

Copyright © 2017 Brian David Pate

All rights reserved. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has permission to reproduce and disseminate this document in any form by any means for purposes chosen by the Seminary, including, without limitation, preservation or instruction.

CHOOSE JESUS:  
A THEOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

---

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

---

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

---

by  
Brian David Pate  
May 2017

**APPROVAL SHEET**

CHOOSE JESUS:

A THEOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

Brian David Pate

Read and Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Miguel G. Echevarria, Jr. (Faculty Supervisor)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Joseph C. Harrod

Date \_\_\_\_\_

To Christa,  
the quiet strength of our home,  
who has her eyes fixed on Jesus, our leader,  
as we run this race together.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....	viii
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES .....	x
PREFACE.....	xi
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
What Is Biblical Theology? .....	3
Definition of Biblical Theology .....	4
Purpose of Biblical Theology .....	7
Summary .....	7
Biblical Theology and Preaching.....	8
The Book of Hebrews in God’s Big Picture .....	9
Literature on the Book of Hebrews.....	11
Exegetical Works .....	12
Theological Works .....	14
A Proposed Sermon Series .....	16
Choose Jesus Because He Is Better (Heb 1:1-4) .....	17
How Not to Drift from God (Heb 1:5-2:4).....	18
Humbled for Us (Heb 2:5-18) .....	18
Only Jesus Can Fill the Empty Heart (Heb 3:1-4:13) .....	19
A Better Priest (Heb 4:14-5:10; 7:1-28).....	19
It Is Finished (Heb 8:1-10:18).....	20
Walk by Faith (Heb 11:1-12:17) .....	20

Chapter	Page
A Better Destination (Heb 12:18-29) .....	21
Conclusion .....	21
2. CHOOSE JESUS BECAUSE HE IS BETTER: HEBREWS 1:1-4.....	22
Introduction to the Book of Hebrews .....	23
Overview of Hebrews.....	26
Jesus Is the Final Chapter of God’s Story (1:1-4) .....	27
Good News: God Speaks (1:1-2a).....	27
Good News: Jesus Is Better (1:2b-4).....	29
Conclusion: Look to Jesus .....	34
3. HOW NOT TO DRIFT FROM GOD: HEBREWS 1:5-2:4 .....	35
The Superiority of Christ Guards against Drifting .....	36
The Superiority of Christ Illustrated by a Coronation Scene .....	36
The Superiority of Christ Demonstrated by OT Citations .....	38
The Superiority of Christ over Angels (1:5-14) .....	39
Response: Gaze at the Glory of Christ (2:1-4) .....	44
Conclusion .....	46
4. HUMBLER FOR US: HEBREWS 2:5-18 .....	48
Jesus Rules for Us (2:5-9).....	50
Jesus Suffers for Us (2:10-13) .....	52
We Must Follow Jesus in Suffering (2:10-11) .....	52
How to Follow Jesus in Suffering (2:12-13) .....	54
Jesus Saves Us (2:14-15) .....	57
Jesus Helps Us (2:16-18) .....	58
Jesus Helps Us Because We Are the Offspring of Abraham (2:16) .....	59
Jesus Helps Us Because He Is a Priest Who Understands (2:17-18) .....	60

Chapter	Page
Conclusion .....	60
5. ONLY JESUS FILLS THE EMPTY HEART: HEBREWS 3:1-4:13 .....	61
Jesus Is Better than Moses (3:1-6).....	62
Jesus Is Better than Joshua (3:7-4:13) .....	65
A Brief Biblical Theology of Rest .....	65
Doubt (3:12-15).....	68
Disobedience (3:16-19) .....	69
Faith (4:1-11).....	70
The Spirit's Scalpel (4:12-13) .....	72
Conclusion .....	73
6. A BETTER PRIEST: HEBREWS 4:14-5:10; 7:1-28 .....	74
What Is a Priest? (5:1-10) .....	75
Why We Need a Priest .....	76
Jesus Is a Better Priest (5:1-10).....	77
Who Is Melchizedek? (7:1-28) .....	80
Melchizedek Points to Jesus (7:1-10).....	81
We Need a Better Priest (7:11-28) .....	82
Application (4:14-16) .....	87
Hold Fast (4:14).....	87
Draw Near (4:15-16) .....	87
Conclusion .....	89
7. IT IS FINISHED: HEBREWS 8:1-10:18 .....	91
We Have a Better Covenant (8:1-12) .....	94
We Have a Better Sacrifice (9:1-10:18) .....	98
Jesus Provides Full Access to God (9:1-28).....	99
Jesus Provides a Complete Sacrifice (10:1-18).....	102

