. One would expect, then, a parallel between his perfection and that of believers. (2) The parallel between 9:9 (κατὰ συνείδησιν τελειῶσαι τὸν λατρεύοντα) and 9:14 (καθαριεῖ τὴν συνείδησιν) does not mean that "perfection" and "cleaning" are synonymous here. Even deSilva himself notes that perfection involves more than merely cleansing (*Perseverance in Gratitude*, 201ff.). (3) One need not deny the cultic context in order to affirm a vocational view of the believer's perfection. DeSilva suggests, "It would be unnatural for ['perfection'] not to take its meaning here from these cultic bearings" (201). Yet, Peterson's interpretation of "perfection" *does* take its meaning from the cultic context. For, the vocation for which the believer is qualified is that of "worshipper" and one who "draws near"—clearly a cultic role. Of course, Peterson maintains that the Christian's service is not restricted to the cultic (i.e., "prayer and praise") but is expanded to "pleasing God in practical obedience (13:16)" (*Hebrews and Perfection*, 140). Yet the verse he cites dubs such practical obedience as "sacrifices." Thus, Hebrews' view is consistent with the Pauline teaching that worship involves presenting oneself to God as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1)—a connection Peterson notices elsewhere (see his *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992], 242). For the Christian, all of life is cultic.

Scholer's rejection of Peterson's vocational view is based on his rejection of a vocational view of *Christ's* perfection (*Proleptic Priests*, 193-94). However, as argued above, Scholer's own understanding of Christ's perfection is not compelling. Regarding the perfection of believers, Scholer writes, "Peterson's position is much closer to our own. Although he persists in describing the believers as 'qualified' through Christ's acts (e.g. 10:14), the point in Heb. seems to have very little to do with any description of the qualification of believers and far more to do with the simple fact and stark reality that believers now possess access to God, which will be fully actualized only in the future" (194). Yet, as already noted, the author states that their perfection involves a cleansing of the conscience, fulfilling the new covenant promise of heart renewal, for the purpose of enabling them "to serve the living God" (9:9, 14)—a portrayal of believers that seems justly described as being "qualified."

from serving God effectively,” maintains Peterson, “is a fundamental presupposition of our writer’s teaching on the perfecting of believers.”<sup>190</sup> The cleansing of the conscience “leads to a decisive change in a person’s heart with respect to God and enables that person to serve God as he requires.” Therefore, the perfecting of believers “has its proper outworking in a life of obedience to God’s will and perseverance in hope.”<sup>191</sup>

Yet can this be so, in light of the warnings of the letter? Koester contends, “Cleansing the conscience does not mean that people become sinless, for the evil, faithless heart continues to threaten them (3:12).”<sup>192</sup> But I respond that, while it is true that the cleansing of the conscience does not produce “sinless” people, neither does continued susceptibility to sin (prior to the eschatological consummation) necessarily imply susceptibility to an “evil, faithless heart,” which leads one to “fall away from the living God” (3:12)—that is, commit apostasy. In light of the author’s exposition, one must notice the conflict in Koester’s statement. How can one who has been perfected through the cleansing of a sinful conscience by Christ’s sacrifice—thus fulfilling the new covenant promise of *heart renewal*—continue to be threatened by an *evil, faithless heart*? If, as argued in connection to 8:1-13, the promise to write God’s law on the heart is a response to the apostasy of those under the first covenant, how does the *fulfillment* of this promise continue to leave new covenant members susceptible to apostasy? Someone may answer that this *must* be so; otherwise there is conflict with the author’s clear warnings against apostasy. I grant this *apparent* conflict. What has not been so readily noticed in

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<sup>190</sup>Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 139.

<sup>191</sup>Ibid., 140. Whitlark (see *Enabling Fidelity to God*, 142-71, esp. 142-46) argues against the view that the author articulates fidelity to God in light of the reciprocity systems of the ancient world (as advocated especially by deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 58-69; cf. *Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 152 [Atlanta: Scholars, 1995]). Whitlark insists that human fidelity to God results from “human transformation and ongoing divine enablement” that is made possible by Christ’s perfection of his people through his new covenant promise fulfilling sacrifice (*Enabling Fidelity to God*, 152).

<sup>192</sup>Koester, *Hebrews*, 416.

Hebrews scholarship, though, is that the possibility of apostasy on the part of believers seems to conflict with the author's clear affirmation that God's promise to transform their hearts has been fulfilled. This fulfillment of the new covenant promises is made even more clear in the following passage.

### **Hebrews 10:1-18, 22**

Hebrews 10:1-18 represents the final unit and climax to the exposition on the superior high priestly ministry of Christ in 8:1-10:18.<sup>193</sup> It concludes (10:16-17) by repeating a portion of Jeremiah's quotation cited in Hebrews 8:8-12. The new covenant prophecy, thus, forms a sort of *inclusio* framing the exposition.<sup>194</sup> Its reappearance—specifically the promise of the law written on the heart in 10:16—demonstrates that the intervening exposition since the prior citation is concerned with describing how the promise is fulfilled in the lives of believers.<sup>195</sup>

Following 9:6-14 and the declaration in 9:15 of Christ's new covenant mediatorial death to secure an inheritance for those called by God, the author explains the necessity of Christ's death (9:16-17)<sup>196</sup> and the requirement that blood be shed to

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<sup>193</sup>See Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 257.

<sup>194</sup>Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*, 85; deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 325; Thompson, *Hebrews*, 170. Cf. Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*, 80.

<sup>195</sup>Contra Peter Gräbe who claims, "Forgiveness of sins, the subject upon which the author wishes to focus, appears in 10:16-17. The central part of the Jeremiah quote receives no emphasis or attention. The author does not touch on the Torah being written on the heart, knowledge of God, or the covenant formula" ("The New Covenant and Christian Identity" in *A Cloud of Witnesses*, 123). However, Gräbe overlooks (1) that the promise of the law written on the heart appears in 10:16-17 as well and (2) that while 9:1-10:18 certainly emphasizes the forgiveness of sins, the author also intends his description of believers' perfection to signify the fulfillment of the promise of heart transformation. Gräbe's comments are a sharp contrast to those of Joslin, whose essay ("Hebrews 7-10 and the Transformation of the Law") appears immediately before his in the same volume. Joslin writes, "The [new covenant] blessings (8.10-12) are essential and integral to one another . . . . Forgiveness is based on the work of the new High Priest, and is tethered to the reality of a perfect and cleansed conscience (9.10, 14) . . . and a sincere and cleansed heart (10.22) . . . . [T]he [new covenant] blessings of the laws on the heart and forgiveness of sins (8.10-12; 10:16-17) are intertwined" (114). According to Edgar V. McKnight, the repetition of the two features of "interior covenant and forgiveness of sins" in 10:16-17 makes clear "that these features are foremost in the author's mind" (*Hebrews-James* [Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2004], 186).

<sup>196</sup>For opposing views from modern commentators on the difficult question of the meaning of

inaugurate the first covenant (9:18-22). Based on this reality of cultic cleansing by blood, the author affirms the need for the heavenly things<sup>197</sup> to be cleansed by the better sacrifice of Christ (9:23). That Christ's sacrifice is better—and definitive—is made clear because he entered heaven itself (not a mere copy) to appear in God's presence (9:24) and, unlike the repetitive offerings of the high priest, Christ's sacrifice to put away sin was offered once for all (9:25-28).

Having emphasized the definitive nature of Christ's sacrifice, the author points to the inability of the law, through its annual sacrifices, to bring about perfection for those who draw near, because the law only has "a shadow of the good things to come, not the true form of the realities" (10:1). The description is similar to 8:5, which speaks of the priests who serve "a copy and shadow of the heavenly things." In other words, the law had a "foreshadowing" function to point forward to that which was complete.<sup>198</sup> The "good things to come" (τῶν μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν) surely represent the new covenant blessings. In 9:11 Christ is called a high priest of the "good things that have come" (τῶν γενομένων ἀγαθῶν), and the following verses make clear that the good things his high priesthood has obtained include eternal redemption (9:12), cleansing of the conscience (9:14), an eternal inheritance (9:15), and abolition of sin (9:26). The now-fulfilled new covenant promises are the "good things to come."

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διαθήκη in vv. 16-17, see Bruce, *Hebrews*, 221-24; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 255-56; deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 308-09; Koester, *Hebrews*, 417-18 (who affirm the meaning "will" or "testament") versus Westcott, *Hebrews*, 300-304; Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 242-43; Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 313 (who affirm the meaning "covenant"). O'Brien defends the view that it refers, not to covenants in general, "but the broken Sinai covenant" (*Hebrews*, 331). He follows the interpretation set forth in Scott W. Hahn, "A Broken Covenant and the Curse of Death: A Study of Hebrews 9:15-22," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 66 (2004): 416-36.

<sup>197</sup>The discussion and conclusions of Hughes (*Hebrews*, 379-82) and Koester (*Hebrews*, 421) are helpful in understanding the claim that the "heavenly things" require cleansing.

<sup>198</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 259. Joslin writes, "[The writer of Hebrews] envisions the cultus to be a shadow that outlines and prefigures the priestly ministry of Christ" ("Hebrews 7-10 and the Transformation of the Law," 115)

The failure of the old covenant to bring about perfection, whether through the priesthood, the Law, or animal sacrifices, has been repeatedly emphasized (7:11, 19; 9:9). In each case, man is presented as worshipper, as one who draws near to God.<sup>199</sup> The same observation is made now in 10:1: the law can never “perfect those who draw near” (τοὺς προσερχομένους τελειῶσαι)—it cannot fit them for an intimate relationship to God as promised in LXX Jeremiah 38:31-34.<sup>200</sup> The reason for the failure is that the sacrifices had to be continually offered every year. If the law *could* make the worshippers perfect through its sacrifices, the author argues in verse 2, would they not have ceased to be offered? For then “having been cleansed once for all” (ἅπαξ κεκαθαρισμέντων), the worshippers would no longer have “consciousness of sins” (συνείδησιν ἁμαρτιῶν)—what the author will later describe as an “evil conscience” (10:22).<sup>201</sup> In other words, the continual nature of the sacrifices—as opposed to the singular sacrifice of Christ (9:26-28)—attests to their ineffectiveness at achieving perfection. Rather, these perpetual sacrifices are an annual “reminder of sins” (10:3), and, since the blood of bulls and goats only availed for an external cleansing (9:13-14), it is impossible for them to take away sin (10:4).

“Therefore,” the author claims in verse 5, God had something better and definitive in mind. In verses 5-7, he quotes from Psalm 40:6-8 (LXX 39:7-9) and argues for a Christological fulfillment of the passage. The psalm prophetically implies that Christ has come to do God’s will by sacrificing himself—an offering that supercedes those of the old cultus (10:8-9).<sup>202</sup> Through Christ’s obedience to God’s will, “we have

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<sup>199</sup>Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 145.

<sup>200</sup>See Attridge, *Hebrews*, 271-72.

<sup>201</sup>As with the parallel between 9:9 and 9:14, so in 10:2, perfection is seen to include the cleansing of the conscience. “That the perfecting of believers involves not only cleansing but also *the consequent approach to God* seems likely from the fact that the object of τελειῶσαι in 10:1 is τοὺς προσερχομένους” (Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 146 [emphasis in original]).

<sup>202</sup>On the author’s use of the psalm and the textual issues involved, see especially Kistemaker, *The Psalm Citations*, 124-30; McCullough, “The Old Testament Quotations in Hebrews,” 368; Guthrie,

been sanctified (ἡγιασμένοι ἐσμέν) through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (10:10).

The concepts of “sanctification,” “perfection,” and “cleansing” all overlap in Hebrews but none should be equated.<sup>203</sup> To “sanctify” (ἀγιάζω) is to consecrate, to set apart. It is used in Hebrews with cultic and covenantal connotations.<sup>204</sup> In 2:11 and 10:14, believers are described as “those who are sanctified” (ἀγιαζόμενοι, ἀγιαζομένους) because of the atoning death of Christ. In the former verse, they are associated with Christ who is “the sanctifier” (ἀγιάζων). The blood of goats and bulls sanctifies for the cleansing of the

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“Hebrews,” 975-78.

<sup>203</sup>One must be careful to distinguish the author’s use of the verbs for “make perfect” (τελειόω), “cleanse” (καθαρίζω), and “sanctify” (ἀγιάζω). As argued above, the parallel between 9:9 (κατὰ συνείδησιν τελειῶσαι τὸν λατρεύοντα) and 9:14 (καθαριεῖ τὴν συνείδησιν) should not be used to argue that “perfecting” is to be identified with “cleansing” here (contra Michel, *Hebräer*, 333 n. 4). A cleansed conscience is necessary for one to be perfected (10:1-2), but perfection includes more than cleansing, as the broader context shows (see Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 136, 259 n. 69). Neither are “sanctify” and “make perfect” “used interchangeably” in Hebrews (contra Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 511; cf. John Dunnill, *Covenant and Sacrifice in the Letter to the Hebrews* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 223), as the statement in 10:14 would amount to a tautology. Finally, while there is overlap between “cleanse” and “sanctify” in Hebrews (e.g., both are achieved by blood [9:13-14; 10:29; 13:12]), “cleansing” alone involves the purging of sin.

Most interpreters recognize overlap in meaning among the terms without equating them. To “cleanse” involves removal of defilement—to purge or purify. In Hebrews the defilement to be cleansed is sin (1:3; 9:14; 10:2). To “sanctify” means to consecrate, to set apart as holy. As Peterson recognizes, it is used in Hebrews in a cultic and covenantal sense (10:10-18; 10:29; 13:12) (*Hebrews and Perfection*, 150; cf. Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 35). Christ’s blood and death sanctify, “setting people apart for a covenant relationship with God” (Koester, *Hebrews*, 121). See also Friedrich Hauck, “καθαρίζω, et al.”; Christian Procksch, “ἀγιάζω, et al.” in *TDNT*, as well as the discussions of the terms in Davidson, *Hebrews*, 203-09; William C. Johnson, “Defilement and Purgation in the Book of Hebrews” (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1973), 260-75.

DeSilva relates the three concepts by seeing perfection as signaling “at one stroke both the cleansing and the consecration of the worshipper, the accomplishment (completion) of two rites designed to bring an object to an appointed goal (cleanness, holiness)” (*Perseverance in Gratitude*, 202). However, though perfection certainly involves both cleansing and sanctification, it seems to go beyond this. Some measure of cleansing and sanctification was possible under the old covenant (9:13). What was not possible was perfection. Cleansing is the basis for sanctification; it is preparatory to sanctification (see Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 34). Furthermore, 10:14 seems to indicate that sanctification is the logical preparation for perfection (Johnson, “Defilement and Purgation,” 263): “He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (the translation of the present passive ἀγιαζόμενος will be discussed below). More helpful is the image (taken from Peterson’s illustration in *Possessed by God*, 37) of the three concepts relating as concentric circles, with cleansing at the center, followed by sanctification, and having perfection as the outermost circle including the other two.

<sup>204</sup>Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 150.

flesh (9:13). But the conscience is cleaned by the blood of Christ (9:14), that is, the “blood of the covenant” which also sanctifies his people (10:29; cf. 13:12). Moreover, the whole context in which 10:10 and 14 are situated is an exposition on new covenant fulfillment: “This is the covenant I will make with them” (10:16). Thus, Christ’s blood and death sanctify, “setting people apart for a covenant relationship with God.”<sup>205</sup>

While the old covenant priests offer repeated sacrifices that can never take away sins (10:11), Christ made one offering for sins (10:12). That this sacrifice was definitive is obvious because, although the old covenant priest “stands” daily to minister (10:11), this superior priest has, in fulfillment of Psalm 110, “sat down” at God’s right hand, until his enemies become his footstool (10:12-13).<sup>206</sup> Why was his single sacrifice effective enough so that he might sit down? “For” (γὰρ) by one offering “he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (τετελείωκεν εἰς τὸ διηνεκές τοὺς ἀγιαζόμενους) (10:14).

What has been anticipated for the last several chapters is finally made explicit. For the first time in the letter, believers are the object of the verb “make perfect.” The dilemma of 10:1 is solved in 10:14. The law could not, through its sacrifices offered continually, perfect those who drew near. But Christ, through his one offering, has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.<sup>207</sup> What the law could not do, Christ has definitively accomplished. The author subsequently quotes again from Jeremiah’s prophecy (10:15-17), this time abbreviated (LXX Jer 38:33-34), providing confirmation from scripture that Christ’s sacrifice was definitive.<sup>208</sup> The shortened quotation focuses

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<sup>205</sup>Koester, *Hebrews*, 121.

<sup>206</sup>On the use of Ps 110:1 in Heb 10:12-13, see David R. Anderson, *The King-Priest of Psalm 110 in Hebrews*, Studies in Biblical Literature 21 (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 233-36.

<sup>207</sup>DeSilva observes the parallel between 10:1 and 14, arguing that the author framed the latter specifically to answer the former. The three shared terms or phrases in the verses (προσφέρουσιν, εἰς τὸ διηνεκές, τελειῶσαι), he believes, “mark this strongly as an *inclusio*” (*Perseverance in Gratitude*, 324).

<sup>208</sup>Aside from the fact that the passage is abbreviated, the text differs in a few respects from the previous quotation, but the changes seem mostly insignificant: (1) The covenant is said to be made “with



on two of the four new covenant blessings: renewal of the heart and the forgiveness of sins.<sup>209</sup> In this way, the author directly ties the perfecting of believers (10:14) to the new covenant promises (10:15-17), arguing that the former fulfills the latter—particularly the promise to write God’s laws on the hearts of his people.<sup>210</sup> Moreover, the prophecy’s repetition shows that the whole purpose of the exposition in chapters 9-10, which

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them” (πρὸς αὐτούς) in 10:16 rather than τῶ ὄκω Ἰσραήλ. (2) “Minds” and “hearts” are inverted, so that the latter comes first in 10:16. Kistemaker suggests that the author wanted to bring the words “law” and “heart” closer together, because of their importance earlier in the letter (*The Psalm Citations*, 129). Thomas agrees, noting that while chap. 10 refers to the failure of the law, 3:12 and 4:12 refer to the failure of the heart. But with the laws put on our hearts, “we have a new confidence and a new hope” (“The Old Testament Citations in Hebrews,” 311). While this thesis is impossible to prove, it would certainly be consistent with what has been said thus far concerning the significance of the “heart” in Hebrews. (3) In 10:17 the words καὶ τῶν ἀνομιῶν αὐτῶν are added after καὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν. (4) The future μνησθήσομαι is used in 10:17 instead of the aorist subjunctive μνησθῶ in 8:12. See the discussion in Guthrie, “Hebrews,” 978-79.

<sup>209</sup>A difficulty with the quotation’s introductory formula (“And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us. For after saying”) lies in the fact that the temporal infinitive (μετὰ τὸ εἰρηκέναι) seems to require something like “then he says” at a later point to introduce the remainder of the quotation. That some scribes felt this angst is reflected in several later MSS where various glosses replace the καὶ beginning v. 17 (see Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 256). Modern translations generally assume an understood introduction in the same place, prior to v. 17: e.g., “He adds” (HCSB), “he then says” (NASB) or “then he adds” (NIV, ESV). Most modern commentaries argue for a similar break. As Westcott argues, “the point of the apodosis lies in the declaration of the forgiveness of sins” (*Hebrews*, 318), presumably because this is the focus on v. 18. However, it is interesting that such emendations are not found in the *early* MS tradition. A number of commentators argue instead that the author intends the break prior to the pronouncement of the promise to put the laws on the heart. Thus, the author employs λέγει κύριος in the quotation to serve as the introduction to the second half: “For after saying, ‘This is the covenant . . .’ the Lord says, ‘I will put my laws on their hearts . . . and their lawless deed I will remember no more.’” So Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1871), 2:164-65; Michel, *Hebräer*, 341; Herbert Braun, *An die Hebräer* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1984), 304; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 281; deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 326; Johnson, *Hebrews*, 254. This latter option seems more likely, since it does not require introducing an “understood” phrase to the passage. Furthermore, while v. 18 declares the fulfillment of sins forgiven as promised in v. 17, the passage follows the declaration of believers’ perfection (v. 14) which fulfills the promise of heart renewal (v. 16). So *both* promises seem to be integral to the author’s argument. As already noted, these two promises are the focus of the author’s exposition in chaps. 9-10. “[I]t would be disturbing to the sense to divide the promise of forgiveness of past transgressions . . . from its necessary condition—the writing of the law upon the heart” (Delitzsch, *Hebrews*, 2:165).

<sup>210</sup>Several interpreters state explicitly that the perfection of believers involves the fulfillment of the promise to write God’s laws on the heart. See, e.g., Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 149, 151; Albert Vanhoye, *Old Testament Priests and the New Priest* (Petersham, MA: St. Bede’s 1986), 220-21; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 281; Koester, *Hebrews*, 123; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 359. Cf. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 268, 71; Steven K. Stanley, “A New Covenant Hermeneutic: The Use of Scripture in Hebrews 8-10” (Ph.D. diss., University of Sheffield, 1994), 98.

followed the first quotation, was to illumine the promises and explain their fulfillment.<sup>211</sup> The author concludes the section with a further explicit pronouncement of fulfillment: “where there is forgiveness of these there is no longer any offering for sin” (10:18). Christ’s sacrifice is definitive because it abolished sin, which the old covenant sacrifices could not take away, and made complete forgiveness a reality. It forever perfected believers by dealing with the perennial problem of the evil and unbelieving heart, which stood in the way of covenant fidelity and about which the old covenant could do nothing. The writer “envisages that *the forgiveness and cleansing available through the death of Christ will lead to that immediate and spontaneous fidelity to God that was foretold by Jeremiah.*”<sup>212</sup>

That the perfection of believers fulfills the new covenant promise of heart transformation is further evidenced by the author’s comments in 10:22. In light of the work of this great high priest, whose blood has granted believers confidence to enter God’s presence through the “new and living way” that he has inaugurated (10:19-21), the author exhorts his readers to “draw near with a true heart [ἀληθινῆς καρδίας] in full assurance of faith.” Such approach to God is possible “since<sup>213</sup> our hearts have been sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (ῥεραντισμένοι τὰς καρδίας ἀπὸ συνειδήσεως πονηρᾶς καὶ λελουσμένοι τὸ σῶμα ὕδατι καθαρῷ).<sup>214</sup> Having just cited Jeremiah’s oracle, it is hard to see how the author’s

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<sup>211</sup>See Malone, “Critical Evaluation,” 192; Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 268; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 281. DeSilva writes, “This reprise serves as a sort of scriptural ‘Q.E.D.’” [“which was the thing to be proven”] (*Perseverance in Gratitude*, 325 n. 51).

<sup>212</sup>Peterson, “The Prophecy of the New Covenant,” 79 (emphasis in original).

<sup>213</sup>Thus taking the two participles as causal, modifying *προσερχώμεθα*. Alternatively, they may be expressing means (so Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 341, 343-44).

<sup>214</sup>Whether the author’s expression about believer’s “bodies being washed with pure water,” is to be seen as a reference to Christian baptism, Old Testament washings, or prophetic imagery—particularly Ezek 36:25-27, is a question that cannot be taken up here and does not seem significantly to impact the above discussion. For consideration of these issues, see, e.g., Peterson, “The Prophecy of the New Covenant,” 78, also n. 19; Lane *Hebrews 9-13*, 287-88; and Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 523-24. If the author is alluding to the Ezekiel passage, it is interesting to note that God’s promise in Ezekiel to “sprinkle clean

description of their hearts could imply anything other than the fulfillment and realization of the prophet’s promise of heart renewal.<sup>215</sup> While the wilderness generation had evil, unbelieving hearts that were hardened and went astray (3:8, 10, 12), the recipients have “true” hearts<sup>216</sup> and can draw near to God in full assurance of faith. This is because their hearts have been “sprinkled clean from an evil conscience” (as noted earlier, “heart” and “conscience” are explicitly brought together here), recalling the forgiven, sin-cleansed conscience that is achieved through Christ’s sacrifice (9:14). Thus, the fulfillment of the promise of forgiveness in LXX Jeremiah 38:34 makes possible the fulfillment of the promise of heart renewal of LXX Jeremiah 38:33.<sup>217</sup> Peterson’s comments are helpful: The promise of forgiveness “is the basis of a new relationship of heart-obedience towards God on the part of his people . . . . Such forgiveness or cleaning from sin enables men to draw near to God.”<sup>218</sup> Cleansed hearts result in true, believing hearts—that is, hearts with God’s laws upon them. This is the essence of a believer’s perfection. “Man is perfected in

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water” on his people, give them a “new heart,” and put his Spirit within them is in close proximity to his declaration in Ezek 37:26 to make with them an “eternal covenant” (*διαθήκης αἰωνίου*), a phrase found in the NT only in Heb 13:20 (see discussion of this text below).

<sup>215</sup>See Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 135, 155; Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 286; Johnson, *Hebrews*, 257-58; Thompson, *Hebrews*, 204. Contra Morrison who writes concerning Jeremiah’s promise, “The author does not do anything with the details of Jer 31—he says nothing about law in the heart” (*Who Needs a New Covenant?*, 60).

<sup>216</sup>While some translations render ἀληθινῆς καρδίας as “sincere heart” (e.g., NIV, NASB) the emphasis seems less on the *sincerity* of the heart than on its *genuineness*—that is, a heart as God intends it to be. “A heart which fulfills the ideal office of the heart,” writes Westcott, “the seat of the individual character, towards God—a heart which expresses completely the devotion of the whole person to God” (*Hebrews*, 324). Thus, while sincerity of heart would certainly result, the author is not telling the recipients to make sure their hearts are sincere before they approach God. He is urging them to approach because, through Christ, God has kept his promise to change their hearts and make their approach a reality.

<sup>217</sup>Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 135.

<sup>218</sup>*Ibid.*, 149. “Our writer’s argument suggests that only when the heart is set free from the burden of unforgiven sins can it be renewed in faith and sincerity towards God” (Peterson, “The Prophecy of the New Covenant,” 78).

relation to God *when the promises of the New Covenant are realized in individual experience.*<sup>219</sup>

But *are* the promises realized? According to Koester,

The effects of the new covenant are not fully realized, of course . . . . [U]nder the new covenant God promises not to recall sins (10:17). God remains mindful of sin, however, insofar as sin remains a threat (4:12-13; 10:26-31). Nevertheless, by giving people a renewed will to be faithful and by promising forgiveness for offenses that have already taken place, God creates a situation in which he does not allow past or present sins to define his relationship with people.<sup>220</sup>

Once again, the presence of the warnings, for Koester, justifies the conclusion that the new covenant is not fully realized. I. Howard Marshall contends, “Perfection is not realized in a moment. The perfected are those who have learned to be fully obedient and loving towards God, and who are sinless. Hence full perfection might be seen as a state attainable only in heaven.”<sup>221</sup>

I contend, though, that the presence of the warnings should not be used to argue that the new covenant promises are not realized or that perfection is incomplete. As noted earlier, salvation in Hebrews clearly reflects an inaugurated eschatology. There is a future dimension to salvation that is yet to be realized. Believers are still to inherit salvation (1:14; 9:15). They eagerly wait for Christ (9:28) and seek a heavenly city (13:14). The warnings of the letter urge them to press on with endurance. But it does *not* necessarily follow that, if ultimate salvation is yet future, then *all aspects* of that salvation are yet future, or that some aspects are only *partially realized*. That an eschatological tension exists within the letter is clear. But in terms of Christ’s new covenant sacrifice, he has appeared “once at the end of ages to put away sin” (9:26). In terms of its effects, he has made purification for sins (1:3), sanctified believers (10:10), and perfected them “for

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<sup>219</sup>Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 155 (emphasis in original).

<sup>220</sup>Koester, *Hebrews*, 441.

<sup>221</sup>I. Howard Marshall, “Soteriology in Hebrews,” in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, 262.

all time” (10:14). Davidson contends that *none* of the three words—“purify,” “sanctify,” and “make perfect,”—appears to be “used proleptically, to describe an act done in principle, the fruits of which progressively manifest themselves.”<sup>222</sup>

Concerning God’s promise to forgive and not remember sins, Koester, in the above quotation, seems to limit this to past sins. But this does not do justice to the author’s argument that Christ has dealt decisively with sin (9:12, 26-28; 10:11-13; 17-18). Marshall is right that sinlessness is only attainable in heaven, but Hebrews does not equate being perfected with being sinless. Responding to Käsemann’s contention that perfection is a future reality, Peterson concurs that there are “unfulfilled aspects of salvation.” The terminology of perfection, he argues,

naturally suggests some eschatological or ultimate adjustment to the nature and situation of men. However, 10:14 clearly locates this perfecting *in the past with respect to its accomplishment and in the present with respect to its enjoyment*. That the primary focus is on the accomplishment of the relationship with God foretold in the oracle of Jeremiah is indicated by the paragraph immediately following 10:14.<sup>223</sup>

He is right to conclude, then, that the author uses the terminology of perfection “to stress the realised aspect of Christian salvation.”<sup>224</sup>

Another line of argument used by some interpreters to deny a definitive perfection of God’s people is based on the verb tenses used in 10:14. To say God’s people are “made complete,” using the perfect tense, is appropriate, claims Koester, “insofar as Christ’s death is the complete and definitive offering that precludes any further sacrifices for sins (10:18). The perfect tense is less suitable for the actual state of

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<sup>222</sup>Davidson, *Hebrews*, 208. He goes on to claim that the words “resemble ‘justify’ in another system of phraseology, and describe actions done once for all, the fruits of which are of present experience” (ibid.).

<sup>223</sup>Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 152 (emphasis in original).

<sup>224</sup>Ibid., 153.

the listeners, since they will contend with sin until God’s purposes are made complete in the heavenly Jerusalem (3:14; 12:1, 23).”<sup>225</sup> “What is in mind,” writes Osborne,

is the completion, or perfecting, of God’s salvation by the “one offering” of Christ . . . The emphasis [in 10:14] is on Christ, who has both completed God’s plan of salvation and is in the process of sanctifying . . . his people. Yet is this process guaranteed or contingent? In this context the question is difficult to answer, for the emphasis is on Christ’s provision rather than the state of the saints.<sup>226</sup>

Osborne’s comments allude to the other controversial tense in the verse, that of the substantive participle *τοὺς ἀγιαζομένους*. Several interpreters of Hebrews argue that the present tense implies an “ongoing” process, indicating “progressive” or “durative” action. They advocate the translation “those who are being sanctified,” which, thus, counterbalances the perfect tense of *τετελείωκεν*. Marie Isaacs’s explanation is representative: “[T]he present participle . . . conveys the on-going sense of ‘are now in the process of being sanctified’, and should warn us against understanding the perfect . . . ‘he has perfected’ as the present full attainment for the believer of perfection which is the future age.”<sup>227</sup>

Regardless of how one understands the aspect of the perfect tense, the adverbial modifier clearly shows that Christ’s perfecting work in 10:14 (*τετελείωκεν*) is definitive: “for all time” (*εἰς τὸ διηνεκές*).<sup>228</sup> Furthermore, the definitiveness of this work

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<sup>225</sup>Koester, *Hebrews*, 440. “The perfect tense might have been used for this action of completion in order to emphasize the finality of Christ’s sacrifice” (435).

<sup>226</sup>Osborne, “Classical Arminian Response,” 229.

<sup>227</sup>Isaacs, *Sacred Space*, 103. “Was einmaliges Ereignis ist (*τετελείωκεν*),” writes Michel, “vollzieht sich in einem fortwirkenden Prozess (*ἀγιαζομένους*)” (*Hebräer*, 341). Spicq says of the participle, “Il y a une application incessante et progressive des mérites de l’offrande du Christ dans l’âme des fidèles” (*L’Épître aux Hébreux*, 2:310). Other interpreters who argue that the present participle denotes an ongoing, progressive, or durative sense include, e.g., Delitzsch, *Hebrews*, 2:162-63; Westcott, *Hebrews*, 317; A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), 891; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 280-81; deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 204; France, *Hebrews*, 131; Allen, *Hebrews*, 503. Lane appears to contradict himself by arguing for both (see *Hebrews 9-13*, 256, 267-68). Cockerill claims it is not progressive “but simply continuous” (*Hebrews*, 452).

<sup>228</sup>The phrase (*εἰς τὸ διηνεκές*) appears four times in Hebrews: 7:3; 10:1, 12, 14. It means “continually” in 10:1 but is used in the sense of “for all time” in the other three occurrences.

cannot be restricted to Christ, apart from the state of *τοὺς ἀγιαζομένους*. Koester and Osborne both insist that the emphasis is on Christ's definitive and complete offering. However, one cannot escape the fact that the verb is *transitive*. So it is difficult to understand how one can disconnect the action of the verb from the objects of that action.<sup>229</sup> The verse does not merely say that Christ made a "definitive offering" ("For by one offering . . .") but also that he definitively perfected believers (" . . . he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified"). Contrary to Osborne, the author does *not* state in 10:14 that Christ has completed or perfected "God's plan of salvation." Rather, he has definitively perfected *τοὺς ἀγιαζομένους*.

Does the present tense of this participle, though, indicate an ongoing sanctification for believers, thus offsetting *τετελείωκεν εἰς τὸ διηνεκές* and negating a definitive work of perfection? It seems unlikely,<sup>230</sup> for these reasons: First, the mere presence of a present substantival participle does not require a translation denoting ongoing or progressive action (as noted above for *προσερχομένους* in 7:25). Such a view is limited and faulty.<sup>231</sup> An examination of the usage of present substantival participles in

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<sup>229</sup>Constantine R. Campbell critiques the traditional approach to understanding the perfect tense, particularly the so-called *resultative perfect* (in which the present result of the action is attributed to the object rather than the subject). However, he also critiques the various views of the perfect advocated by K. L. McKay, Stanley Porter, and Buist Fanning and puts forth his own new suggestion (*Verbal Aspect, the Indicative Mood, and Narrative: Soundings in the Greek of the New Testament* [New York: Peter Lang, 2007], 161-211). However, quite apart from the particular view one takes of the perfect, Campbell is right that "any verbal action will implicate certain consequences or create a new state, regardless of whether the verb is a perfect or an aorist. This is a natural consequence of verbal action, and *it is obvious that the condition of the object of such action should somehow be affected in particular*" (165 [emphasis added]).

<sup>230</sup>Many commentators translate the participle as "those who are sanctified" (or something similar). The following are examples of interpreters who comment on the "timeless" nature of the participle or who affirm that it *does not* describe "ongoing" action: D. Eduard Riggenbach, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1913), 307; Moffatt, *Hebrews*, 141; Johnson, "Defilement and Purgation," 263; Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 150; Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 378-79; Bruce, *Hebrews*, 247; Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 329; Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 387 n. 18; O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 357.

<sup>231</sup>See discussion and examples of various uses of present substantival participles in Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 615-16, 620-21; Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 378-79; Fanning, *Verbal*, 411-12. Wallace argues that substantival participles in particular are more susceptible to reduction in aspectual force. Many in the NT, he argues, are used in "generic utterances," and most of these "gnomic" substantival participles are present tense. He provides examples to demonstrate that these cannot be forced into a "progressive" or

Hebrews (not to mention the NT as a whole) confirms this.<sup>232</sup> Thus, to translate τούς ἀγιαζομένους as “those who are being sanctified” based merely on the participle’s form reads far too much into the present tense, particularly in light of the context.

Second, the translation “those who are sanctified” is much more contextually suited. As already noted, the verse itself points to a definitive perfection of believers, and sanctification and perfection—though not equated—are closely related in Hebrews. Moreover, the author has just stated in 10:10 that through the once and for all offering of Christ’s body, “we have been [or “are”] sanctified” (ἡγιασμένοι ἐσμέν). Why, then, would one read the present participle in 10:14 as indicating an “ongoing process”? DeSilva argues for such based on the “dynamic that Hebrews is creating.” That is, while “the decisive ritual that cleanses and consecrates the believer is accomplished,” the “liminal state that surrounds that sacrifice . . . continues for believers.”<sup>233</sup> However, though I have repeatedly acknowledged the *unrealized* aspect of Hebrews’ inaugurated eschatology, it seems one must keep in mind that the author’s use of *perfection and sanctification*

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“continual” mode (*Greek Grammar*, 615-16). Wallace cautions, though, that most substantival participles can retain something of their aspect. “A *general* rule of thumb,” he suggests, “is that *the more particular (as opposed to generic) the referent, the more of the verbal aspect is still seen.*” Moreover, the aspect of the participle can be diminished “if the particular context requires it” (*ibid.*, 620 [emphasis in original]). If this is so, one should note that the referent of the participle in 10:14 is clearly generic (i.e., not referring to a specific group of believers), and the context seems to require that it not be read as indicating progressive or ongoing action.

Campbell argues that the present participle “semantically encodes imperfective aspect” and the form’s “dominant pragmatic expression” is “contemporaneous temporal reference” (*Verbal Aspect and Non-Indicative Verbs: Further Soundings in the Greek of the New Testament* [New York: Peter Lang, 2008], 22). He concludes that the present *substantival* participle also expresses imperfective aspect. Yet many (he considers examples in Luke’s Gospel), rather than expressing contemporaneous action, are “descriptive” in function—that is, instances where the substantival participle is “less concerned with a continuous action” and portrays “some kind of state or situation” (see *ibid.* 38-41). If Campbell’s aspectual conclusions for the present substantival participle are accepted, τούς ἀγιαζομένους in 10:14 must be viewed as descriptive and *not* denoting continuous action. If it *were* to be understood as continuous—and thus contemporaneous with the verb—one would presumably arrive at the nonsensical translation, “he has perfected for all time those who *were* being sanctified.”

<sup>232</sup>For example, the following present substantival participles in Hebrews do not denote ongoing or continuous action: ὁ ποιῶν (1:7); τοῦ λέγοντος (7:21); τῶν βλεπομένων (11:7); τὸ διαστελλόμενον (12:20); τὸ φανταζόμενον (12:21).

<sup>233</sup>DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 204.



*terminology*, in particular, corresponds to the *realized* aspect of believers' salvation.<sup>234</sup>

This leads to the final reason for rejecting the progressive translation.

Third, Hebrews does not present the sanctification that Christ accomplishes for believers as “progressive.” We have been sanctified through the once and for all offering of Jesus' body (10:10). According to 13:12, he suffered outside the gate, “so that he might sanctify the people through his own blood” (ἵνα ἀγιάσῃ διὰ τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος τὸν λαόν). The author warns in 10:29 that the one who would spurn the Son of God and the blood of the covenant “by which he was sanctified” (ἐν ᾧ ἡγιάσθη) will deserve even more severe punishment than was experienced under the old covenant. Clearly, the sanctification imparted to believers through Christ's sacrificial death is not presented in Hebrews as progressive. “The verb [ἀγιάζειν] . . . is consistently employed in Hebrews to describe the consecration of believers through the death of Christ.”<sup>235</sup> Some interpreters, though, point to the use of the two nouns in 12:10 and 12:14 as evidence of a progressive sanctification. Describing the fatherly discipline of the Lord (12:4-11), the author insists its purpose is that we may share in his “holiness” (τῆς ἀγιότητος) (12:10). In 12:14 the author urges the readers to pursue peace and “sanctification” or “holiness” (τὸν ἀγιασμόν), without which no one will see the Lord. Certainly the context of chapter 12 indicates a moral development expected in the life of believers. For this is immediately

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<sup>234</sup>Critiquing those who argue that τοὺς ἀγιαζομένους is a “timeless description,” Cockerill argues, “This interpretation reduces this statement to near tautology: ‘he has perfected those who are holy’” (*Hebrews*, 452 n. 19). However, as argued above, it is best to see the concepts of sanctification, perfection, and cleansing in Hebrews as overlapping but not synonymous. If that is the case, it is hard to see how the statement amounts to a tautology.

<sup>235</sup>Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 74. The occurrence of the verb in 9:13 indicates that the old covenant sacrifices were able to “sanctify” in terms of a merely outward “cleansing of the flesh.” Hebrews 2:11 contains the only other two occurrences of ἀγιάζω—both as present substantival participles referring to Jesus and to believers: “For the one who sanctifies [ὁ ἀγιάζων] and those who are sanctified [οἱ ἀγιαζόμενοι] are all from One. For this reason, he is not ashamed to call them brothers.” There is no compelling reason to understand either of these as progressive. A similar “non-progressive” rendering of the two participles is found in most translations (see, e.g., RSV, NEB, NIV, NRSV, NASB, ESV)—even in those like the NIV and ESV that render the participle in 10:14 as ongoing. Davidson claims the participles in 2:11 “do not describe progressive action” but are “timeless designations” (*Hebrews*, 66 n. 1).

followed by the warning of 12:15-17 not to be “immoral and godless” like Esau. But this holiness that believers seek is best understood “as a practical expression of their sanctification in Christ.”<sup>236</sup> There is a “not yet” aspect to their salvation that must be pursued; believers are yet to share fully in God’s holiness. But this is an outworking of the definitive sanctification that is already theirs in Christ. The need for believers to pursue practical holiness—while necessary (“without which no one will see the Lord,” 12:14)—does not imply that the sanctification achieved by Christ’s death is incomplete (10:10). For, the use of the verb “to sanctify” in Hebrews does not imply a moral dimension to the consecration of believers in Christ.<sup>237</sup>

Given the definitive nature of a believer’s sanctification and perfection through Christ, one must see the tension that arises with the warning in 10:29. To state (with Koester) that believers can “lose their holiness”<sup>238</sup> or (with Lane) that they can become “reinfected with a permanent defilement,”<sup>239</sup> in light of 10:29—without acknowledging the apparent permanence and assurance of Christ’s saving and new covenant fulfilling work in 9:11-10:18—is to assume a particular reading of the warnings that, in my judgment, fails to properly integrate the passages. The warnings of the letter must have their say so that they may accomplish their purpose, but we ought not let them drive us to conclusions concerning the reality of Christian apostasy that seem to contradict the author’s exposition of what has been accomplished through Christ’s sacrificial death.

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<sup>236</sup>Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 74. See 71-76 for his entire discussion of 12:10, 14. Cf. Davidson, *Hebrews*, 207.

<sup>237</sup>Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 151.

<sup>238</sup>Koester, *Hebrews*, 121.

<sup>239</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 295.

## Hebrews 11:39-40; 12:2

The perfection of believers is mentioned again in 11:40. In chapter 11, the author commends the persevering faith of the OT saints who believed that God is a rewarder to those who seek him (11:6). However, though they were commended through faith, “they did not obtain the promise” (11:39). This failure to obtain the promise was not because of a lack on their part, nor an injustice on God’s part. Rather, in God’s gracious providence, he “had provided something better for us, that they would not be perfected (τελειωθῶσιν) apart from us” (11:40).

One exegetical question arising from the passage is how to understand the ἵνα clause in verse 40. It could express purpose: God provided something better, *so that* the OT witnesses would not attain perfection apart from us. Or, as Peterson argues,<sup>240</sup> the ἵνα could be epexegetic: God provided something better—*that is*, that the OT witnesses would not be perfected apart from us. While the latter is possible, it seems to require<sup>241</sup> that the comparative κρείττων (“better”) be taken in a way contrary to its primary use in the letter—“as a stylistic device to highlight the *superiority of the New Covenant over the Old*.”<sup>242</sup> It seems best, therefore, to read the ἵνα clause as expressing purpose.

DeSilva contends that this passage (and 12:23, to be considered below) suggests that the perfecting of believers “is not merely a cultic *fait accompli* in Hebrews.”<sup>243</sup> He observes that “being perfected” (v. 40) is set parallel to “receiving the

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<sup>240</sup>Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 156-57, 273 n. 199. Peterson is followed by Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 392-93; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 446; and preceded by Riggenbach, *die Hebräer*, 382.

<sup>241</sup>As Peterson suggests (*Hebrews and Perfection*, 273 n. 200).

<sup>242</sup>Köstenberger, “Comparatives in the Book of Hebrews,” 38 (emphasis in original). The author uses κρείττων to speak of Christ as “better” than the angels because of his atoning sacrifice and session at God’s right hand (1:3-4). He encourages the readers that he is convinced of “better things” concerning them—things having to do with salvation. He claims Christ’s blood speaks “better” than Abel (12:24). He speaks of a “better hope” (7:19), a “better covenant” (7:22; 8:6), “better promises” (8:6), “better sacrifices” (9:23), a “better possession” (10:34), a “better country” (11:16), and a “better resurrection” (11:35)—all of which are a reality because of Christ and his new covenant mediatorial role. The only occurrence of κρείττων that seems to be used in a more general sense is 7:7, which affirms the maxim, “the lesser is blessed by the greater (κρείττονος).”

<sup>243</sup>DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 202.

promises” (v. 39)—that is, “arriving at the promised goal for the people of God.” Abraham and the patriarchs looked for God’s city. Perfection, then, means arriving at and entering the goal God has prepared, the New Jerusalem.<sup>244</sup> Thus, on the one hand, deSilva understands perfection as a cleansing and consecration of the believer through Christ’s sacrifice—the “completion of a salvation-historical process” of bringing humanity back to its proper state with God.<sup>245</sup> On the other hand, perfection is also something that the readers await: “their actual entrance into the unshakable kingdom.”<sup>246</sup> It is in this latter sense that the believer’s perfection is anticipated by Christ’s perfection, which signifies “his arrival at his heavenly destiny.”<sup>247</sup>

This understanding of the believer’s perfection in 11:40 is unlikely, however, for three reasons. First, part of the force of deSilva’s argument is to show that the perfection of believers in 11:40 is parallel to Christ’s perfection. Yet, I have argued above against the heavenly exaltation view of Christ’s perfection—and against deSilva’s exegesis in particular. A vocational understanding of Christ’s perfection is exegetically preferable.