Chapter	Page
Conclusion .....	105
8. WALK BY FAITH: HEBREWS 11:1-12:17.....	107
Definition of Faith (11:1-2) .....	107
Examples of Faith (11:3-40).....	109
Faith in the Face of Death (11:4-7) .....	111
Faith in the Midst of Impossible Odds (11:8-12).....	112
Faith as a Pilgrim (11:13-16).....	113
Faith Looking to the Future (11:17-22).....	115
Faith in the Midst of Suffering (11:23-31).....	116
More Examples of Faith (11:32-40).....	117
Object of Faith: Choose Jesus (12:1-17).....	120
Choose Jesus over the Visible (12:1-3).....	120
Choose Jesus Over the Easy Way (12:4-11) .....	122
Choose Jesus Over a Bowl of Soup (12:12-17) .....	122
Conclusion .....	124
9. A BETTER DESTINATION: HEBREWS 12:18-29 .....	125
The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Unshakable Kingdom .....	125
Jesus as Our Leader.....	126
We as Jesus’s Family and Followers.....	127
The Christian Life as a Journey.....	129
The New Heavens and Earth as Our Destination .....	131
Jesus Leads Us to a Better Mountain (12:18-24).....	134
Jesus Leads Us to a Better Kingdom (12:25-29).....	135
Conclusion .....	137
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	140

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BS</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BTCP	Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>The Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBMW</i>	<i>The Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NABPRDS	National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion Dissertation Series
NAC	The New American Commentary
NACSBT	The New American Commentary Studies in Biblical Theology
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
<i>NT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review &amp; Expositor</i>

<i>SBJT</i>	<i>The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</i>
<i>TJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>VE</i>	<i>Vox Evangelica</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

## LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table	Page
1. Proposed sermon series in the book of Hebrews .....	16
2. Exposition of Psalm 110:4 in Hebrews 7 .....	82
3. Faith choices and unseen rewards in Hebrews 11 .....	110

  

Figure	Page
1. Brief overview of the book of Hebrews .....	26
2. Chiastic structure of Hebrews 5:1-10.....	77

## PREFACE

This project is a result of grace. My pride enjoys the fact that mine is the only name on the front page, but the reality is that this project would never have been completed without the kindness of God and the help of many others. I vividly remember that moment, not too many years ago, when I was so discouraged that I felt like God could never use me. From that rock-bottom moment, God has shown grace unmeasured and given me the privilege of being married to Christa, to whom this project is dedicated. Without her patient sacrifice and listening ear, I would have given up a long time ago. She is the quiet strength in my life. She has cared for our son, Caleb, so as to pick up the slack while I traveled and studied for this degree. It is my joy to run this race with her as we follow Jesus together.

The five years I have had the joy of pastoring at Liberty Baptist Church has been a blessed time. Not only have our dear members allowed and encouraged me to pursue this degree, but they have also blessed my family in untold ways. I was able to preach these sermons on the book of Hebrews to the student ministry in the spring of 2015, and then again to our entire church in the fall of 2015. God's people at Liberty are literally the most generous and kind-hearted people I have ever known.

I am especially grateful to Jim Hamilton for his influence in my life. He changed the way I read the Bible, which in turn has blessed my church, family, and personal life. I have met few men as Bible-saturated and kingdom-minded as he. I am also grateful to Miguel Echevarria, my faculty supervisor, who patiently read this entire project and helped make this work stronger than it would have been otherwise. I am grateful for his friendship and the profound ministry he has had in my life. Joseph Harrod

also read this project and provided helpful feedback, for which I am grateful.

What a joy it was to study biblical theology as a tight-knit group of pastors. Jamie Caldwell guided me through the book of Hebrews with his own sermon series, and reminding me to stay practical. Every conversation with Dustin Coleman, whether at Tom and Chee or Chipotle or in the library, inspired me to be a better pastor, preacher, husband, and father. Brent Dunbar provided helpful feedback throughout this project and inspired me to do better academic work, but above all else has become a good friend. Our cohort would have been incomplete without Mitch Evans, who brought interesting arguments to the table, pushed our understanding of Scripture deeper, and did so with winsomeness and grace. I learned from Andy Lackey as he applied his theology in the midst of personal suffering, always with joy and encouragement for others. Mike Rudolf inspired me with his blend of tenacious commitment to sound doctrine and faithful devotion to the people in his church. The “pastor” of our group was, without a doubt, Dan Turner, and I am grateful for the John-Piper-esque passion and encouragement that he brought to all of us. I am grateful to Nate Williams, not only for his friendship, which goes much earlier than this cohort, but also for his humble leadership with his students, guiding them to a biblical worldview. The time in our cohort has been a time of change for many of us, and I am eager to see where God will use each of these men and will be praying for their transitions into new ministries.