Second, deSilva’s interpretation would mean the author is using *τελειόω* in 11:40 in a manner inconsistent with his prior usage, particularly as the concept is developed in chapters 9-10. DeSilva recognizes this and, thus, speaks of two senses in which believers are perfected—one accomplished (cleansing and consecration) and the other yet to come (arrival at the heavenly kingdom). Moreover, he insists that each specific occurrence of the *τελ-* word group is given coherence by the general sense of “to perfect,” derived from the formal meaning of bringing something to its proper, final state

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 202-03.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 424.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 199, 203.

or its appointed goal.<sup>248</sup> However, even if these two different senses of believers' perfection are united by the "general sense" of the word, they are still quite different. Given the prior articulation of the perfection of believers in connection with Christ's new covenant sacrifice (as well as the unlikelihood that Christ's perfection refers to his heavenly exaltation), to argue for a different sense of perfection in 11:40 would seem to require a greater weight of evidence than an alleged parallel expression.<sup>249</sup>

Third, even if receiving the promise in verse 39 is taken as parallel to being perfected in verse 40, one need not conclude that perfection in 11:40 solely means entry into the heavenly city. As Peterson maintains, "the promise of 11:39 refers to the *eschatological salvation as a whole*."<sup>250</sup> In other words, the consummation and fulfillment of God's promises must not be divorced from what has already been achieved by Christ's high priestly work. Perfection in Hebrews is clearly eschatological. But given "its close association with the fulfillment of Jer. 31:31-4," Peterson is right to see perfection terminology used by the author "to stress the realised aspect of man's salvation."<sup>251</sup> This perfecting work of Christ secures a present relationship with God in fulfillment of the new covenant promises, and the Christian's experience of God "*is the earnest of his ultimate transfer to the actual presence of God, in the heavenly city*."<sup>252</sup> Therefore, one need not dichotomize two different senses in which believers are perfected. According to Hebrews 9:15, Christ's death as mediator of a new covenant

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<sup>248</sup>Ibid., 203.

<sup>249</sup>Scholer, who articulates a view of Christ's perfection similar to deSilva's, argues for a single, consistent view of believer's perfection—that is, that it refers to "the present access to God's heavenly sanctuary which they already enjoy" (*Proleptic Priests*, 200). Though Scholer interprets perfection language elsewhere by considering parallel expressions, he apparently did not feel compelled to use this method in 11:40—a fact that deSilva finds surprising (*Perseverance in Gratitude*, 203 n. 59).

<sup>250</sup>Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 157 (emphasis in original).

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 273 n. 202.

<sup>252</sup>Ibid., 157 (emphasis in original).

clearly relates to the fulfillment of the promise by making it possible for those who are called to receive “the promise of the eternal inheritance.” Thus, the perfection that Christ has accomplished by his sacrifice (10:14) can be understood to include glorification, as part of the salvation already achieved for believers. The OT saints did not receive the promised eternal inheritance (11:39) because it was not obtainable until the sacrifice of Christ.<sup>253</sup>

In light of this great “cloud of witnesses” of chapter 11 who have born testimony by their faithful endurance and trust in God, the author exhorts his readers to cast off encumbering sin and “run the race” set before them (12:1). In doing so, they are to fix their eyes on Jesus, “the founder<sup>254</sup> and perfecter” (ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτὴν) of faith (12:2). Though several translations (e.g., RSV, NKJV, ESV) render it “our faith,” no Greek pronoun is present, and the interpretation is unlikely. The author is not speaking of the faith of individual believers, much less “faith” as a creed. Rather, it is faith as demonstrated by the “cloud of witnesses” of chapter 11—faith “in its absolute type, of which he has traced the action under the Old Covenant.”<sup>255</sup> Jesus is both the founder and “perfecter” (τελειωτὴν) of faith. The use of the noun τελειωτής is unattested elsewhere in the Greek Bible. According to N. Clayton Croy, the only contemporary occurrence is found in the late-first-century B.C. writing of Dionysius of Halicarnassus. Dionysius writes that the Attic orator Dinarchus “was neither the ‘inventor’ (εὐρετής) of a style of rhetoric, nor the ‘perfecter’ (τελειωτής) of styles invented by others.”<sup>256</sup> The construction

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<sup>253</sup>Ibid., 158.

<sup>254</sup>On translating ἀρχηγόν, see the discussion above regarding the term’s occurrence in 2:10 under the vocational view of Christ’s perfection.

<sup>255</sup>Westcott, *Hebrews*, 397.

<sup>256</sup>See N. Clayton Croy, *Endurance in Suffering: Hebrews 12:1-13 in Its Rhetorical, Religious, and Philosophical Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 175-76. The occurrence was apparently overlooked until Croy published his “A Note on Hebrews 12:2,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114 (1995): 117-19.

is parallel to that in Hebrews. Hebrews, of course, uses ἀρχηγός, but it is similar to εὐρετής. In Hebrews, though, both terms apply to Jesus. He is both the founder *and* perfecter of faith.

As the “founder/pioneer/originator,” it is not that he was the first to exercise faith. Rather, “he is the first person to have obtained faith’s ultimate goal, the inheritance of the divine promise, which the ancients only saw from afar.”<sup>257</sup> “For the joy set before him,” Jesus endured the cross and despised its shame, with the result that he “has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (12:2). Through this process of suffering, Jesus was himself perfected (2:10; 5:8-9). Through his singular sacrificial death and glorification at God’s right hand, he has also perfected believers (10:10-14) and inaugurated a new and living way to God (10:19-20). Therefore, he is also the “perfecter” of faith. Though he is a model of faith, he is no mere model. His perfect act of obedience implemented the new covenant and made possible a “true heart-obedience” in God’s people.<sup>258</sup> He has given faith “a perfect basis by His high-priestly work.” “Through this,” Delling writes, “πίστις, which is firm confidence in the fulfillment of God’s promise (11:13, 33), has become full assurance.”<sup>259</sup> His faith and what it achieved is, for the readers of Hebrews, a greater incentive for faith than the faith demonstrated by the cloud of witnesses.<sup>260</sup>

### **Hebrews 12:18-24 (5:14; 6:1)**

Following 12:1-3, the author speaks of his readers’ trials in terms of the loving discipline of their heavenly Father for his sons (12:4-11). The remainder of the chapter

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<sup>257</sup>Attridge, *Hebrews*, 356. “The faith of Jesus is the ‘prototype,’ but not one to be transcended by later improvements” (Croy, *Endurance in Suffering*, 176).

<sup>258</sup>Hamm, “Faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” 290.

<sup>259</sup>Delling, “τελειόω,” 86.

<sup>260</sup>Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 173.

consists of the final warning passage of the letter (12:12-29) in which the author exhorts them to pursue holiness (12:14), avoid the godlessness of Esau (12:16-17), heed God's voice (12:25), and serve God with reverence and awe (12:28), lest they incur the same judgment as Esau (12:17) and the rebellious children of Israel (12:25). For the purposes of this chapter, it remains to address the final text that speaks of the perfection of believers and which is embedded in the warning: 12:18-24.<sup>261</sup>

The author presents a contrast in 12:18-24, arguing again for the superiority of the new covenant over the old. As awesome as the circumstances were in which the people of Israel received the law, "more awesome by far are the privileges associated with the gospel."<sup>262</sup> The γάρ of verse 18 indicates that verses 18-24 serve as the ground for the warning of verses 12-17. The privileges of the Christian experience show why the readers must diligently guard against apostasy.<sup>263</sup>

A detailed exposition of the passage is not necessary. For our purposes, it will be sufficient to consider what is meant by the "spirits of the righteous made perfect" (πνεύμασι δικαίων τετελειωμένων) in 12:23. The identity of this group, as well as the "assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven" (ἐκκλησία πρωτοτόκων ἀπογεγραμμένων ἐν οὐρανοῖς) in the same verse, has been a matter of some dispute among interpreters.<sup>264</sup> However it seems best to understand the "assembly" as referring to all of

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<sup>261</sup>I will also consider the use of two remaining occurrences of words based on the τελει- root: the adjective τέλειος in 5:14 and the noun τελειότης in 6:1. See below.

<sup>262</sup>Bruce, *Hebrews*, 354.

<sup>263</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 459.

<sup>264</sup>A minority view is to see the "assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven" as another reference to angels, following the "myriads of angels in festal gathering" of v. 22 (see, e.g., Käsemann, *The Wandering People of God*, 50; Montefiore, *Hebrews*, 231). However, most commentators have rightly discredited this view because of the difficulty of describing angels as having their names enrolled in a heavenly book—an image regularly used of God's people (see Exod 32:32; Ps 69:28; Isa 4:3; Dan 12:1; Luke 10:20; Rev 3:5; 13:8; 17:8). Others have suggested that the phrase refers to the faithful of the old covenant (e.g., Juliana M. Casey, "Assembly in Hebrews: A Fantasy Island?" *Theology Digest* 30 [1982]: 329), but it seems unjustified to restrict the language of "firstborn" whose names are "enrolled in heaven" to OT believers. As noted above, the concept of names written in a heavenly book is an image carried over from the OT and applied to NT believers. Furthermore, while the OT describes Israel as God's



God's people throughout the ages.<sup>265</sup> What, though, of the “spirits of the righteous made perfect”? Some believe it refers to the dead saints of the OT.<sup>266</sup> But there seems to be no need to restrict the group in this way.<sup>267</sup> Many other commentators understand the phrase as describing the righteous of God under *both* covenants who have died.<sup>268</sup>

That the author uses the phrase πνεύμασι δικαίων as an idiom for the godly *dead* is certainly possible, though not indisputable.<sup>269</sup> Regardless, these righteous spirits

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“firstborn,” the NT in general, and Hebrews in particular, recognizes Jesus as *the* firstborn (Rom 8:29; Col 1:15, 18; Heb; 1:6; Rev 1:5). Through their union with Christ, “the Firstborn *par excellence*” (Bruce, *Hebrews*, 359), believers—who are described in Hebrews as God’s “children” and “sons” and as Jesus’ “brothers” (2:10-17; 12:5-8)—are also the “firstborn” of God.

<sup>265</sup>So, e.g., Larry R. Helyer, “The Prōtotokos Title in Hebrews,” *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 6, no. 2 (1976): 3-28; Bruce, *Hebrews*, 358; Hughes, *Hebrews*, 548-49; Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 468-69; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 375; Koester, *Hebrews*, 545. Peterson writes, “By becoming members of this supernal ἐκκλησία through faith, the recipients of Hebrews have approached God in the company of a vast multitude of believers in all ages” (*Hebrews and Perfection*, 276 n. 235).

<sup>266</sup>See, e.g., Davidson, *Hebrews*, 248; Bruce, *Hebrews*, 359-60; Hagner, *Hebrews*, 226.

<sup>267</sup>The author had quoted Hab 2:3-4 earlier, showing that the Lord’s “righteous one” (ὁ δίκαιός) will live by faith (10:38), and then describes his readers as people of faith (10:39). So it is difficult to see why the righteous ones (δικαίων) of 12:23 would not include *all* the believing dead (see Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 164).

<sup>268</sup>See, e.g., Delitzsch, *Hebrews*, 352; Westcott, *Hebrews*, 418; Moffatt, *Hebrews*, 218; Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, 2:408; Hughes, *Hebrews*, 549-50; Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 470; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 376; Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 421; Allen, *Hebrews*, 592. Cf. BDAG, s.v. “πνεῦμα,” 832.

<sup>269</sup>Lane notes, “In Jewish apocalyptic literature the expression ‘spirits [or souls] of righteous persons’ is an idiom for the godly dead (e.g., *Jub.* 23:30-31; *1 Enoch* 22:9; 102:4; 103:3-4; *2 Apoc. Bar.* 30:2)” (*Hebrews 9-13*, 470). Attridge cites additional passages (*Hebrews*, 376 ns. 81, 82). Yet, the evidence does not appear conclusive. Consider the following: (1) Of the texts Lane cites, only *1 Enoch* 22:9 includes the actual phrase τὰ πνεύματα τῶν δικαίων. The other texts either use “spirits” and “righteous ones” in the same context, or they use the expression “the souls [αἱ ψυχαι] of the righteous.” Thus, it seems tenuous to argue that the phrase is *idiomatic* based on limited occurrences of the actual phrase used in this way. (2) There appears to be contrary evidence in early Jewish and Christian literature: *The Shepherd of Hermas* uses the phrase πνεύματα δικαίων to refer to living believers (43:15) (noted by Bruce, *Hebrews*, 359 n. 171). Dan 3:86 (LXX) uses the phrase πνεύματα καὶ ψυχαι δικαίων in the exhortation, “bless the Lord, you spirits and souls of the righteous.” It appears in a lengthy exhortation to all creation to praise God. The portion that addresses human beings (vv. 82-87) repeats the same exhortation for the following groups: “children of men” (v. 82), “Israel” (v. 83), “priests of the Lord” (v. 84), “servants of the Lord” (v. 85), “spirits and souls of the righteous” (v. 86), “holy and humble men of heart” (v. 87). It is not evident that this group in v. 86 is referring to the dead (as BDAG seems to imply; see p. 832). (3) The word πνεῦμα occurs twelve times in Hebrews. Two references are to angels (1:7, 14), and seven are to the Holy Spirit (2:4; 3:7; 6:4; 9:8, 14; 10:15, 29). The remaining three appear to be clear anthropological uses (4:12; 12:9, 23). One of these, Heb 12:9, occurs in the prior immediate context. The author encourages his readers to be subject to “the Father of spirits” (τῷ πατρὶ τῶν πνευμάτων). Commentators, though, do not argue that this

“have been perfected.” DeSilva contends that, consistent with his view of perfection as glorification or heavenly exaltation, their perfection means they have “finally entered into God’s presence.”<sup>270</sup> But, again, as with his interpretation of 11:40, this view of the perfection of believers is not in harmony with what has gone before. Responding to Käsemann, who also argues that the perfection of the righteous occurs “through entry into heaven,”<sup>271</sup> Peterson does not deny that glorification is an essential element in the author’s concept of perfection. “However,” he writes, “the emphasis in previous passages falls on the realisation of the New Covenant relationship between man and God. This is something to be experienced by believers in this age, with glorification as its logical outcome.”<sup>272</sup> Moreover, while Hebrews 12:18-24 is an eschatological scene, it does not follow that the perfection of the spirits of the righteous must refer to their arrival at their heavenly destination. That it refers to that same perfection experienced by believers in the present through Christ’s offering (10:14) is evidenced by 12:24, which speaks of the final participant in this scene: “Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant.” The verse also speaks of his “sprinkled blood” (αἵματι ῥαντισμοῦ) a covenant ratification reference (see 9:12-21) that brings to mind 10:22, in which the author describes the application of Christ’s new covenant sacrifice to believers, whose hearts are “sprinkled clean from an evil conscience”<sup>273</sup>—that is, they are *perfected*. Therefore, attempts to see perfection in 12:23

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refers exclusively to dead human beings—nor would such an interpretation fit the context. (4) Dumbrell and Peterson argue that the “spirits of the righteous made perfect” should be understood as a reference to the “total redeemed community” (W. J. Dumbrell, “The Spirits of Just Men Made Perfect,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 48 [1976]: 158-59), “all who have died manifesting true faith,” and the “saints of all ages ... who have been perfected by the work of Christ” (Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 164).

<sup>270</sup>DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 467.

<sup>271</sup>Käsemann, *Wandering People of God*, 141.

<sup>272</sup>Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 165. “The perfecting of believers is not simply a future concept, equivalent to glorification, though the relationship that the writer describes clearly has eternal consequences” (*ibid.*, 129).

<sup>273</sup>See Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 473. “The ratification of the new covenant on the ground of Jesus’ death secured for the Church the promised blessings attached to that covenant (8:6, 10-12; 10:15-18)” (*ibid.*).

as a *future* eschatological condition are inconsistent with the emphasis in Hebrews that the perfection of believers is a present (eschatological) reality that fulfills LXX Jeremiah 38:31-34.<sup>274</sup>

Two final uses of words based on the *τελει-* root appear in 5:14 and 6:1. In 5:1-10, the author begins his discussion of Jesus as high priest. He returns to this in 7:1 after an intervening warning and exhortation to his readers in 5:11-6:20. The author chastens them for being sluggish and needing to be taught rather than being teachers themselves (5:11-12). Instead of eating solid food, they are like infants who need milk (5:12-13). But solid food, he tells them, is for the *τελείων*—the “mature” (5:14). Understanding the adjective *τέλειος* as meaning “mature,” “adults,” or those “full grown” seems evident given the context and the clear contrast with “infant” (*νήπιος*).<sup>275</sup> “Therefore,” he urges in 6:1, let us leave behind the elementary teaching of Christ and move on to “maturity.” Here, the author employs the noun *τελειότης*. Though some offer a different rendering in 6:1,<sup>276</sup> many see *τελειότης* as denoting the spiritual maturity that the author desires of his readers, so that they will no longer be “sluggish” (6:12; cf. 5:11).

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<sup>274</sup>“There is no escaping the fact that *τελειοῦν* describes an eschatological event in Hebrews, but I have argued from its close association with the fulfillment of Jer. 31:31-4 that the terminology is used by our writer to stress the realised aspect of man’s salvation, from the view-point of the Christian era” (Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 273 n. 202).

<sup>275</sup>This sense for *τέλειος* is clearly attested outside the Bible (see Delling, “*τελειόω*,” 68-69) and in the NT (1 Cor 14:20; Eph 4:13; and probably 1 Cor 2:6; Phil 3:15). In 5:14 English translations render it “mature” (RSV, NIV, NASB, ESV, HCSB), “grown men” (NEB), and “those of full age” (NKJV).

<sup>276</sup>See, e.g., DuPlessis, who suggests, “let us apply ourselves to considering what perfection is” (*TEΛΕΙΟΣ*, 209). He is skeptical about translating it “maturity” since, he argues, (1) there are no examples of the word expressing this meaning, and (2) the use of a passive verb form (*φερώμεθα*) to exhort the readers to higher standards “would not be a very skillful move” (*ibid.*). However, regarding (1), see Delling, “*τελειόω*,” 78; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 312; Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 184-85. With respect to (2), Attridge observes that the verb *φέρω* is used commonly in the passive form in classical sources to mean “move” without reference to agency (*Hebrews*, 162, also n. 97).

Spicq argues that *τελειότης* is “la perfection de la doctrine” (*L’Épître aux Hébreux*, 2:146). Yet, while the author certainly wants them to move on from milk to solid food, *τελειότης* should not be seen as contrasting solely with the “elementary teaching of Christ” of 6:1. He desires that they advance beyond the elementary teaching *so that* they will no longer be “sluggish” (6:12; cf. 5:11), showing earnestness in realizing the assurance of hope and imitating those who inherit the promises (6:11-12). In other words, he desires their spiritual maturity.

As a result, they will show earnestness in having the full assurance of hope and be imitators of those who inherit the promises (6:11-12).<sup>277</sup> In order to attain this maturity, they need to comprehend the author's exposition of Christ's high priestly work and the perfection of believers that results from it (7:1-10:18). This teaching on the perfecting of believers is designed to give "*confidence about their relationship with God* and to encourage them *to persevere in that confidence.*"<sup>278</sup> While the spiritual "maturity" the author urges and the "perfection" he describes are related, they ought not be equated.<sup>279</sup>

The danger of making the two equivalent seems to be the problem with Cockerill's interpretation. While discussing the recipients' immaturity, as well as the maturity to which the author exhorts them, Cockerill contends that the writer exploits the fact that *τελειότης* can mean both "maturity" and "perfection." By the use of the related verb *τελειόω*, he adds, the author "gives content to this 'maturity/perfection.'" Those who experience the provision of the "perfected" savior and live in faithful obedience have been "perfected" and live in "maturity." According to Cockerill,

a contextual understanding of the "maturity/perfection" of Hebrews 6:1 reinforces our contention that the appropriation of the preacher's word about Christ's high priesthood (7:1-10:18) and accompanying benefits (10:19-25) is the "maturity/perfection" that he urges. Therefore, going "on in maturity" is the opposite of "neglecting" the Christ-provided "great salvation" (2:3) and the only means of entering the heavenly homeland.<sup>280</sup>

I agree that heeding the author's exhortation to move on to maturity is *necessary* for the recipients' perseverance in salvation. By doing this they will not be sluggish but imitate those who inherit the promises (6:12). However, the "maturity" the author urges is not the

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<sup>277</sup>For recent interpreters who understand *τελειότης* in 6:1 as maturity, see, e.g., Hughes, *Hebrews*, 193-94; Bruce, *Hebrews*, 138; Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 185; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 163; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 312; Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 204; Johnson, *Hebrews*, 157; O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 212; Allen, *Hebrews*, 340.

<sup>278</sup>Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 186 (emphasis in original).

<sup>279</sup>Cf. Attridge, *Hebrews*, 163.

<sup>280</sup>Cockerill, "Wesleyan Arminian Response," 279-80.

same as the “perfection” they receive through Christ. Cockerill’s argument blurs the distinction between the two. Believer’s *must* press on in maturity. But “perfection” is something done *to* them through the sacrifice of Christ (10:10, 14), not something they attain for themselves or strive after.<sup>281</sup>

### **Hebrews 13:20-21**

One final text is relevant to a discussion of the new covenant in Hebrews: the benediction in 13:20-21. The author asks that God might “equip” his readers “with everything good to do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ” (v. 21). He describes God in verse 20 as “the God of peace who brought back from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep by the blood of the eternal covenant, Jesus our Lord.” The “blood of the eternal covenant” is obviously a reference to the letter’s central argument concerning Christ’s new covenant sacrifice<sup>282</sup> (cf. “blood of the covenant” in 10:29). However, here it is not described as a new covenant but as an “eternal covenant” (*διαθήκης αἰωνίου*).

This phrase, found nowhere else in the NT, appears several times in the LXX to describe God’s covenants.<sup>283</sup> However, in the prophets it appears six times to speak of a coming eschatological covenant that the Lord will make with his people: Isaiah 55:3; 61:8; Jeremiah 27:5 (MT 50:5); 39:40 (MT 32:40); Ezekiel 16:60; 37:26. The usage in LXX Jeremiah 39:40 is especially important since the author’s exposition of Christ’s new covenant sacrifice in Hebrews 8:1-10:18 is based on LXX Jeremiah 38:31-34. In other

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<sup>281</sup>Grant Osborne’s brief consideration of perfection in a study on soteriology in Hebrews seems to suffer from a similar problem. He concludes that perfection has a “twofold thrust”: a “crisis experience of salvation” and the “attainment of ‘completeness’ or ‘maturity’” toward which the Christian strives (“Soteriology in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *Grace Unlimited*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock [Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999], 158).

<sup>282</sup>Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*, 15.

<sup>283</sup>Especially his covenant with Abraham: Gen 17:7, 13, 19; 1 Chr 16:17; Ps 104:10. Other occurrences of the phrase include Gen 9:16; Lev 24:8; 2 Sam 23:5; Isa 24:5.

words, Jeremiah’s reference to an “eternal covenant” in 39:40 appears on the heels of his announcement of the “new covenant” in 38:31-34.<sup>284</sup> The Lord says through Jeremiah in 39:40, “I will make an eternal covenant with them, in which I will not turn away from them. I will put the fear of me in their heart so that they may not fall away from me” (καὶ διαθήσομαι αὐτοῖς διαθήκην αἰώνιον, ἣν οὐ μὴ ἀποστρέφω ὀπισθεν αὐτῶν. καὶ τὸν φόβον μου δώσω εἰς τὴν καρδίαν αὐτῶν πρὸς τὸ μὴ ἀποστῆναι αὐτοὺς ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ). Similar to the description of the new covenant cited by the author in Hebrews 8:10-12 and 10:16-17, Jeremiah claims here that the Lord will sovereignly act on the hearts of the people to bring about their obedience.

Given the close proximity of these two passages in Jeremiah, it seems likely that the author of Hebrews has (at least) this OT reference to “eternal covenant” in mind. If so, it is particularly significant, because not only does LXX Jeremiah 39:40 speak of a divine transformation of the heart to enable obedience—like 38:31-34—but it also indicates the purpose and effect of that transformation: “so that they may not fall away from me.” The verb translated “fall away” or “turn away” is ἀφίστημι, used frequently in the LXX and the NT in a religious sense to describe departure from the Lord—that is, “apostasy.”<sup>285</sup> As noted earlier, the author uses the term in Hebrews 3:12, warning his readers not to have an evil, unbelieving heart like faithless Israel that leads them to “fall

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<sup>284</sup>It seems clear that Jeremiah’s “eternal covenant” is another name for the “new covenant” of the previous chapter, because of the close proximity of both passages in Jeremiah and the similar sovereign work of God on the hearts of the people in each. According to Lundbom, “it is generally agreed” that this “eternal covenant” is the “new covenant” promised in 31:31-34 (*Jeremiah 21-36*, 519). See also J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 596; Terence E. Fretheim, *Jeremiah* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2002), 466.

<sup>285</sup>See, e.g., Deut 32:14; Josh 22:18, 23; Jer 2:5; 17:13; Dan 9:9; Luke 8:13; Acts 15:38; 1 Tim 4:1. It has become a technical term in, e.g., Jer 3:14: “Return, apostate sons” (ἐπιστρέψατε υἱοὶ ἀφεστηκότες). See Schlier, “ἀφίστημι, et al,” 1:512; Kellermann, “ἀφίστημι,” 1:183. Jeremiah, who (like the author of Hebrews) speaks of Israel’s covenant breaking in terms of the condition of the people’s “heart” (see, e.g., Jer 3:17; 4:14; 5:23; 7:24; 9:14; 11:8; 16:12; 17:1, 9; 18:12; 22:17; 23:17, 26), even combines the two terms, describing the faithless man as the one whose “heart turns away [apostatizes] from the Lord” (ἀπὸ κυρίου ἀποστῆ ἡ καρδία αὐτοῦ).

away from the living God.” As I have repeatedly observed, the warnings against apostasy are an integral part of Hebrews, and their role in the letter cannot be overlooked. Yet, by referring to the new covenant in 13:20 as the “eternal covenant,” the author evokes another context from Jeremiah in which the Lord promises a sovereign work on the people’s hearts. Only, in this case, Jeremiah explicitly states that God’s actions in this new and eternal covenant will remedy the problem of apostasy in his people. While a number of Hebrews commentators note the use of “eternal covenant” in the prophets in general and in LXX Jeremiah 39:40 in particular, it seems that none observe the similarity of 39:40 to 38:33 or the covenant’s purpose in 39:40 of preventing the people from falling away.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>286</sup>That the author may be evoking the immediate context of LXX Jer 39:40 by using the phrase “eternal covenant” seems a legitimate hypothesis for four reasons, some of which have already been mentioned: (1) The phrase occurs nowhere else in the NT, and the author could easily have called it the “new covenant” as previously (8:8; 9:15). (2) The broader context of LXX Jer 39:40 includes the promise of the new covenant (LXX 38:31-34) which is so central to the author’s exposition of Christ’s sacrifice. (3) As in Jer 38:33, the Lord promises in 39:40 to transform the people’s *καρδία* (cf. also 39:38 and 38:33). (4) The purpose of God putting his fear in their hearts is so that they will not “fall away” from him. The theme of “falling away” is palpable throughout Hebrews as the author warns his readers not to reject God’s provision in Christ but to hold fast. Moreover, a verbal connection exists through the use of the specific term ἀφίστημι in LXX Jer 39:40 and in one of the author’s warnings in Heb 3:12.

More scholars now advocate consideration of the OT contexts of citations or allusions found in the NT, as opposed to atomistic treatments that focus on the citations and effectively disconnect them from their contexts. See, e.g., the well-known works of C. H. Dodd (*According to the Scriptures: The Sub-structure of New Testament Theology* [New York: Scribner, 1953] and Richard B. Hays (*Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* [New Haven: Yale, 1989]). In his work on the use of the OT in Hebrews, Guthrie suggests that “the author of Hebrews, rather than taking an atomistic approach to citations from Israel’s Scriptures, had in mind, and at times used, OT references in light of their broader contexts” (“Hebrews,” 920). Unfortunately, Guthrie does not apparently see the author’s phrase “eternal covenant” in Heb 13:20 as an OT allusion since he does not discuss the text, even though many interpreters note the use of this phrase in the prophets (see, e.g., Wescott, *Hebrews*, 450; Michel, *die Hebräer*, 538; C. E. B. Cranfield, “Hebrews 13.20-21,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 20 [1967]: 439; Hughes, *Hebrews*, 590; Hagner, *Hebrews*, 250-51; Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 563; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 406-07; Koester, *Hebrews*, 573).

Ezek 37:24-28, another of the eschatological OT texts that uses the phrase “eternal covenant” (37:26), also shares common themes and terminology with LXX Jer 38:33 and Heb 13:20, to include the following: David as “shepherd” (Ezek 37:24; cf. Jesus as “shepherd” in Heb 13:20), “covenant of peace” (Ezek 37:26; cf. “God of peace” in Heb 13:20), and “I will be their God, and they will be my people” (Ezek 37:27; cf. Jer 38:33). The Lord promises through Ezekiel the people’s future obedience (37:24; the promised result of the new covenant), and claims that the nations will know that “I am the Lord who sanctifies (ὁ ἀγιάζων) them” (37:28; cf. the use of the verb in Hebrews).

In light of this observation, the author’s prayer in the benediction of 13:20-21 is not to be missed either. The one who has repeatedly cautioned his readers on the severe and eternal danger of rejecting Christ’s new covenant sacrifice concludes, not with a warning, but with a prayer that God may “equip you with everything good in order to do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight” (v. 21). “Everything good” (παντὶ ἀγαθῷ) with which he prays God will “equip” or “establish” (καταρτίζω)<sup>287</sup> them is the “inner endowment required so that the will of God can be done.”<sup>288</sup> This occurs through God “working” (ποιῶν) in believers what pleases him. The idea is reminiscent of Paul who, having exhorted the Phillipians to “work out” their salvation with fear and trembling (2:12), grounds the command in the fact that God is the one working in them “to will and to work for his pleasure” (2:13).<sup>289</sup> After warning his readers throughout his letter to persevere (with notable instances of confidence along the way; see Hebrews 6:9 and 10:39), the author of Hebrews asks that God himself may accomplish in them what pleases him to secure their obedience. Even in the letter’s benediction, then, there is support for the contention that the new covenant promises preclude Christian apostasy and ground assurance of salvation.

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<sup>287</sup>The term appears twice in Hebrews to speak of the body that God “prepared” for Jesus (10:5) and the worlds that were “created” by the word of God (11:3). It is used in the conclusion of 1 Peter along with three similar verbs to describe what the “God of grace who called you to his eternal glory in Christ” will do for believers: καταρτίσει, στηρίξει, σθενώσει, θεμελιώσει (5:10). Commenting on the passage, Thomas R. Schreiner writes, “There is no need to distinguish carefully between the meanings of the verbs, for together they emphatically make the same point. The God who has called believers to eternal glory will strengthen and fortify them, so that they are able to endure until the end. He will fulfill his promise to save and deliver them. We understand from this that the exhortations to vigilance and resistance are not intended to raise questions about whether believers will receive the eschatological promise. Peter instead conceived of his exhortations as means by which believers will persevere and receive the promise of salvation on the last day” (*1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC [Nashville, Broadman & Holman, 2003], 245).

<sup>288</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 564. Koester (*Hebrews*, 574) observes that “good” refers especially to salvation (9:11; 10:1).

<sup>289</sup>Hughes (*Hebrews*, 591) and Hagner (*Hebrews*, 251) note the similarity between Heb 13:21 and Phil 2:12-13. Of course, Heb 13:20 is a prayer, whereas Phil 2:13 is an indicative.



## Conclusion

In view of the foregoing analysis, let me conclude this chapter with the following observations. First, the perfection of Christ and the perfection of believers are not an exact parallel but there is continuity between them. The perfection of believers involves an inward cleansing of a sinful conscience that is not required of Christ who is sinless. Moreover, while believers are to consider Christ's faithful obedience as a model for themselves, such filial obedience only perfects the *Son*—not the *sons*.<sup>290</sup> However, the perfection of each should be understood in a vocational sense. Christ was perfected—made fit—through his temptation, suffering, death, and exaltation to serve as the “founder of salvation,” the “source of eternal salvation,” and a “priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” Believers are also perfected—qualified for a relationship with God so that they may serve as worshippers, those who “draw near.” “Believers are perfected by the perfecting of Christ.”<sup>291</sup> Moreover, as Peterson notes, the author's use of the terminology of perfection stresses the realized aspect of Christian salvation.<sup>292</sup> Perfection is enjoyed in the present and, thus, is not to be equated with the believer's entrance into the heavenly destination.

Second, the perfection of believers involves the cleansing of a guilty conscience and a definitive consecration to God, which makes drawing near to God possible. According to the author of Hebrews, man's perfection results in a fulfillment of the promises of Jeremiah's new covenant, particularly the Lord's promise to write his law on his people's hearts. Christ's sacrifice for sin brings about complete forgiveness, which is the basis for a new relationship between God and man in which their hearts are

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<sup>290</sup>Hamm, “Faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” 291.

<sup>291</sup>Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 175. Peterson writes, “[A]lthough the perfecting of Christ is a process, necessitating his learning obedience through suffering, his death and exaltation, a simple parallel cannot be argued with respect to the perfecting of believers. They are perfected by *the very actions and accomplishments that perfect Christ*, not by any actions of their own” (emphasis in original).

<sup>292</sup>*Ibid.*, 153.

renewed toward obedience. Such a transformation of the heart in the new covenant resolves a key problem under the old covenant. The old covenant could not bring about perfection—that is, it could not take away sin and enable the people to continue in covenant fidelity. But Christ’s new covenant work changes an “evil, unbelieving heart” (3:12) into a “true heart” (10:22).

Third, according to the author, then, the new covenant was intended to remedy the problem of apostasy as demonstrated by the wilderness generation. Through the sacrificial covenant death of his Son and a unilateral divine work in the human heart, God sovereignly acts to overcome covenant infidelity. While the old covenant was inadequate to take away sin and secure the people’s obedience, under the new and “eternal covenant” (13:20), Christ is able “to save completely/eternally” (7:25), by securing an “eternal redemption” (9:12), so that believer’s may receive an “eternal inheritance” (9:15). The fulfillment of the new covenant promises in the believer’s life is the foundation of Christian assurance (10:22). In light of this, it seems that interpreters who affirm the reality of Christian apostasy in Hebrews have underestimated the strong basis for Christian assurance found in the letter’s exposition of perfection and the new covenant promises.

Fourth, this does not, of course, mean that salvation is fully realized. Hebrews displays an inaugurated eschatology that is present elsewhere in the NT. Believers await Christ’s appearance (9:28) and seek a city that is to come (13:14). Their salvation is not yet consummated. Sin is a reality against which believers struggle (12:14). Yet can those who have been cleansed, sanctified, and perfected fail to arrive at the heavenly destination? Can the “true heart” once again become the “evil, unbelieving heart”? Though there is an “already/not yet” to salvation in Hebrews, the author’s exposition indicates that the promises of the new covenant have been realized. Christ’s once-and-for-all sacrifice has brought fulfillment, not a partial realization.

The realization of the new covenant promises in the perfection of believers is extremely important to a consideration of assurance of salvation in Hebrews. However, the texts addressed in this chapter are not the only ones relevant to this discussion. A significant passage in which the author affirms his confidence in his readers, assures them of God's unfailing purposes towards them, and emphasizes the certainty and security of their hope is Hebrews 6:9-20. This passage must be considered next.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE AUTHOR'S CONFIDENCE, GOD'S OATH, AND THE BELIEVER'S HOPE: HEBREWS 6:9-20

Compared to other passages within the letter, Hebrews 6:9-20 has received little attention in scholarly literature. While there are a multitude of articles examining the warning in 6:4-8, only a handful include 6:9-12 in the discussion<sup>1</sup>—even though both are part of the same textual unit. Furthermore, while a number of articles focus on aspects of 6:13-20, such as the imagery or OT background of verses 19-20, those considering the passage as a whole are scarce.<sup>2</sup> Yet these verses are crucial to a study of assurance of

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<sup>1</sup>Of course, interpreters examining 6:4-8 may include discussion or mention of 6:9-12 in their study, but few demonstrate *by the title of their article* that 6:9-12 is integral to the conversation. These include David G. Peterson, "The Situation of the 'Hebrews' (5:11-6:12)," *RTR* 35 (1976): 14-21; Thomas Kem Oberholtzer, "The Thorn-Infested Ground in Hebrews 6:4-12," *BSac* 145 (1988): 319-28; Victor (Sung-Yul) Rhee, "Christology and the Concept of Faith in Hebrews 5:11-6:20," *JETS* 43 (2000): 83-96; Brent Nongbri, "A Touch of Condemnation in a Word of Exhortation: Apocalyptic Language and Graeco-Roman Rhetoric in Hebrews 6:4-12," *Novum Testamentum* 45 (2003): 265-79; Peter S. Perry, "Making Fear Personal: Hebrews 5.11-6.12 and the Argument from Shame," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32 (2009): 99-125.

<sup>2</sup>See Ceslas Spicq, "Ἀγκυρα et Πρόδρομος dans *Hebr. VI. 19-20*," *Studia Theologica* 3 (1949-50): 185-87; Helmut Köster, "Die Auslegung der Abraham-Verheissung in Hebräer 6," in *Studien zur Theologie der alttestamentlichen Überlieferungen*, ed. Rolf Rendtorff and Klaus Koch (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1961), 95-109; Ceslas Spicq, "L'Épître aux Hébreux et Philon: Un cas d'Insertion de la littérature sacrée dans la Culture profane du Ier siècle" (Hébr. V,11-VI,20 et le 'De sacrificiis Abelis et Caïni' de Pilon), in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, pt. 2, vol 25.4, ed. Wolfgang Haase and Hildegard Temporini (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1987), 3602-18; George E. Rice, "Hebrews 6:19: Analysis of Some Assumptions Concerning *Katapetasma*," *AUSS* 25 (1987): 65-71; Robert P. Gordon, "Better Promises: Two Passages in Hebrews Against the Background of the Old Testament Cultus," in *Templum Amicitiae: Essays on the Second Temple Presented to Ernst Bammel*, ed. William Horbury (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 434-49; David R. Worley, "Fleeing to Two Immutable Things, God's Oath-Taking and Oath Witnessing: The Use of Litigant Oath in Hebrews 6:12-20," *Restoration Quarterly* 36 (1994): 223-36; Roy E. Gane, "Re-opening *Katapetasma* ('Veil') in Hebrews 6:19," *AUSS* 38 (2000): 5-8; Norman H. Young, "Where Jesus has Gone as a Forerunner on Our Behalf (Hebrews 6:20)," *AUSS* 39 (2001): 165-73; Richard M. Davidson, "Christ's Entry 'Within the Veil' in Hebrews 6:19-20: The Old Testament Background," *AUSS* 39 (2001): 175-90; Norman H. Young, "The Day of Dedication or the Day of Atonement? The Old Testament Background to Hebrews 6:19-20 Revisited," *AUSS* 40 (2002): 61-68; Richard M. Davidson, "Inauguration or Day of Atonement? A Response to Norman Young's 'Old Testament Background to Hebrews 6:19-20 Revisited'," *AUSS* 40 (2002): 61-68; Daniel M. Gurtner, "LXX Syntax and the Identity of the NT Veil," *Novum Testamentum* 47

salvation in Hebrews.

I will begin by briefly addressing how the verses fit within the surrounding discourse in terms of structure and function. Then I will proceed exegetically through 6:9-12 and 6:13-20, seeking to understand both the author's confidence in the recipients and the contribution the passage makes to assurance of salvation in Hebrews.

### **Context, Structure, and Function**

Hebrews 6:9-20 occurs at approximately the midpoint of the letter. Having anticipated the discussion of Jesus as high priest (1:3; 2:17; 3:1; 4:14-15), the author finally begins his exposition of the topic in 5:1-10.<sup>3</sup> Yet upon introducing the idea of Christ's appointment as high priest "after the order of Melchizedek" in 5:10, he departs at 5:11 and does not return to the concept until 6:20, a verse that serves as a transition to the full exposition of Christ's Melchizedekan high priesthood in 7:1-28. Thus, William Lane acknowledges, "[I]t is commonly recognized that 5:11-6:20 forms a literary unit within the structure of Hebrews."<sup>4</sup>

Some commentators, including Lane, see 5:11 as the beginning of a major section within the letter, extending through all or part of chapter 10.<sup>5</sup> In general they have followed the structure suggested by Albert Vanhoye who sees 5:11-6:20 as a long preamble opening the great central exposition of Hebrews on Christ's high priesthood.<sup>6</sup>

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(2005): 344-53.

<sup>3</sup>The use of the words *καθίστημι*, *ἀρχιερεύς*, and *θεός* in 5:1 and 5:10 serves as an *inclusio*, marking the boundaries of the section. See George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 82-83.

<sup>4</sup>William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1991), 133.

<sup>5</sup>See, e.g., Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 125-26; Harold Attridge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 19; Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), vi, 58.

<sup>6</sup>Albert Vanhoye, *La structure littéraire de l'Épître aux Hébreux* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1963), 42, 115.

However, it seems best to see this central unit of the letter beginning at 5:1, with 5:11-6:20 understood as a “strategically placed digression,” as George Guthrie argues.<sup>7</sup> That the central section begins at 5:1 rather than 5:11 is supported by the fact that 4:14-16 and 10:19-25 form a significant *inclusio* around this major exposition.<sup>8</sup>

Many commentators agree in seeing 5:11-6:20 as a digression that interrupts the exposition of Christ’s high priesthood begun in 5:1-10.<sup>9</sup> Given this, Cynthia Long Westfall concludes, “[T]here appears to be a consensus among scholars concerning 5:11-6:20 that infers a lack of coherence (or at least disorganization) in the discourse.”<sup>10</sup> Yet her conclusion seems rash. For when one considers each of the commentators Westfall cites (though all view 5:11-6:20 as an interruption or digression), none argues that it results in a “lack of coherence” or “disorganization” in the discourse.<sup>11</sup> In fact most see

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<sup>7</sup>Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*, 110.

<sup>8</sup>See discussion in *ibid.*, 79-82. According to Guthrie, the parallels between 4:14-16 and 10:19-25 (previously noted by Wolfgang Nauck, “Zum Aufbau des Hebräerbriefes,” in *Judentum Urchristentum Kirche: Festschrift für Joachim Jeremias*, ed. Walther Eltester [Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1960], 203-04) “represent the most striking use of *inclusio* in the book of Hebrews.” Guthrie claims Vanhoye’s failure to deal with such obvious parallels “remains a glaring weakness in his approach to the structure of the book” (*The Structure of Hebrews*, 79).

<sup>9</sup>E.g., George Wesley Buchanan, *To the Hebrews: Translation, Comment and Conclusions*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 116; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 133; Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, 12<sup>th</sup> ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 230; David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle “to the Hebrews”* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 209; Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 306-07; Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 152; Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 203-04.

<sup>10</sup>Cynthia Long Westfall, *A Discourse Analysis of the Letter to the Hebrews: The Relationship between Form and Meaning*, Library of New Testament Studies 297 (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 141.

<sup>11</sup>Westfall cites Bruce, Buchanan, deSilva, Koester, and Michel (see Westfall, *A Discourse Analysis*, 141 n. 5). The only scholar whom Westfall cites as an example of support for her view is Linda Lloyd Neeley. Westfall quotes the following statement from Neeley: “The section of 5:11-6:20 is not included in this summary because of indications that it is a digression in the discourse” (“A Discourse Analysis of Hebrews,” *Occasional Papers in Translation and Textlinguistics* 1:3-4 [1987]: 33). However, while Neeley clearly affirms that the passage is a “digression,” she nowhere implies that it results in a lack of coherence or disorganization. One wonders if perhaps Westfall misunderstood the purpose of Neeley’s “summary” from which she omitted 5:11-6:20. This summary is an attempt to distinguish “backbone” material (material that develops the theme of the discourse) from support material. It is “a tool for understanding the framework of major points on which Hebrews is built” (5; see 4-5, 25-29). Neeley’s resulting “summary” of Hebrews consists of three paragraphs that correspond to the three embedded

the interruption as quite purposeful.<sup>12</sup> Guthrie helpfully cautions that one should not assume the term “digression” means “less important.”<sup>13</sup>

Hebrews 5:11-6:20 begins with the third of five warning passages in the letter. In 5:11-6:8, the author scolds his hearers for their spiritual immaturity (5:11-14), exhorts them to press on to maturity (6:1-3), and warns them of the dangerous consequences of apostasy (6:4-8).<sup>14</sup> After this harsh rebuke and warning, he moves to an expression of confidence in his hearers and exhortation to persevere in 6:9-12. Most scholars recognize 5:11-6:12 as a subunit within 5:11-6:20, marked by another *inclusio* in which the phrase *νωθοι γέγονατε* in 5:11 is matched by *νωθοι γένησθε* in 6:12.<sup>15</sup> Hebrews 6:13-20, then, is an “ingressive intermediary transition.”<sup>16</sup> According to Guthrie, it “is ‘intermediary’ in that it stands between 5:11-6:12 and 7:1-28 and is ‘ingressive’ in that it leads out of the digression begun at Heb. 5:11.”<sup>17</sup>

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discourses that she identifies within the letter, and that are an attempt to present “the most prominent material which forms the core points around which a discourse is organized” (30-31). Whether or not one agrees with Neeley’s summary, Westfall’s claim of support from Neeley’s statement seems unjustified. Westfall’s quotation of Neeley sounds as if the latter dropped the passage entirely from consideration in her discourse analysis, which is not the case. When Neeley analyzes the “constituent structure of Hebrews as a whole” (40), she identifies 5:11-6:20 as one of two embedded discourses within 4:14-6:20. Hebrews 5:11-6:20 “provides the exhortations to go on to maturity, learning the deeper things about Christ (which will be presented in the expository section of [4:14-10:18])” (87).