I am indebted to those who provided feedback on the entirety of this project. David Bennett, veteran missionary to Brazil (who also happens to be my father-in-law) gave wise and helpful feedback; I am grateful for his godly example and wise advice. Jeremy McMorris, with whom I have the privilege of pastoring, was faithful to read each chapter and help me wrestle through concepts that were still muddled in my mind. His friendship, leadership, and vision are gifts from God, and it has been a joy to serve with him. I am also grateful for the encouragement of Jonathan Threlfall, Brian Walton, and John Pate throughout this project.

Most of all, I am grateful for Jesus, who truly is better than anything else this world has to offer. My prayer for my church and me—and the burden behind this project—is that we will “turn [our] eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face” knowing that “the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.” May we continue to choose him by faith, for he truly is better.

One quick note needs to be made regarding Scripture references. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version. I have taken the liberty to substitute the ESV’s usage of “LORD” with “Yahweh.”

Brian Pate

Dalhart, Texas

May 2017

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

One of the best tips on Bible reading comes from *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Upon their escape from jail, two bumbling pirates debate the role of providence in their escape. One insists, “It was me being clever,” while the other asks, with open Bible in lap, “How do you know it weren’t divine providence that inspired you to be clever?” To which the first pirate retorts, “You know you can’t read.” Then comes the tip on Bible reading: “It’s the Bible; you get credit for trying!”<sup>1</sup>

Though Christians could benefit from his enthusiasm, albeit misguided, many Christians do little better than this illiterate pirate when it comes to understanding the Bible. Dragging one’s eyeballs across the page does little to further sanctification or understanding of Scripture. The members of Liberty Baptist Church, a church where I have the privilege of serving as an associate pastor, need to have a deeper experience with God through his Word. The book of Hebrews is ideal for helping believers grasp the big picture of the Bible. This project focuses on the book of Hebrews for three reasons.

First, the unfortunate neglect of this book calls for attention.<sup>2</sup> Hebrews has been referred to as “one of the most difficult New Testament books to understand.”<sup>3</sup> As a result, it is a closed book to many Christians. They may treasure a few nuggets regarding

---

<sup>1</sup>*Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man’s Chest*, directed by Gore Verbinski (Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Pictures, 2006).

<sup>2</sup>Lindars mentions that Hebrews “tends to be neglected by those who read the New Testament for spiritual profit. The argument on the sacrifice of Christ also seems to be locked in the presuppositions of the past, so that its value for contemporary theology can be called in question” (Barnabas Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*, New Testament Theology [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], 128).

<sup>3</sup>Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 1.

the two-edged sword (Heb 4:12) and running the race (12:1) and they might frequent the Hall of Faith (chap. 11), and yet the overall theme and argument of Hebrews remain a mystery to many modern day believers. There are a variety of reasons for this. The flow of argument is complex with many asides and excurses along the way. The intricate references to the priesthood and sacrificial system are foreign to modern day believers, tempting them to question the book's relevance for their lives. The author's frequent use of OT quotations and allusions can be confusing and even appear illegitimate at times. The illustration of Melchizedek does little to clear things up. All things considered, Hebrews can be an intimidating book. Such neglect provides motivation to grapple with Hebrews with the goal of clear exposition and relevant application.

Second, the book of Hebrews is significant for a holistic understanding of the Bible. If one wants to grasp the big picture of the Bible, one of the most important books to understand is the Epistle to the Hebrews. Its brilliant eloquence, high Christology, and urgent pastoral appeals all demand scholarly and devotional attention. In addition, Hebrews provides a pattern for biblical theologians by opening a window into "the hermeneutical assumptions of first-century Christians."<sup>4</sup> In so doing, it "provides many of the working elements for developing biblical theology."<sup>5</sup>

Third, the book of Hebrews is brimming with pastoral application. Hebrews was not written by an armchair theologian but by an individual with a warm pastor's heart. George Guthrie remarks that the author's "first concern is to present a dynamic, motivational, relational appeal, not a cold theological treatise."<sup>6</sup> In fact, the entire book of

---

<sup>4</sup>D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 405.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 406.

<sup>6</sup>George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 37.