<sup>12</sup>E.g., Koester (*Hebrews*, 307) and Johnson (*Hebrews*, 154) believe the digression serves a rhetorical function to refocus the readers’ attention. DeSilva identifies no fewer than five purposes for the interruption (*Perseverance in Gratitude*, 209). Michel contends that the exhortation of 5:11-6:20 has a special task: “sie soll das Herzstück des Briefes, Kap. 7-10:18, unterbauen” (*Hebräer*, 231).

<sup>13</sup>Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*, 110 n. 30.

<sup>14</sup>See chap. 4 of this dissertation for consideration of the warning passages.

<sup>15</sup>See Vanhoye, *La structure littéraire*, 115; Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*, 79.

<sup>16</sup>Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*, 141.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 111. Regarding Westfall’s attempt to identify 6:13-7:3 as a unit, Barry C. Joslin claims, “According to present research, this division seems to be unique to Westfall.” See Joslin’s critique in *Hebrews, Christ, and the Law: The Theology of the Mosaic Law in Hebrews 7:1-10:18* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2008), 122 n. 164. See also Barry C. Joslin, “Can Hebrews Be Structured? An Assessment of Eight Approaches,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 6, no. 1 (2007): 99-129, esp. 115-22 on Guthrie and Westfall.

## Hebrews 6:9-12

After the fearful warning against falling away in 6:4-8 that follows the concern over the recipients' spiritual lethargy in 5:11-14, there is a "significant change of tone" in 6:9-12 as the author pronounces confidence in them and a desire for their perseverance.<sup>18</sup> In summary, verse 9 is an expression of confidence in their spiritual state, while verse 10 provides the ground for that confidence. In verses 11-12, then, the author indicates the response he desires from the recipients and the purpose of that response. Overall, I understand verses 9-12 to serve as a justification for the author's warning to avoid apostasy. The main idea is found in verses 11-12 with verses 9-10 seen as a concession: the author desires their diligence (hence the warning) so that they will persevere to the end (vv. 11-12), even though he is confident of "better things" for them (vv. 9-10). The following exegesis will seek to substantiate and develop this interpretation.

While earlier he has referred to them as "brothers" (3:1, 12), in 6:9 the author addresses the listeners even more warmly as "beloved," shifting the tone considerably from 6:4-8. This shift is strengthened by the author's assurance that, in spite of his talk of apostasy, "we<sup>19</sup> are confident<sup>20</sup> of better things concerning you—things pertaining to

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<sup>18</sup>O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 230.

<sup>19</sup>Although *πεπείσμεθα* is normally understood as an authorial plural (e.g., Attridge, *Hebrews*, 174; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 329; O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 230), it need not be so and may reflect the sentiments of those who are with the author (note: "pray for us," 13:18; "Those from Italy greet you," 13:24). Daniel Wallace thinks the scarcity of first person singulars in the letter (found only in 11:32; 13:19, 22, 23) and the appeal to "pray for us" (*ἡμῶν*) in 13:18 "suggests the possibility" that the letter was written by at least two persons with one being better known to the recipients (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 396, 397 n.11). However, the first person singular assertion of authorship in 13:22 would seem to make this unlikely.

<sup>20</sup>According to major grammars, the perfect of *πέιθω* is one of a number of perfects that has come to be used as a present tense verb. See, e.g., A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in Light of Historical Research*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), 881; BDF §341; Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 579-80. O'Brien argues that the perfect tense form displays "imperfect aspect with heightened proximity." This "suggests intensity so that the verb may be rendered, 'I am *firmly* convinced'" (*Hebrews*, 230 n. 121). O'Brien adopts Constantine Campbell's work on aspect. For Campbell's view of the perfect, see his *Verbal Aspect, the Indicative Mood, and Narrative: Soundings in the Greek of the New Testament* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 161-211.



salvation.”<sup>21</sup> The author contrasts his listeners with the apostates of 6:4-8 who were metaphorically described as unfruitful and worthless land (v. 8).<sup>22</sup> Though such land is under the curse of God, the author is confident of “better things” pertaining to them, alluding to the fruitful land that receives God’s blessing (v. 7).<sup>23</sup> The final phrase of verse 9 adds a concession.<sup>24</sup> He is confident “even though we speak in this way”—a reference to the preceding rebuke and warning of 5:11-6:8. In other words, he is convinced that salvation is theirs, in spite of his warning against falling away.

How should one understand the author’s statement of confidence in the recipients? Several commentators emphasize the rhetorical nature of the expression. Harold Attridge says it is a “conventional rhetorical device” used to obligate and persuade.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Craig Koester claims expressions of confidence, rhetorically, help ensure a positive response to a speaker’s request.<sup>26</sup> Citing Aristotle’s advocacy of the rhetorical value of confidence, Koester insists that if the listeners are convinced the speaker is confident, they “are more likely to persevere.”<sup>27</sup> According to David deSilva,

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<sup>21</sup>Ἐχόμενω σωτηρίας is in apposition to τὰ κρείσσονα. For examples from the LXX and extra-biblical Greek of ἔχω + object with the meaning “associated with,” “pertaining to,” “involving,” see BDAG, s.v. “ἔχω,” 11.a; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 174 n. 98. The appearance of the object in the genitive is common (see BDAG).

<sup>22</sup>So also Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Jesus, the Mediator of a ‘Better Covenant’: Comparatives in the Book of Hebrews,” *Faith & Mission* 21, no. 2 (2004): 33.

<sup>23</sup>See Vanhoye, *La structure littéraire*, 119-20. David L. Allen claims the “better things” refers not “to entrance into salvation, but to that which ‘accompanies’ salvation” (*Hebrews*, NAC [Nashville: B&H, 2010], 394). But this appears to be a distinction without a difference. According to the author, the “better things” are necessarily tied to salvation. One is either fruitful land that receives a blessing (salvation) or worthless land that will be cursed (judgment). To be confident of “better things” concerning them is to be confident that they will be fruitful land—and, thus, be confident of their salvation.

<sup>24</sup>C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 167.

<sup>25</sup>Attridge, *Hebrews*, 174. He adds that the direct address “beloved” is a “feature of homiletic style, whatever real affection and concern might have been involved” (ibid).

<sup>26</sup>Koester, *Hebrews*, 316.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 324. See also his section on the author’s “Rhetorical Strategy” (87-92).

the author turns in 6:9-12 to a “different strategy” after his warning—what Aristotle would call “frank speech.” Quoting from Aristotle’s work on rhetoric, deSilva contends that the author’s affirmation of them restores “the sense of mutual goodwill and high estimation between speaker and audience.”<sup>28</sup> For support, Both Attridge and deSilva point to Stanley Olson’s article on Paul’s expressions of confidence in his letters. Olson argues that contemporary writings contain functional parallels, which demonstrate that such expressions are part of Paul’s attempt to persuade.<sup>29</sup> “In each case the expression is linked to the purpose of the letter,” writes Olson, “and the tone of confidence is more pragmatic than sincere—though it may be both.”<sup>30</sup> Given the parallels, Olson believes Paul’s expressions of confidence in, for example, Galatians 5:10, 2 Thessalonians 3:4, and Philemon 21 function to support the admonitions and persuasive purposes of the letters “by creating a sense of obligation through praise.”<sup>31</sup>

I do not deny the rhetorical function of biblical expressions of confidence, whether in Paul or Hebrews. As O’Brien says, the intent of the expression of confidence in Hebrews 6:9, rhetorically, is “to encourage them to persevere in hope and faith.”<sup>32</sup> However, *overemphasis* on the rhetorical nature of the statement and on the Hellenistic parallels seems to run the risk of coloring the expression as *mere* rhetoric. Olson, for example, advises caution at attempts to use the expression to reconstruct the relationship

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<sup>28</sup>DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 245. See also Nongbri, who notes the author’s proper application of Graeco-Roman “rhetorical protocol,” “rhetorical strategy,” and “rhetorical conventions” to make his audience receptive after the harsh warning (“A Touch of Condemnation in a Word of Exhortation,” 277-78). Cf. B. J. Oropeza, *Churches under Siege of Persecution and Assimilation: The General Epistles and Revelation*, vol. 3 of *Apostasy in the New Testament Communities* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), 46.

<sup>29</sup>Stanley N. Olson, “Pauline Expressions of Confidence in His Addressees,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (1985): 282-83. Olson writes, “In some cases, the wording is consistent enough to approach the formulaic” (283).

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 283-83.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>32</sup>O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 230.

between author and reader, given its “typical function.” The expression is “best interpreted as a persuasive technique rather than as a sincere reflection of the way the writer thinks the addressees will respond to his proposals or to himself.”<sup>33</sup> Yet not only does this thesis seem to call the author’s sincerity into question, when applied specifically to the author of Hebrews it would also have to ignore the reason he himself gives for his confidence: “*For* (γάρ) God is not unjust so as to forget<sup>34</sup> your work and the love that you have shown for his name, as you have served and continue to serve the saints” (6:10). I will argue below that the author is referring to the evidence of their internal transformation as members of the new covenant. For now, though, it is significant simply to note that he gives a *reason* for his rhetoric. It is not mere technique, nor is it insincerity. It is a genuine affirmation based on indications that God has truly written his law on their hearts (8:10).<sup>35</sup>

The author can express this confidence because their work and love for the Lord and for one another is a clear example of land that, having received rain, brings forth useful vegetation and receives God’s blessing (6:7). As noted above, the “better things” in 6:9 refers to the fruitful land of 6:7 in contrast to the worthless land of 6:8. Many interpreters affirm this.<sup>36</sup> What has not been argued as frequently is that the author

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<sup>33</sup>Olson, “Pauline Expressions of Confidence,” 295.

<sup>34</sup>The infinitive ἐπιλαθέσθαι indicates result. See BDF §391(4); Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 594; Nigel Turner, *Syntax*, vol. 3 of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, ed. James Hope Moulton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1963), 136.

<sup>35</sup>In his consideration of the Pauline “confidence formula,” John Lee White (*The Form and Function of the Body of the Greek Letter: A Study of the Letter-Body in the Non-Literary Papyri and in Paul the Apostle*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1972]) argues that, while the expression may serve to soften earlier claims, “it is more feasible that the clause is a genuine assertion of confidence.” Regarding Gal 5:10, White believes Paul’s qualification “in the Lord” is the key to understanding his assertion of confidence: “Paul’s confidence, it seems, is vested in the eschatological power of the gospel itself” (64-65). White points to Paul’s explicit articulation of this principle in Phil 1:6 (118 n. 48).

<sup>36</sup>See, e.g., Vanhoye, *La structure littéraire*, 119-20; Peterson, “The Situation of the ‘Hebrews,’” 20-21; Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 144; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 174; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 329; Koester, *Hebrews*, 324; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 230-31. Contra Wayne Grudem (“Perseverance of the Saints: A Case Study from Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Other Warning Passages in Hebrews,” in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will: Historical and Theological Perspectives on Calvinism*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and

is continuing this comparison in 6:10.<sup>37</sup> The author is confident of the “better things” of salvation for them (i.e., they are like the blessed land in 6:7) *because* of their work and love (i.e., because they bear useful vegetation). It is impossible that God would unjustly overlook this work and love shown for his name, as expressed in their past and present service toward the saints.<sup>38</sup> As the fruitful land receives God’s blessing, so fruitful believers receive salvation.

Having said this, it is clear that the recipients’ loving service is not the ground of their salvation. On the one hand, Hebrews (and the NT in general) speaks of salvation as a reward for perseverance in faithfulness (e.g., 10:35-39; 11:6).<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, Hebrews is unambiguous that Christ is the only source of eternal salvation due to his high

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Bruce A. Ware [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995], 133-82), who thinks the “better things” contrast, not with the judgment of 6:8, but with the experiences of 6:4-5 (he argues that the verses are “*inconclusive* regarding the question of whether they indicate genuine salvation,” 140, [emphasis in original]). These experiences, though “good,” are not the “better things” that belong to salvation, “such as love, service, faith, and hope that he mentions in verses 10-12” (158-59). However, Grudem’s argument and support are forced and unconvincing. I am aware of no Hebrews commentator who contends for this interpretation, nor does Grudem cite any authors in support. The natural contrast to the “better things” of 6:9 is the cursed ground in 6:8. Buist M. Fanning, who generally shares Grudem’s view of the warnings, concurs in finding Grudem unpersuasive. See Buist M. Fanning, “A Classical Reformed View,” in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 193 n. 46.

<sup>37</sup>An exception is deSilva who observes on 6:10, “The author begins to concretize the metaphorical language of 6:7-8, drawing out for the audience what the ‘real-life’ counterparts to bearing suitable vegetation are. The hearers have already been producing suitable ‘vegetation’” (*Perseverance in Gratitude*, 245).

<sup>38</sup>That the author likely has in mind both their past and present service is indicated by the combination of aorist and present participles: *διακονήσαντες τοῖς ἁγίοις καὶ διακονοῦντες* (see Peterson, “The Situation of the ‘Hebrews’,” 21; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 175; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 331).

<sup>39</sup>See Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 841-64, esp. 861-62. DeSilva seems to go too far, though, in his consideration of Hebrews in terms of the ancient “patron-client” relationship and the social institution of reciprocity, leading him to interpret 6:10 in a way that suggests believers’ actions are meritorious. On 6:10, he says the author claims, “God regards their acts of love and service toward one another as virtuous, meriting remembrance and reward” (*Perseverance in Gratitude*, 246). By persevering in faith and serving their fellow saints, “the hearers would preserve God’s recognition of their worthy reception of his benefits and thus stimulate him to continue to benefit them” (247). Later, he writes, “The author specifically directs the hearers to ‘return’ God’s favor by showing love and performing acts of service . . . . It is by doing so that they make a ‘just’ return that the ‘just’ God will not forget. Their commitment to making a fair return assures them of God’s ongoing, future favor” (254). “Clients who respond to their patron with loyalty, respect, and obedient service as the patron directs have every confidence that the grace relationship will continue secure and that the flow of benefits from the patron will be untrammelled” (258).

priestly ministry in atoning for sin (e.g., 2:9-10; 5:9-10; 7:24-25; 10:10-14). Thus, in 6:9-10, the author is not suggesting that their good works are meritorious—earning them a salvation that God is obligated to render. Rather, their love and good works (though they will be rewarded) are evidence that the “better things” of salvation are theirs—that is, they demonstrate lives that have experienced the transforming effects of Christ’s sacrifice.

Though believers are responsible to believe and persevere in faithfulness (as chapter 4 of this dissertation will argue), the transformation of the heart from “unbelieving” (3:12) to “true” (10:22) occurs only through Christ’s new covenant sacrifice that atones for sin and puts God’s law in their hearts (10:14-18). In chapter 2, I argued that the “perfection” of believers (10:14), according to Hebrews, involves the cleansing of a guilty conscience and a definitive consecration to God, which enables one to draw near to God. Through Christ’s offering, man is perfected, resulting in a fulfillment of Jeremiah’s new covenant promises that ensure heart transformation (8:10-12; 10:16-17). In light of this, the author exhorts the recipients to draw near to God with true hearts “since our hearts have been sprinkled clean from an evil conscience” (10:22). Further exhortations that flow from the fulfillment of the new covenant promises in the lives of believers include maintaining their confession (10:23) and stimulating each other “to love and good works” (10:24). Concrete examples of this kind of love and good works that the recipient’s have demonstrated are then given in 10:32-34. Most interpreters consider these acts of service to be what the author has in mind in 6:10.<sup>40</sup>

Such steadfast ministry in the face of opposition is made possible through Christ’s heart-

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<sup>40</sup>E.g., Ceslas Spicq, *L’Épître aux Hébreux* (Paris: Gabalda, 1953), 2:157, 158; Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 225; Herbert Braun, *An die Hebräer* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1984), 180; Donald A. Hagner, *Hebrews*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1983), 93; Peterson, “The Situation of the ‘Hebrews’,” 21; Bruce, *Hebrews*, 151; Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 144; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 175 n. 112; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 331; deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 246; Koester, *Hebrews*, 317; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 231; Allen, *Hebrews*, 395.

transforming work. It is only the blood of Christ that cleanses the guilty conscience so that one may “serve the living God” (9:14). Therefore, if such faithful service to God has been genuinely demonstrated “for his name” (6:10), the author has adequate grounds for expressing confidence in their salvation (6:9).<sup>41</sup> In his analysis of the warnings of Hebrews, Buist Fanning seems to concur with this line of thought. The emphasis in Hebrews on the inward cleansing of believers through Christ’s new covenant sacrifice so that they may serve God, Fanning suggests, “may very well be the theological foundation for the reassurance that [the author] offers in 6:9-10 and 10:32-34 based on the readers’ past and present obedience.” That is, “those who have begun to experience the transforming power of this new covenant mediated by Jesus’ high priesthood will continue to show the persevering faith that is needed, based not on changeable human ability but on the sustaining power of God at work within them.”<sup>42</sup>

Having granted this concession of his confidence in his readers in 6:9-10, the author explains in 6:11-12 the purpose of the prior warning in 6:4-8: he wants to see them diligently persevere to the end and inherit the promises.<sup>43</sup> The author shifts his tone in 6:9 to affirm his confidence; in 6:11 he shifts again to offer justification for his warning. In short, his argument is as follows: I warn you that anyone who falls away from Christ will experience eschatological judgment (6:4-8). Now, even though I say this, I have

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<sup>41</sup>R. T. France comments on 6:9-10, “Their behavior proves the reality of their salvation—not just good deeds as such, but work that springs from an obvious love for God (lit., ‘for his name’) and that has in the past resulted in practical Christian service to their fellow Christians (cf. 10:32-34) . . . God, the just judge, knows this and will not forget. The point is not that their good deeds earn God’s favor, but that God is well aware of the evidence which even to a human observer testifies to their spiritual genuineness” (*Hebrews*, in vol. 13 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006], 85). So also, Thomas R. Screiner and Ardel B. Caneday: “[T]he author is optimistic about the future destiny of the readers because their love has been fervent and their good works have been manifested in the church. In other words, the author is convinced that they belong to the people of God because of the changes that have occurred in their lives” (*The Race Set before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001], 294).

<sup>42</sup>Fanning, “A Classical Reformed View,” 204-05.

<sup>43</sup>Ellingworth comments on 6:11, “The author has issued his warning . . . to encourage them to persevere in their faith to the end” (*Hebrews*, 331).

confidence of your salvation, brothers, because of your demonstrated work and love for God and the saints (6:9-10). Yet, I offer this warning because we want to see you avoid apathy, persevere faithfully, and inherit the promises (6:11-12).

In 6:11 the author indicates the response he wants from them. He desires each one of the recipients to show the same “diligence” or “zeal” (σπουδήν)—the opposite of the “apathy” or “laziness” (νωθοί) they are to avoid.<sup>44</sup> They are to show this diligence πρὸς τὴν πληροφορίαν τῆς ἐλπίδος. The meaning of the phrase is not entirely clear. The preposition πρὸς could indicate purpose/goal,<sup>45</sup> “toward,”<sup>46</sup> or “with regard/reference to.”<sup>47</sup> The noun πληροφορία appears four times in the NT, two of which are found in Hebrews—here and in 10:22.<sup>48</sup> Interpreters and translations are divided as to whether it has a subjective meaning (“full assurance/certainty”) or an objective meaning (“fullness/fulfillment/realization”) in Hebrews 6:11.<sup>49</sup> While it is difficult to decide among the options, perhaps the most likely is “we desire that each of you show the same diligence *regarding the certainty of your hope* until the end,” taking πρὸς in the third

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<sup>44</sup>Koester, *Hebrews*, 317; Johnson, *Hebrews*, 166.

<sup>45</sup>So Attridge, *Hebrews*, 175; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 232, also n. 134.

<sup>46</sup>So Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 332; Koester, *Hebrews*, 317.

<sup>47</sup>So BDAG, s.v. “πρὸς,” 875; Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 130. For this use of πρὸς, see Robertson, *Grammar*, 626; BDF §239(6).

<sup>48</sup>The other two NT occurrences are Col 2:2 and 1 Thess 1:5. It does not occur in the LXX and is found only sparingly in extant Hellenistic literature, where it means “full assurance” or “certainty” according to Gerhard Delling, “πληροφορία,” in *TDNT*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 310-11; BDAG, s.v. “πληροφορία”; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 175 ns. 119, 120.

<sup>49</sup>Those rendering it subjectively in 6:11 as “full assurance/certainty” include, e.g., ESV; NASB; Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1871), 1:302-03; Hughes, *Hebrews*, 228; Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 148-49; Koester, *Hebrews*, 317; James W. Thompson, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 136; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 232. Those understanding it in a more objective manner in 6:11 as “fullness/fulfillment/realization” include, e.g., HCSB; Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1920), 158; Hugh Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1964), 112; Delling, “πληροφορία,” 311; Bruce, *Hebrews*, 151; Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 130; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 175; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 332; deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 247; Johnson, *Hebrews*, 167.

manner above and understanding πληροφορία in a more subjective sense. In other words, the author wants them to show diligence in manifesting certainty in their Christian hope until the end, similar to his earlier exhortations in 3:6 and 14 to hold fast their confidence (3:6), the hope in which they boast (3:6), and their assurance “until the end” (3:14).<sup>50</sup>

The purpose (ἵνα) of their diligence is “so that you may not be lazy/apathetic<sup>51</sup> but imitators of those who, through<sup>52</sup> faith and patience, inherit the promises” (6:12). The author’s desire that the recipients be “imitators” anticipates the exposition and exhortation on faithful OT figures in 11:1-40. However, the immediate reference is to Abraham in the passage that follows (6:13-15), who “waited patiently” and “received the promise” (6:15). As the author makes clear, although Abraham and other OT saints can

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<sup>50</sup>I have opted for the above reading for the following reasons: (1) According to Günther Harder (“σπουδή,” in *TDNT*, 564), in Philo, the object of σπουδή (“diligence/zeal”) is often denoted by either ὑπέρ or πρὸς (see, e.g., Philo, *Somnii* 2.67). If this was common in Koine, it might make it less likely that πρὸς should be seen as denoting purpose or goal here. See also Delitzsch (*Hebrews*, 1:303, 303 n. 2) who understands πρὸς in 6:11 to denote “reference” and claims, “The classical phrase would be σπουδαίως ἔχειν πρὸς τι.” (2) As noted above, the expression is similar to the author’s call in 3:6 and 14 to hold fast their confidence, the hope in which they boast, and their assurance “until the end” (μέχρι τέλους, 3:14; 6:11 uses ἄχρι τέλους; the presence in 3:6 of the phrase μέχρι τέλους βεβαίαν in some MSS is likely an interpolation from 3:14; see Bruce M. Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1994], 595). (3) In 10:22, the other context in Hebrews in which πληροφορία occurs (ἐν πληροφορία πίστεως), the meaning “in full assurance/certainty of faith” seems to fit better than “in fullness/fulfillment/realization of faith.” Interestingly, of the interpreters and translations cited above who opt for “fullness/fulfillment/realization” in 6:11, half adopt the meaning “full assurance/certainty” in 10:22 (see HCSB; Montefiore, *Hebrews*, 174; Bruce, *Hebrews*, 254; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 523; deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 339). David Ripley Worley’s assertion that the meaning “assurance of hope” would be “no more than a tautology of σπουδῆν . . . ἄχρι τέλους and synonymous with ‘patient faith’ in the next verse” seems puzzling and unjustified (“God’s Faithfulness to Promise: The Hortatory Use of Commissive Language in Hebrews” [Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1981], 139).

<sup>51</sup>The phrase νωθροὶ γένησθε of course refers back to the corresponding expression νωθροὶ γεγόνατε ταῖς ἀκοαῖς in 5:11. Having examined the uses of νωθρός in the LXX, the Apocrypha, and Hellenistic works from the fifth century B.C. through the second century A.D., John M. Campbell (“An Analysis of the Semantic Domains of ΝΩΘΡΟΣ with Implications for the Interpretation of Hebrews 5.11-6.12,” Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary) contends that the author is not referring to the recipients’ inability to understand nor to their active revolt (as some interpreters argue): In the context of Hebrews it “does not convey their inability of understanding but inattention to understanding . . . The writer was referring to negligence and remission in their dedication to proper teaching . . . The lexeme carries the meaning of laziness in reaction rather than an active revolt. They have become relaxed, and their carelessness has affected their inattentiveness and their capacity to receive and retain solid instruction” (97).

<sup>52</sup>The preposition διὰ expresses means.



be said to have received promises in a limited sense (e.g., 6:15; 11:33), ultimately they did not receive what was promised (11:13, 39).<sup>53</sup> For the ultimate recipients of God’s promise(s) are believers in Christ.<sup>54</sup> These promises are both already fulfilled and yet to be fulfilled. The new covenant “better promises” (8:6) of heart renewal and sins forgiven (8:10-12) have been realized through the “perfection” of believers (10:14-17, 22).<sup>55</sup> Yet, the readers are called to endure so that they may receive what was promised (10:36). For a promise still remains of entering God’s rest (4:1), and they must be diligent to enter into it (4:11). As 6:12 states, access to this promise comes through imitating those who have faith and, thus, avoiding the example of the disobedient who lacked faith (3:18-19; 4:11). But this is only made possible through the redeeming death of Christ, the mediator of a new covenant, whose blood cleanses transgressions, so that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance (9:14-15).

Thus, in spite of his confidence in his readers’ salvation, the author warns them not to fall away. This is because he wants them to express a diligent assurance in their Christian hope, which will enable them to avoid the danger of apathy, faithfully endure, and so receive what God has promised them. But if the author is assured of their salvation due to the heart-transformation that their works manifest, why would he need to warn them to avoid the *νοθήρως* that leads to apostasy? This question anticipates the discussion of the warnings and their purpose in chapter 4. For now, I contend that one ought not blunt the force of the author’s confidence because of his warnings and exhortations to persevere, as if the latter negates the former. In the next passage, 6:13-20, the author explains the reason that the readers can have confidence to exercise “faith and patience”

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<sup>53</sup>On the meaning of “received the promise,” see further below on 6:15.

<sup>54</sup>See Attridge, *Hebrews*, 176-77; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 239, 339; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 234. “All the promises of God converge on the great Messianic salvation whose final consummation has still to come” (Julius Schniewind and Gerhard Friedrich, “ἐπαγγελία,” in *TDNT*, 584).

<sup>55</sup>See chap. 2 of this dissertation.

until the end: God’s promise-confirming oath and the hope, like an anchor, that enters within the veil.

### **Hebrews 6:13-20**

The author transitions to a new section in 6:13 that will ultimately lead back to the topic of Christ’s high priesthood “after the order of Melchizedek” (6:20) that was introduced at 5:10 and to which the author turns in 7:1-28. The *γάρ* in 6:13 links the call in 6:12 to imitate the faith and patience of those who inherited the promises, with the specific example of Abraham.<sup>56</sup> This is not the first time he has mentioned Abraham, nor will it be the last (2:16; 7:4-5; 11:8-19). However, though the author wants the readers to imitate Abraham’s patient faith in God’s promise (6:15), the real emphasis in the passage is on God, whose unchanging promise and oath provide certainty of hope (6:17-20).<sup>57</sup> This is, of course, consistent with the exhortation in 6:11-12. The author wants his readers to inherit the promises of God through faith and patience, but this is not mere exertion of will in emulating Abraham. As noted above, having certainty in their hope (6:11) will make perseverance possible (6:12). According to 6:13-20, God’s sure faithfulness to keep his promise will make their certainty possible.

### **Hebrews 6:13-15**

When God made his promise to Abraham, he swore by himself (6:13), saying, “I will surely bless you and multiply you” (6:14).<sup>58</sup> The reference is to Genesis 22:15-17

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<sup>56</sup>Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 335; France, *Hebrews*, 87.

<sup>57</sup>“[T]he reliability and sincerity of the Promisor are elaborated while Abraham’s exemplary patient faith receives only passing mention” (Worley, “God’s Faithfulness to Promise,” 109). “The author emphasizes God’s faithfulness rather than Abraham’s faith . . . Abraham’s rôle is relatively passive” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 334). “Abraham is cited as an example . . . but God is actually the focus of attention” (Koester, *Hebrews*, 332). See also O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 235.

<sup>58</sup>On the minor differences between the author’s text and LXX Gen 22:16 from which it is taken, see George H. Guthrie, “Hebrews,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 965-66. Septuagint translators customarily translated the Hebrew infinitive absolute by adding a cognate participle to a finite verb to strengthen the verbal idea (BDF §422). On *εἰ μήν*, see Attridge, *Hebrews*, 178; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 337.

in which the Lord reaffirms his earlier promises to bless and multiply Abraham (Gen 12:2-3, 7; 13:14-17; 15:5-7, 13-16; 14:4-8, 19) after Abraham's faithful willingness to sacrifice Isaac (Gen 22:1-14). According to the author, the reason God swore "by himself" was because he "had no one / nothing greater by which to swear" (6:13). In verses 16-18, he will explain both the reason and purpose for God guaranteeing his promise by swearing an oath. But, for now, the author simply reports the outcome: "and, thus,<sup>59</sup> having waited patiently, [Abraham] received the promise."<sup>60</sup>

Though verse 15 is short, its interpretation is contested. Most commentators affirm that, when the author says Abraham "received the promise," he means Abraham actually received the *content* of the promise—the thing promised. James Swetnam, however, argues that for Abraham to "receive the promise" in 6:15 means he "received the final and definitive confirmation of the promise of numerous offspring after the supreme test of his patience."<sup>61</sup> In other words, Abraham received a "reinforced promise" in Genesis 22:17, "not the offspring themselves."<sup>62</sup> According to Swetnam, this reception of promises (as opposed to what was promised) is described in 6:15 and 11:33 (which use ἐπιτυγχάνω) and in 11:17 (which uses ἀναδέχομαι), whereas the author refers to "things promised" in 9:15, 10:36, 11:13, and 11:39 (which use λαμβάνω and κομίζω).<sup>63</sup> In Hebrews 6:11-15 the author argues that the recipients should imitate those who received

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<sup>59</sup>The adverb οὕτως modifies ἐπέτυχεν (not μακροθυμήσας). It refers back to vv. 13-14, which describe God swearing an oath to accomplish his promise to Abraham. "Thus," Abraham received the promise. Rightly, Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 338; Koester, *Hebrews*, 326.

<sup>60</sup>As noted above, Abraham is the specific example the author had in mind in v. 12. Note the use of μακροθυμήσας and ἐπαγγελίας in v. 15 which recall the μακροθυμίας and ἐπαγγελίας of v. 12 (Attridge, *Hebrews*, 179-80).

<sup>61</sup>James Swetnam, *Jesus and Isaac: A Study of the Epistle to the Hebrews in the Light of the Aqedah* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), 184.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 90 n. 22. So also Lane, who follows Swetnam (*Hebrews 1-8*, 151). Buchanan writes, "That which Abraham 'received' ... was the 'promise'—not its fulfillment, which the author claimed was still pending in his day" (*Hebrews*, 115).

<sup>63</sup>See the discussion of these texts in Swetnam, *Jesus and Isaac*, 90-92.

the promises so that they may receive “what is much more important—the things which were promised.”<sup>64</sup> This interpretation would resolve the palpable tension between 6:15, which says Abraham received the promise, and 11:13 and 39, which say OT saints *did not* receive what was promised.

I contend, though, that the author means Abraham received “what was promised” in 6:15, not merely a “reinforced promise.” It is unlikely that a distinction between the reception of promises and the things promised is intended, for the following reasons: (1) It seems clear that Abraham’s reception of the promise in 6:15 is an example of those who inherit the promises in 6:12, whom the readers are to emulate. But those who inherit the promises—both in verse 12 and verse 17—are surely inheriting the *content* of the promises. To “ἐπέτυχεν the promise” in verse 15 should be understood the same way.<sup>65</sup> (2) Understanding Abraham as receiving a “reinforced promise” in 6:15 does not seem to fit the context of 6:12-18 and is rather anticlimactic. To say that Abraham received a promise “but not its fulfillment,” Ellingworth observes, “is harsh in a passage the whole point of which is to emphasize that God keeps his promises.”<sup>66</sup> (3) According to Louw and Nida, there is significant overlap of meaning among the verbs Hebrews uses to indicate that one “received” or “obtained” the promise(s).<sup>67</sup> That the

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 90 n. 22.

<sup>65</sup>See Michel, *Hebräer*, 251; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 338-39; Koester, *Hebrews*, 326; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 236. Swetnam (ibid., 185 n. 48) claims the singular “promise” in 6:17 refers to the eternal life that Christians inherit, while the plural “promises” of 6:12 refer to the multiple promises that Abraham inherited (multiplicity of offspring and land). But the use of a cognate verb and noun (κληρονομέω in v. 12 and κληρονόμος in v. 17) with ἐπαγγελία in both passages in the same context makes it hard to accept that the object means “promises” in one case and “thing promised” in the other. “There is no consistent difference in meaning between singular and plural forms [of ἐπαγγελία]” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 338; see also Schniewind and Friedrich, “ἐπαγγελία,” 584 n. 65).

<sup>66</sup>Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 338. Marcus Dods contends that, if Abraham only received a promise of future blessing “and not the thing itself,” μακροθυμήσας would be irrelevant. “He had not to wait for the promise, but for its fulfillment” (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, in vol. 4 of *The Expositor’s Greek Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.], 303).

<sup>67</sup>See Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 1:564-65, 572-74.

author intends different nuances of meaning through the use of these diverse verbs is doubtful. It is more likely the variations are stylistic.<sup>68</sup> (4) As mentioned above, it is better to understand OT saints as having received promises in a limited but not ultimate sense.<sup>69</sup> Most commentators understand the promise Abraham received as referring to Isaac—whether to his birth, his preservation through the attempted sacrifice, or both.<sup>70</sup> “The difference between 6:12, 15 and 11:13, 39,” Koester writes, “reflects a typological understanding of the OT: the promise is fulfilled penultimately in the birth of Isaac and

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<sup>68</sup>So Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 238-39, 338. Michel believes the idioms in 6:12 and 15 correspond (*Hebräer*, 251).

<sup>69</sup>“[T]he author of Hebrews believed that he and his listeners were the ultimate recipients of God’s promises . . . . At another level the ancient models of faithful perseverance not only were given promises but also received their fulfillment . . . in a limited sense” (O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 234). “God both made and kept his promise to Abraham that he would have descendants, but no OT figure received the fulfillment of what God now offers to believers in Christ” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 339).

<sup>70</sup>See, e.g., Westcott, *Hebrews*, 161; Michel, *Hebräer*, 251; Hughes, *Hebrews*, 231; D. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 150; Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 151; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 179-80; Bruce, *Hebrews*, 153; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 338; Koester, *Hebrews*, 326; Johnson, *Hebrews*, 169; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 180. Since the oath takes place after the attempted sacrifice of Isaac, some commentators speculate that the author may have had in mind a later event. Michel reasons that perhaps he received the protection of his descendants (*Hebräer*, 251). Spicq suggests that the promise may be the birth of Esau and Jacob (*Hébreux*, 2:160), who were born fifteen years before Abraham’s death (cf. Gen 21:5; 25:7, 26). Delitzsch argues that, since the restoration of Isaac preceded the oath, Isaac cannot be the promise. Rather, Abraham did not receive the promise in this life, “but persevering unto death, he obtained it, as we see, afterwards in full accomplishment.” For, Abraham’s death was not the end of his life “as indeed is clear from xi. 13-16, which discloses so deep a view into the pilgrim-longings of the Hebrew patriarchs, and the satisfaction they have now received in the world above” (*Hebrews*, 1:309). Thus, 11:13, 39 refer only to the fact that the patriarchs did not receive the promises *in this life* (see *ibid.*, 310).

However, the city for which Abraham longed (11:10, 16) is still to come (13:14). In addition, the OT saints did not receive what was promised (11:39) because perfection was not yet possible until the coming of Christ (11:40). It is hard to believe that 6:15 is a reference to the perfection that believers now receive. It is more likely that the promise Abraham received in 6:15 does indeed refer to Isaac. After all, if the author wants the readers to imitate Abraham’s perseverance in light of God’s promises (6:12, 15) by emphasizing that God truly keeps his promises, it would seem he would want to point them to a promise kept in Abraham’s life to which Scripture bears witness—not a promise that Abraham received after death, for which the readers have no evidence. Of course, in an ultimate sense, the promise was not Isaac; the promise was multiplied offspring, land, and becoming a blessing to the world—the fulfillment of which were hardly all possible in Abraham’s lifetime. Yet Isaac *was* the one on whom the promise depended. In his birth and deliverance, the writer can truly say Abraham “received the promise” (see Bruce, *Hebrews*, 153; Leon Morris, *Hebrews*, in vol. 12 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 59).

ultimately in resurrection in the world to come.”<sup>71</sup> Through delivering Isaac, God kept his promise to Abraham (in down payment form) to bless and multiply him (6:14).

### **Hebrews 6:16-20**

The author now makes a comparison between human and divine oaths (6:16-18), beginning with the human side in 6:16.<sup>72</sup> He offers simple observations about the general practice of oath taking among human beings that his readers would no doubt accept. When taking an oath, people swear by someone/something greater than themselves—whether a god, a ruler, a sacred object, etc.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, oaths serve as confirmation, ending all disputes—that is, they “provide a legal guarantee of a testimony’s truthfulness.”<sup>74</sup> In swearing by God, the oath-taker calls upon God “to ratify the unequivocal truthfulness of what was asserted or promised.”<sup>75</sup> According to 1 Kings 8:31-32, oaths were invoked in disputes between neighbors: God is asked to hear the oath, condemn the wicked, and vindicate the righteous. The swearing of an oath obligated

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<sup>71</sup>Koester, *Hebrews*, 326. Similarly, Ellingworth (*Hebrews*, 333): “There is no contradiction if the typological distinction is borne in mind.”

<sup>72</sup>Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 339.

<sup>73</sup>The comparison τοῦ μείζονος could be masculine (“someone”) or neuter (“something”). As Koester notes, oaths in Scripture and the ancient world were often sworn with reference to God or a ruler, though swearing by sacred locations or objects (such as heaven, the temple, Jerusalem, the altar, etc.; see Matt 5:34-36; 23:16-22) was not unknown (*Hebrews*, 326).

<sup>74</sup>George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 242. On the use of common Hellenistic legal terminology in the passage, see Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 149; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 180. Attention has frequently been drawn to parallels between Heb 6:13-20 and Philo’s discussion of God’s oath, with a variety of explanations being offered. Spicq, who famously argued for direct Philonic influence, points to the similarities in thought here (*Hébreux*, 1:64-66). See also Spicq’s analysis of parallels in thought between Philo and Heb 5:11-6:20 (“L’Épître aux Hébreux et Philon, 3607-18). Helmut Köster contends that the parallels are explained by access to a common tradition (“Die Auslegung der Abraham-Verheissung in Hebräer 6,” 101-02). Ronald Williamson denies any influence, arguing that the treatment on divine oaths by the author of Hebrews is “very different from that of Philo” and that he was “completely unaware” of Philo’s teaching (*Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970], 209). Offering yet another alternative, Worley suggests the similarities may be the result of a “similar rhetorical training in the use of forensic oath” (“God’s Faithfulness to Promise,” 132).

<sup>75</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 151.

the person to his pledge. With these assertions, the recipients of the letter would be in agreement.

This description of human oath-taking sets up the author's explanation in 6:17 of the reason<sup>76</sup> for the divine oath to Abraham: "Since God desired all the more to show to the heirs of the promise the immutability of his purpose, he guaranteed<sup>77</sup> it with an oath." Recall the train of thought: the author wants his readers to imitate those who inherit the promises (6:12). He provides the specific example of Abraham to whom God made a promise and swore an oath to fulfill it (6:13-14). As the author desires his readers to do, Abraham persevered and obtained the promise (6:15). Now, in 6:17, the author explains why God swore an oath. It was given because he wanted to prove to those who were to inherit the promise the unchanging nature of his will—that is, his immutable intention to bless his people just as he blessed Abraham and assure them that they would inherit the promise. If an oath among humans maximizes one's obligation (6:16), one can be even more certain that God will fulfill his oath.<sup>78</sup> God's promise should have been sufficient. But God guaranteed his promise with an oath for the sake of his people, so that—as the next verse shows—they may be encouraged to persevere in light of his unchanging purpose. The heirs of the promise must persevere. But, according to the

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<sup>76</sup>The introductory expression ἐν ᾧ most likely expresses cause (cf. Heb 2:18). According to Spicq, "[Il] se rattache à toute la phrase précédente . . . et serait l'équivalent de διό" (*Hébreux*, 2:161). See also BDAG, s.v. "ἐν," 329 (9.a); Michel, *Hebräer*, 252; Lane, *Hebrews* 1-8, 148; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 180; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 340-01; Johnson, *Hebrews*, 170; O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 238.

<sup>77</sup>While the verb μεσιτεύω is found in Hellenistic writings, it does not occur in the LXX and is used in the NT only here. Most commentators and translations render it "guaranteed" or "confirmed" in Heb 6:17. See Albrecht Oepke, "μεσίτης, μεσιτεύω," in *TDNT*; Dieter Sängler, "μεσίτης, μεσιτεύω," in *EDNT*, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993). For David Worley's thesis on the meaning of μεσιτεύω, see further below on 6:18 and the discussion of the "two immutable things."

<sup>78</sup>This does not mean that God is bound to a human system of oath taking, as O'Brien notes. "Rather, our author is simply drawing an analogy: oaths point to a confirmation of truth" (*Hebrews*, 237-38).

author, one of the means God uses to enable them to persevere is to assure them that his purpose to bless them is immutable.<sup>79</sup>

In 6:18 the author offers a statement of purpose and means: “so that, through two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to hold fast the hope set before us may have strong encouragement.” The purpose (ἵνα) of God’s promise and oath is that his people might have strong encouragement and, thus, persevere to the end. The means (διὰ) by which they are enabled to persevere are the “two immutable things” just mentioned: God’s promise and oath. The following exegesis will seek to justify the above translation and interpretation.

The author claims that believers can have strong encouragement “through two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie.” Most interpreters believe the two immutable things are God’s promise and oath.<sup>80</sup> But since he does not state explicitly in this verse what these two things are, several proposals have been offered.<sup>81</sup> Some agree

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<sup>79</sup>Commentators often point to the similarity between Heb 6:17 and Philo who, perceiving a problem with the fact that God swears an oath since there is no chance that he would lie, argues that its purpose is to bring comfort and conviction to man in his weakness. See Philo *De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini* 91-94. For a quotation and translation of the text, see Attridge, *Hebrews*, 179 n. 17. Lane maintains that Philo and Hebrews diverge in their expression of the oath’s purpose. While “Philo concludes that God swore an oath to Abraham ‘to assist faith,’” the purpose of the oath for the author of Hebrews is “to prove how irrevocable was the resolve expressed in the divine promise (v 17)” (*Hebrews 1-8*, 151). Of course, Hebrews does not indicate that the author sensed a problem with God swearing an oath. However, one need not acquiesce to any theory of dependence or shared tradition between Philo and Hebrews in order to acknowledge the similarity of their answers. For, contra Lane, God *did* intend his oath “to assist faith.” As Lane observes, the oath demonstrated the irrevocable nature of the divine resolve. But the purpose of the oath is clearly expressed in 6:18—so that believers may be encouraged to persevere.

<sup>80</sup>See, e.g., Helmut Köster, “Die Auslegung der Abraham-Verheissung in Hebräer 6,” in *Studien zur Theologie der alttestamentlichen Überlieferungen*, ed. Rolf Rendtorff and Klaus Koch (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1961), 100; Otfried Hofius, “Die Unabänderlichkeit des göttlichen Heilsratschlusses: Erwägungen zur Herkunft eines neutestamentlichen Theologumenon,” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 64 (1973): 135-36; Westcott, *Hebrews*, 163; Montefiore, *Hebrews*, 115; Hagner, *Hebrews*, 98; Hughes, *Hebrews*, 233; Bruce, *Hebrews*, 154; Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 152; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 342; Koester, *Hebrews*, 328; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 239.