Hebrews is a “word of exhortation” (Heb 13:22), most likely a sermon or collection of sermons.<sup>7</sup>

The goal of these studies in the book of Hebrews was to help members of Liberty Baptist Church to choose Jesus because he is better. Rather than getting bogged down in a book they hardly understand, I trust that the members of Liberty were able to glimpse an exalted view of Christ and press forward into the glorious realities he has made possible in the New Covenant. This was accomplished in part by preaching a series of sermons through the book of Hebrews from a biblical theological perspective.

Before delving into the book of Hebrews itself, several issues must be addressed. (1) For these sermons to emerge from a biblical theological perspective, it is important to define biblical theology and understand its purpose. (2) Once a working definition of biblical theology has been established, it is necessary to explore how this should affect the task of preaching. I will briefly explore what a sermon from a biblical theological perspective would look like. (3) Preaching through the book of Hebrews from a biblical theological viewpoint faces unique challenges. To proceed, one must ascertain the role that the book of Hebrews plays in God’s grand redemptive story. (4) This is not the first time the book of Hebrews has been studied in this way, so it will be important to explore the literature relevant to this project. (5) Finally, a sermon series through the book of Hebrews from a biblical theological perspective will be presented.

### **What Is Biblical Theology?**

There are right and wrong ways to put together a puzzle. Some people dump all the pieces on the floor and start matching. Others find pieces that almost fit and force them into place. Most people begin by looking at the box cover so they can see the big

---

<sup>7</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 584.

picture. Then they connect the border pieces so they have a good framework. Then the individual pieces fall neatly into place. Before long, the puzzle is completed.

When studying the Bible, it is important to understand how it fits together. It is unwise (and dangerous) to study the Bible like some people work puzzles. Cobbling random verses together will produce some strange theology. It is vital to understand the big picture and establish a good framework into which one can fit all the pieces.

### **Definition of Biblical Theology**

This brings us to the world of biblical theology, a branch of theology that is vital for the church's understanding of its doctrines and practices. Biblical theology is the new kid on the block when it comes to the modern study of theology. The field of biblical theology is far from monolithic and has even been used to defend contradictory viewpoints. Edward Klink and Darian Lockett make this point when they assert, "Biblical theology has been used for . . . divergent perspectives and agendas. Biblical theology has become a catchphrase, a wax nose that can mean anything" from a historical-critical to a theological model.<sup>8</sup> Ever since J. P. Gabler argued for the delineation of biblical and systematic theology in 1787,<sup>9</sup> the field of biblical theology has received attention from liberals and conservatives alike. Throughout the Enlightenment and short-lived Biblical Theology Movement, biblical theology was a tool for those who rejected the authority of Scripture. According to James Hamilton, it is quite possible that "[Geerhardus] Vos salvaged the tool from the damage done to it by the Enlightenment."<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup>Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 13, emphasis in original.

<sup>9</sup>See Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 23-24.

<sup>10</sup>James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 43. Still, there are many approaches to biblical theology, spanning from historical to canonical to theological. These views are explored in Klink and Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology*.

Far from replacing time-honored approaches, the discussion regarding biblical theology provides foundational support for exegetical, systematic, and applied theology. Each of these serves an important role in arriving at a full-orbed picture of God's revelation. Biblical theology assists in putting together the puzzle called the Bible by providing the big picture of God's story and building a framework by highlighting the emphases of the Bible. With this in mind, biblical theology can be defined as a hermeneutical grid that keeps an eye on the unique theological emphases of the biblical authors while keeping the other eye on the way God's grand redemptive story is unfolding.

**God's metanarrative.** Reading the Bible without understanding biblical theology is like putting together a puzzle without consulting the box cover. Biblical theology acknowledges from the outset that the Bible is the story of God's redemptive history.<sup>11</sup> As God's story of redemption unfolds, God progressively reveals himself.<sup>12</sup> Although the Bible spans thousands of years and dozens of authors, there are connecting themes that form a metanarrative.

One theme that runs through the entire Bible, for example, is that of God's kingdom. God is the king. The kingdom consists of God's people in God's place enjoying God's presence.<sup>13</sup> His kingdom was perfect in the Garden of Eden but Adam and Eve rebelled against God's kingship. Ever since, man has been trying to build his own kingdom and God has been on a mission to restore his kingdom. When King Jesus arrives, he announces that the kingdom has also arrived. After the King is murdered and

---

<sup>11</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, "Preaching and Biblical Theology," *SBJT* 10 (2006): 22.