<sup>81</sup>A unique example overlooked by most commentators is the proposal of David Worley who argues that the two things are God’s oath and his serving as witness to the sworn oath, the latter idea coming from Worley’s interpretation of ἐμεσίτευσεν ὄρκῳ in v.17 (“he became a witness to the oath”). See Worley, “God’s Faithfulness to Promise,” 148-51; idem, “Fleeing to Two Immutable Things, God’s Oath-Taking and Oath Witnessing,” 225-28. Worley believes the best analogy is found in a text from Philo in



that the author has in mind God’s promise and oath, but they identify these with the declaration of Christ’s Melchizedekian priesthood in Psalm 110:4—which the author introduced at Hebrews 5:6 and to which he will return in chapter 7—and the oath God swore to confirm it (7:20-21).<sup>82</sup> George Guthrie notes the parallels in language between 6:13-18 and 7:20-21. The author will tell his readers in 7:20-21 that Jesus became a priest through God’s sworn oath (ὄρκιωμοσίας). In Psalm 110:4, God demonstrates the “immutability” or “unchangeableness” (ἀμετάθετον) of his purpose (6:17) by declaring that he has sworn and will not “change his mind” (μεταμεληθήσεται).<sup>83</sup>

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which, though *μεσιτεύω* is not collocated with “oath,” the verb is used in a context in which an oath is sworn between two people. The other two texts he cites are from Josephus and Epictetus (sixth century). These employ “oath” with the noun *μεσίτης*, which Worley understands to mean “witness” in both cases (see “God’s Faithfulness to Promise,” 149-50). While it is a possible view, the limited supporting evidence leaves me ultimately unconvinced for the following reasons: (1) Whatever credence one may grant to Worley’s consideration of the use of the word elsewhere, the idea of God serving as a witness to the oath in Heb 6:17 seems to add too much new information to the context. The author has clearly indicated that God swore an oath to Abraham (vv. 13-16). But to understand *ἐμεσίτευσεν* as saying that God also acted as *witness* to his own oath (rather than simply referring to God’s confirmation of his promise with an oath as described in vv. 13-14) seems to go against the rule of maximal redundancy: “the best meaning is the least meaning”—that is, a hapax legomenon should be defined so that it contributes least to the total message of the passage in which it is found (see Moisés Silva expounding the rule as described by linguist Martin Joos in *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*, rev. ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 153-54). (2) Of the passages Worley cites, only one uses the verb, and I find it inconclusive. The text from Philo, which deals with deposits, reads, *ἀοράτῳ δὲ πράγματι πάντως ἀόρατος μεσιτεύει θεός, ὃν εἰκὸς ὑπ’ ἀμφοῖν μάρτυρα καλεῖσθαι* (Philo *De Specialibus Legibus IV* 31, in Loeb Classical Library 341 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939], 25-27). It would seem that the verb here could have the attested meaning “guarantee” or “confirm” and need not be synonymous with *μάρτυρα* (see the studies of *μεσίτης* and *μεσιτεύω* by Oepke in *TDNT* and Sängler in *EDNT*). (3) If one is to consider the meaning of the noun (as Worley has done), it would seem that its three uses in Hebrews would be more relevant. Though *μεσίτης* can mean “witness” (see Oepke, “*μεσίτης, μεσιτεύω*,” 600), it means “mediator” in Hebrews. In each case (8:6; 9:15; 12:24), the author declares that Jesus is the mediator of a “better covenant” or “new covenant.” A parallel expression in 7:22 states that he is the “guarantor/guarantee” (*ἔγγυος*) of a new covenant. This is not to say that *ἔγγυος* and *μεσίτης* are synonymous in Hebrews. But given the use of the latter in the letter, there seems no need to suppose that *μεσιτεύω* means “to become a witness.”

<sup>82</sup>See, e.g., Attridge, *Hebrews*, 181-82. Similarly, George Guthrie believes that the oath of v. 17 refers to Ps 110:4. Guthrie’s proposal is unique, though, because he claims the “two immutable things” are that Jesus is an eternal priest (Ps 110:4a, expounded in Heb 7:15-25) and that he is a priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4b, expounded in 7:11-14). See Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*, 110-11; G. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 242-43. Another proposal is that of Friedrich Schröger who suggests that the author is referring to God’s two declarations in Ps 2:7 and Ps 110:4 quoted in Heb 5:5, 6 (*Der Verfasser des Hebräerbriefs als Schriftausleger* [Regensburg: Pustet, 1968], 128-29 n. 2).

<sup>83</sup>Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*, 110-11; G. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 242-43. Bertold Klappert also points to parallels between 6:13-20 and 7:19-22 (*Die Eschatologie des Hebräerbriefs* [Munich: Kaiser,

However, since the author has not yet begun his detailed discussion of Jesus' high priesthood as of 6:18, it is hard to accept that the "two immutable things" are intended as a reference to this. Even though Psalm 110:4b is quoted in Hebrews 5:6 (thus, the idea is not completely "new"), God's sworn oath confirming Christ's Melchizedekian priesthood (Ps 110:4a) is neither mentioned nor quoted until Hebrews 7:20-21. Thus, it would seem that a reader would most naturally see the "two immutable things" as referring to the immediate context of verses 13-17 and to the promise and confirming oath given to Abraham (6:13-15).<sup>84</sup> Having said that, it is also hard to argue that the author's discussion of the divine oath in 6:13-18 has *nothing* to do with the divine oath in 7:20-21, given how important Psalm 110:4 and the sworn confirmation of Christ's priesthood are to the author's argument in chapter 7. That the author would make much of two divine oaths is not accidental.<sup>85</sup> It may be that the author is simply establishing an analogy: if God's promise to Abraham could be trusted, being made even more certain because it was confirmed with an oath, then Jesus should be trusted as a priest after the order of Melchizedek since God has confirmed his eternal installation with an oath as well. Perhaps better than this, though, is Lane's typological understanding: in light of the focus on the Christian community in 6:17-18, "It would appear to be proper to regard the promise given to Abraham and confirmed with an oath as the type that is given to the community of the new covenant in Christ."<sup>86</sup> The promise and oath extended to Abraham apply also to the listeners who, as "heirs of the promise" (6:17), will share in the

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1969], 32).

<sup>84</sup>So James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924), 88; Montefiore, *Hebrews*, 115; Hagner, *Hebrews*, 98; O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 239.

<sup>85</sup>David Peterson writes, "The promise to Abraham with an oath and the promise of the Melchizedek priesthood with an oath apparently hang together in our writer's thinking" (*Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the 'Epistle to the Hebrews'* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982], 113).

<sup>86</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 152.

promised blessing.<sup>87</sup> However, the promise of blessing to Abraham is ultimately fulfilled only in Christ's exaltation as high priest.<sup>88</sup> Confirmed by an oath, his high priesthood alone results in blessing and multiplied offspring (6:14) to Abraham's spiritual descendents (2:16), as Jesus brings many sons to glory (2:10).

The ἵνα introducing 6:18 indicates the purpose for God's oath. It was so that "we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may have strong encouragement." An exegetical question arises regarding the infinitive κρατῆσαι. It could be complementary, completing the idea of the participle καταφυγόντες and explaining why they have fled (as reflected in the translation above),<sup>89</sup> or it could be expegetic, explaining the noun παράκλησιν and the purpose of the encouragement (thus, "we who have fled may have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us").<sup>90</sup> The placement of the infinitive immediately after the participle, rather than after the noun, would seem to support the former translation.<sup>91</sup> Thus, the author includes himself with his

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<sup>87</sup>See Koester, *Hebrews*, 328, 334.

<sup>88</sup>See Bruce, *Hebrews*, 155.

<sup>89</sup>So, e.g., NIV; Eduard Riggenbach, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1922), 174-75; Bruce, *Hebrews*, 152; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 182-83; Johnson, *Hebrews*, 172; O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 240 n. 182; Allen, *Hebrews*, 401-01. See also BDAG, s.v. "καταφεύγω."

<sup>90</sup>So, e.g., NASB; ESV; HCSB; Spicq, *Hébreux*, 2:163; Montefiore, *Hebrews*, 115; Hughes, *Hebrews*, 232-33; Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 147; Koester, *Hebrews*, 329.

<sup>91</sup>Attridge, *Hebrews*, 183. Koester (*Hebrews*, 329), among others, argues that κρατῆσαι should be translated "hold fast," similar to the exhortation in 4:14 to "hold fast" the confession. Those who translate the infinitive after the participle usually render it "fled to take hold of." But translating in this latter way seems required if one takes the infinitive with the participle (Koester takes the infinitive with "encouragement"), since καταφυγόντες would most likely refer to their conversion—that is, they have fled sin and judgment to take hold of Christ for salvation and security (see Hughes, *Hebrews*, 234; G. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 234).

Several interpreters detect OT allusions in the language the author uses in v. 18. Some insist that the author intends an allusion to Abraham and the patriarchs "fleeing" for refuge as strangers and exiles (cf. Heb 11:8-16). Others point to the use of καταφεύγω in the LXX for the Israelites seeking refuge in the Levitical cities (Num 35:25-26; Deut 4:42). While possible, such allusions are speculative, and nothing in the context of 6:13-20 requires it. Though the LXX uses the verb in the sense of fleeing for refuge or help (e.g., Gen 19:20; Ps 142[143]:9; Isa 10:3), it has no special connection to the patriarchs, and the majority of its occurrences do not refer to cities of refuge. In the papyri, καταφεύγω "is a technical expression for supplicants 'fleeing' or 'resorting' to any one for help" (James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament: Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-*

readers as those who have fled to take hold of the “hope” set before them. With most commentators, I take “hope” (ἐλπίδος) here to refer to an objective reality rather than a subjective expectation.<sup>92</sup> The objective nature of the hope seems supported by the fact that it is “set before” or “lying before” (προκειμένης) them (cf. the use of the verb in 12:1, 2).<sup>93</sup> They have previously fled to “take hold” (κρατέω) of this hope (6:18), and the author exhorts them to continue to “hold fast” (κατέχω) the hope in which they boast (3:6) and their confession of hope (10:23). It is this Christian hope about which he wants them to have full assurance (6:11). This “better hope” involves perfection and enables believers to draw near to God (7:19). Thus, ἐλπίδος in 6:18 “denotes the objective content

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*Literary Sources* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960], 334). Robert P. Gordon contends that the associated ideas of “fleeing” and “laying hold” indicate that the author has in mind the practice of seeking sanctuary at the altar, as explained in Exod 21:12-14 and demonstrated in 1 Kgs 1:50-51; 2:28-29 (“Better Promises,” 438). However, the verbal parallels are not exact. Exodus 21:14 uses καταφεύγω, speaking of one fleeing after an intentional homicide. But it does not actually say the person “took hold” of the altar, though this may be implied in the command to “take him from my altar” (ἀπὸ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου μου λήμψῃ) and put him to death. In 1 Kgs 2:28, Joab “flees” (φεύγω, without the prefix) and “takes hold of” (κατέχω, not κρατέω) the horns of the altar. In 1 Kgs 1:50, Adonijah “arose, went, and took hold of” (ἀνέστη καὶ ἀπῆλθεν καὶ ἐπελάβετο) the horns of the altar. Gordon acknowledges the lack of verbal correspondence with the OT texts, but believes the viability of the allusion does not depend upon this (439-40). Be that as it may, it still seems an unlikely allusion for the author of Hebrews to use. Commenting on Exod 21:14, Douglas K. Stuart notes that though the practice is twice described as taking place, the Bible does not actually endorse it. After explaining the probable logic of the practice, he writes, “God rejects all this elaborately conceptualized nonsense and simply states in v. 14 that a murderer must be taken from the tabernacle altar . . . and put to death. In other words, the Sinai covenant allowed no such thing as altar sanctuary.” When Adonijah and Joab tried it, “they were doing so without warrant from the covenant” (*Exodus*, NAC [Nashville: B&H, 2006], 486-87). Moreover, if “fleeing to take hold” refers to this practice, then the “anchor” image in 6:19 is quite strange, since it would be set between two tabernacle images in vv. 18 and 20. If the author had altar sanctuary in mind, why not simply refer to their hope as an “altar” rather than an “anchor”?

<sup>92</sup>Hans-Friederich Weiss (*Der Brief an die Hebräer* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991], 365-66) and Koester (*Hebrews*, 329) maintain that the hope is both objective and subjective. The objective nature of “hope” in Hebrews seems clear from its use in 3:6 prior to its occurrence in 6:11, 18. In Heb 3:6, the author urges the readers to hold fast their confidence and their “boasting in hope” or “hope in which they boast” (τὸ καύχημα τῆς ἐλπίδος). I understand the phrase in this way (contra Attridge who translates τῆς ἐλπίδος as an adjectival genitive, “hopeful boast” [*Hebrews*, 112]) because of the parallel with “confidence.” The author wants them to persevere by maintaining their active confidence and boasting. That in which they boast is their Christian hope—i.e., what they hope for. Thus, τῆς ἐλπίδος is an objective genitive. Ellingworth claims the objective character of the phrase in 3:6 “is confirmed by the fact that ἐλπίς in Hebrews (6:11, 18; 7:19; 10:23) is always used absolutely” (*Hebrews*, 212). Cf. O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 137.

<sup>93</sup>See A. B. Davidson, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1882; reprint, Grand Rapids, Zondervan 1950), 127; Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 153.

of hope, consisting of present and future salvation.”<sup>94</sup> Since believers know it is impossible for this promising and oath-taking God to lie, those who have taken hold of the hope set before them have strong encouragement.

Why do they need encouragement? In the context, it is clear that they need encouragement so that they may persevere. Again, the discussion of God’s promise and oath in verses 13-18 is intended to flesh out *why* the readers can have assurance in their hope (6:11) so that they will persevere and inherit the promises (6:12). The certainty of God’s promise and oath is a means (“*through* two immutable things”) by which they have the necessary encouragement needed to manifest assurance in their hope until the end. Why does God’s promise and oath encourage their perseverance and certainty? Because God has purposed to fulfill his promise to Abraham, and that purpose is unchanging. His purpose is immutable (*ἀμετάθετον*, v. 17), and his promise and oath are immutable (*ἀμεταθέτων*, v. 18). The fulfillment of the promise, therefore, is not *grounded* in Abraham’s obedience—nor in the heirs’ obedience—but in the “unchangeableness of God’s purpose” (6:17). Of course, one *must* exercise faith and patience to inherit the promises (6:12). But, according to the author, such faith and patience are not the reasons God will fulfill his promise and oath. He will fulfill them “because it is impossible for God to lie” (6:18). This certainty and assurance of the “hope set before us” provides the necessary encouragement they need to reach the end.

The certainty of their hope is further described in verse 19 as the author prepares to transition in verse 20 back to the discussion of Christ’s Melchizedekian priesthood. The feminine relative pronoun ἣν introducing verse 19 refers to the immediately preceding ἐλπίδος. So while the discussion of hope continues, the author introduces a new image: it is a hope “which we have as our soul’s anchor” (ἣν ὡς ἄγκυραν ἔχομεν τῆς ψυχῆς). The modifiers that follow (ἀσφαλῆ τε καὶ βεβαίαν καὶ

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<sup>94</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 153. Cf. BDAG, s.v. “ἐλπίς,” 320.

εἰσερχομένην) are feminine and could modify ἄγκυραν or ἐλπίδος.<sup>95</sup> While ἄγκυραν is the closest noun in agreement, commentators have frequently found the image of an anchor entering through the curtain into the heavenly holy place to be problematic.<sup>96</sup> As a result, many have argued that either (1) “sure and steadfast” are modifying “anchor,” while the participle, “enters,” reaches back to modify “hope,”<sup>97</sup> or (2) all three attributes modify “hope.”<sup>98</sup> But such concerns seem unnecessary. Of course anchors do not reach up into the heavens, nor do they enter into the holy place! But the imagery accomplishes what the author intends: to illustrate and reinforce his message of a hope that is firmly secured.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, attempts to argue that the attributes modify “hope” but not “anchor” seem hollow since the author identifies the two—hope is “like an anchor.”<sup>100</sup>

This sure and steadfast anchor of hope “enters behind the curtain.” Though the allusion to the curtain is somewhat ambiguous, the author’s subsequent discussion makes

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<sup>95</sup>Of course, it could also modify the relative pronoun ἣν, as some have argued. But since ἐλπίδος is the antecedent, one is still left with essentially two choices.

<sup>96</sup>Westcott refers to the “strangeness of the image” (*Hebrews*, 165). Davidson (*Hebrews*, 128) and Attridge (*Hebrews*, 183) find the figure “incongruous.” Cf. Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 345; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 241 n. 187. This is perhaps why some have identified the “anchor” (and, thus, the “hope”) with Jesus. See, e.g., Köster, “Die Auslegung der Abraham-Verheissung in Hebräer 6,” 106; Ceslas Spicq, “Ἄγκυρα et Πρόδρομος dans *Hebr. VI. 19-20*,” 186. But the text says their anchor/hope enters within the curtain “where Jesus entered as a forerunner for us,” and, thus, the author appears to distinguish clearly between the two. Michel writes, “Jesus ist auch nicht einfach mit der Hoffnung identifiziert, weil dann V. 20 überflüssig wäre” (*Hebräer*, 253-54 n. 6).

<sup>97</sup>E.g., Moffatt, *Hebrews*, 89; Koester, *Hebrews*, 329.

<sup>98</sup>E.g., Westcott, *Hebrews*, 165; Michel, *Hebräer*, 253-54 n. 6; Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 153; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 345; G. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 243-44; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 241 n. 187; Allen, *Hebrews*, 401.

<sup>99</sup>“There is no need to try to visualize the bizarre picture of refugees holding on to an anchor as it goes through a curtain; the metaphorical sense is clear enough. It is about finding security in the safest place of all” (France, *Hebrews*, 88-89).

<sup>100</sup>France writes, “Grammatically it could be ‘hope’ rather than the ‘anchor’ that enters, but since the anchor represents the hope, this makes little difference to the boldness of the imagery” (*ibid.*, 88). Those who see all three attributes modifying “anchor” include, e.g., Delitzsch, *Hebrews*, 1:319; Spicq, *Hébreux*, 1:164-65; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 183-84. Attridge claims the other attempts are “forced and artificial construals” that “ignore Hebrews customary bold handling of its imagery” (*Hebrews*, 184 n. 73).

it clear<sup>101</sup> that the reference is to the second, inner curtain before the most holy place through which the high priest entered once a year on the Day of Atonement (9:3, 6-7, 24-25).<sup>102</sup> Why is this anchor sure and steadfast? Because it enters behind the curtain into the most holy place, “where Jesus entered for us as a forerunner, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (6:20). The title “forerunner” (πρόδρομος), similar to the author’s previous titles for Jesus (ἀρχηγός, 2:10; ἀπόστολος, 3:1), designates leadership, but it especially denotes precedence and implies a sequence.<sup>103</sup> He entered “for us” and precedes us. But his role as forerunner does not, of course, indicate *mere* precedence. It is not simply that he has gone first and believers will follow. For according to the latter half of verse 20, it is *through his high priestly ministry* that Jesus serves as the forerunner of believers.<sup>104</sup> Recall also the context of the first reference to Psalm 110:4

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<sup>101</sup>“Following the author’s usual practice, he gives here a preliminary indication of a theme which will become much more important later” (Paul Ellingworth, “Jesus and the Universe in Hebrews,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 58 [1986]: 343).

<sup>102</sup>The vast majority of interpreters identify the curtain in 6:19 as that separating the inner sanctuary from the outer. George Rice’s attempt to refute this (“Hebrews 6:19: Analysis of Some Assumptions Concerning *Katapetasma*,” 65-71) has itself been soundly refuted. See Gane, “Re-opening *Katapetasma* (“Veil”) in Hebrews 6:19,” 5-8; Young, “Where Jesus has Gone as a Forerunner on Our Behalf (Hebrews 6:20),” 165-73; Gurtner, “LXX Syntax and the Identity of the NT Veil,” 344-53.

Most interpreters have also assumed that the OT background to 6:19 is the Day of Atonement. However, Richard Davidson argues instead that the background is the dedication/inauguration of the sanctuary (Exod 40:1-9; Lev 8:10-12; Num 7:1). Since Hebrews compares Jesus to Moses and since Moses entered the most holy place during its inauguration, Davidson contends this event is the most probable Old Testament background to 6:19-20. He considers three texts from the cultic section of the letter that he believes help interpret 6:19-20 and support his conclusion: (1) 10:19-20, (2) 9:12, and (3) 9:24 (See Davidson, “Christ’s Entry ‘Within the Veil’ in Hebrews 6:19-20: The Old Testament Background,” 175-90; idem, “Inauguration or Day of Atonement? A Response to Norman Young’s ‘Old Testament Background to Hebrews 6:19-20 Revisited’,” 61-68). Yet, even though Hebrews clearly alludes to dedication/inauguration events (e.g., 9:18-21), Norman Young shows that (contra Davidson) this is an unlikely background for 6:19-20. Besides the other arguments Young offers, it seems to me the most significant is that Moses is never presented as a *high priest* in his work of tabernacle dedication/consecration. Hebrews 6:19-20, on the other hand, says that Jesus entered the most holy place as a high priest.

<sup>103</sup>See Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 154. The word occurs only here in the NT, and is infrequent in the LXX. See the survey in Otto Baurenfeind, “πρόδρομος,” in *TDNT*, 235.

<sup>104</sup>J. Cassien contends, “Mais toutes ces interprétations sont plus ou moins étrangères au contexte dans lequel l’image nous est parvenue dans Hébr. Dans le contexte de l’épître Jésus est entré en faveur de nous au déjà du voile, comme précurseur, κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισέδεχ ἀρχιερεὺς γενόμενος εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. La phrase que je viens de citer est une explication de πρόδρομος. Elle fait dépendre la qualité de

at Hebrews 5:10 where this inclusio opens. The author presents Jesus, perfected through his obedient suffering, as the “source of eternal salvation” for believers (5:9), being designated by God as a high priest like Melchizedek (5:10).<sup>105</sup> Thus, in light of both 6:20 and 5:8-10, it is clear that Jesus serves as a “forerunner” by obtaining access through his high priestly sacrifice into the heavenly holy place, the very presence of God, opening the way for those who will follow (cf. 10:19-21). Their hope of salvation—their anchor—is sure and steadfast, secured in God’s presence, because of Jesus’ eternal (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, 6:20) high priestly ministry on their behalf.

Does this provide grounding, though, for assurance of salvation? Koester and deSilva would seem to say no. According to Koester, the anchor imagery suggests, “[T]he listeners’ hope has already been secured at their port of destination.” Yet, one must remember that the readers “have not disembarked at God’s place of rest (Heb 4:1-11) in the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22-24).” Though their anchor is planted, they are “in danger of drifting from their Christian moorings (2:1b) and must therefore hold fast (2:1a).”<sup>106</sup> DeSilva similarly reminds, “For the present, however, ‘hope’ is the only part of the believer that has entered, and as long as the believer holds onto that hope, he or she holds onto the lifeline by which to enter.”<sup>107</sup>

On one level, these commentators are certainly right. The author repeatedly urges the readers to hold fast until the end and warns them of the severe danger of drifting away. Yet, this should not lead us to Koester and deSilva’s conclusion (both affirm the reality of Christian apostasy) for the following reasons.

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précurseur que l’auteur de l’épître attribue à Jésus, de son ministère pontifical. Jésus est notre précurseur en tant que grand prêtre éternel selon l’ordre de Melchisedech.” (“Jésus le Précurseur [Hébr. VI 19-20],” *Theologia* 27 [1956]: 106).

<sup>105</sup>Baurenfeind suggests the correspondence with 5:8-10 based on the shared reference to Ps 110:4 (“πρόδρομος,” 235).

<sup>106</sup>Koester, *Hebrews*, 334.

<sup>107</sup>DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 252.



First, by describing the anchor imagery in light of the warnings, both Koester and deSilva have taken the author's picture of a *certain* hope dependent on Jesus's high priestly ministry and made it an *uncertain* hope dependent on the believer's perseverance. Has the author warned the readers of the danger of "drifting away" (2:1)? Yes, but this ought not be mixed with the anchor image of 6:19-20, for the whole point here is to say that their hope is "sure and steadfast" because of divine action on their behalf; there is no possibility of "drifting." Does the author warn the readers to "hold fast" their hope (3:6), which they had fled to "take hold" of (6:18)? Yes, but the anchor simile should not be interpreted in light of this warning, as these commentators have done. Both Koester and deSilva assume a secured anchor at the destination, but they also assume that the readers must hold on to the anchor if they are to have any hope of reaching that destination. But this is saying something about the anchor of hope that the author does not say. The warnings to hold fast are real and must be reckoned with—but they are not in view here. Hebrews 6:18-20 is not part of the author's effort to *warn* in order to encourage perseverance but, as already argued, part of the author's effort to *promote assurance* in order to encourage perseverance (6:11). The anchor is not an image of *warning* but of *assurance*.

Second, one must be careful, of course, not to press all of the details of an image that an author employs. Having said that, though, when an author uses the imagery of a "sure and steadfast anchor," should one not expect it to convey, at least, the idea that it securely holds the ship in place—quite apart from the ship's passengers' efforts to hold onto it?<sup>108</sup> Koester and deSilva say the readers must "hold fast" because they are "in danger of drifting" and that, as long as each believer "holds onto" that anchor of hope, they hold onto their "lifeline." But what "strong encouragement" (6:18) is there in the

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<sup>108</sup>Regarding the image, Hughes writes, "The *personal* security of the man whose hope rests on Christ is intended. The metaphor of an anchor in itself effectively portrays the concept of fixity" (*Hebrews*, 235, [emphasis in original]).

picture of an immovable anchor that is not actually secured to the ship and that only serves as a lifeline as long as one clutches onto it in the midst of a storm-tossed sea?<sup>109</sup>

The author's assuring image of the believer's hope as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul that is secured in the heavenly holy place seems to be completely undone by these commentators. Calvin's comments are helpful:

When we are bound in this way to God, even though we have to contend with continual storms, we are safe from the danger of shipwreck. That is why he says the anchor is *sure and steadfast*. It is possible for an anchor to be torn out or for a cable to break or a ship to be broken in pieces by the violence of the waves. That happens at sea. But the power of God to support us is quite different, as is also the strength of hope and the firmness of His Word.<sup>110</sup>

While Koester and deSilva rightly see the author's concern for his readers and correctly understand that he warns them to endure and not to throw away their confidence (10:35-36), I believe they assume a view of the warnings that negates the spiritual security of the believer as expressed in 6:18-20. In Hebrews, the author both warns and assures. Hebrews 6:16-20 is a picture of assurance. DeSilva claims that hope "is the only part of the believer that has entered" the heavenly holy place.<sup>111</sup> But, according to the author, this hope is the anchor *of their soul*. Their hope is not disconnected from them. Christ's high priestly sacrifice and its application to them grants them access to God's presence by doing a perfecting and sanctifying work within them (7:19; 10:1, 14) that fulfills the new covenant promises (8:10-12; 10:15-17).<sup>112</sup> Their hope of salvation is truly secure and steadfast—not because it is deposited in some secure and steadfast location

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<sup>109</sup>I credit John Piper with stimulating my thinking along these lines. See his "Hope Anchored in Heaven," <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/hope-anchored-in-heaven> (accessed 15 July 15, 2010).

<sup>110</sup>John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and the First and Second Epistles of Peter, Calvin's Commentaries*, trans. William B. Johnston, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 86.

<sup>111</sup>DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 252.

<sup>112</sup>See chap. 2 of this dissertation.

for them, assuming they reach it—but because, as the author will go on to explain in Hebrews 7-10, Christ’s eternal high priestly once-and-for-all sacrifice has “perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (10:14).

### Conclusion

Let me offer a summary conclusion to this chapter. First, the author’s expression of confidence in his readers’ salvation (6:9), in spite of his previous harsh warning, should be understood as genuine, not *mere* rhetoric to influence their response. For, the author offers a justification for his confidence. He has seen the evidence of their salvation in their love for God and practical service toward his people (6:10). God will not be unjust and overlook this clear demonstration of “better things” concerning them. R. T. France explains it well in his comments on verses 9-10:

Their behavior proves the reality of their salvation—not just good deeds as such, but work that springs from an obvious love for God (lit., “for his name”) and that has in the past resulted in practical Christian service to their fellow Christians (cf. 10:32-34) . . . God, the just judge, knows this and will not forget. The point is not that their good deeds earn God’s favor, but that God is well aware of the evidence which even to a human observer testifies to their spiritual genuineness.<sup>113</sup>

Second, this confidence does not imply that the author is not concerned for them. This is the point of his warnings. He wants them to understand the tragic consequences of apostasy, so that they will press on in faith. Warnings are a means God uses to enable his people to persevere (see chapter 4 of this dissertation). However, so are God’s promises and assurance. The author wants them to show diligence in having assurance of their Christian hope until the end (6:11). This is also a means of perseverance, for, by doing so, they will not be apathetic but imitate those who inherit the promises through faith and patience (6:11-12).

Third, to give them assurance, the author reminds them of God’s promise to Abraham, guaranteed with an oath, to bless and multiply him (6:13-14). This promise

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<sup>113</sup>France, *Hebrews*, 85.

was not merely for Abraham but for all those who would inherit the promise (6:17). Why did God confirm the promise with an oath? An oath provides certain confirmation (6:16), and God desired to give certainty to his people through two immutable things—his promise and oath—that his purpose to bring blessing to them is *itself* immutable (6:17). “The implication is that the Christian hope consists of nothing other than what God promised to Abraham (cf. Rom. 15:8),” writes Donald Hagner, “and therefore that our realization of that hope is finally as certain as God’s word and his oath.”<sup>114</sup> Just as Abraham patiently waited and obtained the promise (6:15), so the heirs of the promise have strong encouragement to persevere themselves (6:18), knowing that God cannot lie, and he will bring the fulfillment to pass.

Fourth, their Christian hope—i.e., that for which they hope—is certain. The hope of salvation that God had set before them and to which they had fled (6:18) is likened to a sure and steadfast anchor of their souls (6:19). Their security is certain because this anchor enters into the heavenly holy place where Jesus has entered as an eternal high priest according to the order of Melchizedek (6:19-20). The hope that anchors their souls is bound up with Jesus and his high-priestly sacrifice on their behalf, which grants them access into God’s presence. “The security of our souls rests firmly,” George Guthrie states, “in the eternal, high-priestly work of Christ.”<sup>115</sup> Whatever purpose the author has by issuing warnings to his readers, his aim in 6:19-20 is clear: “the purpose of all of these physical metaphors is to describe our spiritual security.”<sup>116</sup>

How, then, is one to understand the author’s intense warnings not to “fall away” (e.g., 3:12)? Is this the sin of apostasy? Who is in danger of committing the sin?

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<sup>114</sup>Hagner, *Hebrews*, 98.

<sup>115</sup>G. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 244.

<sup>116</sup>France, *Hebrews*, 89.

Can the tension between the warnings and the conclusions of chapters 2 and 3 be resolved? To these questions we now turn.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE WARNING PASSAGES

#### **Introduction**

Chapters 2 and 3 have sought to build a case for assurance of salvation in the Letter to the Hebrews, a theological theme I contend has been underestimated by many Hebrews interpreters. The obvious reason that one would consider this theme unsupported, though, is the presence of one of the letter's most notable features: the five rigorous warning passages in Hebrews 2:1-4; 3:12-4:13; 6:4-8; 10:26-31; and 12:12-29. Regardless of how strong a case one makes for the author's certainty of a believer's salvation, a viable explanation must be offered to explain these jarring texts—which seem to call any alleged assurance into question. Yet I insist that the same is true from the other perspective as well: a viable explanation of the warnings must be offered to account for the arguments of the past two chapters. A reading of the warnings is needed that properly integrates them with the passages that promote Christian assurance.

I argue that the warning passages in Hebrews are directed toward genuine Christian believers, exhorting them to beware the sin of apostasy. Rather than implying that the conclusions reached thus far are invalid, the warnings of the letter serve as a means of salvation. While they are genuine admonitions to avoid renouncing one's Christian commitments, those who truly have faith in Jesus Christ for their hope of salvation will heed them. Thus the warnings are compatible with the theme of assurance of salvation present in the letter.

To support this proposal, the following chapter will proceed in two stages. First, I will consider and evaluate the three most common interpretations of the warnings. Then, building on the exegesis and conclusions of the first section, I will present the “means-of-salvation” view advocated here, demonstrate how it best integrates the warnings and assurance, and engage with critics of the view.

### **Three Common Interpretations of the Warning Passages**

Even a cursory examination of the secondary literature reveals that most interpreters of the warnings in Hebrews hold to one of three common views.<sup>1</sup> Of course,

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<sup>1</sup>While a few additional views have been proposed, they have proved implausible to most interpreters of the letter. Such minority views include that of Verlyn D. Verbrugge (“Towards a New Interpretation of Hebrews 6:4-6,” *Calvin Theological Review* 15 [1980]: 61-73) who argues that the focus in Heb 6:4-6 is not on rejection of an individual believer but a *local, covenant community*. The key, he claims, is Isa 5:1-7, which is the background for the agricultural metaphor in Heb 6:7-8 and puts the interpretation of 6:4-6 “squarely within the context of God’s relationship to his people as a covenant community” (65). The warning, then, applies only to the entire local Christian community addressed by the letter. “In other words, the writer is not so much interested in each separate individual as he is in the congregation as a whole” (67). Of course, even if God rejects a community for its apostasy, this does not mean that there are no believers among them. As in the OT (and even in the churches of Revelation; see Rev 3:4), God preserves a remnant even when he rejects a majority that has apostatized (69). However, Harold W. Attridge argues that the parallels with Isaiah 5 are inexact and contends instead that such imagery was very common in the OT and contemporary literature, citing various examples (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989], 172, also n. 62). Moreover, in his examination of the OT background to Heb 6:7-8, George H. Guthrie suggests echoes of Deuteronomy are more likely (“Hebrews,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007], 962-64). In addition, Scot McKnight rightly shows that Verbrugge’s approach fails when considered against a synthetic appraisal of the warning passages—which clearly shows the author is concerned with the apostasy of *individuals*, not a group (“The Warning Passages of Hebrews: A Formal Analysis and Theological Conclusions,” *Trinity Journal* 13 NS [1992]: 53-54).

According to another marginal view, the argument of Hebrews that the sacrifice of Jesus had supplanted the OT sacrifices is directed toward certain first-century *unbelieving* Jews. Kenneth S. Wuest argues that, though they had abandoned the temple sacrifices, made a profession of Christ, and identified with Jewish believers, yet these Jews did not have faith. The author warns them, therefore, not to return to temple sacrifices but to place their faith in Jesus (*Hebrews in the Greek New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948], 15-17). He addresses his letter to the church, knowing it is comprised of both real believers and those only making a profession of faith. Thus, he calls them “holy brothers” (3:1) based on this profession, even though he knows some are not truly saved (68). When it comes to the warning in 6:4-6, Wuest contends, “[I]t should be plain that this sin cannot be committed today. There is no temple in Jerusalem, there are no sacrifices to leave and return to, no attesting miracles being performed, there is no question as to the closing of the old dispensation and the opening of the new” (118). Similar to the “false-believer” view to be discussed below, Wuest holds that the warnings are directed only toward those who do not yet have faith. Yet, for Wuest, the danger to the readers is due to their particular location in salvation history at the “closing of the old dispensation and the opening of the new.” If they were to reject the Messiah and return to the OT sacrifices, “they would render their hearts so hard that they would be

students of the letter have brought a whole range of strategies and approaches to bear on the passages in an attempt to interpret them.<sup>2</sup> In speaking of *three* common views, I mean overall perspectives on how to understand the following: the sin the author warns the readers to avoid, who is in danger of committing the sin, and the nature of the consequences. Most interpreters fall into one of three camps, which I describe as (1) the loss-of-rewards view, (2) the false-believer view, and (3) the loss-of-salvation view. In the following survey, I will analyze the warning passages through the lenses of these views and offer an evaluation of each.

### **Loss-of-Rewards View**

Proponents of the loss-of-rewards view insist that the author of Hebrews is directing his warnings at believers in Christ. Moreover, they argue that the sin the readers are warned to avoid is not apostasy from Christ but, rather, a rebellious unwillingness to pursue spiritual maturity. The corresponding punishment is a temporal chastening, involving loss of divine blessings and physical discipline—perhaps even death. I will consider the writings of two recent advocates of the warnings from this perspective:

Randall C. Gleason and David L. Allen.<sup>3</sup>

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impervious to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. They would be irrevocably lost. There would be no more hope for them” (113). Thus, Wuest both offers an explanation for the impossibility of renewed repentance (6:6) and at the same time argues that the sin itself is no longer possible for believers to commit (see also p. 183 on 10:26). Yet it is difficult to see why the potential for apostasy is restricted to this transitional period, merely because those were the circumstances confronting the author.

Another minority view deserving of mention is commonly described as the “hypothetical view.” Since the “means-of-salvation” view is sometimes confused with the hypothetical view, I will comment further on it below.

<sup>2</sup>See, e.g., the sample assortment of recent approaches and their advocates listed by Casey W. Davis, whose own article offers yet another method for shedding light on the passage: “Hebrews 6:4-6 from an Oral Critical Perspective,” *JETS* 51 (2008): 753. For a survey of recent studies of the warnings in Hebrews, see also B. J. Oropeza, “The Warning Passages in Hebrews: Revised Theologies and New Methods of Interpretation,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 10, no. 1 (2011): 81-100.

<sup>3</sup>See Randall C. Gleason, “The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8,” *BSac* 155 (1998): 62-91; idem, “The Old Testament Background of Rest in Hebrews 3:7-4:11,” *BSac* 157 (2000): 281-303; idem, “The Eschatology of the Warning in Hebrews 10:26-31,” *TynBul* 53 (2002): 97-120; idem, “A Moderate Reformed View,” in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007); and David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, NAC (Nashville:



Randall C. Gleason argues that the OT background of the warnings sheds light on their interpretation. The author of Hebrews uses a typological correspondence between OT examples—particularly the exodus generation—and his present audience. “This is significant,” Gleason contends, “because in each warning the spiritual condition, ‘falling away,’ and judgment of the exodus generation provides important clues” for determining the condition, sin, and judgment of the readers.<sup>4</sup> While OT references are explicit in four of the warnings,<sup>5</sup> few interpreters have recognized an OT reference in 6:4-6.<sup>6</sup> However, Gleason contends that the author’s language in 6:4-6 provides allusions to the wilderness generation.<sup>7</sup> More recently, commentators and other interpreters have either acknowledged the viability of this OT background in 6:4-5 or adopted it as likely.<sup>8</sup>

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B&H, 2010), 377-93.

For a similar argument, see also G. H. Lang, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Paternoster, 1951), 98-107; and the five articles by Thomas Kem Oberholtzer: “The Warning Passages in Hebrews Part 1: The Eschatological Salvation of Hebrews 1:5-2:5,” *BSac* 145 (1988): 83-97; “The Warning Passages in Hebrews Part 2: The Kingdom Rest in Hebrews 3:1-4:13,” *BSac* 145 (1988): 185-96; “The Warning Passages in Hebrews Part 3: The Thorn-Infested Ground in Hebrews 6:4-12,” *BSac* 145 (1988): 319-28; “The Warning Passages in Hebrews Part 4: The Danger of Willful Sin in Hebrews 10:26-39,” *BSac* 145 (1988): 410-19; “The Warning Passages in Hebrews Part 5: The Failure to Heed His Speaking in Hebrews 12:25-29,” *BSac* 146 (1989): 67-75.

Examples of additional advocates of the view (popular and otherwise), with some variations, include Zane Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege* (Dallas: Retention Viva, 1981), 73-84; idem, “Hebrews” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Suck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983), 794-95; R. T. Kendall, *Once Saved, Always Saved* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1983), 107-11; Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle, 1992); 433-55; Michael Eaton, *No Condemnation: A New Theology of Assurance* (Downers Grive, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 208-17.

<sup>4</sup>Gleason, “A Moderate Reformed View,” 342-43.

<sup>5</sup>Disobedience to the law spoken through angels (2:2), disobedience of the wilderness generation (3:7-11), disobedience to the law of Moses (10:28), disobedience at Sinai (12:25-26).

<sup>6</sup>Exceptions to this are G. H. Lang, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Paternoster, 1951), 98-103; and Noel Weeks, “Admonition and Error in Hebrews,” *WTJ* 39 (1976): 72-80.

<sup>7</sup>Gleason, “The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8,” 74-78. Dave Mathewson (“Reading Heb 6:4-6 in Light of the Old Testament,” *WTJ* 61 [1999]: 209-25) reaches similar conclusions regarding the OT background to 6:4-6 and extends the contribution of McKnight’s helpful synthetic analysis of the warnings (“The Warning Passages of Hebrews”) by adding *OT example* as a fifth component present in each warning (210-211).

<sup>8</sup>E.g., see Martin Emmrich, “Hebrews 6:4-6—Again! (A Pneumatological Inquiry),” *WTJ* 65 (2003): 83-87; Guthrie, “Hebrews,” 962; Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Erdmanns, 2010), 221-22; and Allen, *Hebrews*, 366-76. For a critique, see Gareth Lee Cockerill,

According to Gleason, the four substantival participles in 6:4-5 that describe the group in question find correspondence with the exodus generation:

“enlightened” (6:4) = the pillar of fire  
“tasted of the heavenly gift” (6:4) = the manna  
“partakers of the Holy Spirit (6:4) = the Spirit coming upon the seventy elders  
“tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come” (6:5) = receiving of the Mosaic law confirmed by signs<sup>9</sup>

Due to this typological correspondence, Gleason considers the readers to be “genuine believers in danger of forfeiting covenant blessings and of undergoing the physical discipline of God while escaping final judgment.”<sup>10</sup> This is because, in spite of their unbelief and rebellion at Kadesh-barnea, “the Exodus generation was a redeemed people.”<sup>11</sup> Though their sin was great, they did not commit “absolute apostasy.” This is evident since (1) the Lord pardoned them in response to Moses’ prayer (Num 14:20); (2) they grieved and confessed their sin and resolved to enter the land (Num 14:39-40); and (3) God did not permit them to return to Egypt but cared for them in the wilderness.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Moses and Aaron were also guilty of unbelief and rebellion (Num 20:12, 24) and were similarly denied entrance into the land of Canaan. But since interpreters do not identify their sin and punishment as apostasy and eternal judgment, neither should one view the sin and punishment of the Israelites in this way.<sup>13</sup>

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*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Erdmanns, 2012), 278 n. 21; B. J. Oropeza, *Churches under Siege of Persecution and Assimilation: The General Epistles and Revelation*, vol. 3 of *Apostasy in the New Testament Communities* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), 34.

<sup>9</sup>Gleason, “A Moderate Reformed View,” 343-44, 352-53; idem, “The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8,” 75-78. Mathewson argues similarly, though he includes verbal parallels between Heb 6:4-5 and the Septuagint to further establish the connections and to justify seeing the phrases in Hebrews as “echoes” (“Reading Heb 6:4-6 in Light of the Old Testament,” 215-20).

<sup>10</sup>Gleason, “A Moderate Reformed View,” 344.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 345.

<sup>12</sup>Gleason, “The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8,” 80.

<sup>13</sup>Gleason, “A Moderate Reformed View,” 348-50.

In light of this background, Gleason reasons that ἀποστῆναι in Hebrews 3:12 must be understood as describing something less than apostasy. The author likely uses ἀποστῆναι as an echo of Moses' warning at Kadesh-barnea, "Do not rebel [ἀποστάται] against the Lord" (LXX Num 14:9).<sup>14</sup> In addition, the other LXX uses of ἀφίστημι do not suggest the word is a technical term for apostasy.<sup>15</sup> To understand the "rest" that the readers must not fail to enter, Gleason argues one must note the OT concept of rest to which the author appeals in 3:7-4:11.<sup>16</sup> God gave his people Israel rest for the purpose of worshipping him and enjoying his covenant blessings.<sup>17</sup> However, hardened, rebellious hearts can lead to forfeiture of this privilege, as with the wilderness generation (Heb 3:7-11; Ps 95:8-11). Of course, this "did not affect their election and salvation as the people of God but it did qualify, hamper, and negate their celebration of the life-sustaining presence of God."<sup>18</sup> According to the author of Hebrews, this offer of rest was not limited in time or place; his readers can still enter by trusting in God's life-sustaining presence through Jesus their high priest.<sup>19</sup> But if they similarly harden their hearts in unbelief, they will fail to enter God's rest—that is, "lose the opportunity to worship God joyfully in the safety of His presence and to enjoy the covenantal blessings." In accordance with the OT pattern, failure to fulfill the stipulations of the new covenant results in covenantal consequences.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Gleason, "The Old Testament Background of Rest in Hebrews 3:7-4:11," 291.

<sup>15</sup>Gleason, "The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8," 79.

<sup>16</sup>See Gleason, "The Old Testament Background of Rest in Hebrews 3:7-4:11," 294-303.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 296.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 301.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 302.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 303.

In Hebrews 6:6, *παραπεσόντας* is also understood as less than apostasy. In the LXX *παραπίπτω* describes a “serious sinful act or attitude against God,” the precise nature of which must be determined contextually.<sup>21</sup> What is the context of its use in Hebrews 6:6? The author has just emphasized the readers’ spiritual immaturity. They are “dull of hearing” (5:11) and need teaching, though they ought to be teachers themselves by now (5:12). Thus, the sin the author describes with *παραπεσόντας* is a “decisive point of refusal to press on to maturity.”<sup>22</sup> This parallels the Israelites at Kadesh-barnea who refused to enter and possess the land, with the result that the Lord condemned them to the wilderness. While they changed their minds and attempted to take the land the next day, he denied them entry (14:39-45)—even though he had pardoned their unbelief and rebellion (Num 14:20). Their prior refusal to obey God resulted in an “inability to repent” and receive the blessing of entering the land.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the readers of Hebrews were in danger of forfeiting God’s temporal blessings. If they “fall away” and do not press on to maturity (Heb 6:1), they will be “denied the blessings that come with faithful obedience.”<sup>24</sup> Just as the wilderness generation forfeited blessing and experienced physical death, so also the readers may experience the same, Gleason argues.<sup>25</sup>

Gleason contends the participles *ἀναστουροῦντας* and *παραδειγματίζοντας* in 6:6 are causal, describing why it would be impossible for them to be renewed to repentance. To “crucify the Son of God” is to reduce Christ’s death “to the level of a common

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 80-81.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 82. The decisive and “once for all” nature of the sin is evident because ἅπαξ is modifying *παραπεσόντας* just as it is the preceding four participles (79).

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 82-83.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 83.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 88-89. Specifically, the author may have foreseen the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans in 70 A.D. If they reverted back to Judaism, the readers would experience physical death along with rest of the Jews in Jerusalem. Gleason considers several passages that, he argues, demonstrate this historical background is in view (“The Eschatology of the Warning in Hebrews 10:26-31,” 106-13).

criminal execution, as the Jewish leaders had originally intended.” If they returned publicly to the Levitical sacrifices, it “would in effect empty Christ’s death of any sacrificial redemptive value” and bring public disgrace and shame upon Christ:

Though they thought their quiet return to Judaism in order to escape Jewish persecution would be harmless, their failure to hold fast to their confession in Christ placed them in a similar category with those who cried out, “Crucify Him!” . . . Refusing to mature and a quiet return to the temple sacrifices were enough to suggest that they viewed Christ’s crucifixion as having no value beyond a criminal’s death.<sup>26</sup>

The cursing of Hebrews 6:8 refers to “temporal discipline rather than eternal destruction.” The author’s description of the thorn-producing land as “worthless” (*ἀδόκιμος*) does not disprove this. For while the word is “used of unbelievers several times” in the NT, “it can refer to believers,” Gleason claims, pointing to Paul’s usage of the word in 1 Corinthians 9:27.<sup>27</sup>

Gleason interprets the harsh warning in 10:26-31 consistently. The “willful” sin of verse 26 hearkens back to Numbers 15:30 and Deuteronomy 17:12, where such deliberate sin was punished by being completely “cut off”—i.e., put to death. The “fury of fire” in Hebrews 10:27 did not refer to eternal punishment in its original context (Isa 26:11) but to physical judgment due to covenant unfaithfulness. For one to “trample under foot the Son of God” and to regard as “unclean the blood of the covenant” (Heb 10:29) is not to repudiate Christ, but to consider his sacrifice as common—not superior to other OT sacrifices. The quotations from and allusions to the OT in Hebrews 10:30-31 confirm that the warning is concerned with serious covenant unfaithfulness—though not apostasy—which would result in physical death, not eternal damnation.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Gleason, “The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8,” 85.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>28</sup>Gleason, “The Eschatology of the Warning in Hebrews 10:26-31,” 113-19. Other advocates of the loss-of-rewards view argue that the sin is indeed apostasy—yet this does not result in loss of salvation. Dillow, e.g., contends, “It is the danger of final apostasy which is in view” in the letter. This “failure to go on to maturity” results in “spiritual lapse, a hardened heart, and unbelief.” If they do not press on to maturity, “they are in danger of denying the faith altogether.” Yet, just as the failure of the wilderness

David L. Allen is in general agreement with Gleason’s view; however, it is significant to note some of his specific interpretive judgments. He cautions against hasty interpretations of the warning at 2:3, for the text does not explicitly describe the judgment from which one will not escape. In addition, the author does not say the great salvation is *rejected* but rather *neglected*, and there is a difference in meaning between the two words.<sup>29</sup> Regarding 3:12, he insists that to understand “sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God” as apostasy is to read too much into the words, for the terms lack specificity. It is highly unlikely the author means apostasy by the use of ἀποστῆναι, for the verb appears only once in the book and never again in any of the other warnings. Apostasy may be inferred, but it is not directly stated.<sup>30</sup>

In his lengthy consideration of 6:4-6, Allen argues that the participles in verses 4-5 *clearly* describe believers.<sup>31</sup> What is also clear is that there is little to no linguistic support—from Classical Greek, the LXX, or Koine Greek—for interpreting παραπεσόντας (“fall away,” a NT *hapax legomena*) in verse 6 to mean a technical term for apostasy. Thus he questions why lexicographers and many commentators understand it so.<sup>32</sup> The likely reason is that “they are giving a theological interpretation to the word based more on an interpretation of the surrounding context of Hebrews 6 and less on lexicography.” But based on the lexical evidence, “if *parapiptō* means to apostatize in the conventional theological understanding of the word, *it is the singular exception of the*

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generation to persevere did not lead to the loss of their salvation, “neither would the potential failure of the Hebrews.” Instead, the danger they face is “the forfeiture of their position as one of Christ’s metochoi, those who will partake with Him in the future reign of the servant kings” (*The Reign of the Servant Kings*, 442, 443).

<sup>29</sup>Allen, *Hebrews*, 194.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 262-65.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 348-54.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 359-61.

*known uses of the word.*”<sup>33</sup> Rather, the meaning of “fall away” is the opposite of “go on to maturity” in verse 1. The LXX use of the word and the Kadesh-barnea background shows that the readers were in a similar danger: “If they do not hold fast their confession of faith in Christ (Heb 3:6; 4:14; Heb 10:23), if they disobey and rebel against the Lord and remain in such an unrepentant state, if they refuse to press on to maturity, God himself will not permit them to repent because of the high-handed and blatant sin they have committed.”<sup>34</sup> The “discipline” they will incur for such sin is *temporal*—“loss of opportunity to go on to maturity in the Christian life, loss of effective service for Christ in this life, loss of the blessings of God that come from an obedient life, and in some cases perhaps premature physical death”—and *eschatological*—“loss of rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom 14:10-12; 1 Cor 3:10-15; 2 Cor 5:10) and perhaps loss of position of leadership/service in the coming millennial kingdom.”<sup>35</sup>

I will respond to Gleason and Allen under four points. First, I agree that the wilderness generation is a significant foil the author employs as he warns his readers. Moreover, as noted above, recent interpreters who hold various views of the warnings agree that this OT context is a viable interpretive background to the disputed participles in 6:4-5. What is at least questionable is the spiritual condition of the wilderness generation and the corresponding penalty they incurred for their sin that Gleason and Allen assume. The wilderness generation is consistently presented by Hebrews—as well as by the rest of the NT (e.g., Acts 7:37-41; 1 Cor 10:1-5; Jude 5) and even the OT (e.g., Pss 95, 78)—in a negative light for their unbelief and rebellion. Gleason repeatedly

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 361-62 (emphasis in original). “Words mean what they mean in context, and the immediate, book, canon, and wider extra-biblical contexts are not in favor of the meaning ‘apostasy’” (390).

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 369. “Hebrews 6:1-8 is not a soteriological passage; it is a sanctification passage, as is made clear from the context” (390).

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 377.

points to OT texts that speak of the exodus generation as “saved” and “redeemed,”<sup>36</sup> but in their contexts these references need mean nothing more than a *physical* salvation from Egypt.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, as argued in chapter 2 of this dissertation, when the author says (quoting Jeremiah) they “did not continue/remain in my covenant” (Heb 8:9), he is describing that generation’s *apostasy*. The problem of Israel’s “evil, unbelieving hearts” (3:12) was to be remedied by the new covenant promise of having the law written on the heart of God’s people (8:10). The texts Gleason cites do not necessarily claim as much as he assumes regarding their spiritual condition. He argues the wilderness generation did not commit apostasy because the Lord pardoned them (Num 14:20), but, again, this need mean nothing more than he allowed them to live *physically*. Their acknowledgment of their sin is hardly praiseworthy in the context, for their subsequent resolve to enter the land is condemned as disobedience (Num 14:41-43).<sup>38</sup> Nor must the judgment of death upon the wilderness generation necessarily be merely physical.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Gleason, “A Moderate Reformed View,” 346.

<sup>37</sup>Cf. C. Adrian Thomas, *A Case for Mixed-Audience with Reference to the Warning Passages in the Book of Hebrews* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 77. Thomas R. Schreiner and Ardlie B. Caneday caution, “We must carefully consider the language the New Testament uses to describe Israel’s deliverance from slavery in Egypt and apostasy in the wilderness. For example, consider Jude 5: ‘Now I want to remind you, though you all know, that the Lord once saved a people from the land of Egypt and afterward destroyed those who did not believe.’ We would be wrong to conclude that God spiritually saved the Israelites that he brought out of Egypt. Jude is not saying that God spiritually redeemed Israel and that later in the wilderness Israelites lost the gift of salvation and perished. Rather, Jude’s argument hangs on Israel’s typological relationship to God’s people in Christ. Israel received a type of salvation, for God redeemed them from slavery in Egypt” (*The Race Set before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001], 226 [emphasis in original]). Gleason emphasizes that the wilderness generation was *spiritually* redeemed but then insists that their judgment was only *temporal, physical* death.

<sup>38</sup>Equating the sin and judgment of Moses with that of the Israelites is questionable also, for both the OT and Hebrews make a distinction between them. While Moses’ sin prevented him from entering the land, the sin of the Israelites was a pattern of consistent rebellion—in spite of God’s works performed before them—provoking his continual wrath (Ps 95:8-11; Heb 3:7-19). Though his sin was grave and bore consequences, Moses is hailed as the most humble of men (Num 12:3), the greatest of prophets (Deut 34:10), and a faithful servant over God’s house (Heb 3:2).

<sup>39</sup>See Craig R. Koester (*Hebrews*, AB [New York: Doubleday, 2001], 261) who observes, commenting on Heb 3:17 and the Israelites’ corpses falling in the desert, “‘Corpses’ (*kola*) commonly were dead bodies that were left unburied (1 Sam 17:46; Lev 26:30), which connoted an accursed death (Gen 40:19; Deut 28:26; 1 Kgs 14:11; 21:24; 2 Kgs 9:10, 34-35; Jer 7:33; Ezek 29:5; 2 Macc 9:15). This was



In the end, though, whatever one concludes about the spiritual condition of the wilderness generation and the kind of judgment they received, there is an obvious escalation for the readers of Hebrews. Even if the wilderness generation experienced only a physical judgment, the situation of the author's audience is far worse. When he warns them, he uses a lesser-to-greater argument, insisting that—in light of the superiority of the Son and his new covenant sacrifice—their judgment will be worse than that of old covenant apostates with eschatological consequences (see Heb 2:1-3; 10:28-29; 12:25).<sup>40</sup> Gleason sees too much correspondence and not enough escalation. The “rest” that the author warns them not to miss (4:1, 11)—whether it refers to something inaugurated in the present (with future consummation) or solely in the future—is eschatological.<sup>41</sup> Even if one accepts Gleason's interpretation of the rest (“to worship God joyfully in the safety of His presence and to enjoy the covenantal blessings”), clearly the author of Hebrews is admonishing his readers not to miss the eternal, eschatological dimension of God's rest (4:9-10)—not a temporal aspect.<sup>42</sup> Gleason draws an equivalency between the old and

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deemed suitable for apostates (Isa 66:24).”

<sup>40</sup>Noted by Grant Osborne in his response to Gleason, “Classical Arminian Response,” in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, 384-90; and Thomas, *A Case for Mixed-Audience*, 78-79. See also most commentators. Thomas R. Schreiner argues that Gleason fails to see the nature of biblical typology. He writes, “The physical destruction of Israel becomes a type of *eternal* and *eschatological* judgment. In other words, typology is characterized by escalation” (*Run to Win the Prize: Perseverance in the New Testament* [Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2009], 47 n. 30).

<sup>41</sup>Interpreters differ over whether the rest is a present reality that will be consummated in the future or future only. Some see it inaugurated in the present with a future fulfillment. See, e.g., C. K. Barrett, “The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology*, ed. W. D. Davies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 372; A. T. Lincoln, “Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament,” in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 212; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 126; William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1991), 99. Others see it as a future reality. See James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ICC (New York: Scriber, 1924), 51; Jon Laansma, *'I Will Give You Rest': The Rest Motif in the New Testament with Special Reference to Mt 11 and Heb 3-4* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 306; O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 165-66. None view the rest as wholly present.

<sup>42</sup>Attridge (*Hebrews*, 128) and O'Brien (*Hebrews*, 171) come down on opposite sides of the debate mentioned in the previous note. However, both recognize the rest is ultimately something enjoyed eschatologically.

new covenants. In accordance with the OT pattern, “the forfeiture of rest in Hebrews corresponds to the covenantal consequences for failing to fulfill the stipulations of the New Covenant order.”<sup>43</sup> But the entire letter demonstrates that the superiority of the new covenant means that the blessings for belief and the judgment for unbelief are eternal. “For the readers of Hebrews, the stakes are higher.”<sup>44</sup> New covenant blessings and consequences surpass those of the old covenant as reality surpasses shadow (10:1)

Second, and following from the previous point, their attempt to interpret the sin as less than apostasy and the consequent judgment as only a temporal loss of blessings is unconvincing. Gleason says *ἀδόκιμος* (“worthless”), found in 6:8 to describe the land, “is used of unbelievers several times” but is also used by Paul to refer to a believer in 1 Corinthians 9:27.<sup>45</sup> Actually, the word refers to unbelievers more than several times. Outside of Hebrews, it occurs only in Paul (Rom 1:28; 1 Cor 9:27; 2 Cor 13:5, 6, 7; 2 Tim 3:8; Titus 1:16) and in *every* instance—except perhaps 1 Corinthians 9:27—it refers to unbelievers. Gleason and Allen both appeal to 1 Corinthians 9:27 to justify that *ἀδόκιμος* need not mean loss at the final judgment, since Paul uses it of himself. The apostle disciplines himself lest he be “disqualified.” But neither Gleason nor Allen argue their case, they simply assert that Paul is speaking of physical discipline and loss of reward.<sup>46</sup> Contrary to their judgment, though, Paul likely uses the word consistently throughout his writings.<sup>47</sup> Regardless, it is hard to escape the conclusion,

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<sup>43</sup>Gleason, “The Old Testament Background of Rest in Hebrews 3:7-4:11,” 303.

<sup>44</sup>Osborne, “Classical Arminian Response,” 387.

<sup>45</sup>Gleason, “The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8,” 87. He cites three Pauline texts as examples where the term is used of unbelievers.

<sup>46</sup>Gleason, “The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8,” 87; Allen, *Hebrews*, 378-79. Allen writes, “A careful study of the word makes it clear it is not a technical term descriptive of unbelievers” (379). Yet, he only cites two texts: 1 Cor 9:27 and 2 Cor 13:5. From these two instances, he claims Paul’s usage “indicates a dual focus” (378).

<sup>47</sup>The occurrence in 1 Cor 9:27 is part of a warning (9:23-27) to the Corinthians that they ought to follow Paul’s example. Therefore, the meaning “reprobate” for *ἀδόκιμος* is consistent with the means-of-salvation view advocated in this chapter. For an exposition of this interpretation, see Schreiner and

reached by most commentators, that it refers to eternal loss in Hebrews 6:8. The “burning” of the cursed, worthless land is a frightening image of the final judgment of the apostate.<sup>48</sup>

The same is true with their interpretation of 10:26-31. Gleason and Allen contend that the physical punishment suffered under the Mosaic covenant awaits the readers as well if they persist in willful sin (vv. 26-27). But the author’s statement that “there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins” (v. 26) cannot be explained away as merely a comparison to the similar situation in Numbers 15:30-31 where there was no atonement available for willful sin.<sup>49</sup> For the author’s warning follows immediately after his exposition of Christ’s high priestly sacrifice as the only means of removing sin once and for all (10:10-18). The phrase in 10:26 recalls 10:18.<sup>50</sup> Christ’s unique, efficacious, definitive sacrifice removes the need for further offering (v. 18). For the author then to say in 10:26 that a sacrifice for sins no longer remains for the offender is to say that this sole means of atonement has been repudiated.<sup>51</sup> Gleason contends the more severe

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Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*, 178-83.

<sup>48</sup>Allen claims, “[T]he text does not say the ground [in Heb 6:8] is ‘cursed’ but in *danger* of being cursed” (ibid., 379, [emphasis in original]). But this seems to be an attempt to evade the obvious. Attridge is right: “The adjective is not meant to suggest that the land is not subject to a curse, as if there were still hope for it. Like the similar remark on the old covenant at 8:13, the portentous phrase suggests something *inevitable*” (*Hebrews*, 173, [emphasis added]). Gleason’s interpretation of 6:7-8 fits with his proposed historical context: the author foresees that, if the readers return to Judaism, they will experience physical death at the impending destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. (“The Eschatology of the Warning in Hebrews 10:26-31,” 106-13). Thus, consistent with Deut 11:26-28, he claims, the blessing and cursing language of 6:7-8 refers to the physical *land*. The “burning” will not involve the loss of salvation but forfeiture of blessing when the land is destroyed (“The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8,” 86-87). But while Gleason is probably right to see texts like Deut 11:26-28 as providing a covenantal background to Heb 6:7-8, his proposed historical reconstruction is highly improbable. The responses to Gleason’s alleged historical background by Grant R. Osborne, Buist M. Fanning, and Gareth L. Cockerill are devastating (see *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, 378-429). Hebrews 6:7-8 is an agricultural metaphor depicting the two possible responses of the readers to the author’s warning (see, e.g., O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 227ff.; Koester, *Hebrews*, 323; Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 277).

<sup>49</sup>See Allen, *Hebrews*, 522.

<sup>50</sup>Οὐκέτι περὶ ἁμαρτίας ἀπολείπεται (10:18); οὐκέτι περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἀπολείπεται θυσία (10:26).

<sup>51</sup>See Lane, *Hebrews* 9-13, 292-93; Koester, *Hebrews*, 452; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 375.

punishment threatened in 10:29 need not mean greater in kind (i.e., spiritual rather than physical death) but simply in degree (more severe physical punishment).<sup>52</sup> Again, though, this explanation does not fit the context and misses the author’s whole argument of escalation. The blood of bulls and goats provides merely external cleansing (9:13); they cannot take away sin (10:4). Christ’s blood cleanses the conscience (9:14) and removes sin forever (10:12-18). To “trample on the Son of God” and regard his blood as profane (10:29) is to reject the very means of entry into the heavenly sanctuary (10:19ff.). Allen claims the “destruction” (*ἀπώλειαν*) threatened in 10:39 does not mean “everlasting destruction,” though he admits “such an interpretation is contextually possible.”<sup>53</sup> However, though the word occurs only here in Hebrews, it is used often by various NT authors and consistently refers to eschatological destruction.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the destruction of which the author speaks is parallel to God’s taking no pleasure in the one who shrinks back (10:38) and contrasted with receiving what was promised (10:36) and preserving one’s life (10:39). The loss-of-rewards view is forced to reject the most natural, contextual meaning of the author’s description of sin and judgment.

Third, despite the protests of Gleason and Allen, it is likely *ἀποστῆναι* (3:12) and *παραπεσόντας* (6:6) refer to acts of apostasy in their contexts in Hebrews. Regarding *ἀφίστημι*: (1) Both authors contend that the use of *ἀφίστημι* in Hebrews 3:12 is an echo of Joshua and Caleb’s warning to the Israelites in Numbers 14:9 where the noun *ἀποστάται* is used.<sup>55</sup> But, even if one grants the possibility that the author had this context in mind, *ἀποστάται* here clearly describes people committing apostasy from the Lord—

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<sup>52</sup>Gleason, “The Eschatology of the Warning in Hebrews 10:26-31,” 117.

<sup>53</sup>Allen, *Hebrews*, 535.

<sup>54</sup>Matt 7:13; John 17:12; Acts 8:20; Rom 9:22; Phil 1:28; 3:19; 2 Thess 2:3; 1 Tim 6:9; 2 Pet 2:1, 3; 3:7, 16; Rev 17:8, 11. The only NT exception is the use of the word by the disciples to call the woman’s pouring of expensive perfume on Jesus a “waste” (Matt 26:8; Mark 14:4).

<sup>55</sup>LXX: *ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου μὴ ἀποστάται γίνεσθε ὑμεῖς*. Gleason, “The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8,” 79; Allen, *Hebrews*, 261.

renouncing his deliverance from slavery and rejecting his promise of land.<sup>56</sup> For the warning of Joshua and Caleb in Numbers 14:9 is a reaction to the Israelites' rebellious lament: they cry that Egypt was preferable to being delivered to death by the hand of God in the wilderness, and they declare their intent to appoint a leader who will take them back to Egypt (Num 14:1-4). (2) Allen insists that the singular usage of ἀποστῆναι in the letter argues against its meaning "apostasy" in 3:12.<sup>57</sup> But such a conclusion does not follow. Given Allen's interpretation, it is unclear how the appearance of the verb in all five warnings would persuade him. Moreover, the author is varied in his description of the sin throughout the warnings. The exact same terminology is not required in each instance for one to comprehend the meaning. (3) While ἀφίστημι has a semantic range in the LXX and the NT, both use the verb to describe apostasy. So there is clear precedent—in the Greek OT and Christian writings contemporary with Hebrews—for using the word in this way.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, (4) The context of Hebrews 3:12 demands that the phrase "departs from the living God" refer to apostasy, because it follows from an "evil, unbelieving heart" (3:12) and results in a failure to enter "God's rest" (4:1, 11).

Regarding παραπίπτω: (1) Understanding παραπεσόντας in Hebrews 6:6 as describing a "falling away" from God (in terms of apostasy) seems to best fit the immediate context, as well as a synthetic reading of all five warnings. In light of what

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<sup>56</sup>Liddell and Scott provide the glosses "runaway, deserter, rebel" (*A Lexicon Abridged from Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1871], s.v. "ἀποστατής"). "LEH" offers "apostate" as a possible meaning at Num 14:9 (*Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, rev. ed., compiled by Johan Lust, Erik Eynikel, and Katrin Hauspie [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2003], s.v. "ἀποστατής"). According to T. Muraoka, Num 14:9 is an example of the meaning "one who renounces one's allegiance to sbd else" (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* [Louvain, Belgium: Peeters, 2009], s.v. "ἀποστατής"). *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (ed. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009]) translates Num 14:9 as "do not become deserters from the Lord."

<sup>57</sup>See Allen, *Hebrews*, 262, 263, 265.

<sup>58</sup>See, e.g., Deut 32:15; Josh 22:18, 19, 23, 29; Jer 3:14; Ezek 20:38; 1 Macc 1:15; 2:19; 1 Tim 4:1. See also the discussion in Heinrich Schlier, "ἀφίστημι," in *TDNT*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972).

Allen claims is a lack of support for such a meaning in any Greek usage of the term prior to Hebrews, he argues that lexicographers and commentators who adopt this meaning “are giving a theological interpretation to the word based more on an interpretation of the surrounding context of Hebrews 6 and less on lexicography.”<sup>59</sup> In response, I would say that is *exactly* what they are doing. Word meanings are ultimately determined by their context, and the vast majority of lexicographers, commentators, and other interpreters have understood the word in this way based on the context of Hebrews. (2) In the eight appearances of *παραπίπτω* in the LXX, the meaning “to sin,” “to transgress,” or “to fall away” is most common.<sup>60</sup> Yet even if one were to translate it “sin” in Hebrews 6:6, clearly the author has very serious sin in mind, as he indicates by *ἐκουσίως ἀμαρτανόντων* in 10:26. (3) Gleason says *παραπίπτω* describes a “serious sinful act or attitude against God,” the precise nature of which must be determined contextually.<sup>61</sup> With this assessment I agree. Where I disagree is with the contextual analysis that he offers. Allen declares, “If *parapiptō* means to apostatize in the conventional theological understanding of the word, it is the singular exception of the known uses of the word.”<sup>62</sup> Yet his assessment cuts both ways, for Allen agrees with Gleason that “falling away” means “a decisive point when one refused . . . to press on to maturity.”<sup>63</sup> But nowhere in the extant literature does *παραπίπτω* mean “a refusal to press on to maturity.”<sup>64</sup> The question is:

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<sup>59</sup>Allen, *Hebrews*, 361.

<sup>60</sup>See Wis 12:2; Ezek 14:13; 15:8; 18:24; 20:27; 22:4. *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* renders the verb in one of these ways in each of these texts. The word also occurs in Wis 6:9 (where the meaning could also be “to sin”) and Esth 6:10.

<sup>61</sup>Gleason, “The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8,” 80-81.

<sup>62</sup>Allen, *Hebrews*, 361-62.

<sup>63</sup>Gleason, “A Moderate Reformed View,” 355, as quoted in Allen, *Hebrews*, 369.

<sup>64</sup>See Allen’s citation of an unpublished work that details the meaning of every occurrence of the word in extra-biblical Greek (*Hebrews*, 359-60).

what kind of serious sin is the author describing through the use of the word? The meaning “apostasy” seems most likely.

Fourth, one wonders if the hermeneutical grid through which Gleason and Allen interpret Hebrews and the warnings is so stifling as to make no other view possible. What exactly would the author have to say in order to convince them that he is speaking of apostasy? Gleason describes the sin against which the author warns the readers as “a public return to the animal sacrifices of the Levitical system,” a “quiet return to Judaism,” a “failure to hold fast their confession in Christ,” and viewing “Christ’s crucifixion as having no value beyond a criminal’s death.”<sup>65</sup> Allen describes the sin as a failure to “hold fast their confession of faith in Christ (Heb 3:6; 4:14; Heb 10:23)” and as “disobey[ing] and rebel[ing] against the Lord and remain[ing] in such an unrepentant state.”<sup>66</sup> If such rejection of the Christian confession and unrepentant return to Judaism cannot be described as apostasy, what can be?<sup>67</sup> Allen insists that the author warns the readers about *neglecting* their salvation (2:3)—not *rejecting* it. He claims Esau “repudiated the *blessing*, not *God*” (see Heb 12:17), and thus “there is no indication he lost standing in God’s covenant people.”<sup>68</sup> But these appear to be distinctions without a difference. Taking the warnings synthetically, to “neglect” their great salvation (2:3) is to regard as profane the blood of the covenant (10:29). The warning not to imitate Esau (12:16-17) occurs alongside a warning not to “fall short of the grace of God” (12:15). Allen claims, “The absence of *eternal damnation terminology* in Hebrews 6 militates against

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<sup>65</sup>Gleason, “The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8,” 85.

<sup>66</sup>Allen, *Hebrews*, 369.

<sup>67</sup>Allen (*Hebrews*, 262 n. 538) claims Koester is correct when he says the unbelieving heart at 3:12 is “a heart that abandons the God it has known” (Koester, *Hebrews*, 258). But if “abandoning the God one has known” is *not* apostasy, one wonders what actions would qualify. According to R. T. France the author’s varied descriptions of the sin he warns them to avoid “could hardly sound more terminal” (*Hebrews*, in vol. 13 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006], 78).

<sup>68</sup>Allen, *Hebrews*, 386 (emphasis added).

interpreting the passage as referring to eternal loss.”<sup>69</sup> Yet, as argued above, the terminology and context of eternal judgment are clearly there. It is the *interpretive framework* that militates against interpreting the passage as referring to eternal loss. Moreover, must the author express themselves in precisely the *words* Allen demands in order for the *concepts* to be conveyed?<sup>70</sup> Is it really “reading too much into the words” to identify “sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God” (3:12) as apostasy?<sup>71</sup> This seems to require interpretive standards so demanding that it ensures one’s preferred viewpoint.<sup>72</sup>

Two final observations are worth noting: (1) Even if Paul speaks of an eschatological loss of rewards for believers in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, such a concept is absent in Hebrews. Gleason and Allen must import the idea into the latter. Thus, it seems unjustified to describe the consequences about which the author warns the readers as a “loss of rewards.” (2) Gleason allows that the “greater kind of judgment” awaiting the readers, if they fall away, *could* suggest “eternal eschatological destruction.”

However, this would seem to contradict the author’s repeated assurances given to his audience regarding the “eternal” (*αἰωνίου*) nature of their “salvation” (5:9), “redemption” (9:12), and “inheritance” (9:15). Furthermore warning them against the possibility of eternal destruction would conflict with the claim that Jesus, their superior High Priest, “is able to save forever (or completely) those who draw near to

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 391-92 (emphasis added).

<sup>70</sup>Responding to Gleason’s argument that eternal condemnation terminology is absent, Buist M. Fanning says, “As a matter of fact, the terms Gleason is looking for are not consistently used elsewhere to describe eternal condemnation. He is able to cite certain texts where these terms are present, but other texts can be cited, sometimes in the same books, where none of these words is present and yet it clear that final judgment is in view.” He then lists various example NT texts (“Classical Reformed Response” in *Four Views of the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, 410).

<sup>71</sup>See Allen, *Hebrews*, 264.

<sup>72</sup>Allen ask why, if apostasy was the problem the author feared, he did not cite such failures as the golden calf incident, the Israelites’ desire to return to Egypt, and their idolatry at Baal of Peor (ibid., 390). But why would such examples count as evidence for apostasy? Allen has already argued that the wilderness generation “did not lose their salvation” (367) and their deaths did not “mean they were unconverted” (383). Why then would these other acts of rebellion qualify as acts of apostasy any more than the Kadesh-barnea rebellion?



God through Him” (7:25) since “He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (10:14).<sup>73</sup>

The conflict Gleason perceives is real. But is there a more viable interpretation of the warnings that effectively integrates them with the author’s emphasis on assurance of salvation?

### **False-Believer View**

According to advocates of this view the sin the author highlights is indeed apostasy, and the corresponding punishment is eternal judgment. However, the readers of his letter are a “mixed audience” that includes both believers and unbelievers, and the warnings are ultimately directed at the latter—those within in the congregation who, though they have experienced some of the blessings associated with the message of salvation and affiliation with the people of God, have never truly believed. Thus, the warnings are describing false believers. Two proponents of this position with whom I will interact are Wayne Grudem and Buist M. Fanning.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>Gleason, “The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8,” 90.

<sup>74</sup>Wayne Grudem, “Perseverance of the Saints: A Case Study from Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Other Warning Passages in Hebrews,” in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will: Historical and Theological Perspectives on Calvinism*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 133-82; Buist M. Fanning, “A Classical Reformed View,” *Four Views of the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, 172-219.

Additional examples of advocates of this view include John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and the First and Second Epistles of Peter, Calvin’s Commentaries*, trans. William B. Johnston, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 76; John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews with Preliminary Exercitations*, ed. William H. Goold (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 5:84; Roger Nicole, “Some Comments on Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Doctrine of the Perseverance of God with the Saints,” in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 355-64; Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 216; idem, “Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Peril of Apostasy,” *WTJ* 35 (1973): 137-55; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 144; Leon Morris, *Hebrews*, in vol. 12 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 55; R. Bruce Compton, “Persevering and Falling Away: A Reexamination of Hebrews 6:4-6,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 1 (1996): 135-67; George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 230; Thomas, *A Case for Mixed-Audience*, 90-96; Robert A. Peterson, “Apostasy in the Warning Passages,” *Presbyterian* 34 (2008): 27-44.

Examining the descriptive terms in Hebrews 6:4-6, Wayne Grudem admits that “the cumulative force of these terms” *can* be used to argue those described “were genuine Christians before falling away.” Yet, he contends this position is premature in reaching its conclusion. Rather, upon closer examination, the terms are seen to be *inconclusive*: “for they speak of events that are experienced both by genuine Christians and by some people who participate in the fellowship of a church but are never really saved.”<sup>75</sup> In reality, “the people in 6:4-6 *did not have any of the signs of true saving faith.*”<sup>76</sup>

Grudem then works his way through each of the terms, putting forth evidence intended to raise doubt concerning the former view. The “enlightening” that the group experienced (φωτισθέντας, v. 4)<sup>77</sup> should not be equated with “believed the gospel” or “came to faith,” for the word is not used in this sense in the NT. It refers instead to “learning and understanding,” and the “the most” that can be said is that it involves an “intellectual understanding of the facts of the gospel.”<sup>78</sup> The occurrence of the same verb in Hebrews 10:32 does not oppose this conclusion, because the “the parallel with ‘receiving the knowledge of the truth’ in verse 26 would indicate that receiving knowledge of the gospel is all that the author means.”<sup>79</sup> The enlightening “does not necessarily imply that they actually believed it.”<sup>80</sup> Regarding the “tasting” (γευσάμενους,

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<sup>75</sup>Grudem, “Perseverance of the Saints,” 139-40.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 140 n. 14 (emphasis in original).

<sup>77</sup>The verb φωτίζω is used in the NT in the sense of literally giving light (e.g., Luke 11:36; Rev 22:5) and in a figurative sense with the meaning “to enlighten” (John 1:9; 1 Cor 4:5; Eph 1:18; 3:9; 2 Tim 1:10). The verb has sometimes been thought to be a technical term denoting “baptism” because of its later usage in the early church and because it was so translated by the Syriac Peshitta (See Bruce, *Hebrews*, 145 n. 39; and Attridge, *Hebrews*, 169 n. 44). Yet “prior to the middle of the second century there is no clear evidence that φωτίζειν means ‘to baptize,’” and the Syriac Peshitta “stands alone among Syriac and other older versions” (Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 141).

<sup>78</sup>Grudem, “Perseverance of the Saints,” 141-42.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 141, also n. 16. See also 164.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 164.

vv. 4, 5)<sup>81</sup> of the heavenly gift, the good word of God, and the powers of the coming age, Grudem claims there are two factors “inherent in the idea of *geuomai* when it means ‘taste.’” These are “(1) the tasting is temporary, and (2) a more permanent experience of the thing might or might not follow.” Those in 6:4-6 certainly had a “genuine experience.” But, as Grudem puts it, “The question is whether they had a *saving* experience of these things, whether the experience was one that brought regeneration, saving faith, justification, etc.”<sup>82</sup> Finally, Grudem considers the phrase describing the individuals as “partakers” or “companions” (*μετόχους*, v. 4) of the Holy Spirit. He cautions that *μέτοχος* has “a range of meaning and may imply very close participation and attachment, or may imply only a loose association.” Hebrews 3:14 is an example of having a “saving participation” as a “partaker of Christ,” while the term can also be used “in a looser sense, to refer to associates or companions.” As apparent examples of the latter, he quotes Luke 5:7 (the only NT occurrence outside of Hebrews) and Hebrews 1:9 (quoting Ps 45:7). In the former, the disciples signal for their “partners” in another boat to help them with the catch of fish; the latter speaks of the “comrades” or “companions” of the Son. Grudem grants that being “partakers” of the Holy Spirit could refer to “regeneration,” but this cannot be assumed, for “regeneration is not the only way people partake of the Holy Spirit or receive some of his benefits.” It could refer simply to some other benefits of the Holy Spirit, like “answers to prayer or even in using some spiritual gifts.” Therefore, the most one can say with certainty about being a “partaker of the Holy

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<sup>81</sup>The verb *γεύομαι* is used to speak of literally “tasting” by mouth or of metaphorically “experiencing” something. See BDAG, s.v. “*γεύομαι*”; Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 1:808. John Owen’s contention that the metaphorical idea “signifies no more but to make a trial or experiment” clearly does not fit with the similar use in Heb 2:9 where Jesus “tasted” death for everyone (see Owen, *Hebrews*, 5:79).

<sup>82</sup>Grudem, “Perseverance of the Saints,” 145-46 (emphasis in original).

Spirit” is that it means “*to be associated in some way with the work of the Holy Spirit and to share in some of the benefits the Holy Spirit gives.*”<sup>83</sup>

Grudem goes on to discuss eighteen examples of language that Hebrews uses to describe true Christians.<sup>84</sup> Only one of these descriptions occurs in 6:4-6: “The saved are enlightened.” However, since (as noted above) Grudem argues that the phrase means merely “heard the gospel,” it is a description that can be applied to believers and unbelievers.<sup>85</sup> If the author had wanted to make it clear that 6:4-6 was describing believers, he could have used these other seventeen phrases to do so. But he did not. “He chose to use language that does not describe those who are truly saved.”<sup>86</sup>

Since the phrases in 6:4-6 are inconclusive and can describe believers or unbelievers who have heard the gospel and had some attachment to the people of God, Grudem argues that a final decision must be based on the surrounding context—specifically, Hebrews 6:7-12.<sup>87</sup> The metaphor of the field in verses 7-8 illustrates two different kinds of people. Both pieces of ground experienced the same rain, but one produced useful vegetation while the other yielded thorns and thistles. The latter ground’s response to the rain “reveals the kind of ground it was in the first place.” Similarly, once those described in verses 4-6 fell away, their response to their spiritual experiences “revealed what their true status was all along: they had never truly been saved in the first place.”<sup>88</sup> When the author tells his audience that he is confident of “better things” concerning them (v. 9), Grudem insists that this does not refer to the fruitful land over

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<sup>83</sup>Grudem, “Perseverance of the Saints,” 147-48 (emphasis in original).

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 162-68.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 163-64.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 172.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 152, also n. 46.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 155-56.

against the worthless land of verses 7-8. Instead the author is speaking of “better things” in comparison to the (merely) good experiences of verses 4-5. These better things are virtues such as “love, service, faith, and hope” mentioned in verses 10-12—“the kinds of good fruit that do give evidence of salvation.”<sup>89</sup>

Grudem then considers the other warning passages but finds nothing in them inconsistent with his conclusions reached regarding 6:4-6. The author’s use of the first person plural “we” in the warning of 2:1-4 (and elsewhere) is simply a “conversational convention.” It does not imply that the author and all his readers are subject to the warnings against apostasy—but only that *some* of them are in danger of falling away.<sup>90</sup> Grudem admits that the author’s general practice is to speak to his audience as Christians. He then warns them not to fall away. But, he contends, “this is simply because he knows there are some in the congregation whose spiritual status is unclear.”<sup>91</sup> As with 6:4-6, Grudem grants that one could build a case from 10:26-31 that those described are believers; however, the phrases found there are not decisive.<sup>92</sup> Specifically, the author speaks of the apostate and the blood of the covenant “by which he was sanctified” (10:29). Yet, this need not be the sanctification that comes with salvation, for the word has a broader meaning, not only in Hebrews but in the NT as well. Grudem cites several examples where *hagiazō* is used to speak of outward sanctification, moral influence, or ceremonial purification (Heb 9:13; 1 Cor 7:14; Matt 23:17, 19; 1 Tim 4:5; 1 Pet 3:15). Since a “ceremonial focus pervades the context [of Heb 9:1-10:39], a ceremonial sense of ‘sanctify’ would be appropriate in 10:29.”<sup>93</sup> Thus, the warnings describe those who had never been truly saved.

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 157-59.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 173.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 162, also n. 67.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 176.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 177.

Buist Fanning holds a similar view to Grudem. Yet he is more tentative in his approach and more willing to acknowledge a tension in the letter.<sup>94</sup> He grants the plausibility that the warnings describe believers: he plainly states that a “straightforward reading” of the descriptions in 6:4-6 “leads us to understand them to refer to full and genuine Christian experience.”<sup>95</sup> He also believes a “straightforward reading” leads one to conclude that the sin is apostasy and the corresponding punishment is eternal judgment.<sup>96</sup> However, he contends that all of these conclusions must be considered provisional. The reason is because one would also infer from the author’s description of God’s faithfulness and the transforming power of Jesus’ new covenant sacrifice that believer’s will, as a result, persevere to the end.<sup>97</sup> The problem then lies in bringing these elements together: “The straightforward results are disparate enough that we have a problem coming to a consistent synthesis . . . . Our reading of one or more of the elements obviously needs to be adjusted. But which one and on what grounds?”<sup>98</sup>

Fanning presents a way forward by detecting a framework of thought in Hebrews. Two statements made by the author serve as an interpretive paradigm for bringing these disparate elements together coherently: the conditional statements in 3:6 and 3:14. Several interpreters prior to Fanning have argued similarly regarding these conditionals, though not in detail.<sup>99</sup> Fanning contends, “Careful attention to the wording

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<sup>94</sup>Robert Peterson, who also holds the false-believer view, observes this difference in the presentations of Grudem and Fanning. Peterson finds Grudem’s work less cogent because it is missing “the working assumption—taken seriously—that he may in fact be wrong about these important matters. It is the demonstration of just such a humble spirit that enhances the work of Buist Fanning in his contribution to *Four Views of the Warning Passages in Hebrews*” (“Apostasy in the Warning Passages,” 37).

<sup>95</sup>Fanning, “A Classical Reformed View,” 180. Fanning claims the deduction that the individuals in 6:4-6 are believers is a “perfectly plausible conclusion” (177).

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 180-90.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 192-205.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 205. Fanning claims, “There is an unavoidable tension in putting these elements together” (176).

<sup>99</sup>An early advocate of this argument is F. F. Bruce. Speaking of the conditionals, Bruce writes,

shows that these lines do not cite what *will* be true if they hold on, but what *is already* true of them, if in fact they endure.” Holding fast in the faith will not make them God’s household and partakers of Christ but will demonstrate the reality that these things are so.<sup>100</sup> Most interpreters have understood these conditionals as expressing a “cause-to-effect relationship (C/E)” between protasis and apodosis, but Fanning believes it is better seen as an “evidence-to-inference (E/I)” relationship. Fanning thinks this can be argued not only contextually but also—more notably—linguistically. Citing LXX and NT examples<sup>101</sup> Fanning argues that when the protasis speaks of a “contextually specific event,” conditionals seem to present a C/E relationship (with the apodosis being a future event caused by the protasis event). But when the protasis speaks of a “customary condition” or “broadly characteristic action,” conditionals seem to present a E/I relationship (with the apodosis being an existing state or condition evidenced by the protasis event).<sup>102</sup> Since the protases of 3:6 and 3:14 are “broad, characteristic” actions

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“Nowhere in the New Testament more than here do we find such repeated insistence on the fact that continuance in the Christian life is the test of reality” (*Hebrews*, 94). Hebrews 3:14 stresses the necessity of perseverance: “only if they kept their original confidence firm to the end could they be truly called partners of Christ” (101). Bruce was followed by Hughes (*Hebrews*, 138, 139, 151) and Morris (*Hebrews*, 33). D. A. Carson understands 3:6 and 14 similarly to Bruce, primarily due to the perfect tense “we have become” (γεγόναμεν) in 3:14: “It follows from this verse that although perseverance is mandated, it is also the evidence of what has taken place in the past” (*Exegetical Fallacies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996], 84-85). Cf. D. A. Carson, “Reflections on Christian Assurance,” *WTJ* 54 (1992): 20: “Hebrews virtually defines true believers as those who hold firmly to the end the confidence they had at first (3:6, 14).” Grudem (“Perseverance of the Saints,” 175) and O’Brien (*Hebrews*, 136) have followed Carson. See also G. Guthrie for the same argument (*Hebrews*, 230).

<sup>100</sup>Fanning, “A Classical Reformed View,” 207. Cf. Buist M. Fanning, “A Theology of Hebrews,” in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 410-11.

<sup>101</sup>His focus is limited to “third-class protases (any tenses) with apodases containing present indicative of εἶμι or perfect indicative of any verb” (“A Classical Reformed View,” 211 n. 85).

<sup>102</sup>See *ibid.*, 206-15. Fanning claims the case for reading 3:6 and 3:14 as E/I conditionals is further strengthened by a temporal view of the Greek tenses in the indicative—but that his argument does not require this feature (213 n. 88, 215). For Fanning’s view of verbal aspect, see his *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 126-324. In his published dissertation on Hebrews (written under Fanning’s supervision), C. Adrian Thomas argues for the same interpretive paradigm (*A Case for Mixed-Audience*, 182-89). Both Fanning (“A Classical Reformed View,” 209-10 n. 83) and Thomas (*A Case for Mixed-Audience*, 184-90) cite the study of Charles E. Powell that classifies the protasis/apodosis relationships in the NT conditionals (“The Semantic Relationship Between the Protasis and the Apodosis of

and not specific events, they are best seen as reflecting an E/I relationship. On this reading, then, “the author’s underlying structure of thought” is revealed, making “an implicit distinction between true and false faith.”<sup>103</sup> Fanning admits that 6:4-5 and 10:29 are still problematic, since they seem to describe genuine Christian experience. His answer is to understand the writer as “portraying the *phenomena* of their conversion, what their Christian experience looks like outwardly. He portrays them in distinctly Christian terms to emphasize how close they have been to the faith and what they are rejecting if they depart.”<sup>104</sup> Thus, 6:4-5 and 10:29 describe false believers.