<sup>12</sup>Vos states that biblical theology is "the study of the actual self-disclosures of God in time and space" (Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1948], 5).

<sup>13</sup>I owe this idea and some of the wording to Vaughan Roberts: "The kingdom of God: God's people in God's place under God's rule and blessing" (Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2002], 22).

resurrected, his kingdom advances through the missionary efforts of his disciples. The book of Revelation is the dénouement to God's big story: the triumph of the King and the consummation of God's kingdom in the new heavens and earth. Biblical theology opens our eyes to the grandeur of the big picture of the Bible.

**Unique emphases.** Biblical theology also builds a supporting framework for biblical interpretation. In the same way that a puzzle is completed quickest by constructing the “edge pieces” first, so also one's understanding of the Bible thrives within the confines of the framework of the biblical authors' unique emphases. In other words, biblical theology seeks to answer the question, “What was important to the biblical authors?” This theological approach thereby “seeks to understand the Bible in its own terms, in its own chronology, as reflected in its canonical form.”<sup>14</sup> Biblical theology seeks inductively to uncover the unique themes of the Bible as they organically develop in God's progressive revelation.<sup>15</sup>

As an interpretive method, biblical theology helps us adopt the worldview of the Bible as our own. It does so by unveiling the big picture of the Bible and demonstrating the continuity of intercanonical themes. Biblical theology also builds a framework for Bible interpretation by allowing the unique emphases of individual authors to surface inductively. In summary, biblical theology is a hermeneutical method that interprets the unique emphases of individual biblical authors in light of the metanarrative.

---

<sup>14</sup>Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 45.

<sup>15</sup>See Michael Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church: A Guide for Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 26. There is room in the field of biblical theology to focus on the unique contributions of specific corpa or authors within the Bible. See James M. Hamilton, Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 15.

## **Purpose of Biblical Theology**

This approach to theology is vital for the health of the church in doctrine and practice. Like an impatient child jamming puzzle pieces into place, creative theologians can easily import their own ideas into the text of Scripture. Biblical theology protects the church from erroneous theology by allowing “the book to tell its own story instead of imposing onto it an alternative story generated by the modern academy.”<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, biblical theology is valuable for church practice. This theological process reveals what the text meant to its original recipients. The task is incomplete without discovering what the text means to a contemporary audience. It is not merely for scholarly curiosity that the theologian discovers the perspective of the biblical authors, but it is so that he may adopt it as his own.

## **Summary**

There are right and wrong ways to do theology. Some people base their lives on verses drawn at random from a promise box. Others impose their ideas on Scripture and force troublesome verses into their preconceived system. Biblical theology protects from both of these errors by highlighting God’s big picture while also valuing the unique contributions of individual authors.

Having gained an understanding of the definition and purpose of biblical theology, the next step is to ascertain how this approach to theology should affect one’s preaching. For this project to successfully present sermons in the book of Hebrews from a biblical theological perspective, it is crucial to understand what a biblical theological sermon would look like.

---

<sup>16</sup>Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 44.

## **Biblical Theology and Preaching**

Modern believers too often have a flannelgraph-story view of the Bible. The average Christian does not read the Bible from a biblical theological perspective, thus limiting their understanding of the grand picture of the Bible, unique emphases of individual authors, and important intercanonical connections. The need for biblical theology in the pew provides the gospel minister the responsibility (and opportunity) to preach from a biblical theological perspective.

Biblical theology can become an aid to effective preaching in at least three ways. First, a sermon flavored by biblical theology will connect the passage under consideration to the overarching story of the Bible. It will answer the question, What is the relationship of this pericope to the theme(s) of the Bible as a whole? What role does this passage play in God's grand story of redemption? For example, preaching the story of David and Goliath as an example of bravery only scratches the surface. A wise preacher will show how this story exalts the anointed king in conquering the seed of the serpent.

Second, preaching from a biblical theology perspective will highlight the unique themes of the biblical author. The sermon should connect the text to its immediate context. How does this paragraph advance the story or argument the author is making? Are there themes that support unique emphases of this author? For example, Luke seems to emphasize wealth and poverty. If one were preaching on Luke 12:13-21, he would want to understand Luke's theology of wealth and explain how this passage supports Luke's overall emphasis.

Third, a biblical theologian will note intercanonical connections. The preacher will work hard to explain any types or symbols that point to a larger fulfillment in Christ (or point out previous symbols that are interpreted in the passage at hand, as the case may be). For example, connecting 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 with Ezekiel 43:6-7, 9, 12 helps believers realize that, just as *porneia* was not allowed in the eschatological temple, so

sexual immorality has no place in their lives now that they are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Preaching through the book of Hebrews from a biblical theological perspective introduces unique challenges. The book of Hebrews stands at a critical juncture in redemptive history, and its theological message must be interpreted accordingly. This brings us to the experience of first-century believers.