Let me respond to the false-believer view by first addressing Grudem’s arguments regarding the participles in 6:4-5, beginning with “enlightened” (φωτισθέντας). First, the author’s only other use of “enlightened”—in 10:32—is significant since he likely uses it here in a manner similar to 6:4. But, contrary to Grudem, it is doubtful it refers to mere intellectual understanding of the gospel. Even if we assume that “receiving the knowledge of the truth” (τὸ λαβεῖν τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν τῆς ἀληθείας) in 10:26 means merely a non-salvific “receiving knowledge of the gospel,” it does not require that “enlightened” in 10:32 is used synonymously. In contrasting the two responses, the author may intend “enlightened” also to express contrast, signifying belief in the gospel.

Second, having said that, one need not assume with Grudem that “receiving knowledge of the truth” in 10:26 refers to *mere* hearing and understanding. He asserts this twice but gives no evidence in support.<sup>105</sup> While the expression occurs nowhere else

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New Testament Conditional Constructions,” [Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2000]). More recently, Andrew J. Wilson has also advocated Fanning’s view of these conditionals. See his “Hebrews 3:6b and 3:14 Revisited,” *TynBul* 62 (2011): 247-67.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 215.

<sup>104</sup>Fanning, “A Classical Reformed View,” 217. Using similar language, G. Guthrie describes this position (which he also advocates) as the “*phenomenological unbeliever view*,” which holds that “the ambiguous language here suggests a participation in the things of God associated with entrance to the Christian community—they look from outward appearances like Christians—but that those under consideration have not experienced true faith” (*Hebrews*, 230).

<sup>105</sup>Grudem, “Perseverance of the Saints,” 141 n. 16, 164. Grudem writes, “Here [10:26],



in Hebrews, “knowledge of the truth” (ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας) clearly means more than mere intellectual assent in the Pastorals (see 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Tim 2:25; 3:7; Titus 1:1). Thus, both the expression in 10:26 and “enlightened” in 10:32 likely refer to belief in the gospel.<sup>106</sup>

Third, the context reinforces this because the author includes himself with his listeners as subjects of the action in 10:26: “If *we* deliberately sin after receiving knowledge of the truth.” Grudem insists that the author’s use of the first person plural in the warnings is simply a “conversational convention.” But the warning beginning in 10:26 immediately follows 10:19-25 in which—also using repeated first person plurals—the author exhorts and encourages his readers *as Christians*. Surely the author’s use of first person plurals in 10:19-25 is not just a “conversational convention.” So why would such be the case as he begins verse 26?

Fourth, Grudem claims φωτίζω should not be equated with “believed the gospel” because it isn’t used in this way in the NT. He critiques McKnight who claims it refers to conversion in Christian literature and who cites Attridge’s list of evidence.<sup>107</sup> Grudem insists, “Attridge’s own claim is not exactly that they speak of conversion, but of ‘the reception of a salvific message’ . . . a sense not really incompatible with my own position.”<sup>108</sup> However, Attridge argues that the participles in verses 4-5 depict “the initial

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‘receiving the knowledge of the truth’ simply means hearing and understanding the gospel, and probably also giving mental agreement or approval to it” (164). Yet he backs this claim with no evidence.

<sup>106</sup>Relying on and arguing in a similar manner to Grudem, R. Bruce Compton insists, “There is no indication in [10:26] that receiving a knowledge of the truth suggest the idea of regeneration. It simply means that the readers had been taught or instructed in the truth of God’s Word. The same may be said of the expression in 10:32” (“Persevering and Falling Away,” 148). Yes, these expressions *may* mean no more than that. But Compton offers no evidence from the context to sustain his assertion. He claims there is “no indication” in the text that the phrase means “regeneration.” That may be, but who said anything about *regeneration*? We must allow each biblical author to use his own soteriological vocabulary and concepts. Compton provides no contextual evidence to substantiate that the phrase means “simply . . . taught or instructed.”

<sup>107</sup>See Grudem, “Perseverance of the Saints,” 141 n. 18; McKnight, “The Warning Passages,” 46; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 169-70 n. 43.

<sup>108</sup>Grudem, “Perseverance of the Saints,” 141 n. 18.

experience of *conversion* and life in the eschatological community.”<sup>109</sup> Thus, he plainly means more by the phrase “reception of a salvific message” than does Grudem. Moreover, Grudem’s claim that, in the NT, *φωτίζω* “is not a technical term that means ‘hear and believe the gospel’ or ‘come to saving faith’” is too simplistic.<sup>110</sup> At issue is not whether the verb has become a *technical term* for “come to saving faith” but whether the author uses it to speak of an “enlightening”—a spiritual understanding—only experienced by Christian converts. Given the combined description of the individuals in 6:4-5, comparison with the other warnings, and use of the verb in 10:32, the answer appears to be yes.<sup>111</sup>

Concerning the “tasting” (*γευσάμενους*) that these individuals have enjoyed in 6:4-5, consider the following. First, Grudem asserts that “inherent in the idea of *geuomai*” (whether used literally or figuratively) is the idea fact “the tasting is temporary” and “a more permanent experience of the thing might or might not follow.”<sup>112</sup> But this seems contradicted by the only other use of *γεύομαι* in Hebrews, in which Jesus “tasted death” (2:9). This metaphorical use of the verb obviously means to “experience,” but how could one have a *temporary* experience of death with no permanent experience proceeding (the reality of the afterlife notwithstanding)?<sup>113</sup> Grudem does not cite the five NT figurative

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<sup>109</sup>Attridge, *Hebrews*, 170 (emphasis added).

<sup>110</sup>Grudem, “Perseverance of the Saints,” 141.

<sup>111</sup>Regarding other NT uses, the occurrences of *φωτίζω* in Eph 1:18 and 3:9 (at least) seem to be obvious examples of an “enlightening” only experienced by believers.

<sup>112</sup>Grudem, “Perseverance of the Saints,” 145. He also writes, “The common factor in all instances of tasting is that the tasting is a temporary experience, not a continuing one, and it sometimes (or often) results in no permanent experience or permanent change in the person doing the tasting” (145 n. 27). Neither of the entries for the verb in BDAG or Louw and Nida, *Greek English Lexicon* (see above note) mention any temporary nature of the tasting experience.

<sup>113</sup>Of course, the reality of the resurrection is no exception to this. For the author was certainly not describing Jesus’s experience of death as “tasting” in order to convey the idea that it was only temporary in view of the resurrection. Compton argues, “Christ tasting death for every man was an experience that did not continue indefinitely. It took place within a specific period of time” (“Persevering and Falling Away,” 149). But is this relevant? From the biblical worldview, *all* death is “temporary”—if by this one means all will be raised to either life or judgment. Thus, the “temporary” nature of Jesus’ death has

uses of *γεύομαι* outside of Hebrews—none of which indicate that these experiences are viewed as temporary.<sup>114</sup> The figurative use of the verb is simply a vivid description of a real experience. Therefore, it is surprising to see Grudem conclude his discussion of the use of the verb in 6:4-5,

As we have noted, the New Testament examples of tasting show that the tasting is temporary, and a more permanent experience of the thing tasted might or might not follow. In these verses, this means that the tasting of the heavenly gift, and the word of God, and the coming powers, was temporary, and we cannot tell from the mere fact of such tasting if a more permanent experience of these things followed or not.<sup>115</sup>

Such a conclusion is unwarranted and unproven.

Second, when Grudem addresses the use of *γεύομαι* in Hebrews 2:9, though, the argument is slightly different:

I can agree that a “real experience” of the thing tasted is in view not only in Hebrews 2:9 but also in every example of *geuomai* mentioned . . . . Similarly, in Hebrews 6:4-6 the people had a genuine experience of the heavenly gift and the word of God and the powers of the age to come. But that is not the point. The question is whether they had a *saving* experience of these things, whether the experience was one that brought regeneration, saving faith, justification, etc.<sup>116</sup>

Here it is not a question of the *temporary* nature of the experience but the *quality* of the experience. Yet, Grudem succeeds in defeating the opposing interpretation only by insisting on an unwarranted burden of proof—particularly since none of the other figurative uses of *γεύομαι* in the NT suggest that there is more than one level of experience of the thing being tasted. As R. T. France comments, “[I]n the biblical

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nothing to do with the author’s use of the verb *γεύομαι* to describe it. Saying Jesus “tasted” death is simply a figurative way of saying he *really* died.

<sup>114</sup>In the Gospels, Jesus speaks of individuals “tasting” death (Matt 16:28; Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27; John 8:52), while Peter exhorts his readers to grow spiritually, “if you have tasted that the Lord is kind” (1 Pet 2:3).

<sup>115</sup>Grudem, “Perseverance of the Saints,” 147.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 145-46 (emphasis in original).

language ‘taste’ as a metaphor means to experience to the full.”<sup>117</sup> So to insist that the author is describing some *limited or inauthentic* Christian experience is to import this idea into the text.

Third, Grudem admits that if one could show “that ‘the heavenly gift’ was salvation, then a ‘real experience’ of salvation would have to be understood as the beginning of the Christian life.” He thinks the phrase likely refers to the Holy Spirit and argues that “tasted the heavenly gift” means they “had *some* experience of the power of the Holy Spirit . . . . But such experiences of the Holy Spirit do not themselves indicate salvation.” He then contends that the two other phrases “*can* be understood similarly.” Tasting “the goodness of the word of God” means to “come to know and even feel *something* of its truthfulness and power. But this is not the same as believing for eternal life.” He suggests several of what he considers probable meanings for tasting “the powers of the age to come.” But, he insists, “These experiences do not *necessarily* indicate that the person is saved.”<sup>118</sup> However, the fact that these expressions *can* have a more limited meaning does not mean they *do* here. Grudem moves from a possible to a probable without offering evidence from Hebrews. Scot McKnight’s critique of Roger Nicole applies equally to Grudem—both of whom argue these expressions do not “necessarily” imply salvation.<sup>119</sup> McKnight writes,

Any exegete knows that there are no *necessary* interpretations and exegeses because necessity is impossible to attain when one is dealing with induction and historical probabilities . . . . It is not hard to show that any interpretation is unnecessary . . . . Nicole’s logic has been that since the texts do not necessarily demand regeneration then they do not mean regeneration. He has forced a text to be guilty until it can prove itself innocent.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup>France, *Hebrews*, 82. McKnight (“The Warning Passages of Hebrews,” 46-47) and Hughes (*Hebrews*, 209) similarly deny that the figurative use implies any variation in degree of the thing tasted.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., 146 (emphasis added).

<sup>119</sup>See Nicole, “Some Comments on Hebrews 6:4-6,” 362.

<sup>120</sup>McKnight, “The Warning Passages of Hebrews,” 53 (emphasis in original). Compton, too,

Grudem’s discussion of the phrase “have become partakers of the Holy Spirit” follows similar argumentation. His claim that μέτοχος can imply “very close participation” or “only a loose association” is neither substantiated by reference to a lexicon entry nor verified by the texts he cites.<sup>121</sup> To add the modifiers “very close” or “loose” is a case of special pleading.<sup>122</sup> As an example of “loose association” Grudem cites Luke 5:7 which speaks of Peter’s fishing companions. Peter could be influenced by them or benefit from them—“without having a thoroughgoing change of life caused by that association.”<sup>123</sup> While one can hardly disagree with this last statement, would any reader of Luke 5:7 actually think of this distinction? Grudem argues that being a partaker of the Holy Spirit in 6:4 means to be associated only “*in some way*” with the Holy Spirit.<sup>124</sup> As with the other phrases in 6:4-5, his form of argument guarantees his interpretation. He insists that whether or not it was a *saving* experience of enlightenment, tasting, or partaking is inconclusive (“Regeneration is not the *only* way people partake in the Holy Spirit”).<sup>125</sup> But since the author says something has happened, all one can say “with confidence” is that they partook of “*some of the benefits*” of the Holy Spirit.<sup>126</sup>

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repeatedly contends that the evidence “is capable of a different interpretation” (“Persevering and Falling Away,” 149 and *passim*). Most texts are. But the question is which interpretation is most likely in light of the context?

<sup>121</sup>His entire statement reads, “It is not always clear to English-speaking readers that this term has a range of meaning and may imply very close participation and attachment, or may imply only a loose association with the other person or persons named” (Grudem, “Perseverance of the Saints,” 147). But the validity of this claim seems equally unclear to readers of the *Greek* texts. Neither BDAG (s.v. “μέτοχος”) nor Louw and Nida (*Greek English Lexicon*, 1:447) support the range of meaning that Grudem proposes.

<sup>122</sup>Note McKnight’s similar assessment of Nicole who argues that μέτοχοι in Heb 1:9 means *mere* companionship (“The Warning Passages of Hebrews,” 50).

<sup>123</sup>Grudem, “Perseverance of the Saints,” 148.

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*, 148-49 (emphasis in original).

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*, 148 (emphasis added).

<sup>126</sup>*Ibid.* Oropeza writes, “*There is in fact no passage in the New Testament that affirms unbelievers or fake Christians having a share in the Holy Spirit*” (*Churches under Siege*, 35-36, [emphasis in original]).

Grudem seems to assume that upon encountering the word μέτοχος one must discern the level of association intended by the author—on a spectrum from weak to strong. Since one cannot prove a strong (saving) association in Hebrews 6:4, one can only be certain of an association of unknown (but less than salvific) intensity. But, of course, one cannot *prove* that the experiences are non-salvific either. Grudem’s method is to raise a shadow of a doubt about the opposing view and conclude that his own view must be accepted by default (“all we can say with confidence”). Aside from this, though, what if the polarity—in light of the word’s context—is not between *weak and strong association* but rather between *association and no association at all*? The uses of μέτοχος in Hebrews 3:1, 3:14, and 12:8 do not appear to compel the reader to ask about the *degree* of association or sharing that is implied. The context of each seems to indicate simply that one either shares in the object (a heavenly calling, Christ, discipline) or does not. There is no level of intensity involved. Grudem does not provide contextual evidence that the author intends a distinction in the degree to which the expressions in 6:4-5 may be true of someone. It would seem the burden is on him to demonstrate this.<sup>127</sup>

Grudem then proceeds to identify eighteen descriptions that he contends the author could have used if he wanted to be “clear” about the identity of those in 6:4-6. Here I offer just four brief comments: (1) A majority of commentators argue that the

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<sup>127</sup>Gerald L. Borchert contends the clauses in Heb 6:4-6 provide the “*finest brief definition of what is normally understood to be a Christian found anywhere in the New Testament!*” (*Assurance and Warning* [Nashville: Broadman, 1987]; 172, [emphasis in original]).

In his sermon on Heb 6:4-6, Charles Spurgeon writes, “First, then, we answer the question, WHO ARE THE PEOPLE HERE SPOKEN OF? If you read Dr. Gill, Dr. Owen, and almost all the eminent Calvinistic writers, they all of them assert that these persons are not Christians. They say, that enough is said here to represent a man who is a Christian externally, but not enough to give the portrait of a true believer. Now, it strikes me they would not have said this if they had had some doctrine to uphold; for a child, reading this passage, would say, that the persons intended by it must be Christians. If the Holy Spirit intended to describe Christians, I do not see that he could have used more explicit terms than there are here. How can a man be said to be enlightened, and to taste of the heavenly gift, and to be made partaker of the Holy Ghost, without being a child of God? With all deference to these learned doctors, and I admire and love them all, I humbly conceive that they allowed their judgments to be a little warped when they said that; and I think I shall be able to show that none but true believers are here described” (“Final Perseverance,” in *The New Park Street Pulpit*, <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0075.htm> [accessed August 12, 2012]).

expressions in 6:4-6 are *clear* descriptions of believers. So, unfortunately, clarity is in the eye of the beholder.<sup>128</sup> (2) Thomas R. Schreiner has rightly argued that Grudem offers no clear methodological basis for saying certain descriptions in Hebrews describe true Christians while those in 6:4-6 do not.<sup>129</sup> (3) One need not use specific *words* in order to convey a particular *concept*.<sup>130</sup> (4) Of course, the expressions in 6:4-6 are not all unique to that text. The author uses “enlightened” to describe the readers at 10:32 and describes them as “partakers/sharers” of Christ (rather than the Holy Spirit) at 3:14. However Grudem offers explanations to explain why these do not count.<sup>131</sup> But, even if one *assumes* for the sake of argument that the terms are not used elsewhere in Hebrews to describe the readers as believers, this does not prove Grudem’s case. In light of the severe nature of the passage, one could counter that the author intends these unique, figurative expressions to provide an especially vivid portrayal of the apostates—describing their experience in (mostly) sensory terms—and, thus, to emphasize the great folly of rejecting what they have experienced.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup>E.g., France writes, “It therefore seems clear that the people described in these verses are real Christians, not just interested people on the fringe. This is the clear implication of the language used in light both of Hebrews’ use of similar terms elsewhere and of general NT usage” (*Hebrews*, 83). Even Fanning, who ultimately agrees with Grudem that these are false believers, says that they are described “in distinctly Christian terms” in 6:4-5 (“A Classical Reformed View,” 217).

<sup>129</sup>See Thomas R. Schreiner, “Perseverance and Assurance: A Survey and Proposal” *The Southern Baptist Journal of the Theology* 2 (Spring 1998): 49-50.

<sup>130</sup>I have argued this elsewhere with regard to John’s Gospel. See Christopher W. Cowan, “The Father and Son in the Fourth Gospel: Johannine Subordination Revisited,” *JETS* 49 (2006): 127-28.

<sup>131</sup>See Grudem, “Perseverance of the Saints,” 141, 147-48, 163-64.

<sup>132</sup>In the above discussion of the loss-of-rewards view, I referenced the article by Mathewson (“Reading Heb 6:4-6 in Light of the Old Testament”). I generally find Mathewson’s argument plausible—that, just as the other four warnings include OT examples, the participles of the warning in 6:4-6 may possibly be verbal “echoes” of the experiences of the wilderness generation (see *ibid.*, 215-20). If Mathewson is correct, this would provide another explanation for the author’s description here and further nullify Grudem’s argument regarding the specific language the author used.

While I think Mathewson’s thesis in this regard is viable, though, I find his conclusion faulty when he sides with the false-believer view. He claims that, “in analogy to the old covenant community the people depicted in 6:4-6 are *not genuine believers* or true members of the new covenant community” (224, [emphasis in original]). But if 6:4-6 is functioning as the rest of the warning passages, then the experience it describes *must* be that of believers. Mathewson rightly notes (223) that the argument in 6:4-6 is implicitly

Hebrews 6:7-12 is “the most relevant context,” Grudem claims, for understanding the terms in 6:4-6.<sup>133</sup> He insists that the metaphor of the field in 6:7-8 substantiates his interpretation. The nature of the ground was uncertain until it received rain. The subsequent thorns revealed that the land “had been bad land all along.” The difference lies “not in the kinds of events experienced but in the kinds of ground the rain fell on.”<sup>134</sup> But, again, Grudem has had to read this into the text. The focus of the metaphor is not the *kind* of ground it had been “all along” but upon the *response* to the abundant rain. Does it yield useful vegetation or worthless thorns? It is a picture warning Christians against rejecting God’s salvation—not a picture warning false Christians against rejecting a *message* of salvation.

Though 6:7-8 can be understood as picturing two different converts—those bearing good fruit (faithful believers) and those bearing bad (apostates)—the illustration can equally be understood to say the same land once produced useful vegetation and subsequently yields thorns. Grudem claims this latter interpretation “is not compatible” with the illustration for two reasons: “(1) There is no indication of good fruit-bearing before falling away, so this view is simply speculation with no data to support it. (2) The author uses present participles to indicate a continuous process of bearing.”<sup>135</sup> However, Grudem’s first reason is without warrant. To borrow from his own argumentation, the illustration does not *necessarily* picture two different tracts of land. It is not “speculation”

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*a fortiori*, just like the arguments in the previous warnings in 2:1-4 and 3:7-4:13 (see also 10:28-29 and 12:25 in the final two warnings). However, in the other *a fortiori* warnings, the admonition to persevere is delivered to the audience *as believers* who have had an experience superior to those under the old covenant. The author argues throughout the letter, “If those who experienced the blessings under the old covenant perished because of unfaithful disobedience, how much more will this be true of those who experience the blessings of the new covenant and then reject it?” Thus, if 6:4-6 is working similarly, the fact that the wilderness generation proved to be unbelievers (cf. 3:19) does not imply that 6:4-6 describes unbelievers. Consistency with the other warnings would imply just the opposite.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid., 152 n. 46.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid., 155-56.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid., 156.



to argue that the grammar of verses 7-8 can be read as depicting one piece of land first bearing fruit and then thorns.<sup>136</sup> With respect to the participles, their present tense form in no way requires that they be understood as describing a continuous process, and such is unlikely. Grudem offers no contextual support for continual action, and I am aware of no Hebrews commentator who makes anything of the participle tenses in these verses.

Grudem thinks that when the author speaks of his confidence of “better things” for the readers in 6:9 this does not mean better than the judgment of 6:8 but rather better than the good experiences of 6:4-5. These experiences, though “good,” are not the “better things” that belong to salvation, “such as love, service, faith, and hope that he mentions in verses 10-12.”<sup>137</sup> Many interpreters, however, explicitly argue that the “better things” in 6:9 refer to the fruitful land of 6:7 in contrast to the worthless land of 6:8.<sup>138</sup> Grudem’s argument and support are forced and unconvincing.<sup>139</sup> Again, I am aware of no Hebrews

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<sup>136</sup>This is exactly the reading of, e.g., Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 326; Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Hebrews, James and Jude* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 218-19; France, who writes, “At first the land benefits . . . and so it shares in God’s blessing; but then it changes and instead produces thorns and thistles” (*Hebrews*, 83); and Gareth L. Cockerill, who writes, “It is important to note that there is really only one soil in this passage. In verse 7 this soil is described by two attributive participial phrases . . . . The conditional participle of verse 8, however, implies, ‘What if this very same soil brings forth weeds and thistles?’” (“A Wesleyan Arminian View” in *Four Views of the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, 277).

Grudem writes, “Though grammatically the same word, ‘ground’ (*gē*), is referred to in verses 7 and 8, the ‘but’ (*de*) and the conditional sense of the participle in verse 8 (“but if it bears thorns and thistles. . .”) show that the author is not thinking of the same piece of land at all, for he clearly thinks of two distinct possibilities for two very different grounds” (“Perseverance of the Saints,” 155). Yet this does not follow. There is no inherent reason why the “but” and the conditional participle *require* the author to be speaking of two different pieces of ground.

<sup>137</sup>Grudem, “Perseverance of the Saints,” 158-59.

<sup>138</sup>See, e.g., Albert Vanhoye, *La structure littéraire de l’Épître aux Hébreux* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1963), 119-20; David G. Peterson, “The Situation of the ‘Hebrews’ (5:11-6:12),” *RTR* 35 (1976): 20-21; Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 144; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 174; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 329; Koester, *Hebrews*, 324; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 230-31.

<sup>139</sup>Fanning (who shares Grudem’s overall understanding of the warnings) concurs in finding Grudem’s argument unpersuasive that the “better things” of 6:9 contrast with the experiences of 6:4-5 (“A Classical Reformed View,” 193 n. 46).

commentator who contends for this interpretation, nor does Grudem cite any authors in support. The natural contrast to the “better things” of 6:9 is the cursed ground in 6:8.

I conclude my response to Grudem with a consideration of his view of 10:29 in which the author speaks of the apostate and the blood of the covenant “by which he was sanctified.”<sup>140</sup> Grudem cites several NT texts to support a “nonsaving” meaning for *ἀγιάζω*. One of these occurrences is found at Hebrews 9:13, which speaks of the mere external cleansing afforded by the animal sacrifices of the old covenant. Yet, this is the sole use of the verb in Hebrews with this meaning. The other five instances in Hebrews outside of 10:29 (2:11 [x2]; 10:10, 14; 13:12) all refer to the definitive sanctification that comes through the new covenant sacrifice of Christ (see chapter 2 of this dissertation for discussion).<sup>141</sup> The sanctification in 10:29 is clearly a result of Christ’s new covenant sacrifice, not old covenant animal sacrifices, so a “ceremonial” sanctification is entirely inconsistent. Grudem insists that, since a “ceremonial focus pervades the context [of Heb 9:1-10:39], a ceremonial sense of ‘sanctify’ would be appropriate in 10:29.” But what pervades the context of Hebrews 9:1-10:39 is the superiority and efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice to those of the old covenant.<sup>142</sup> In particular, 10:10 and 10:14 use *ἀγιάζω* to describe how Christ has sanctified his people by the offering of his body. It is this

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<sup>140</sup>In spite of his position on the warnings, Fanning admits that 6:4-5 and 10:29 are still problematic, since they seem to describe genuine Christian experience. His answer is to understand the writer as “portraying the *phenomena* of their conversion, what their Christian experience looks like outwardly,” in order “to emphasize how close they have been to the faith and what they are rejecting if they depart” (“A Classical Reformed View,” 217). However, it is difficult to see how the language of 10:29—“the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified”—can be viewed as describing a false believer’s *outward* experience. Fanning acknowledges that 10:29 “is a more difficult reference for me” (“A Classical Reformed View,” 217).

<sup>141</sup>“The verb *hagiazein* . . . is consistently employed in Hebrews to describe the consecration of believers through the death of Christ. We have been decisively and definitively cleansed and sanctified” (David Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995], 74).

<sup>142</sup>“Grudem, by relegating the sanctification in Hebrews 10:29 to ceremonial sanctification, actually contravenes one of the major themes of Hebrews, namely, what was anticipated in shadowy form in the Old Testament has now become a reality in and through the sacrifice of Christ” (Schreiner, “Perseverance and Assurance,” 50).

sacrificial offering that the author has in mind when he speaks of the “blood of the [new] covenant by which he is sanctified” in 10:29. The author’s usage of sanctification language in the context and the flow of the argument make it extremely implausible that he means anything other than the definitive sanctification of 10:10 and 10:14.<sup>143</sup>

Arguing from the more immediate context of 10:29, Grudem points to the “new and living way” (10:20) by which believers can “enter the sanctuary” (10:19), and “draw near” (10:22). But the author “knows that some may fall away, even though *they assemble with the congregation of believers.*” So he exhorts them not to neglect meeting together (10:25) in light of the warning in 10:26. “In such a context,” Grudem writes,

It is appropriate to understand “profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified” to mean “*by which he was given the privilege of coming before God with the congregation of God’s people.*” In this sense, the blood of Christ opened up a new way of access to God for the congregation—it “sanctified” them in a parallel to the Old Testament ceremonial sense—and this person, by associating with the congregation, was also “sanctified” in that sense: He or she had the privilege of coming before God in worship.<sup>144</sup>

But I contend that Grudem’s understanding is neither “appropriate” nor exegetically viable. The “new way” opened by this great high priest’s blood provides access to the holy place *only* for those who have a true heart and a cleansed conscience by means of his sacrifice (10:20-22). The congregation for whom access to God is available consists *only* of those new covenant members whose sins are forgiven and who have God’s laws written on their hearts and minds—*all* of whom know the Lord (8:10-12). Those sanctified once and for all by Jesus Christ’s sacrifice are perfected forever (10:10, 14). Therefore, according to Hebrews, there is no sense in which any false converts who may

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<sup>143</sup>Schreiner’s contention that “Grudem has rigged the categories so that those described in Hebrews 6:4-6 and 10:26-29 are excluded as genuine Christians” (ibid., 49) seems further substantiated when one observes that, among Grudem’s eighteen “descriptions [from Hebrews] of what God has done in the lives of those who are saved” (Grudem, “Perseverance of the Saints,” 162 and ff.), Grudem does not include that believers are *sanctified*—in spite of the author’s repetition of this significant soteriological reality (2:11; 10:10,14; 13:12). The problem with including it as a descriptor of Christians, of course, is that it also describes the apostates in 10:29.

<sup>144</sup>Grudem, “Perseverance of the Saints,” 177-78 (emphasis in original).

be present among the readers have been sanctified merely by “associating with the congregation.” The author’s argument leaves no room for a “sanctification” through Christ’s blood that gives *unbelievers* the “privilege of coming before God in worship.”<sup>145</sup>

Concerning the argument of Fanning, et al., about the conditionals in 3:6, 14, let me offer the following five responses. First, I find that Fanning’s attempt to identify the protases of C/E relationships as “contextually specific” events and the protases of E/I relationships as “customary” conditions or “broadly characteristic” actions fails to satisfactorily convince—based on the examples he cites. It is not at all clear that the linguistic pattern is valid. Therefore, the argument that the conditionals in 3:6 and 3:14 display E/I relationships because their protases involve “broad, characteristic” actions does not necessarily follow. For, some of Fanning’s C/E examples *also* appear to involve “broad, characteristic” actions.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup>Others who hold a version of the false-believer view have offered various explanations for 10:29. Nicole argues that the relative pronoun in the phrase ἐν ᾧ ἡγιασθη (“by which he was sanctified”) may grammatically refer to Christ. Presumably, he means it may refer to “the Son of God” of the preceding phrase (“Some Comments on Hebrews 6:4-6,” 356 n. 1). Yet, in Hebrews, Jesus is the one who sanctifies believers (particularly in the immediate context); he is never himself sanctified.

Hughes says Christ’s blood *sanctifies* the believer—that is, “his defilement is removed . . . he is made acceptable to God; his conscience is purified . . . he is set apart for the holy calling of serving the living God.” The apostate spoken of in 10:29 partook of “the communion cup,” which “is the new covenant in his blood” (*Hebrews*, 423). Thus, Hughes claims, “profaning the blood of the covenant” is related to this sacrament (424). By seceding from the community, the apostate shows that his faith was “not genuine” and he “has profaned” the blood of Jesus. “The blood which made it possible for him to enter the sphere of God’s holiness he has treated as a thing unholy, thus completely contradicting the profession he had formerly made” (423). However, nothing in the context indicates that the author has communion in view when he speaks of the blood of the covenant. Moreover, the blood of Christ does not enable unbelievers to enter “the sphere of God’s holiness.” Only believers with true hearts and cleansed consciences have boldness to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus (10:12-22).

G. Guthrie translates the phrase impersonally: “by which one is sanctified” (*Hebrews*, 230). As Guthrie argues, this option is grammatically “feasible”; however, it is not at all contextually probable. It is more natural to understand the relative pronoun as referring to the apostate identified by the three substantive participles in the same verse: ὁ . . . καταπατήσας . . . ἡγησάμενος . . . ἐνυβρίσας (“the one who tramples . . . regards . . . mocks”). This is what makes the subordinate clause so potent and shocking: the apostate who has been sanctified by Christ’s blood now regards that same blood as profane and worthless. It “disturbs the general parallelism of the verse and is powerful rhetorically” (O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 379).

<sup>146</sup>See *ibid.*, 211-12. Even Wilson, who generally follows Fanning, does not find all of Fanning’s examples persuasive (“Hebrews 3:6b and 3:14 Revisited,” 259-60). As an example, consider Rom 14:23, which Fanning claims displays a C/E relationship: “The one who has doubts is condemned if he eats.” Even though it does seem to reflect a C/E relationship, in context, Paul is speaking generally and does not have a specific individual in mind. This is in clear contrast to the specificity of John 19:12 (“If you

Second, in a recent article discussing 3:6 and 3:14, Andrew J. Wilson, who generally agrees with Fanning’s argument, observes that several of Fanning’s E/I examples (Wilson lists Lev 13:37 and Ezek 14:9) have a perfect verb in the apodosis and a present situation described in the protasis—just like Hebrews 3:14. Given this pattern, “and in light of the fact that *no* C-E relationship in the LXX or New Testament contains a perfect active in the apodosis when the protasis speaks of a present situation,” one should understand Hebrews 3:14 as an E-I relationship also.<sup>147</sup> However, Wilson is simply incorrect. One of Fanning’s C/E examples, Job 21:6, displays the “effect” in the apodosis with a *perfect active* indicative (ἐσπούδακα). Moreover, three more of Fanning’s C/E examples contain a *perfect middle or passive* verb in the apodosis (Ezek 33:9; Rom 7:2; 14:23). In each of these four examples, the protasis speaks of a “present situation.”<sup>148</sup>

Third, Fanning, Carson, Grudem, Thomas, and Wilson all highlight the perfect tense-form in 3:14 (the verb in 3:6 is ἐσμεν). They argue that the perseverance of believers (“if we hold fast”) displays the evidence of something that has taken place in the past: they “have become” (γεγόναμεν) partakers of Christ.<sup>149</sup> However, as just

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release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend”)—which Fanning places in the same category. It is hard to see how Rom 14:23 is any less “broadly characteristic” than Lev 13:51 (“If the infection spreads in the garment . . . the infection is a malignant leprosy”), an example in the E/I category. Of the twelve examples Fanning lists on 211-12 (and in note 86), I find at least *eight* to be questionable examples of “specific events”: Lev 19:7; Ezek 33:9; Rom 7:2, 3; 14:23; 1 Cor 7:39; 1 John 1:9; 4:20. Fanning admits to four “counterexamples” in each category (see 211 n. 86, 212 n. 87), but it seems the number of counterexamples could easily be enlarged, throwing his pattern into question. Daniel Wallace identifies the use of the perfect in Rom 7:2 (κατήγγηται) as “gnomic”—i.e., “a generic or proverbial occurrence” (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 580-81).

<sup>147</sup>Wilson, “Hebrews 3:6b and 3:14 Revisited,” 260 (emphasis added).

<sup>148</sup>By “present situation,” Wilson appears to mean, not that the verb is present tense in form, but that the “evidence” in the protasis is present at the time one derives the “inference” from the apodosis. In the two examples Wilson cites (Lev 13:37; Ezek 14:9), the “present situation” in the protases are aorist active subjunctive verbs (ibid.). In the four C/E examples cited above, one can likewise argue that the “cause” in the protasis is present at the time of the “effect” of the apodosis.

<sup>149</sup>See Fanning, “A Classical Reformed View,” 215; Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 84-85; Grudem, “Perseverance of the Saints,” 175; Thomas, *A Case for Mixed-Audience*, 186-87; Wilson, “Hebrews 3:6b and 3:14 Revisited,” 255-58.

observed, four of Fanning’s C/E conditionals have a perfect indicative tense-form expressing the “effect” of the apodosis. Since the apodosis of a C/E relation refers to something *future* from and caused by the event of the protasis,<sup>150</sup> these examples show it is not out of the question for a C/E conditional with a perfect indicative form in the apodosis to have a future orientation.<sup>151</sup> Describing the “proleptic (futuristic) perfect,” Daniel Wallace writes, “This usage occurs *in the apodosis of a conditional clause* (either explicit or implicit) *and depends on the time of the verb in the protosis.*”<sup>152</sup> Fanning claims that, since the conditions in 3:6 and 3:14 are in inverted order, “the indicative tenses of the apodoses are more likely to carry their normal temporal sense (time portrayed relative to the time of speaking) without being affected by any time frame set by the protasis.”<sup>153</sup> However, he offers no examples to substantiate this claim. Finally, one should be very cautious about making temporal inferences based solely on the perfect tense-form, in light of the current intense debate over verbal aspect.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>150</sup>Fanning, “A Classical Reformed View,” 211.

<sup>151</sup>Note the criticism of Wilson that Schreiner and Caneday (*The Race Set before Us*, 201) provide “no examples of this phenomenon in Koine Greek” (“Hebrews 3:6b and 3:14 Revisited,” 257).

<sup>152</sup>Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 581 (emphasis added).

<sup>153</sup>Fanning, “A Classical Reformed View,” 215.

<sup>154</sup>Regarding the perfect tense-form in particular, Constantine Campbell claims it is “unquestionably one of the most controversial and difficult facets of the Greek verbal system. There exists little agreement among scholars as to both the temporal reference and aspectual qualities of the perfect . . . . As for temporal reference, the perfect has been described variously as a present tense, a past tense, a past-with-present-consequences tense, and a non-tense” (*Verbal Aspect, the Indicative Mood, and Narrative: Soundings in the Greek of the New Testament* [New York: Peter Lang, 2007], 161).

Stanley Porter, in keeping with his view that tense-forms grammaticalize only aspect and not time, claims that the perfect in 3:14 is “timeless” (*Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood* [New York: Peter Lang, 1989], 269). On the other hand, Campbell critiques Porter’s view of the perfect (as well as the views of K. L. McKay and Buist Fanning) and offers his own perspective (*Verbal Aspect, the Indicative Mood, and Narrative: Soundings in the Greek of the New Testament* [New York: Peter Lang, 2007], 161-211). Yet, Campbell agrees with Porter that temporal reference is not semantically encoded in a verb’s tense-form (See his *Basics of Verbal Aspect in Biblical Greek* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008], 22-24).

Fourth, as Schreiner observes, “The major problem with Fanning’s view is that the other conditional statements in Hebrews are prospective, and thus it is quite unlikely that the conditions in Heb. 3:6 and 3:14 would function differently from the other conditions in the letter.”<sup>155</sup> Moreover, these two conditionals bracket the example of the wilderness generation from Psalm 95 (Heb 3:7-11) and the author’s warning to the readers not to have “an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God” (3:12). As part of a passage whose intent is to exhort the readers to avoid apostasy and persevere, it seems more likely that 3:6 and 3:14 are doing the same.<sup>156</sup> Given the overall orientation of Hebrews, it seems unlikely that these two conditional sentences are used by the author to provide “an interpretive paradigm,” “a framework of thought,” or “the pattern for making sense of the warnings,” as Fanning argues.<sup>157</sup>

Fifth, in the end, though, whatever view one takes of the conditionals in 3:6 and 3:14, it does not significantly affect the view of the warnings I will advocate in this chapter. While I think it more likely that these conditionals present “a contingent situation in which the apodosis is fulfilled if the protosis is fulfilled,”<sup>158</sup> the means-of-

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<sup>155</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize: Perseverance in the New Testament* (Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2009), 96 n. 8.

<sup>156</sup>See also the responses of Grant Osborne and Gareth Cockerill to Fanning regarding the conditionals in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, 231, 242-44.

<sup>157</sup>Fanning, “A Classical Reformed View,” 206. Responding to Fanning, Cockerill writes, “Can a particular interpretation of two conditional clauses overturn the weight of evidence?” (*Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, 243). Responding to Thomas (*A Case for Mixed-Audience*, 182-89) who follows Fanning’s view of the conditionals, Oropeza observes, “A number of scholarly studies in recent years structure the entire message of Hebrews, and none of them regard 3.6 or 3.14 as the central thesis for the letter/homily . . . and this raises doubts that the writer of Hebrews would consider these verses to be the foundation for interpreting the warnings” (“The Warning Passages in Hebrews,” 84). Elsewhere Oropeza argues that 3:6 and 3:14 should be interpreted in light of the larger context of Heb 3-4 and the warning against apostasy. “Conversely, there is no reason for us to read the multiple warnings throughout this homily in light of a highly debatable interpretation of 3:6 and 14” (*Churches under Siege*, 26). “There is no compelling basis for why these verses should be the foundation for interpreting the warnings in Hebrews when they never function as the thesis nor the first, last, or most extensive argument of the homily and/or its warnings” (*ibid.*, 26 n. 112).

<sup>158</sup>Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize*, 96 n. 8.

salvation view reaches the same conclusion as the false-believer view—that is, believers will persevere.<sup>159</sup>

I conclude, then, that the false-believer view—like the loss-of-rewards view—is an improbable reading of Hebrews in general and the warnings in particular.<sup>160</sup> Having said that, this does not mean there were no false believers in the Christian communities. It is indeed quite likely that the author of Hebrews was dealing with a “mixed audience,” as some advocates of the false-believer view call it. Such an audience no doubt included some who professed faith in Christ and associated with the church, but who would prove to be unbelievers (see discussion below under the means-of-salvation view). As Schreiner states, “The NT authors, after all, did not know in advance who in the churches were inauthentic. They were not given infallible knowledge about the spiritual state of their readers.”<sup>161</sup> The point, though, in my critique of the false-believer view is that the author of Hebrews is not addressing and describing pseudo-believers in the warnings of his letter. His admonishments are intended for believers and portray (e.g., 6:4-5) genuine Christian conversion.

At one point in his essay, Grudem observes a stark disparity between the view that those in 6:4-6 are believers and the author’s affirmation in 6:9. He contends,

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<sup>159</sup>That one’s view of the conditionals does not necessarily affect one’s view of the warnings is evident from the fact that Wilson, who follows Fanning, et al., regarding the conditionals, agrees with the overall perspective of Schreiner and Caneday on the warning passages (See “Hebrews 3:6b and 3:14 Revisited,” 265-67).

<sup>160</sup>France insists that the false-believer view “is not a plausible reading of the words the author uses [in 6:4-5]. Moreover, the point of this passage in context is that it relates in some way to the author’s concern for his readers, and the letter as a whole makes it clear he is writing to those who both in their own view and in his are genuine Christians, however immature and vulnerable. He is calling them not to initial conversion but to fuller discipleship” (*Hebrews*, 84). Elsewhere France contends, “If it were not for the difficulty many readers find in the concept of ‘real Christians’ falling away, no one would ever have doubted this is what our author is talking about” (*ibid.*, 83). Similarly, McKnight: “One suspects that if the “fall away” participle [in Heb 6:6] were not present a completely different reading of these descriptions would result” (“The Warning Passages of Hebrews,” 48 n. 104).

<sup>161</sup>Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize*, 115.



If the author had meant to say that the people mentioned in verses 4-6 were truly saved, then it is very difficult to understand why he would say in verse 9 that he is convinced of better things for his readers, that is, things that belong to salvation. *In writing this he shows that the people that he speaks of in verses 4-6, while they had many blessings, did not have salvation.*<sup>162</sup>

Similar to Gleason above, Grudem cannot see how the author's confidence and assurance of his readers can fit alongside warnings to these same readers to avoid apostasy. Gleason resolves the conflict by arguing that the sin is not apostasy. Grudem resolves it by arguing that those warned are not believers.<sup>163</sup> Yet a better interpretation of the warnings will not require us to choose between the two.

### **Loss-of-Salvation View**

As mentioned in chapter 1, this position describes most Hebrews commentators. The majority view is that the author is warning believers to avoid the sin of apostasy, and the consequence for such deliberate rejection of Christ's sacrifice is eternal judgment for Christian apostates. Recent advocates of the loss-of-salvation view include Scot McKnight, Gareth Cockerill, and Grant Osborne.<sup>164</sup>

One of McKnight's significant contributions to the study of the warnings in Hebrews (acknowledged even by those who disagree with him) is his "synthetic" examination of them—that is, considering the form of all five warnings together and observing their common components: the audience, the sin, the exhortation, and the consequences of the sin.<sup>165</sup> McKnight rightly argues that an examination of all the warning passages helps shed light on the controversial warning in 6:4-6. Considering

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<sup>162</sup>Grudem, "Perseverance of the Saints," 159 (emphasis in original).

<sup>163</sup>"[A]t some point every Christian must attempt to formulate a synthesis in which all relevant biblical passages are understood in a way that yields a consistent formulation" (Grudem, "Perseverance of the Saints," 180 n. 94).

<sup>164</sup>McKnight, "The Warning Passages of Hebrews," 21-59; Cockerill, "A Wesleyan Arminian View," 257-92; Grant R. Osborne, "A Classical Arminian View" in *Four Views of the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, 86-128.

<sup>165</sup>See McKnight, "The Warning Passages of Hebrews," 25 and ff.

each component across the warnings grants a more complete picture of the author's meaning.<sup>166</sup> His synthetic appraisal makes it very difficult to conclude that the author is *not* warning Christians to avoid the sin of apostasy lest they be damned.<sup>167</sup> From his analysis, McKnight concludes that “phenomenological believers can lose their faith and forfeit final, eternal salvation.”<sup>168</sup>

At this point, I will neither defend nor critique this view, for I have already done both. In my challenge of the two previous views above, I implicitly defended the loss-of-salvation reading—that Hebrews warns believers not to commit apostasy—as the most exegetically satisfying. Nevertheless, the ultimate conclusion of this view—that the warnings necessarily imply that Christians can commit apostasy—conflicts with the findings of the previous two chapters. In other words, though the majority of interpreters correctly argue that the author warns believers in Christ not to reject him for fear of divine judgment, it does not necessarily follow that believers can actually apostatize. For this clashes with the strong basis in Hebrews for Christian assurance of salvation, grounded in the following: the fulfillment of the new covenant promises in the believer's life, the intent of the new covenant to remedy the problem of apostasy in members of the old covenant, the immutability of God's promise to bless believers, the certainty of the Christian hope, etc. (see chapters 2 and 3).

What is needed then is a reading of the warnings that will best integrate them with the themes in Hebrews that ground Christian assurance. Such a reading will demonstrate the compatibility of the tensions in the letter.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>166</sup>Ibid., 26-27.

<sup>167</sup>See *ibid.*, 27-48.

<sup>168</sup>Ibid., 24 (cf. 58). McKnight argues that “this ‘phenomenological’ faith is all that humans can experience in the present order of things; some of these believers persevere unto eternal life and others will not and so will be condemned” (24 n. 12).

<sup>169</sup>One other recent and unique reading of the warnings must be mentioned: Martin Emmrich's “Hebrews 6:4-6—Again! (A Pneumatological Inquiry).” Emmrich follows Mathewson (“Reading Heb 6:4-6 in Light of the Old Testament”) and others who argue the experience of the wilderness generation serves

## The Warnings as a Means of Salvation

### Explanation of the Means-of-Salvation View

The view I will defend as most satisfying is called the “means of salvation view.”<sup>170</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner and Ardel B. Caneday have presented the most recent and sustained articulation of this model for understanding biblical warnings.<sup>171</sup> This view

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as the typological background to the warning in Heb 6:4-6 (83-87). However, he believes Mathewson introduces artificial categories to Hebrews when he speaks of “true/false believers” (though he acknowledges this distinction is found in the NT) (87-88). The readers in Hebrews are “*believers* because (or as long as) they are *pilgrims*.” There is no distinction—unless they separate themselves from the community. Emmrich insists that this does not “impinge upon the doctrines ‘irresistible grace’ or ‘sovereign election’,” for the author does not have a *divine perspective* but a *pastoral perspective*, not knowing the “ultimate spiritual condition” of his addressees. According to Heb 6:4-6, what they have experienced thus far are the “*realized blessings* of the eschaton.” Yet these are “provisional” since “salvation” is “yet to be gained” (89, also n. 27). Thus, “all of the blessings enumerated in Heb 6:4-6—including the gift of the Spirit—can be forfeited under the conditions discussed so far. The gift of *πνεῦμα*, therefore, does not appear to be final . . . . Consequently if a (former) member of the community has apostatized . . . there is no more ground for any continuing salvific work of the Spirit” (90). Concluding his article, he writes, “If they refuse to stay the course, the gift of the Spirit will be irrevocably lost” (94).

What is unique about Emmrich’s interpretation is he does not appear to affirm the loss-of-salvation view, in spite of his understanding that members may lose the gift of the Spirit if they apostatize. For he seems to affirm the doctrine of election (note also, the article appeared in *WTJ*). However, the “realized” blessings of the eschaton received by the community are provisional and not yet final, since salvation is yet to be gained. Therefore, Emmrich argues one can experience the salvific blessings of Heb 6:4-6 and yet lose the Holy Spirit through apostasy—*presumably*, because one was never part of the elect. My responses must be brief: (1) Emmrich maintains that the pilgrims in Hebrews can lose the Spirit by drawing an analogy to individuals in the OT who “lost” the Spirit (90). However, he does not adequately address *φωτισθέντας* in Heb 6:4. Though he identifies the pillar of light as the background experienced by the wilderness generation, he does not indicate how this applies to the addressees of Hebrews. As argued above, the most likely meaning of *φωτισθέντας* is Christian conversion. But how could such an “enlightening” be lost? (2) Emmrich’s efforts to account for community members losing the Spirit ultimately fall short. Regardless of the loss of the Spirit in the OT (Emmrich cites, e.g., Saul, Samson, and the departure of the glory from the temple in Ezekiel; see 90, also n. 30), reception of the Spirit in the NT is the *sine qua non* of new spiritual life. Believers are by definition those who receive and walk by the Spirit (cf. Carson, “Reflections on Christian Assurance,” 11-12). Emmrich’s view appears to place an unjustified distinction between the elect and those who receive the eschatological new covenant gifts. In other words, it seems (for Emmrich) the elect experience the new covenant gifts, but not everyone who experiences the new covenant gifts is part of the elect. Cf. the critique in chap. 2 of this dissertation of Richard L. Pratt Jr. (“Infant Baptism in the New Covenant,” in *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, ed. G. Strawbridge [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003], 156-74) regarding breaking the new covenant. A more viable view of the warnings will not require one to conclude that new covenant members can commit apostasy.

<sup>170</sup>This is the title given by Schreiner in “Perseverance and Assurance,” 52.

<sup>171</sup>See Schreiner, “Perseverance and Assurance”; Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*; Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize*; Thomas R. Schreiner, “Warning and Assurance: Run the Race to the End,” in *The Perfect Saviour: Key Themes in Hebrews*, ed. Jonathan Griffiths (Nottingham, UK: InterVarsity, 2012), 89-106.

contends that the warning passages of the NT “are addressed to *believers*, and they are threatened with eternal destruction (not loss of rewards) if they commit apostasy.” However, genuine believers will not apostatize.<sup>172</sup> Schreiner and Caneday confess that the view is not original with them; it “has been expressed clearly in prior generations but not recently.”<sup>173</sup> (See Appendix 1 of this dissertation for examples of past interpreters who have viewed the biblical warnings in general, and those in Hebrews in particular, as a divine means of salvation for God’s people.)

According to the broad NT witness, believers in Jesus—both new converts and experienced Christians—are never instructed that they will inherit the kingdom of God regardless of their actions. Rather, apostolic teaching regularly includes exhortations to persevere in order to obtain eternal life.<sup>174</sup> This is no denial that Christians now possess eternal life. Instead it is an acknowledgment that the NT presents salvation with both present and future dimensions. This “already-but-not-yet character of salvation” is a reality because the cross and resurrection of Christ “constitute the invasion of God’s end-time work into the present age.”<sup>175</sup> While Hebrews *primarily* presents salvation as a future reward,<sup>176</sup> the letter also clearly reflects the “inaugurated eschatology” of the rest of the NT.<sup>177</sup> According to the NT, the gift of salvation is a present possession of

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<sup>172</sup>Schreiner, “Perseverance and Assurance,” 52 (emphasis in original). Schreiner and Caneday do not concentrate solely on Hebrews but argue their case from a broad selection of NT texts. So, while they discuss texts in Hebrews that promote assurance and critique alternative interpretations of the warnings in Hebrews, they do not engage in as detailed and focused an analysis as I have attempted in chaps. 2-4.

<sup>173</sup>Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*, 14.

<sup>174</sup>Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize*, 15-23.

<sup>175</sup>Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*, 47.

<sup>176</sup>McKnight, “The Warning Passages of Hebrews,” 55-56; Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*, 199.

<sup>177</sup>On the present and future aspects of eschatology in Hebrews, see, e.g., Barrett, “The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” 363-93; Lincoln, “Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament,” 197-220; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 76-77; Koester, *Hebrews*, 100-04; Scott D. Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen

believers because they have received God’s Holy Spirit who is the pledge of their redemption—the future fulfillment of which they yet await. Viewing God’s promises and warnings through the already-but-not-yet orientation of the NT is, therefore, essential.<sup>178</sup> Apostolic authors use a variety of metaphors to describe the one “prize” of eschatological life in the kingdom of God, but all of them have a present and future dimension—that is, each metaphor indicates that salvation has been inaugurated but not yet consummated.<sup>179</sup> How does one obtain the prize of salvation? Of course, the redemptive work of Jesus Christ is the *objective* basis of salvation. But the *subjective* means of salvation is the individual exercise of faith in Christ. To finally receive eternal life, Christians must persevere in faith to the end; they must “run the race.”<sup>180</sup> As with salvation, the NT also uses a variety of metaphors to describe the complexities of faith. Together they demonstrate that faith is a gift received from God but also an action that one must exert.<sup>181</sup>

To provoke and encourage faith, NT authors employ both conditional promises and warnings. God’s promises assure eternal life, on the condition that one believes in Jesus. God’s warnings threaten eternal judgment, on the condition that one falls into unbelief. These two are not opposed to one another but are complementary, both elaborating on the initial call to believe the gospel. Promises and warnings function together, eliciting a faith in God that perseveres.<sup>182</sup> “[T]he warnings serve the promises,

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Testament (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 6.

<sup>178</sup>Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*, 143-44.

<sup>179</sup>See *ibid.*, 46-86.

<sup>180</sup>*Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>181</sup>*Ibid.*, 100-41.

<sup>182</sup>*Ibid.*, 40-43.

for the warnings urge belief and confidence in God’s promises. Biblical warnings and admonitions are the means God uses to save and preserve his people to the end.”<sup>183</sup>

While the warnings of Hebrews are especially intense, such passages are not restricted to Hebrews but are found throughout the NT.<sup>184</sup> G. C. Berkouwer, who advocates the means-of-salvation view in his *Faith and Perseverance*, emphasizes the significant role of admonition in Scripture. “Final perseverance is set before believers as a goal coupled with warnings.”<sup>185</sup> Their function is to admonish the readers to persevere—not because they *have* fallen away—but so that they *will not*. “The warnings are *prospective*, not *retrospective*. They are like road signs that caution drivers of dangers ahead on the highway. They are written so that readers will heed the warnings and escape the consequences threatened.”<sup>186</sup> Given the severity of the warnings in Hebrews, it is no surprise that the future dimension of salvation is primary in the letter. The author does not use the warnings as retrospective declarations that certain individuals were never Christians in the first place. Instead he admonishes the readers to persevere to obtain final salvation, which is not yet consummated.<sup>187</sup> The purpose of the warnings in the NT in general and Hebrews in particular “is redemptive and salvific.”<sup>188</sup> They arouse believers from laziness (Heb 5:11; 6:12) and incite them to a healthy fear of God (Heb 4:1). Heeding them “is the means by which salvation is obtained on the final day.”<sup>189</sup> The

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<sup>183</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>184</sup>See the surveys of NT warnings in Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize*, 27-50; Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*, 147-204.

<sup>185</sup>G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Perseverance*, trans. Robert D. Knudsen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 84.

<sup>186</sup>Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize*, 50.

<sup>187</sup>For this critique of Grudem’s view of the warnings as retrospective, see Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*, 198-99.

<sup>188</sup>Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize*, 50.

<sup>189</sup>Schreiner, “Perseverance and Assurance,” 53.

warnings “draw our focus to the not-yet aspect of salvation without doing damage to the fact that believers already have salvation. Biblical admonitions and warnings link the already and the not yet.”<sup>190</sup>

Such a model enables one to integrate assurance and warning in Hebrews and make sense of the tensions in the letter. For the means-of-salvation view recognizes the warnings as genuine admonitions that believers must heed to be saved. But they are not intended to call assurance of salvation into question. Nowhere does Hebrews say that the readers *have fallen away*.<sup>191</sup> He warns them *lest they do* and urges them to continue in faith. “[T]he warnings do not quench assurance but are one of the means the Lord uses to strengthen it.”<sup>192</sup> Therefore, it is not inconsistent for the author of Hebrews to speak of the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Christ as bringing about the realization of the new covenant promises in the lives of his readers, while simultaneously warning them not to fall away from the living God. The heart transformation they have undergone ensures that they will

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<sup>190</sup>Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*, 16.

<sup>191</sup>See, e.g., Ellingworth who writes, “Nowhere does the author state that any of his readers has already fallen into apostasy.” He contends that 10:29 is “clearly generic” (*Hebrews*, 75, also n. 28). Westcott argues that the case presented in 6:4-6 is hypothetical—that is, the conditions of apostasy have not actually been fulfilled (*Hebrews*, 167). Fanning claims the readers may be on the verge of danger, but they have not taken the frightening step described in the warnings. The author speaks of the failure as “*potential* rather than *actual*” (“A Classical Reformed View,” 206, [emphasis in original]). Hebrews 10:25 seems to be the only possible exception. It is “the strongest indication of the concrete problem that Hebrews as a whole is designed to address” (Attridge, *Hebrews*, 290). McKnight believes 10:25 suggests that some “had already abandoned Christianity” (“The Warning Passages of Hebrews,” 42). However, Fanning regards the actions in 10:25 as “a worrisome precursor—a sign of lethargy [which the author *does* accuse them of in 5:11]—rather than an indication of actual ‘falling away’” (“A Classical Reformed View,” 181 n. 17). William L. Lane calls it “a *prelude* to apostasy on the part of those who were separating themselves from the assembly (*Hebrews 9-13*, WBC [Dallas: Word, 1991], 290, [emphasis added]). The γάρ (“for”) beginning v. 26 demonstrates its connection to v. 25. The warning beginning in v. 26 seems to indicate that those who “deliberately and persistently abandon the fellowship of Christian believers are in danger . . . of abandoning the Lord himself!” (O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 371; cf. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 290-91; Hugh Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [London: Adam and Charles Black, 1964], 177).

<sup>192</sup>Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize*, 112. The author of Hebrews “does not wish to attack this boldness and assurance . . . This is not a disturbing and threatening of the assurance of salvation by setting the Hebrews over the abyss of an uncertain choice between alternatives. It is an admonition, whose purpose is to lead them to a more secure walk in the way of salvation” (Berkouwer, *Faith and Perseverance*, 119).

heed the warnings the author gives. Even though he admonishes them, he is “confident of better things” for them—things pertaining to salvation (Heb 6:9).<sup>193</sup>

The means-of-salvation view is, thus, distinguished from the other common views and avoids their weaknesses. In agreement with the loss-of-rewards view, the warnings are understood as directed to believers; however, what the author cautions them to avoid is apostasy, and the corresponding punishment is eternal damnation. The means-of-salvation view agrees with the false-believer view (which Schreiner and Caneday describe as the “tests-of-genuineness view”) on the identity of the sin and its consequences, but it sees the warnings as prospective admonitions to believers not retrospective descriptions of pseudo-believers. Finally, this view of the warnings concurs with the loss-of-salvation view that Hebrews urges its Christian readers not to fall away from God or they will experience eternal judgment. Yet it does not reach the same conclusion. Warnings to believers to avoid apostasy do not necessarily imply that they *can or will* apostatize.

Unfortunately, interaction with Schreiner and Caneday’s thesis has been minimal among those dealing with Hebrews, warnings, and/or assurance.<sup>194</sup> A few recent

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<sup>193</sup>To answer the question of the identity of those who *do* actually fall away, Schreiner and Caneday look to other NT passages that truly are *retrospective*, such as Matt 7:21-23; 1 Cor 11:19; 2 Tim 2:18; 1 John 2:19 (see Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*, 214-44; Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize*, 108-16). Speaking of 1 John 2:19, Schreiner writes, “Here is the retrospective view that is missing from the warnings. No one who is truly elect will ever fall away, for those who do apostatize reveal that they were never genuinely saved” (Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize*, 109). Is it possible that some of the readers of Hebrews ultimately left the faith? Yes. What if one were to ask the author about some who subsequently committed apostasy and failed to heed his warnings? “I think he would have said, ‘They are Esau in the midst of Jacobs (cf. Heb. 12:15-17). They were never truly part of God’s people’” (ibid., 116). But, again, this is very different from saying the warnings are not directed to God’s people.

<sup>194</sup>For example, in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews* (2007), Osborne and Fanning each briefly reference *The Race Set before Us*, but neither interacts with Schreiner and Caneday’s thesis. Robert Peterson omits the book in his article, “Apostasy in the Hebrews Warning Passages” (2008), and neither of the two major recent commentaries on Hebrews by O’Brien (2010) and Cockerill (2012) mentions *The Race Set before Us*. I found only one reference to *The Race Set before Us* in a footnote in B. J. Oropeza’s chapter on Hebrews in *Churches under Siege of Persecution and Assimilation: The General Epistles and Revelation*, vol. 3 of *Apostasy in the New Testament Communities* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012). However, there was no interaction with the book’s thesis and no mention of the book in his bibliography.



interpreters, though, have offered criticisms of the means-of-salvation view, and I now turn to consider these. While further articulation of what the view does and does not entail is necessary, I will do this in the context of responding to those who have been critical of it.

### **Criticisms of the Means-of-Salvation View**

I will now respond to several criticisms that have been directed at the means-of-salvation view, particularly as that view has been articulated in the works of Schreiner and Caneday.<sup>195</sup>

**The view makes final salvation dependent on perseverance and seems almost to advocate salvation by works.** In a review of *The Race Set before Us* by Schreiner and Caneday, Roy B. Zuck claims their view “comes dangerously close to salvation by works, and it fails to give absolute unqualified assurance of salvation for any believer.”<sup>196</sup> He labels their view as “double talk.” “How can the authors affirm that believers now have eternal life and yet say that if they do not persevere they will not receive eternal life.”<sup>197</sup> C. Adrian Thomas claims the problem stems from their treatment of the “conditional statements with respect to the ‘not-yet’ aspect of salvation.” While the “already” of salvation “seems secure, the ‘not yet’ seems insecure, and in fact, can only be secured by persevering to the end.” How then can Schreiner and Caneday claim, “The already in every instance guarantees the not yet”? Their insistence that God’s promise of

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<sup>195</sup>Two interpreters, Wilson (“Hebrews 3:6b and 3:14 Revisited”) and Thomas (*A Case for Mixed-Audience*), critique Schreiner and Caneday’s interpretation of the conditionals in 3:6 and 3:14. However, I have addressed the conditionals above under the false-believer view and, thus, do not address this issue in the following consideration of criticisms.

<sup>196</sup>Roy B. Zuck, Review of *The Race Set before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance* by Thomas R. Schreiner and Ardel B. Caneday, *BSac* 160 (2003): 243.

<sup>197</sup>*Ibid.*, 241.

eternal life is conditional is “confusing.”<sup>198</sup> Even though they point to the already-not-yet motif, “it is difficult to avoid being charged with teaching salvation by works.” For, while they insist that the already is secured, “to make the possession of final salvation (the effect) dependent upon perseverance . . . (the cause) seems to remove the security from the already.”<sup>199</sup> Kenneth Keathley agrees that Schreiner and Caneday’s proposal comes “dangerously close to a works-salvation position.”<sup>200</sup> David Allen insists, “[T]he forensic nature of justification is correctly affirmed in this view”; however, “it appears that final justification awaits the completion of a life of perseverance.” This is “contrary to Scripture.”<sup>201</sup>

Responding to detractors on this issue, Schreiner and Caneday insist that NT authors regularly speak of conditions for eternal life and, so, one must not work from a hermeneutic that assumes conditions are contrary to the gospel.<sup>202</sup> Rather, one must understand how the NT presents the gospel as both conditional and unconditional. While salvation is conditioned on perseverance, “election to salvation is unconditional.” The faith and good works necessary to persevere are produced by God’s electing grace. But we do not thereby ignore the biblical tension and the necessity of perseverance.<sup>203</sup> The

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<sup>198</sup>Thomas, *A Case for Mixed-Audience*, 82-83.

<sup>199</sup>*Ibid.*, 83 n. 293.

<sup>200</sup>Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 185.

<sup>201</sup>Allen, *Hebrews*, 374.

<sup>202</sup>Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*, 330. Advocates of the loss-of-rewards view argue that perseverance has no function regarding salvation but only for attaining rewards, because otherwise salvation would be based on works (see *ibid.*, 27-29). The hermeneutic employed by these interpreters requires that perseverance, *by definition*, have nothing to do with salvation. Therefore, “not yet” texts that seem to indicate otherwise are trumped by “already” texts—and the NT tension is lost.

<sup>203</sup>*Ibid.*, 331. Regarding the theme of election in Hebrews, McKnight insists, “election is simply not fundamental to our author’s theological constructions.” Yet he allows, “hints of divine sovereignty are perhaps to be glimpsed in 2:10-16; 3:3-4 and 6:1.” McKnight credits these references to David Peterson (McKnight, “The Warning Passages of Hebrews,” 24 n. 9). In contrast to this, Jason A. Whitlark contends, “Hebrews is rich with election themes” and proceeds to consider various election motifs in the letter (*Enabling Fidelity to God: Perseverance in Hebrews in Light of the Reciprocity Systems of the*

*unconditional* promise grounds the *conditional* promises and warnings in the grace of God, which precedes and creates faith and obedience, according to the NT witness (Eph 2:10).<sup>204</sup>

In *Run to Win the Prize*, Schreiner responds to criticisms of *The Race Set before Us*. Included is a chapter addressing the charge of “works-righteousness” in which he considers a broad selection of NT authors and texts and explains what is meant by works being *necessary* for salvation.<sup>205</sup> Works are necessary, not as the *basis* of salvation, but as the “fruit or evidence of faith.”<sup>206</sup> Therefore, “the call to perseverance . . . is a call to faith, not a call to work up the energy to make it to the end by our own strength.”<sup>207</sup> Our faith is not the *ground* or *basis* of our salvation; our faith is the *condition, means, or instrument* of salvation.<sup>208</sup> Warnings “function to extend the initial call of the gospel on throughout our lives.”<sup>209</sup> They are “a call to continue to believe.”<sup>210</sup> This is true of NT warnings in general and the warnings of Hebrews in particular. The author of Hebrews does not exhort his audience to salvation by works but to keep trusting Christ. His atonement is the only basis for forgiveness. For the author, to apostatize is to cease

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*Ancient Mediterranean World* [Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008], 148 ff.).

<sup>204</sup>Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*, 206. See also Schreiner, “Perseverance and Assurance,” 53.

<sup>205</sup>Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize*, 70-88.

<sup>206</sup>*Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>207</sup>*Ibid.*, 75. Upon seeing a pre-publication draft of *Run to Win the Prize*, Keathley (who was critical of *The Race Set before Us*) says Schreiner “clarifies his position and provides a helpful response to concerns expressed by me and others. Most helpful is his description of perseverance, which he defines as ‘persevering faith’—a definition with which I agree wholeheartedly” (*Salvation and Sovereignty*, 185 n. 75).

<sup>208</sup>Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize*, 107.

<sup>209</sup>Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*, 206.

<sup>210</sup>Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize*, 107. “The admonitions and warnings are simply to remain with Him and with the Church, which looks only to Christ for all things. All admonition appeals to this reality of faith” (Berkouwer, *Faith and Perseverance*, 109).

trusting in Christ's sacrifice for salvation.<sup>211</sup> For the one who abandons Christ, "there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins" (10:26).

Allen's criticism that their view is "contrary to Scripture" since "final justification" appears to await "the completion of a life of perseverance" does not cite specific page numbers from Schreiner and Caneday. I assume he refers to their discussion of the NT "already/not yet" tension and its application to justification. Schreiner and Caneday affirm that the vast majority of NT references indicate that justification is forensic and that this righteousness is a present gift. Yet it is also an "end-time gift and verdict." Texts like Galatians 5:5 demonstrate that Paul locates this gift of righteousness in the last day, even though he is confident of receiving it. Likewise, they argue that Paul in Romans 2:13 and 3:20 speaks of a future declaration of righteousness to be located on the day of judgment.<sup>212</sup> Given the pervasiveness of the "already/not yet" tension in the NT, Zuck's charge that their position is "double talk" seems less a criticism of their view than of the NT itself. At issue is not merely two different interpretations of NT texts but two different hermeneutical approaches to the NT.

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<sup>211</sup>Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize*, 82.

<sup>212</sup>Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*, 79-80. See also 187. In his commentary on Galatians, Schreiner writes on Gal 5:5, "The hope believers await *is* the final verdict of righteousness. Such a reading does not contradict the truth that believers are righteous now, nor should it be read as implying that justification is a process of renewal. Rather, the eschatological verdict differs from what God pronounces in history in that on the last day God's verdict is announced before the whole world" (*Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012], 316, [emphasis in original]). Elsewhere, Schreiner argues that all God's saving works "are eschatological gifts. The declaration that people are righteous during the present time indicates that God's end-time verdict has now been pronounced ahead of the last day, and it will be declared to the whole world on the day of judgment (cf. Rom. 5:1; 8:33-34; Gal. 5:5)" (*New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008], 30-31). G. K. Beale speaks of the "consummative aspect to believers' justification" which occurs at Christ's coming. He identifies three aspects of this "future justification": (1) "public demonstration of justification/vindication through final, bodily resurrection"; (2) "justification/vindication of the saints through public announcement before all the world"; and (3) "public demonstration to the entire cosmos of believers' justification/vindication through their good works" (*A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011], 903). Calvin writes concerning Gal 5:5, "[W]e look for the time when God will openly show that which is now hidden under hope" (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960], 1:591). Thus, Allen's suggestion that this view is "contrary to the Reformed theology of Schreiner and Caneday" (*Hebrews*, 374) is also unwarranted.

**If the passages are warning believers to avoid the reality of apostasy, they do not promote assurance but undermine it.** Thomas wonders how the warnings can complement the promises of God and inspire faith, “if the salvation already possessed by a believer can only be finally secured by heeding the warnings to persevere to the end.”<sup>213</sup> He finds it hard to imagine how a believer “can be assured of being eternally secured, when ‘eternal life is at stake’ in the warnings of Scripture.”<sup>214</sup> “From a purely experiential point of view,” Thomas contends, “the warnings of Scripture, rather than evoke faith and confidence in God’s promises, often evoke fear, trepidation, and insecurity in the believer. Otherwise, why have these passages caused so much concern among Christians?”<sup>215</sup>

Thomas’s contention that divine warnings to believers to beware apostasy conflict with divine promises rather than complement them is mistaken. Again, to quote Schreiner, a warning to persevere is “a call to faith, not a call to work up the energy to make it to the end by our own strength.”<sup>216</sup> Warnings urge believers to *continue* in belief. “It is not as if believers begin by trusting Christ and then the warnings summon them to trust in themselves and their good works.”<sup>217</sup> Just as the initial call of the gospel urges faith in Christ’s sacrifice to escape divine judgment and not in one’s own works, so the warnings of Hebrews admonish the readers to beware of an unbelieving heart (3:12), hold fast their confession in Christ (4:14), and trust that no other sacrifice can take away their sins (10:11-18, 26). Understood in this way, it is hard to see how the warnings fail to complement NT promises like 1 John 5:13, in which assurance of salvation is *conditioned*

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<sup>213</sup>Thomas, *A Case for Mixed-Audience*, 83.

<sup>214</sup>*Ibid.*, 83 n. 296, quoting Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*, 268.

<sup>215</sup>Thomas, *A Case for Mixed-Audience*, 82 n. 287.

<sup>216</sup>Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize*, 75.

<sup>217</sup>*Ibid.*, 107.

on faith: “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.”<sup>218</sup>

Thomas does not understand how believers can have assurance when Schreiner and Caneday insist that “eternal life is at stake” in the warnings. Clearly, according to Hebrews, assurance is integral to faith. In Hebrews 11, “faith necessarily involves assurance regarding the trustworthiness of God’s word.”<sup>219</sup> All of the OT heroes in this chapter actively expressed faith in concrete ways because they had confident assurance in the promises of God in spite of the improbability of those promises.<sup>220</sup> Yet, Schreiner and Caneday also rightly observe that the author of Hebrews “does not say, ‘You will be

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<sup>218</sup>Having questioned how warnings and promises can complement one another, Thomas then back-peddles: “There is probably indeed a complementary relationship between the promises and the warnings. But to explain this relationship in the sense that ‘warnings . . . function to extend the initial call of the gospel on throughout our lives . . . always pointing out the narrow pathway to salvation’ does not remove the possibility of apostasy from the gospel, despite the claim that warnings ensure faith in the gospel” (Thomas, *A Case for Mixed-Audience*, 83-83, quoting Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*, 206). Then, in a footnote, he again back-peddles from this last statement: “There may be some truth to the statement that warnings and admonitions ‘extend the initial call of the gospel.’ But part of the problem with this point is the way evangelicals have come to offer the initial call to faith in the gospel.” Thomas then proceeds to critique a particular view (which he attributes to Zane Hodges) and says, “[T]he initial call of the gospel is not an invitation to a single act of appropriation, but a call to an on-going faith-appropriation. Now this is not to say that a persevering faith is the effective cause of salvation or that one does not possess salvation until he perseveres to the end. This is actually the problem with the means-of-salvation view; it sets up a cause-effect relationship between perseverance and the final possession of salvation.” He concludes, “The warnings, then, are complementary to the promises in that whereas perseverance is evidence of salvation, the lack of perseverance is evidence of the absence of salvation” (Thomas, *A Case for Mixed-Audience*, 83-84 n. 297). In response to Thomas: (1) It is hard to escape the conclusion that Thomas does not really understand Schreiner and Caneday, who clearly state that believers will not apostatize, because the warnings ensure their perseverance. Furthermore, they would agree with his final statement just quoted that perseverance is evidence of salvation and a lack of perseverance is evidence of the absence of salvation. Where they would disagree is in identifying the warnings themselves as a necessary instrument in ensuring that perseverance. (2) Thomas’s back-peddling on his criticisms of Schreiner and Caneday ends with a critique of Zane Hodges’s view of a “single act of appropriation” of the gospel and Thomas’s affirmation of “a call to an on-going faith-appropriation.” Yet, Schreiner and Caneday clearly do not side with Hodges and repeatedly advocate the biblical requirement that believers persevere in faith. (3) Thomas says the actual problem with the means-of-salvation view is “it sets up a cause-effect relationship between perseverance and the final possession of salvation.” But the means-of-salvation view denies that perseverance in faith is the *ground* of salvation. “Faith is a condition for salvation and a means of salvation, but it cannot be construed as the *basis* of salvation but the *instrument* of salvation” (Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize*, 107).

<sup>219</sup>Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*, 272.

<sup>220</sup>*Ibid.*, 272-73.

saved no matter what you do in the future,’ but rather exhorts them to diligence in godliness to the end of their lives so that their hope is sure” (6:11).<sup>221</sup> Though assurance is integral to faith, “assurance vanishes if we do not continue in the obedience that springs from faith.”<sup>222</sup> One who has claimed faith in the Son of God and his sacrifice but who spurns that sacrifice, tramples the Son of God, and insults the Spirit of grace (10:29) has no *cause* for assurance. Thus the author admonishes the readers to beware of following such a path and falling into the hands of the living God (10:30). Such a warning against apostasy does not *undermine* a believer’s assurance. Rather, it urges the believer to continue trusting in Christ, the source of eternal salvation (5:9), so that he may have assurance. Rightly understood, the warnings of Hebrews should only “evoke fear, trepidation, and insecurity in the believer” (to quote Thomas) *if* he is contemplating apostasy. Because, for the apostate, “there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins” (10:26).<sup>223</sup>

**If the warnings are a divine means of perseverance, then it would be impossible for any believer to fall away, yet such defections happen in Scripture.**

Thomas argues that viewing warnings as God’s means of ensuring perseverance would seem to mean the impossibility of believers defecting. “But this could only be true if the warnings are *effectual* means of perseverance, in which case no believer at any time could defect. But what of examples of defection in Scripture, in spite of repeated

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<sup>221</sup>Ibid., 294.

<sup>222</sup>Ibid.

<sup>223</sup>Quoting Schreiner and Caneday, Thomas writes, “What kind of assurance is it to know that ‘if believers apostatize [and they can] their destiny is the lake of fire, the second death, hell’” (Thomas, *A Case for Mixed-Audience*, 83 n. 296, quoting *The Race Set before Us*, 268). Again, as argued above, the warnings to beware apostasy—which all believers heed—exhort believers to continue in faith, just as they began. Assurance of salvation is not promised to believers no matter what they do—particularly if they reject faith in the sacrifice of the Son of God. Furthermore, the bracketed phrase Thomas has inserted in the above quote from Schreiner and Caneday seems to confirm his misreading of them, for they clearly argue that “God promises to sustain until the end those who are genuinely part of the people of God” (*The Race Set before Us*, 246; see 245-67).

warnings?” He cites the examples of the wilderness generation, Moses, Aaron, Miriam, and Peter. If these were believers, “it is clear that the warnings did not safeguard their perseverance.”<sup>224</sup> B. J. Oropeza finds Schreiner and Caneday’s position problematic due to “the lack of explicit support” for it in Hebrews, “especially given that in 3.6-4.11 the wilderness generation’s apostasy occurred despite divinely sanctioned warnings.”<sup>225</sup>

Two responses are necessary. First, Thomas and Oropeza are right: it is quite clear that there are those in Scripture who do not heed divine warnings and who fall away from the Lord. Yet Schreiner and Caneday address this phenomenon in an extended discussion of the identity of “fallen runners.”<sup>226</sup> After a consideration of 1 John 2:19 and the parable of the soils from the Gospels, followed by an analysis of specific examples of apostasy (Israel in the wilderness, Alexander, Hymenaeus, Philetus, Demas, and Judas), they conclude that those who fail to persevere “are people who have varied responses to the gospel” but who prove “by their failure to persevere, to be imposters.”<sup>227</sup> “Those who do not persevere reveal that they were not genuinely part of the people of God.” This *retrospective* view found in texts like 1 John 2:19 is a reflection on the status of those who have apostatized. But the warnings are *prospective*. They do not look backward at those who have fallen away but point forward, urging believers to continue believing until the end so they may obtain salvation.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>224</sup>Thomas, *A Case for Mixed-Audience*, 82 (emphasis in original).

<sup>225</sup>Oropeza, “The Warning Passages in Hebrews,” 84.

<sup>226</sup>See chap. 5 (“Reflecting on Fallen Runners: Who Are Those Who Have Fallen Out of the Race?”) in Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*, 214-44.

<sup>227</sup>*Ibid.*, 243.

<sup>228</sup>Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize*, 108-12. New Testament writers do not intend “to split readers into two groups before the warnings: first, those who are truly saved, and second, false believers . . . . The NT authors, after all, did not know in advance who in the churches were inauthentic . . . . The writers also exercised a judgment of charity in writing to their congregations, assuming the readers were genuine believers. They did not view their readers suspiciously . . . . The writers, of course, addressed churches as a whole. They were convinced that a genuine work of grace had occurred. This is not to say, however, that every single individual in the churches was truly saved” (115).



Of course, one who holds to the loss-of-salvation view (and even the loss-of-rewards view) may contend that those who have fallen away were genuine believers. But the point is this: Thomas and Oropeza are critiquing the means-of-salvation view based on their own presuppositions—that is, they argue that such individuals were believers who failed to heed divine warnings, which thus disproves the means-of-salvation view. However, this is not problematic for Schreiner and Caneday since they argue the NT demonstrates that these individuals never bore fruit worthy of the gospel and proved by their definitive defection from Christ that they were never truly his.<sup>229</sup> Unbelievers such as the wilderness generation would not be expected to obey divine admonitions. They are a means of perseverance for *believers*.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>229</sup>For a defense of this position, see the above referenced chapter in Schreiner and Caneday (*The Race Set before Us*, 214-44), especially the discussion of the typological relationship between Israel and the church (222-26). They argue, “Jude, Hebrews, and Paul do not contend that the Israelites had believed unto salvation only to lose God’s gift of salvation by unbelief . . . . They appeal to Israel’s rebellion to admonish us to be the true people of God that Israel was not” (226). As the author of Hebrews warns his readers regarding the wilderness wanderers, “They were unable to enter because of unbelief” (Heb 3:19). See also the discussion of the wilderness generation above in my critique of the loss-of-rewards view.

<sup>230</sup>Given the agreement between the means-of-salvation view and the false-believer view (or the “test-of-genuineness” view) on this matter of interpretation (that those who finally fall away prove they were never truly believers), Keathley offers this criticism: “So what the warning passages describe happens to false professors but not to the elect, and the Means-of-Salvation position seems to collapse into the standard Evidence-of-Genuineness view” (*Salvation and Sovereignty*, 184). Thomas echoes Keathley’s evaluation (*A Case for Mixed-Audience*, 82 n. 289). However, this is a rather baffling critique that lacks substance. While the two views agree on this important point, they also significantly diverge in their interpretation of the intended recipients and function of the warnings, as the present chapter has demonstrated. The one view no more “collapses” into the other any more than the loss-of-rewards view could be said to “collapse” into the loss-of-salvation view since the former agrees with the latter that the warning are addressed to believers.

Furthermore, Keathley is incorrect when he concludes that “the warning passages apply more to false professors than to true believers” in the means-of-salvation view, since Schreiner and Caneday argue that those who apostatize were never really believers (*Salvation and Sovereignty*, 184 n. 69). The conclusion is erroneous, for Schreiner and Caneday do not argue that the purpose of NT warnings is to admonish and reveal false believers. Instead, this is the view of Grudem, who writes concerning biblical warnings, “The purpose is always to warn those who are thinking of falling away or have fallen away that if they do this it is a strong indication that they were never saved in the first place (“Perseverance of the Saints,” 176). Rather, Schreiner and Caneday insist that the purpose of warnings is to admonish believers of the dangers of apostasy and, so, to enable their perseverance. The warnings are *prospective*. However, passages like 1 John 2:19 are *retrospective*—turning one’s attention backward to reflect upon why some fail to persevere in faith (see Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*, 215-22).

Second, but what about the failure of those whom most all interpreters would agree are believers? Thomas asks why biblical warnings are not effectual for a believer like Peter, an example “of defection in Scripture, in spite of repeated warnings.” Here again, though, Schreiner and Caneday attend to this very question, considering “two kinds of falling” in the examples of Peter and Judas.<sup>231</sup> Of course, one must note that the means-of-salvation view does not argue that biblical warnings prevent believers from falling into *sin*—even grievous sin.<sup>232</sup> The purpose of the warnings is to enable believers to persevere in faith and bear fruit to the end—in spite of repeat failures along the way. Divine warnings prevent believers from finally *apostatizing* from Christ.<sup>233</sup> Furthermore, Schreiner and Caneday insist that the NT authors distinguish between the “defections” of Judas and Peter. Judas was never a believer (John 6:64, 70) and, therefore, his falling was not from true faith. On the other hand, Peter’s fall, though awful, does not end in denial of Christ but in repentance and restoration (John 21:15-19). Yet, this is not due to Peter’s own strength but due to the effective prayer of Jesus (Luke 22:31-32). Though Peter denied his Lord, he ultimately heeded Jesus’ exhortation, “When you turn back, strengthen your brothers,” (Luke 22:32) and persevered.

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<sup>231</sup>See Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*, 238-43.

<sup>232</sup>Peter’s sin in particular is described as “loathsome” and “aggravated” (ibid., 241-42). “Nowhere [in the NT] is sin tolerated or dismissed as trivial. On the other hand, the authors do not conclude from the presence of sin in the churches that the recipients are unbelievers . . . . Naturally, no room or excuse is given for sin in the lives of believers, and yet there is an implicit understanding that believers are not outside the realm of sin and do not conquer sin perfectly” (Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize*, 58-59).

<sup>233</sup>I. Howard Marshall writes, “Since the irresistibility of grace is not such that the believer is infallibly preserved from the possibility of sinning, we must be pardoned for wondering whether it automatically preserves him from the possibility of falling away” (*Kept by the Power of God: A Study of Perseverance and Falling Away* [Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1969], 206). Yet, this view Marshall criticizes would appear to be a valid reading of the NT testimony. While NT authors admonish believers not to sin, they also acknowledge that they *will* sin (e.g., 1 John 1:8-2:2). Thus believers are commanded to “put to death the deeds of the body” (Rom 8:13; cf. Col 3:5); it is a reality with which they struggle. Yet one can legitimately conclude that this struggle will not lead to final apostasy because the NT authors also indicate that God will preserve his own until the end (e.g., John 6:37-39; Rom 8:29-30; Phil 1:6; 1 Pet 1:5; Jude 24-25).

**If believers cannot actually apostatize, then the warnings are artificial.**

The means-of-salvation view contends that genuine believers will not fall away.

Therefore, some claim this view causes the warnings to lose their force and become artificial. How is one to be alarmed by warnings when perseverance is inevitable? This is Joseph C. Dillow's question.<sup>234</sup> "If it is true that the readers are true Christians and that they are therefore eternally secure, it is ludicrous to think that the warnings would have any significant impact."<sup>235</sup>

In responding to this critique, it is important first to point out that one must not confuse the means-of-salvation view with the "hypothetical" view. Thomas Hewitt, a proponent of this interpretation, believes a hypothetical case is suggested by the phrase "if they shall fall away," thus viewing *παραπεσόντας* in 6:6 as a conditional participle.<sup>236</sup> The author "is dealing with supposition and not with fact, so that he may correct wrong ideas. If such a falling away could happen, he is saying, it would be impossible to renew them again unto repentance unless Christ died a second time, which is unthinkable."<sup>237</sup> Homer A. Kent Jr. contends the author of Hebrews presents a hypothetical case "to illustrate the folly of apostasy." The author momentarily assumes the view of some of his "confused and wavering readers"—that they could be "truly regenerate" and yet return to Judaism. He then warns them what the outcome would be if this were possible.<sup>238</sup> The

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<sup>234</sup>Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, 221.

<sup>235</sup>*Ibid.*, 224. Cf. Allen, *Hebrews*, 375-76.

<sup>236</sup>Thomas Hewitt, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 108. Of course, viewing the participle in 6:6 as conditional does not necessitate the hypothetical view of the warnings.

<sup>237</sup>*Ibid.*, 110-11. Hewitt quotes B. F. Westcott who says, "The case is hypothetical," in reference to Heb 6:1-8. However, Westcott also explains what he means by the "hypothetical" descriptor: "There is nothing to shew that the conditions of fatal apostasy had been fulfilled, still less that they had been fulfilled in the case of any of those addressed (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. [New York: Macmillan and Co., 1920], 167). In other words, the apostasy described in 6:4-6 is a hypothetical case. It is not an actual description of some group the author has in mind. Thus, Westcott does not affirm the view Hewitt advocates (observed in Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God*, 146).

<sup>238</sup>Homer A. Kent Jr., *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), 113.

concern then is to correct erroneous thinking about the seriousness of apostasy. If one were to depart from Christ—which is not possible—one could not be saved.<sup>239</sup> In the mean-of-salvation view, however, the warnings are genuine admonishments delivered to Christians not to fall away. The author is not correcting their thinking but warning his readers of a real danger so that they do not apostatize.<sup>240</sup>

But how are the warnings to have any real significance if genuine believers will always heed them and never fall away? Why the need to admonish someone not to commit apostasy if God’s preserving grace will keep him from actually apostatizing anyway? “The problem with this objection,” Schreiner writes, “is that it assumes that the warning plays no role or function in keeping believers from falling away.”<sup>241</sup> In other words, the objection seems to conceive of perseverance in terms of an abstract doctrine. But life for the believer is not lived in the abstract. It requires faith—without which it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6). Perseverance demands a faith that trusts God in spite of unseen realities (11:1-2) and that rises to action (11:3-36). Therefore, the doctrine of perseverance is no “*a priori* guarantee” that enables believers “to get along without admonitions and warnings,” Berkouwer explains. “[P]erseverance is not something that is

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<sup>239</sup>See Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*, 35-37.

<sup>240</sup>I. Howard Marshall is an example of an author who equates the means-of-salvation with the hypothetical view. He argues that Berkouwer appears “to adopt as a general principle of biblical interpretation the view of T. Hewitt that the dangers against which the believer is warned are not real dangers because the believer never in fact disobeys the warnings” (*Kept by the Power of God*, 205; in Marshall’s footnote citing Berkouwer’s *Faith and Perseverance*, he references no page numbers). Nevertheless, as demonstrated above, the view of Hewitt is distinct from that of Berkouwer. Marshall again equates the two views in his *New Testament Theology* as he discusses the warnings in Hebrews. After considering the hypothetical view, he describes the means-of-salvation view as “a variant of this view” (*New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses: One Gospel* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004], 686). Cf. Thomas, “A Case for Mixed Audience,” 81 n. 286. Though the means-of-salvation view is not to be equated with the hypothetical view, one can see how confusion arises. Kent, an advocate of the hypothetical view, insists that, according to this position, “true believers would be warned by this statement to remain firm (and from the human standpoint the warnings of Scripture are a means to ensure the perseverance of the saints)” (*Hebrews*, 113). Nicole, when he critiques the hypothetical view, notes that advocates of the view argue that the warnings in Hebrews are a “means God uses to prevent Christians from apostatizing” (“Some Comments on Hebrews 6:4-6,” 356).

<sup>241</sup>Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize*, 97.

merely handed down to us, but it is something that comes to realization only *in the path of faith*.<sup>242</sup> Believers persevere in faith, holding fast to their confession in Jesus, because they are admonished to “hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for the one who promised is faithful” (10:23).

A NT passage that illustrates this tension is Acts 27, narrating Paul’s treacherous voyage and shipwreck.<sup>243</sup> Here a warning must be obeyed in order for the ship’s passengers to be saved (Acts 27:30-32) in spite of the fact that a divine promise was given earlier to Paul that everyone’s life would be preserved (Acts 27:21-26). The threat was not hypothetical but very real: if the sailors fled the ship, the remaining passengers would perish. The author of Acts apparently saw no discrepancy between the divine guarantee to Paul of safety and Paul’s subsequent warning as the necessary means of ensuring that safety.

Though D. A. Carson does not himself advocate the means-of-salvation view of the warning passages,<sup>244</sup> his discussion of the tension between the two biblical perspectives of divine sovereignty and human responsibility is nevertheless instructive.<sup>245</sup> Carson argues that these two perspectives are demonstrably taught repeatedly in both the OT and the NT.<sup>246</sup> Yet, he contends that believers must ensure “that these complementary

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<sup>242</sup>Berkouwer, *Faith and Perseverance*, 110-11 (emphasis in original).

<sup>243</sup>See the discussions of Acts 27 in Robert L. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 697; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (London: Banner of Truth, 1958), 548; Herman Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church and New Creation*, vol. 4 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 267-68; Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*, 209-12; Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize*, 97-99.

<sup>244</sup>As noted above, his interpretation of the conditionals in Heb 3:6 and 14 is consistent with the false-believer view. See Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 84-85; idem, “Reflections on Christian Assurance,” 20.

<sup>245</sup>See D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension* (Eugene: Oregon, 1994). Carson applies this tension to a variety of contexts, including prayer (*A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992], 145-66) and suffering (*How Long O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006], 177-203).