### **The Book of Hebrews in God's Big Picture**

The intended audience of the book of Hebrews was a largely Jewish congregation<sup>17</sup> that was tempted to revert to Judaism and its system of priests and sacrifices.<sup>18</sup> They failed to grasp how the promised arrival of King Jesus had launched the new age and replaced the OT rituals. Living as they did at the juncture between the old and new covenants, it was difficult to grasp God's big picture of redemption. Like Polly and Digory in *The Wood between the Worlds*,<sup>19</sup> perhaps they felt trapped between two realities: the world of the old covenant and the world of the new covenant. One world was crumbling, breathing its last; the other world was just beginning. They needed to know into which world to jump. The book of Hebrews serves as a bridge between the old and new covenants.

---

<sup>17</sup>It is not necessary to hold that this congregation was entirely Jewish, but it is likely that their “theological vocabulary and conceptions were informed by the rich legacy of Hellenistic Judaism” (William L. Lane, *Hebrews*, WBC 47 [Nashville: Thomas Nelson], 1:lv). For his extended treatment on the intended audience, see Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:li-lx.

<sup>18</sup>Frank Thielman believes that they were prone to return to Judaism “as a means of avoiding the social ostracism, imprisonment, theft, and violence that went with their commitment to an unpopular and novel eastern cult” (Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, 588). Barnabas Lindars proposes that they wanted to return to the Jewish sacrificial system because it helped them *feel* forgiven: “The readers have lost confidence in the power of the sacrifice of Christ to deal with their consciousness of sin” (Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*, 12). Lindars’ reconstruction of the letter’s audience is short on fact and long on conjecture.

<sup>19</sup>C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 28.

The world of the OT is held together with images such as the priesthood, the sacrificial system, and the Promised Land (and the promised rest they enjoyed within it). Since “all the promises of God find their Yes in [Jesus]” (2 Cor 1:20) it is not surprising that Hebrews presents Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of these OT concepts. Hamilton explains that “both the priesthood and the sacrificial system given to Old Testament Israel are shadows pointing forward to better realities in Christ (cf. Heb. 10:1).”<sup>20</sup> Not only is Jesus a new and better priest (Heb 5-7), but he is also a new and better sacrifice (Heb 9-10). The ministry of Jesus replaces the Old Covenant because it is “more excellent” and “better” (Heb 8:6). There is no need for repeated offerings since Jesus’s sacrifice was “once for all” (Heb 10:10-12).<sup>21</sup> Although OT saints were able to experience partial rest in the Promised Land, “the promise of entering his rest still stands” (Heb 4:1) for NT believers when they turn in faith to the One who said, “I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28).<sup>22</sup>

The author of Hebrews is concerned that believers are caught between two worlds. Instead of drifting and turning back to the old covenant, the author exhorts them to press on and place faith in Jesus as their superior priest and better sacrifice. God’s metanarrative is not stagnant; it is advancing toward Jesus as the fulfillment of all of God’s promises. Returning to the old covenant system would be, in the words of Frank Thielman, “turning back the eschatological clock.”<sup>23</sup> These believers must not go

---

<sup>20</sup>Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, 80.

<sup>21</sup>Schreiner examines the connection between Old Testament sacrifices and the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. “The author of Hebrews does not repudiate OT sacrifices. . . . OT sacrifices were commanded by God and were fitting for a previous era of redemptive history. They point to another bloody sacrifice. They are typological in nature, anticipating a better sacrifice to come” (Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 589).

<sup>22</sup>Schreiner describes the land promise as ultimately fulfilled in the new heavens and new earth. “The author of Hebrews understands the land promises of the OT typologically. The rest in the land granted to Israel under Joshua points to a greater rest, a heavenly rest, a Sabbath rest, which will be enjoyed by the people of God. . . . The land promise will be fulfilled, but it will be fulfilled in a new world, a world where rest is unending and where God resides in the city” (Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 595-96).

<sup>23</sup>Thielman adds that “turning back the eschatological clock” would be “settling for the shadowy outline of atonement when the substance that the outline describes has already arrived and Christ

backwards. They must get on board with the flow of God’s grand redemptive story. If they remain caught between these two worlds, the author of Hebrews warns them that they will get left behind.