<sup>246</sup>Carson articulates the two truths in this way: “1. God is absolutely sovereign, but his

truths function in our lives in the same ways they function in the lives of believers in Scripture.” Biblical “exhortations to believe and obey” never function to present God “as fundamentally dependent on us” or to “reduce God to the absolutely contingent.” Instead, they function “to increase our responsibility, to emphasize the urgency of the steps we must take.” Similarly, the biblical emphasis on divine sovereignty does not function to encourage an “uncaring fatalism” or moral indifference. It functions, instead, as the ground for believing in “God’s gracious control” of all things.<sup>247</sup> Carson goes on to discuss several examples in which biblical figures intercede in prayer, pleading that this sovereign God would relent of the disaster he threatens (such as Moses in Exod 32). He concludes,

God expects to be pleaded with; he expects godly believers to intercede with him. Their intercession is *his own appointed means* for bringing about his relenting, and if they fail in this respect, then he does not relent and his wrath is poured out . . . . [I]n God’s mercy Moses proved to be *God’s own appointed means*, through intercessory prayer, for bringing about the relenting that was nothing other than a gracious confirmation of the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The really wonderful truth is that human beings like Moses and you and me can participate in bringing about God’s purposes through *God’s own appointed means*.<sup>248</sup>

Carson argues that an end assured by God does not negate a divinely appointed means requiring human response.

On the one hand, the exposition of the fulfillment of the new covenant promises in the lives of the recipients of Hebrews functions to promote assurance of salvation; it does not function to encourage the readers to apathy. On the other hand, the warnings of the letter do not function to call into question Christ’s once-and-for-all

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sovereignty never functions in Scripture to reduce human responsibility. 2. Human beings are responsible creatures—that is, they choose, they believe, they disobey, they respond, and there is moral significance in their choices; but human responsibility never functions in Scripture to diminish God’s sovereignty or to make God absolutely contingent” (*A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, 148).

<sup>247</sup>Ibid., 160-61.

<sup>248</sup>Ibid., 164 (emphasis added).

perfecting work in the life of the believer; they function to admonish the recipients that if they cease trusting in Christ, they will perish. Therefore, Dillow’s complaint—that if the believer’s salvation is secure, it is ludicrous to assume warnings would have a significant impact—falls flat. Berkouwer is correct: Scripture nowhere allows one to take the continual and immutable nature of God’s grace for granted or to respond to it with passivity.<sup>249</sup> Moses did not presume on the security of God’s promise of blessing to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Rather, he petitioned God to relent of his threat to destroy the people so that the promise of blessing would be remembered and fulfilled (Exod 32:11-4). Paul did not presume on the security of God’s promise to deliver all of the ship’s passengers. Rather, he admonished the soldiers, “Unless these men remain in the ship, you cannot be saved” (Acts 27:31). In the same way, the readers of Hebrews must not presume upon the security that Christ’s one sacrifice for sins has perfected them forever. Instead, they must take care lest they have an evil, unbelieving heart that leads them to fall away from the living God (Heb 3:12). They will inherit the promised salvation precisely by heeding the warnings—warnings that call them to embrace faith (i.e., holding fast their confession in Jesus and boldly approaching the throne of grace, 4:16) and to reject apostasy (i.e., trampling on the Son of God and profaning the covenant blood by which they were sanctified, 10:29).<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>249</sup>Berkouwer, *Faith and Perseverance*, 97.

<sup>250</sup>Marshall compares the means-of-salvation view to the universalist view of J. A. T. Robinson (Marshall does not refer to a specific writing by Robinson). Robinson contends that all people must take seriously, on the subjective level, the warnings of divine judgment. But ultimately every person will be overcome by the divine love in Christ and surrender to him. Thus, only heaven is objectively real. Marshall contends that this is what the means-of-salvation view does with the warnings, if one simply replaces “all people” in Robinson’s argument with “all the elect” (*Kept by the Power of God*, 206-07). In this way, the means-of-salvation view “is treating the warnings against falling away with as little seriousness as Robinson treats the threats of eternal punishment: in both cases the warnings are deprived of objective content” (207). However, Marshall’s comparison is unjustified. As Marshall himself observes, Robinson’s “attempt to reinterpret the biblical teachings about Hell so that it is only subjectively true” is plainly problematic (207). The NT authors present eternal judgment as an objective reality that human beings will face apart from faith in Jesus Christ. For Robinson, hell is imaginary. Advocates of the means-of salvation view, of course, acknowledge the reality of the NT testimony of eternal judgment. Moreover, Marshall’s accusation that the means-of-salvation view does not take the warnings seriously and robs them of their objective content is false. If a believer falls away from Christ, he will experience divine judgment. The fact

Consider one final argument. Not everyone will find this persuasive, but those who hold particularly to the false-believer view should not, in principle, find it objectionable. Those who understand the NT to present salvation as an act of divine election nevertheless do not cast aside the call to sinners to believe in Jesus. Though God decides according to his electing purposes to whom he will show mercy (Rom 9:11-18) and predestines them for adoption through Jesus Christ (Eph 1:5), yet the elect cannot call on and believe in him unless the good news of the gospel is preached to them (Rom 9:14). One might object that the call to believe is meaningless and unnecessary if God's elect will certainly believe. However, exhorting sinners to believe in Jesus is exactly what the apostles did. They did not call upon their hearers to determine if they were elect but to repent of sin and believe in Jesus Christ (e.g., Acts 2:38; 3:19-20; 10:43; 13:38-39; 16:31).<sup>251</sup> For "the preaching of the gospel is the means God uses to bring his own to faith."<sup>252</sup> Most who affirm the false-believer view of the warnings would agree with this perspective. God's electing purposes from before creation do not invalidate the requirement that sinners must have faith in Jesus to be saved. Paul contends that God promises to call, justify, and glorify those whom he predestines (Rom 8:30), but the apostle nevertheless is under obligation to preach the gospel that people may be saved (1 Cor 9:16-23). "Belief is a *condition* to be saved, but God through his grace has promised to fulfill that condition in the lives of his elect . . . . Those who hear must believe and repent to be saved, and they are summoned to respond with the utmost urgency."<sup>253</sup>

The means-of-salvation view of the warning passages should be understood similarly. Schreiner explains:

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that genuine believers will *not* fall away does not permit the believer the freedom to ignore the warnings. For it is only by heeding the warnings that he will persevere in faith and obtain final salvation.

<sup>251</sup>See Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize*, 105-07.

<sup>252</sup>*Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>253</sup>*Ibid.*



God has promised that his elect will persevere, just as he promised to grant faith to his chosen ones. Such a promise does not eliminate the need to persevere. Both the summons to persevere and the initial call to believe in the gospel are conditions that must be fulfilled to be saved, but in both instances God grants the grace so that the conditions will certainly be fulfilled in those who belong to him. The certainty that God will grant perseverance does not remove the moral urgency to persevere in faith, just as the certainty that God will grant faith to the elect does not lessen the need to believe.<sup>254</sup>

Therefore, for most who affirm the false-believer view, it does not follow that the warnings are superfluous if believers will certainly heed them—any more that the proclamation of the gospel is superfluous if the elect will certainly be saved. Both the call to faith *and* the call to persevere in faith are the means God uses to save his own.<sup>255</sup>

**The contention that warnings only express what is *conceivable* and not what is *possible* is confused reasoning.** Schreiner and Caneday claim that warnings “do not say anything about what is possible in the sense of ‘capable or likely to happen.’” Rather, they “express what is capable of being conceived with the mind.” In response, Zuck asks, “Is it not strange reasoning to say that a warning sign on a mountainside does *not* mean it is possible for a climber to fall? Why then the sign?”<sup>256</sup> Allen, Keathley, and Thomas all find Schreiner and Caneday’s claim confusing and conflicting.<sup>257</sup> But the statements about warnings only expressing what is *conceivable* occur in the context of

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<sup>254</sup>Ibid., 106-07.

<sup>255</sup>Ibid., 107. Another way of considering this same issue draws on the distinction between natural ability and moral ability (See, e.g., Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will* [London: Thomas Nelson; reprint, Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1996], 23-31). If Scripture commands an unbeliever to repent and believe the gospel, does this not imply that he is able? According to his *natural* ability, yes. He has the human capacities to turn from sin and believe in Christ. However, he lacks the *moral will*—he is dead in trespasses and sins and must be made alive (Eph 2:1-5). The proclamation of the gospel is the divine means for bringing an unbeliever to Christ. Though the unbeliever *can* believe the gospel, he is *not willing*. Likewise, believers have no natural inability that prevents them from renouncing Christ. But they have been born again and set free from slavery to sin. While a Christian *can* commit apostasy, he *will not*, because God preserves him, and one of the means God uses to prevent apostasy is biblical warnings.

<sup>256</sup>Zuck, Review, 374, (emphasis in original).

<sup>257</sup>Allen, *Hebrews*, 374; Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty*, 183; Thomas, *A Case for Mixed-Audience*, 81 n. 286.

Schreiner and Caneday’s attempt to address the language of *possibility*. They contend that using the words *possible* and *possibility* with regard to the warnings is problematic, for the words “are not suitable to capture the intention and function of conditional warnings” since they are “too ambiguous.” The words may denote something that can be “anticipated, considered, or imagined.” Yet, some—such as advocates of the loss-of-salvation and loss-of-rewards views—“insist that the warnings speak of possibility in the sense of something that is capable or likely to occur.” But this is incorrect. Warnings “express what is capable of being conceived with the mind. They speak of things conceivable or imaginable, not of things likely to happen. In fact, this is the objective of warnings and admonitions. They appeal to the mind to conceive how actions have consequences.”<sup>258</sup> Therefore, they do not “confront us with an uncertain future. They do not say that we may perish. Rather they caution us lest we perish. They warn that we will surely perish if we fail to heed God’s call in the gospel.”<sup>259</sup>

Consider an analogy with Jesus. According to Hebrews, he was perfected for his role as high priest through suffering (2:10), which involved experiencing the full range of human temptations (2:18; 4:15). He offered up tears and prayers to the one able to save him from death (5:7). Through his suffering, he learned obedience and was perfected, becoming the source of eternal salvation (5:8-9). Though he was tempted to reject God’s will, his declaration was “I have come to do your will, O God” (10:7). Yet, the author assures us that Jesus was without sin (4:15).<sup>260</sup> He was holy, innocent, and

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<sup>258</sup>Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set before Us*, 207.

<sup>259</sup>Ibid., 208.

<sup>260</sup>Of course, not all interpreters of Hebrews would agree that the author affirms Jesus’ sinlessness. Ronald Williamson (“Hebrews 4:15 and the Sinlessness of Jesus,” *Expository Times* 86 [1974]: 5) suggests that 4:15 may actually mean—not that Jesus was perpetually sinless—but that he achieved sinlessness “only after a struggle in which it is not inconceivable that he actually sinned.” Williamson follows George Wesley Buchanan (*To the Hebrews: Translation, Comment and Conclusions*, AB [New York: Doubleday, 1972], 130-31) who argues that Jesus’ sacrifice was offered for his own sins and for those of the people (7:27). Thus, 4:15 “may be understood in reference to the crucifixion alone, and not to Jesus’ entire life” (130). See the reply to Williamson and Buchanan in David Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the ‘Epistle to the Hebrews’* (Cambridge:

undefiled (7:26). So, does his moral perfection render his temptations void? If Jesus suffered and was genuinely tempted to disobey God, does this not necessarily imply that it was *possible* for him to disobey God? Apparently not according to Hebrews. Herman Bavinck, who also interprets the warnings as a means-of-salvation, insists,

It is . . . completely mistaken to reason from the admonitions of Holy Scripture to the possibility of a total loss of grace. This conclusion is illegitimate as when, in the case of Christ, people infer from his temptation that he was able to sin. The certainty of the outcome does not render the means superfluous but is inseparably connected with them in the decree of God.<sup>261</sup>

One can *conceive* of Jesus sinning, but it was impossible for him to do so. Yet, his temptations were real and had a purpose in his life—that he might be made a merciful and faithful high priest to make propitiation for the people (2:17). Similarly, though believers are recipients of the new covenant promises and perfected forever (10:14), they are tempted to fall away and, so, the author of Hebrews admonishes them to hold fast. Such warnings do not indicate that it is possible for them to commit apostasy, but they do serve a genuine purpose in their lives: to cause them to consider the miserable end of rejecting Christ’s sacrifice and to endure in diligence, so they “may not be apathetic but imitators of those who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises” (6:12).

### **Conclusion**

I conclude this chapter with the following observations. First, it seems clear that none of the three widely-accepted models for understanding the warnings of Hebrews is without serious difficulty. The loss-of-rewards view must argue that the sin and judgment about which the author warns is not apostasy and final judgment. The false-believer view must argue that the warnings are directed to and describe unbelievers who have had close affiliation with the people of God. Yet, I contend that these

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Cambridge University Press, 1982), 188-90.

<sup>261</sup>Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church and New Creation*, 267–68.

arguments and their accompanying exegesis face insurmountable problems (and the majority of Hebrews commentators would seem to agree). The loss-of-salvation view offers a much more satisfying explanation. But their conclusion that genuine believers can fall away contradicts the texts and themes discussed in chapters 2 and 3 that promote assurance of salvation. Therefore, I believe they have underestimated the significance of assurance in Hebrews.

Second, the means-of-salvation view does not suffer from the exegetical difficulties encountered by the other positions and is able to integrate assurance and warning in Hebrews. This view understands the warnings as addressed to Christians and describing genuine Christian conversion, admonishing believers not to reject Christ's sacrifice and fall away from their only hope. At the same time, the means-of-salvation view contends that believers will not apostatize and can truly have assurance based on the work of their perfected high priest who has perfected them and secured their eternal salvation. While a few interpreters have interacted with the writings of Schreiner and Caneday, this has been minimal. As I have sought to demonstrate above, those who have been critical of their thesis seem to often misunderstand the view and have been unsuccessful in their attempt to discredit it.

Third, some might consider the means-of-salvation view a minority position, since its contemporary advocates are few (I primarily cite the works of Berkouwer, Schreiner, and Caneday in this chapter). However, many have actually held this position in the history of interpretation. Appendix 1 provides quotations from the following: Herman Bavinck, Richard Baxter, Louis Berkhof, James P. Boyce, John Calvin, William Cunningham, Robert L. Dabney, John Dagg, Jonathan Edwards, Andrew Fuller, Charles Hodge, E. Y. Mullins, John Owen, Charles H. Spurgeon, and A. W. Pink. Furthermore, since the publication of *The Race Set before Us*, several NT interpreters have, in their writings, either endorsed Schreiner and Caneday's thesis or commended their view as

viable.<sup>262</sup> Thus, future interpreters addressing Hebrews, warnings, and/or assurance cannot ignore their argument.

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<sup>262</sup>See Scott Hafemann, *The God of Promise and the Life of Faith: Understanding the Heart of the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 216; John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry* (Nashville: B&H, 2001), 111 n. 2; Craig L. Blomberg, *Preaching the Parables: From Responsible Interpretation to Powerful Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 231 n. 16; Frank Thielman *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 607; Alan P. Stanley, *Did Jesus Teach Salvation by Works? The Role of Works in Salvation in the Synoptic Gospels* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2006), 248; Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 684 n. 101; David G. Peterson, *Transformed by God: New Covenant Life and Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 97 n. 31; Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 694 n. 89.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

I have contended that scholarship has underestimated assurance of salvation and the author's confidence in his recipients' salvation in the Letter to the Hebrews—that is, commentators and other interpreters have not adequately considered texts and themes that seem to promote Christian assurance. I have sought to demonstrate this by exegetical and theological examination of relevant texts. I have also analyzed the obvious obstacle to assurance of salvation in Hebrews for many—the letter's warning passages—and argued for a model of interpreting them that does not conflict with assurance.

In chapter 1, I considered the history of research on warnings and assurance in Hebrews. First I probed five modern Hebrews commentators: William Lane, David deSilva, Craig Koester, F. F. Bruce, and Donald Hagner. The first three served as representatives of the majority of Hebrews commentators, who conclude that the author of Hebrews warns believers to beware of apostasy, with the implication that it is possible for them to renounce faith in Christ. Yet, their conclusions are not altogether satisfying, as they seem to interpret the perfection of believers, the new covenant promises, the author's confidence in his readers, and God's oath to Abraham in light of the warnings. Koester acknowledges a tension in the letter between warning and assurance and resolves it in favor of the warnings. Lane does not acknowledge a tension, but his commentary seems to display as much. Bruce and Hagner, on the other hand, reject Christian apostasy as biblically grounded, but they disagree regarding whom the warnings describe. Bruce claims they describe false believers and emphasizes that 3:6 and 3:14 articulate that perseverance is the evidence of belief. Hagner claims the warnings are directed to believers but is not compelled as a result to conclude that this necessarily implies

Christian apostasy.

The remainder of the chapter considered four other relevant studies dealing with warning and assurance by Gerald Borchert, Randall Gleason, Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday, and Buist Fanning. Similar to Hagner, Borchert believes the warnings describe believers and lets the tension stand. However, he does little to examine assurance of salvation in Hebrews. Gleason concurs that the warnings depict genuine Christian experience but resolves the tension by arguing the sin is not apostasy and the resulting punishment is not eternal judgment. Though he discusses and affirms assurance of salvation in Hebrews, his discussion is brief and not developed. Fanning is forthright in acknowledging a tension in the letter. Similar to Bruce, he points the way forward by arguing that 3:6 and 3:14 provide the author's framework of thought. These conditional sentences describe not what will be true but what is already true of the readers if they persevere. The warnings, thus, describe false believers but do so by portraying the outward, phenomenological experience of Christian conversion. Schreiner and Caneday offer a distinctive perspective. They contend that the warnings describe true believers and admonish them not to commit apostasy. However, the warnings are a divine means of salvation, and thus true believers will heed them.

For many modern scholars, then, the intensity of the warnings in Hebrews has overshadowed any texts that would seem to imply that believers have assurance of salvation. This called for a study that would explore this underdeveloped topic in the letter. It would also require an interpretation of the warnings that could give a viable account of them.

In chapter 2, I suggested that interpreters have underestimated the significance of the perfection of believers in Hebrews—in spite of how vital this theme is for the author. I argued, consistent with others (especially David Peterson), that the perfection of Christ and the perfection of believers in Hebrews should be understood as vocational and

responded to objections. Then I analyzed several texts relevant to the study of the perfection of believers and the new covenant promises: 3:7-4:13; 7:11-28; 8:1-13; 9:1-10; 10:1-18, 22; 11:39-40; 12:18-24; and 13:20-21.

I concluded that the perfection of believers in Hebrews involves the cleansing of a guilty conscience and a definitive consecration to God, which makes it possible for believers to draw near to God. This perfection results in a fulfillment of the promises of Jeremiah's new covenant, particularly the Lord's promise to write his law on his people's hearts. Christ's sacrificial death for sin grants complete forgiveness and is the basis for a new relationship between God and man in which their hearts are renewed toward obedience. This heart transformation under the new covenant solves the problem of the old covenant: it could not perfect the worshipper (7:11, 19; 9:9; 10:1)—that is, it could not take away sin (10:4) and enable the people to continue in covenant fidelity (8:9). But Christ's new covenant sacrifice changes the "evil, unbelieving heart" (3:12) into a "true heart" (10:22). Thus, according to the author, a fundamental purpose of the new covenant was to remedy the problem of apostasy as demonstrated by the wilderness generation. Through the covenant death of his Son and a unilateral divine work in the human heart, God sovereignly acts to overcome covenant infidelity. Given this, it seems that interpreters who affirm the reality of Christian apostasy in Hebrews have underestimated the strong basis for Christian assurance found in the letter's exposition of perfection and the new covenant promises. How can the "true heart" once again become an "evil, unbelieving heart"?

In chapter 3, I provided an exegetical analysis of 6:9-20, seeking to understand both the author's confidence in the recipients and the contribution the passage makes to assurance of salvation in Hebrews. It is significant that the author's expression of confidence in his readers at 6:9 follows on the heels of his harsh warning at 6:4-8. Contrary to some, I contended that his comments in 6:9 are not mere rhetoric to influence



their response but genuine confidence in light of the evidence of their salvation expressed in their love for God and practical service toward his people (6:10).

The author is, of course, concerned for them. This is the point of the warnings—to encourage their perseverance. But it is also the point of the promises, which should not be undermined by the warnings. The author encourages their assurance by reminding them of God’s promise to Abraham, guaranteed with an oath, to bless and multiply him (6:13-14). This promise was not merely for Abraham but for all those who would inherit the promise (6:17). God desired to give certainty to his people through his immutable promise and oath that his purpose to bring blessing to them is itself immutable (6:17). Just as Abraham patiently waited and obtained the promise (6:15), so the heirs of the promise have strong encouragement to persevere themselves (6:18), knowing that God cannot lie, and he will bring the fulfillment of his promise to pass. That for which they hope is certain. This hope of salvation is likened to a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul (6:19), which is bound up with Jesus and his high-priestly sacrifice for them, granting them access into God’s presence. Their souls are secure.

Having demonstrated a basis for assurance of salvation in Hebrews—an assurance grounded in the author’s confidence of his readers’ salvation, his explanation of God’s promise and his immutable purpose to bless them, and his exposition of the new covenant perfection of believers—I proceeded in chapter 4 to provide an interpretation of the warnings that is faithful to the author’s intent and consistent with his basis for confident assurance. I analyzed the arguments of the three most common interpretations of the warning passages: the loss-of-rewards view, the false-believer view, and the loss-of-salvation view. Randall Gleason and David Allen rightly see the warnings as directed to and describing true Christian experience. However, their attempt to understand the prohibited sin as a stubborn failure to mature and the threatened judgment as a loss of rewards is exegetically unconvincing. Wayne Grudem and Buist Fanning are correct

when they argue the author warns against apostasy—rejection of the sacrificial work of Christ—and the consequent penalty of eternal judgment. However, their effort to interpret those described in the warnings as false believers who have merely experienced the external blessings of association with the people of God is unsuccessful. The third most common view—that the warnings admonish believers to avoid the sin of apostasy or face eternal judgment—is the majority view of Hebrews commentators. However, the findings of chapters 2, 3, and 4 demonstrate that while these advocates interpret the warnings rightly, their conclusion that it is therefore possible for believers to fall away from God is unjustified.

Then, I presented the means-of-salvation view of the warning passages. This view has been held by many in the history of interpretation but has been most recently advocated by Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday. I contend this view does not suffer from the exegetical difficulties encountered by the other positions and is able to integrate assurance and warning in Hebrews. The mean-of-salvation view understands the warnings as addressed to Christians, describing genuine Christian conversion, and admonishing believers not to fall into apostasy. The majority of commentators would agree that this is the most straightforward reading. Yet, this view maintains that genuine believers will not apostatize and can truly have assurance of salvation in light of the new covenant sacrifice of their high priest who has perfected them and secured their eternal salvation. The warnings are a divine means of ensuring their salvation. Believers will heed admonishments to avoid apostasy. While few have interacted with Schreiner and Caneday's works, I have offered responses to those who have. I have argued that these interpreters have either misunderstood the means-of-salvation view or have failed to undermine the position by their criticisms. The means-of-salvation view is not only viable but offers the best means of integrating the warnings of Hebrews with the letters basis for assurance of salvation.

In light of my work, I suggest the following as potential areas of future research: (1) Schreiner and Caneday's thesis is significant and is based on their own inductive exegesis of numerous biblical texts. However, their work was intentionally broad in scope. They did not make a detailed case for assurance of salvation in Hebrews nor did they engage in extensive argument with those who take opposing views of the warnings in Hebrews, as I have sought to do. What is needed, then, is a consideration of other NT books besides Hebrews, exploring a given author's articulation of salvation alongside an examination of his warnings to believers, in an effort to confirm further the validity of the means-of-salvation view. (2) The appendix in this dissertation shows that the means-of-salvation view, though it is perhaps in the minority today, has been broadly affirmed by significant interpreters in the past five hundred years. If the writings of these same authors and others were studied, further examples would no doubt surface. It would be helpful to engage in sustained studies of how specific exegetes (e.g., Calvin, Edwards, Spurgeon) dealt with warning passages throughout the corpus of their writings as they encountered them in the NT (and the OT). (3) Finally, further work is needed on understanding conditional sentences in Greek, specifically as it pertains to interpreting those in Hebrews 3:6 and 3:14. What is needed is a study that establishes more clear criteria for determining when a conditional sentence displays a cause-and-effect relationship and when it displays an evidence-to-inference relationship.

APPENDIX  
PAST ADVOCATES OF THE  
MEANS-OF-SALVATION VIEW

Viewing biblical warning passages as a means of salvation finds support in various interpreters in the past five hundred years. This appendix provides quotations of individuals who have interpreted biblical warnings in general—or the warnings of Hebrews in particular—in a manner consistent with the means-of-salvation view<sup>1</sup> presented in chapter 4 as articulated by G. C. Berkouwer, Thomas R. Schreiner, and Ardel B. Caneday.<sup>2</sup>

**Herman Bavinck**

Now the question with respect to this doctrine of perseverance is not whether those who have obtained a true saving faith could not, if left to themselves, lose it again by their own fault and sins: nor whether sometimes all the activity, boldness, and comfort of faith, actually ceases, and faith itself goes into hiding under the cares of life and the delights of the world. The question is whether God upholds, continues, and completes the work of grace he has begun, or whether he sometimes permits it to be totally ruined by the power of sin. Perseverance . . . is a gift of God . . . He watches over it and sees to it that the work of grace is continued and completed. He does not, however, do this apart from believers but through them. In regeneration and faith, he grants a grace that as such bears an inadmissible character; he grants a life that is by nature eternal; he bestows the benefits of calling, justification, and glorification that are mutually and unbreakably interconnected. All of the above-mentioned admonitions and threats that Scripture addresses to believers, therefore, do not prove a thing against the doctrine of perseverance. They are rather the way in which God himself confirms his promise and gift through believers. They are the means by which perseverance in life is realized. After all, perseverance is also not coercive but, as a gift of God,

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<sup>1</sup>Of course, when some of the following interpreters argue that specific biblical warnings *outside* of Hebrews are a means of salvation, it does not necessarily follow that this is true for the warnings in Hebrews.

<sup>2</sup>Except where noted, the writings of Thomas R. Schreiner and Ardel B. Caneday have served as the source for the following quotations.

impacts humans in a spiritual manner. It is precisely God's will, by admonition and warning, morally to lead believers to heavenly blessedness and by the grace of the Holy Spirit to prompt them willingly to persevere in faith and love. It is therefore completely mistaken to reason from the admonitions of Holy Scripture to the possibility of a total loss of grace. This conclusion is illegitimate as when, in the case of Christ, people infer from his temptation that he was able to sin. The certainty of the outcome does not render the means superfluous but is inseparably connected with them in the decree of God. Paul knew with certainty that in the case of shipwreck no one would lose one's life, yet he declares, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved" (Acts 27:22, 31).<sup>3</sup>

### **Richard Baxter**

God by commanding faith and repentance, and making them necessary conditions of Justification, and by commanding perseverance, and threatening the Justified and Sanctified with damnation if they fell away; and making perseverance a condition of Salvation, doth thereby provide a convenient means for the performance of his own Decree, of giving Faith and Repentance and perseverance to his Elect; For he effecteth his ends by suitable moral means; and such is this Law and Covenant, to provoke man to due fear, and care and obedience, that he may be wrought on as a man.<sup>4</sup>

### **Louis Berkhof**

There are warnings against apostasy which would seem to be quite uncalled for, if the believer could not fall away . . . . But these warnings regard the whole matter from the side of man and are seriously meant. They prompt self-examination, and are instrumental in keeping believers in the way of perseverance. They do not prove that any of the addressed will apostatize, but simply that the use of means is necessary to prevent them from committing this sin. Compare Acts 27:22-25 with verse 3 for an illustration of this principle.<sup>5</sup>

### **James P. Boyce**

The warnings of God's word are also means to the same end [of salvation]. They imply the importance of Christian exertion, and the value of effort as well as the

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<sup>3</sup>Herman Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church and New Creation*, vol. 4 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 267-68.

<sup>4</sup>Richard Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* (London, Nevill Simmons: 1675), I.ii.54. I am grateful to Timothy Beougher for providing this quotation.

<sup>5</sup>Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th rev. and enlarged ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 548.

possibility of danger. The Hebrews were warned that they should fear lest, a promise being left of rest, any of them should seem to come short of it. Heb. 4:1. They are especially warned to go on unto perfection, upon the statement that "As touching those who were once enlightened, and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and tasted the word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and then fall away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame," Heb. 6:4-6. This was a description of such persons as they themselves were; of real Christians. They were, in themselves, in real danger of such a fall. They were only secure from it through the purpose and power and grace of God. This danger was therefore a fit cause for exhortation to them to push forward unto perfection. There were doubtless many around them who had appeared, or had professed to have the privileges here referred to, who, by their desertion of Christianity, were inflicting grievous evil upon the cause of Christ. These Christians were tempted to commit the same sin. Should they do this, they could not be renewed again unto repentance; and this warning was given as the means under God of restraining them from sin. It is thought by some that this passage shows the possibility of a fall from grace, and therefore is contrary to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. It is admitted that, regarded in their own strength only, there was this possibility of fall in the persons addressed. But the doctrine we are considering does not regard the believer as preserved and as persevering only through himself. He is thus kept by God; not by his own power. One of the means by which this is done, is that he is warned of the danger in which he is of himself, that he may co-operate with God, so as not only to be preserved, but also to persevere in the divine life. Of like purpose, and to the same effect, are the other warnings found in the tenth chapter of this epistle in verses 26-29, 38, and those in 2 Pet. 2:20, 22, and elsewhere in the Scriptures.<sup>6</sup>

### John Calvin

This [Mark 13:21-22] was added for the purpose of exciting alarm, that believers may be more careful to be on their guard; for when such unbounded freedom of action is allowed to *false prophets*, and when they are permitted to exert such powers of deceiving, those who are careless and inattentive would easily be entangled by their snares. Christ therefore exhorts and arouses his disciples to keep watch, and at the same time reminds them that there is no reason for being troubled at the strangeness of the sight, if they see many persons on every hand led away into error. While he excites them to solicitude, that Satan may not overtake them in a state of sloth, he gives them abundant ground of confidence on which they may calmly rely, when he promises that they will be safe under the defense and protection of God against all the snares of Satan. And thus, however frail and slippery the condition of the godly may be, yet here is a firm footing on

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<sup>6</sup>James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2006), 433. I am grateful to Justin Dillehay for providing this quotation.

which they may stand; for it is not possible for them to fall away from salvation, to whom the Son of God is a faithful guardian. For they have not sufficient energy to resist the attacks of Satan, unless in consequence of their being *the sheep of Christ, which none can pluck out of his hand* (John x. 28). It must therefore be observed, that the permanency of our salvation does not depend on us, but on the secret election of God; for though our salvation is *kept through faith*, as Peter tells us (1 Pet. i. 5), yet we ought to ascend higher, and assure ourselves that we are in safety, because the Father hath given us to the Son, and the Son himself declares, that *none who have been given to him shall perish* (John xvii. 12).<sup>7</sup>

### **William Cunningham**

[The] proper primary effect [of biblical warnings] evidently being just to bring out, in the most impressive way, the great principle of the invariableness of the connection which God has established between perseverance, as opposed to apostasy, as a means, and salvation as an end; and thus to operate as a means of effecting the end which God has determined to accomplish,—of enabling believers to persevere, or preserving them from apostasy; and to effect this in entire accordance with the principles of their moral constitution, by producing constant humility, watchfulness, and diligence.<sup>8</sup>

### **Robert L. Dabney**

The certainty that he will not [apostatize] arises, not from the strength of a regenerated heart, but from God's secret, unchangeable purpose concerning the believer; which purpose He executes towards and in him by moral means consistent with the creature's free agency. Among these appropriate motives are these very warnings of dangers and wholesome fears about apostasy. Therefore, God's application of the motives to the regenerate free agent, proves not at all that it is God's secret purpose to let him apostatize. They are a part of that plan by which God intends to ensure that he shall not.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, trans. by William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 3:141 (italics in original). Thus, even though Calvin argues that those described in Heb 6:4-6 are false believers (*The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and the First and Second Epistles of Peter, Calvin's Commentaries*, trans. William B. Johnston, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963], 76), elsewhere he argues that warnings to avoid apostasy are a means to urge believers on in perseverance.

<sup>8</sup>William Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, 1st ed. (1862; reprint, London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1969), 2:500-01.

<sup>9</sup>Robert L. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (1878; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 697. Credit for this quotation goes to Joseph C. Dillow (see his *The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [Schoettle, 1992]; 219).

## J. L. Dagg

The explanation which has been given of this passage [1 Cor 9:27], removes all appearance of inconsistency between it and the doctrine of the saints' final perseverance; yet it admits that Paul was stimulated to activity and perseverance in the Christian conflict, by the belief that his obtaining of the crown depended on his perseverance and success in the struggle. Those who understand the doctrine of perseverance to imply that God's people will obtain the crown without the struggle totally mistake the matter. The doctrine is that God's people will persevere in the struggle; and to suppose that they will obtain the crown without doing so is to contradict the doctrine. It is a wretched and fatal perversion of the doctrine, if men conclude that, having been once converted, they will be saved, whatever may be their course of life . . . . So God has appointed necessary means for preserving the divine life in the soul, and the use of these means is as indispensable to the accomplishment of the purpose, in this, as in all other cases in which he has chosen to work by means. The doctrine of final perseverance, when properly understood, does not teach that God's people are in no sense in danger of final apostasy. Paul tells us that he had often been in perils of waters (2 Cor. 11:26). One of these times of danger was the shipwreck which he experienced in his voyage to Rome. He, and all his companions in the vessel, were in great danger; and they could not have been saved, if the necessary means for their preservation had not been used. Yet God had both purposed and promised their deliverance. The righteous, notwithstanding the purpose and promise of God, are scarcely saved, (1 Pet. 4:18). They succeed at last, as by a narrow escape. Through danger, imminent danger, they are at last delivered: and, in order to that deliverance, the use of the appointed means is as necessary as the appointment itself;—as necessary as the purpose of God.

The warning which the Scriptures give to the people of God constitute an important part of the means which God has appointed for their perseverance in holiness to eternal life. As the rock in the mariner's chart guards him from being dashed to pieces, so these warnings preserve the spiritual mariner from destruction. The awful warnings given by Paul to the Hebrews were designed to guard them against final apostasy. They therefore imply that there was danger of such apostasy. The heirs of promise might have strong consolation, in the hope founded on the oath and promise of God, that they would be brought safely through the danger. In the wisdom of God, the warnings are so given, so as to secure their proper effect, without destroying the confidence in God, which is the Christian's hope and joy.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>J. L. Dagg, *Manual of Church Order* (Penn Laird, VA: Sprinkle, 2009), 295-97. I am grateful to Justin Dillehay for providing this quotation.



## **Jonathan Edwards**

Here [1 Cor 9:27] you see the apostle is very careful lest he should be a castaway, and denies his carnal appetites, and mortifies his flesh, for that reason. He did not say, 'I am safe, I am sure I shall never be lost; why need I take any further care respecting it?' Many think because they suppose themselves converted, and so safe, that they have nothing to do with the awful threatenings of God's word, and those terrible denunciations of damnation that are contained in it. When they hear them, they hear them as things which belong only to others, and not at all to themselves, as though there were no application of what is revealed in the Scripture respecting hell, to the godly. And therefore, when they hear awakening sermons about the awful things that God has threatened to the wicked, they do not hear them for themselves, but only for others. But it was not thus with this holy apostle, who certainly was as safe from hell, and as far from a damnable state, as any of us. He looked upon himself as still nearly concerned in God's threatenings of eternal damnation, notwithstanding all his hope, and all his eminent holiness, and therefore gave great diligence, that he might avoid eternal damnation. For he considered that eternal misery was as certainly connected with a wicked life as ever it was, and that it was absolutely necessary that he should still keep under his body, and bring it into subjection, in order that he might not be damned; because indulging the lusts of the body and being damned were more surely connected together. The apostle knew that this conditional proposition was true concerning him, as ever it was. 'If I live wickedly, or do not live in a way of universal obedience to God's commands, I shall certainly be a castaway.' This is evident, because the apostle mentions a proposition of this nature concerning himself in that very chapter where he says, he kept under his body lest he should be a castaway. 1 Cor. ix. 16. 'For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of, for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel.' What necessity was there upon the apostle to preach the gospel, though God had commanded him, for he was already converted, and was safe; and if he had neglected to preach the gospel, how could he have perished after he was converted? But yet this conditional proposition was still true; if he did not live a life of obedience to God, woe would be to him; woe to him, if he did not preach the gospel. The connexion still held. It is impossible a man should go any where else than to hell in a way of disobedience to God. And therefore he deemed it necessary for him to preach the gospel on that account, and on the same account he deemed it necessary to keep under his body, lest he should be a castaway.<sup>11</sup>

## **Andrew Fuller**

[Commenting on Matt 5:29-30] The tremendous consequences held up to induce such sacrifices teach us that a single lust persisted in will issue in eternal ruin, and

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<sup>11</sup>Jonathan Edwards, "The Character of Paul an Example to Christians," <http://www.biblebb.com/files/edwards/paul.htm> (accessed August 12, 2012).

that it is necessary even for those whom the Lord may know to be heirs of salvation, in certain situations, to be threatened with damnation, as the means of preserving them from it.<sup>12</sup>

### **Charles Hodge**

[Commenting on 1 Cor 8:11] Paul's language in this verse seems to assume that people may perish though Christ died for them. It belongs, therefore, to the same category as those numerous passages that make the same assumption with regard to the elect. If such passages are consistent with the certainty of salvation of all the elect, then this passage is consistent with the certainty of the salvation of those for whom Christ specifically died. It was absolutely certain that none of Paul's companions in shipwreck was on that occasion to lose his life, because the salvation of the whole company had been predicted and promised; and yet the apostle said that if the sailors were allowed to take away the boats, those left on boards could not be saved. This appeal brought about the fulfillment of the promise. So God's telling the elect that if they apostatize they will perish prevents their apostasy.<sup>13</sup>

### **E. Y. Mullins**

There is expressed in these [apostasy] passages a sense of real danger. As Paul and the writer of Hebrews regarded the variable devotion and infirmities and sins of men, they trembled for the outcome. We are therefore not justified in explaining away the obvious meaning and in saying that the passages are designed to teach something else . . . . These are not accounts of things which occurred, but of real dangers. Looked at from the standpoint of human weakness, they may occur. There is, however, another factor to be reckoned with, God's grace.<sup>14</sup>

### **John Owen**

[Commenting on Heb 3:12-14]: It is true our persistency in Christ doth not, as to the issue and event, depend absolutely on our own diligence . . . . But yet our own diligent endeavor is such an indispensable means for that end, as that without it, it

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<sup>12</sup>Andrew Fuller, *Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, in vol 2 of *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (Boston: Lincoln, Edmands, & Co., 1833), 92. Dillow (*Reign of the Servant Kings*, 238) referenced Arthur W. Pink (*An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953], 88) who quoted Fuller. However, Pink did not cite where the quotation appeared in Fuller's writings. An examination of Fuller's exposition of the Sermon on the Mount yielded the above quotation.

<sup>13</sup>Charles Hodge, *1 Corinthians* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1995), 144. I am grateful to A. B. Caneday for pointing me to this quotation.

<sup>14</sup>E. Y. Mullins, *The Christian Religion in its Doctrinal Expression* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1917), 435. I am grateful to Russell D. Moore for providing this quotation.

will not be brought about . . . . If we are in Christ, God hath given us the lives of our souls, and hath taken upon himself in His covenant the preservation of them; but yet we may say, with reference unto the means that he hath appointed, when storms and trials arise, unless we use our diligent endeavors, “we cannot be saved.” Hence are the many cautions that are given us, not only in this epistle wherein they abound, but in other places of Scripture also, that we should take heed of apostasy and falling away . . . .

These warnings are not given merely to professors in general, whose condition is dubious whether they are true believers or no; nor unto those that are entering only on the ways of Christ, lest they should recoil and desert them; but they are given unto all true believers, those of the greatest growth and attainments, Phil. iii. 11-13, that they may know how indispensably necessary, from the appointment of God and the nature of the thing itself, our watchful diligence and endeavors are unto our abiding in Christ.<sup>15</sup>

### Charles Spurgeon

“But,” says one, “You say they cannot fall away.” What is the use of putting this “if” in, like a bugbear to frighten children, or like a ghost that can have no existence? My learned friend, “Who art thou that repliest against God?” If God has put it in, he has put it in for wise reasons and for excellent purposes. Let me show you why. First, O Christian, it is put in to keep thee from falling away. God preserves his children from falling away; but he keeps them by the use of means; and one of these is, the terrors of the law, showing them what would happen if they were to fall away. There is a deep precipice: what is the best way to keep any one from going down there? Why, to tell him that if he did he would inevitably be dashed to pieces. In some old castle there is a deep cellar, where there is a vast amount of fixed air and gas, which would kill anybody who went down. What does the guide say? “If you go down you will never come up alive.” Who thinks of going down? The very fact of the guide telling us what the consequences would be, keeps us from it. Our friend puts away from us a cup of arsenic; he does not want us to drink it, but he says, “If you drink it, it will kill you.” Does he suppose for a moment that we should drink it? No; he tells us the consequences, and he is sure we will not do it. So God says, “My child, if you fall over this precipice you will be dashed to pieces.” What does the child do? He says, “Father, keep me; hold thou me up, and I shall be safe.” It leads the believer to greater dependence on God, to a holy fear and caution, because he knows that if he were to fall away he could not be renewed, and he stands far away from that great gulf, because he knows that if he were to fall into it there would be no salvation for him.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews with Preliminary Exercitations*, ed. William H. Goold (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 4:157-58. Like Calvin, Owen argues that Heb 6:4-6 describes false believers (5:84). However, he is similarly inconsistent, acknowledging here that warnings to avoid apostasy are for believers as well, so that they may persevere.

<sup>16</sup>Charles Spurgeon, “Final Perseverance” in *The New Park Street Pulpit*, <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0075.htm> (accessed August 12, 2012).

**Arthur W. Pink**

To say that real Christians need no such warning because they cannot possibly commit that sin, is, we repeat to lose sight of the connection which God Himself has established between His predestined ends and the means whereby they are reached. The end to which God has predestined His people is their eternal bliss in Heaven, and one of the means by which that end is reached, is through their taking heed to the solemn warning He has given against that which would prevent their reaching Heaven.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Pink, *Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, 616. Credit for this quotation goes to Dillow (*The Reign of the Servant Kings*, 224).

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## ABSTRACT

### “CONFIDENT OF BETTER THINGS”: ASSURANCE OF SALVATION IN THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

Christopher Wade Cowan, Ph.D.  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012  
Chair: Dr. Thomas R. Schreiner

This dissertation contends that interpreters have underestimated assurance of salvation in the Letter to the Hebrews and the author's confidence in his recipients' salvation. Chapter 1 considers the history of research, examining how several recent commentators and interpreters have understood the warnings and assurance in the letter. Special attention is given to their interpretation of the perfection of believers and the new covenant promises, as well as the author's confidence, God's promise, and the believer's hope in Hebrews 6:9-20.

Chapter 2 examines the concept of perfection in Hebrews—with respect to Christ and believers—and specifically considers its relationship to the promises of the new covenant as prophesied in Jeremiah 31, quoted in Hebrews 8:8-12 and 10:16-17. I analyze several relevant texts, including 3:7-4:13; 7:11-28; 8:1-13; 9:1-10; 10:1-18, 22; 11:39-40; 12:18-24; and 13:20-21, and consider implications for assurance of salvation.

Chapter 3 provides an exegetical analysis of Hebrews 6:9-20, seeking to understand the author's confidence in the recipients and the contribution the passage makes to assurance of salvation in Hebrews.

Chapter 4 offers an explanation of the warnings of Hebrews that can account for

the findings of chapters 2 and 3. I consider and evaluate the three most common interpretations of the warnings: the loss-of-rewards view, the false-believer view, and the loss-of-salvation view. Building on this, I present the “means-of-salvation” view, responding to criticisms of the view and demonstrating how it best integrates the warnings with the passages and themes that promote Christian assurance.

Thus, I defend the thesis that interpreters of Hebrews have greatly underestimated assurance of salvation in the letter (1) by demonstrating that the author implicitly affirms his readers can have assurance of salvation in light of the sacrificial work of Christ and (2) by demonstrating that the means-of-salvation view offers the best means of integrating assurance of salvation with the warnings against Christian apostasy in the letter.

## VITA

Christopher Wade Cowan

### PERSONAL

Born: April 27, 1970, Weirton, West Virginia  
Parents: John and Betty Cowan  
Married: Dawn Michelle Harshman, March 13, 1999

### EDUCATIONAL

Diploma, Brook High School, Wellsburg, West Virginia, 1988  
B.A., West Virginia Wesleyan College, 1992  
M.Div., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003

### ACADEMIC

Adjunct Instructor of New Testament Interpretation, The Southern Baptist  
Theological Seminary, 2007-2008, 2010  
Adjunct Instructor of New Testament, Union University, 2012  
Adjunct Fellow in Greek, New College Franklin, 2012-

### ORGANIZATIONAL

Evangelical Theological Society