The “bridge” constructed by the author of Hebrews serves to connect the old covenant and the eschatological realities of the new covenant. By exposing the symbols and quotations of the OT, he demonstrates how Jesus replaces the old covenant system. Therefore, it is a vital book for every NT believer to understand. If one wants to understand God’s big picture in the Bible, he must understand Hebrews.

Understanding the role of Hebrews in God’s big picture is vital to progressing in a biblical theological sermon series. Others have written extensively on the theology of the book of Hebrews. In regard to theology, innovation is not necessarily a virtue, and so I have gleaned from the insights of those who have studied the book of Hebrews before me.

### **Literature on the Book of Hebrews**

Listing the resources on the book of Hebrews would require a book in itself. Specific issues relating to Hebrews have generated volumes of opinion.<sup>24</sup> The following overview of literature on Hebrews is by no means exhaustive, but reflects the best resources upon which this project will be based. Most significant for this project are exegetical works (commentaries) and theologies of the book as a whole.

---

has already provided the ultimate atonement” (Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, 587).

<sup>24</sup>For an extensive bibliography of commentaries and works on special issues, see Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), xxiv-xlix. For an older but equally extensive bibliography, see Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:xxx-xlvi.

## Exegetical Works

Perhaps the most exhaustive commentary on the book of Hebrews is the monumental work by John Owen (originally published between 1668 and 1684).<sup>25</sup> Written in response to Socinian Soteriology, Owen emphasizes the beauty of Jesus and how it should affect the lives of believers.<sup>26</sup> Kelly Kopic praises Owen's work, saying that his commentary "blends biblical scholarship, theological reflection, and pastoral concern unlike anything else I know of in the history of commentaries on Hebrews."<sup>27</sup> One of Owen's primary contributions to the study of Hebrews is in the area of OT typology.<sup>28</sup> John Owen's seven volumes on the book of Hebrews remain a wealth of blessing and benefit for modern interpreters, especially those desiring to explore Hebrews from a biblical theological perspective.

The best modern commentary on the book of Hebrews is widely recognized to be the two-volume work by William Lane in the Word Biblical Commentary series.<sup>29</sup> *Hebrews* was first published in 1991 and begins with over 150 pages of valuable introductory material, including a masterful essay on "Importance and Appropriation of the Old Testament Text."<sup>30</sup> Of the commentaries reviewed here, Lane's is one of the few to explore the theology of Hebrews in a discrete section, and briefly at that. Lane proposes that "the central theme of Hebrews is the importance of listening to the voice of God in Scripture and in the act of Christian preaching."<sup>31</sup> He briefly explores the high

---

<sup>25</sup>John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 7 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991).

<sup>26</sup>J. I. Packer, introduction to *Hebrews*, by John Owen (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), ix.

<sup>27</sup>Kelly M. Kopic, "Typology, the Messiah, and John Owen's Theological Reading of Hebrews," in *Christology, Hermeneutics, and Hebrews: Profiles from the History of Interpretation*, ed. Jon C. Laansma and Daniel J. Treier (New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 136.

<sup>28</sup>For a helpful treatment of Owen's perspective on typology, see *ibid.*, 139-54.

<sup>29</sup>Lane, *Hebrews*.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 1:cxxii-cxxiv.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 1:cxxvii.

Christology of the book, including the book of Hebrews' perspective on the humiliation and exaltation of the Son and his role as priest.<sup>32</sup> For a synthesis of microscopic and macroscopic exegesis, Lane's commentary on Hebrews stands unrivaled.

O'Brien's commentary on the book of Hebrews was released in 2010 as part of the Pillar New Testament Commentary series.<sup>33</sup> With his characteristically clear and stimulating style, O'Brien expounds the book of Hebrews verse by verse, but also shows the flow of argument and how each paragraph connects to the whole message.<sup>34</sup>

Recently F. F. Bruce's respected work on Hebrews in the New International Commentary on the New Testament series<sup>35</sup> was ably replaced by Gareth Lee Cockerill's 2012 work.<sup>36</sup> Cockerill interprets the warning passages from a Wesleyan Arminian perspective.<sup>37</sup> In the introduction to the commentary, Cockerill includes a section on "The Sermon's Use of the Old Testament," which is a great aid in understanding the intercanonical connections in the book of Hebrews.<sup>38</sup>

Written specifically from a biblical theological perspective is Thomas Schreiner's volume in the Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation series.<sup>39</sup> Schreiner not only lives up to his reputation for clear exegesis, but also deftly identifies

---

<sup>32</sup>Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:cxxxv-cxlv.

<sup>33</sup>O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*.

<sup>34</sup>Recent attention has been drawn to O'Brien's less-than adequate method of citing his sources, leading Eerdmans to withdraw his commentary on Hebrews (<http://www.eerdmans.com/Pages/Item/59043/Commentary-Statement.aspx>). Without even trying, I noticed two examples as I read different commentaries: O'Brien lifts extended wording from Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:233 (O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 316) and comes very close to plagiarizing Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:409 (O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 452). This flaw does not negate the value of O'Brien's work, but does motivate me to strive toward stricter standards in my own writing.

<sup>35</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

<sup>36</sup>Cockerill, *Hebrews*.

<sup>37</sup>Cockerill represented the Wesleyan Arminian view in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 257-92.

<sup>38</sup>Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 41-59.

<sup>39</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *Hebrews*, BTCP (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2015).

the OT types and allusions. His explanation of the author's use of the OT is particularly helpful. He concludes the commentary with a significant section on the biblical theological themes in the book of Hebrews.<sup>40</sup>

### **Theological Works**

The commentary literature reviewed above provides scant treatment of the theology of the book of Hebrews as a whole. This task is picked up by others, whether in individual volumes or a chapter in a New Testament theology.

Until recently, the primary example of exploring the theology of Hebrews was the fascinating work by Barnabas Lindars in the excellent series published by Cambridge University Press.<sup>41</sup> His understanding of the message of Hebrews is fresh and illuminating. Understanding the situation of the original recipients is, according to Lindars, the key to understanding the theology of Hebrews. Based on Hebrews 13, his reconstruction of the original audience leads him to conclude that this group of believers was tempted to revert to the old system of sacrifices because “they need to *feel* that they are forgiven.”<sup>42</sup> Lindars unpacks the theological message of Hebrews by working progressively through the book of Hebrews. He proposes that the epistle begins by gaining rapport with his audience by reiterating “the foundation in the primitive kerygma.”<sup>43</sup> Lindars makes significant and helpful contributions to the discussion on the theology of Hebrews. First, Lindars convincingly argues that the inauguration of the new age in the perfect sacrifice of Christ is a key theme in the book of Hebrews.<sup>44</sup> Second and

---

<sup>40</sup> Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 435-99.

<sup>41</sup> Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 14. By concluding that this was the sole attraction to the Jewish sacrificial system, Lindars misses other factors, including the fact that they were being persecuted and ostracized by society, their families, and even the government. It is not necessary to conclude that the teaching they had received was deficient.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-42.

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

especially helpful is Lindars' conception of perfection, not as a "moral ideal" but to express the completion of God's redemptive plan.<sup>45</sup> Third, Lindars offers a helpful interpretation of the notorious warning passages. Lindars proposes that there remains no other sacrifice for sin if one rejects Jesus's death on the cross. His sacrificial death is the only potent sacrifice. If they return to the old sacrifices, "paradoxically they are turning away from the means of reconciliation in the endeavour to find it."<sup>46</sup> This short book is a valuable help in understanding the theological message of Hebrews. Its helpfulness in grasping the big picture of the book outweighs the brief criticisms one will have along the way.<sup>47</sup>

The recent contribution to the New Studies in Biblical Theology series is an excellent one-volume theology of the book of Hebrews. Expanding on, and sometimes overlapping with, his 2010 Pillar commentary on Hebrews, Peter T. O'Brien explores the theology of Hebrews in *God Has Spoken in His Son: A Biblical Theology of Hebrews*.<sup>48</sup> He arranges his treatment topically, looking at God's revelation (chap. 1), Christology (chap. 2), Soteriology (chap. 3), the people of God (chap. 4), and the warning passages (chap. 5). While his treatment on the author of Hebrew's use of the OT is good so far as it goes, I would have preferred more in depth treatment of the hermeneutical presuppositions of the NT authors.

The theology of the book of Hebrews is ably but briefly expressed in larger works. In his excellent treatment, Frank Thielman argues that the theological point of Hebrews is that Jesus is God's climactic revelation and then he highlights the practical

---

<sup>45</sup>Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*, 44.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 69.

<sup>47</sup>These critiques include Lindars's questioning the sinlessness of Jesus (ibid., 63n53) and undermining the inerrancy of Scripture (ibid., 86).

<sup>48</sup>Peter T. O'Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son: A Biblical Theology of Hebrews*, NSBT 39 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016).

implications.<sup>49</sup> In *The King in His Beauty*, Thomas Schreiner connects the book of Hebrews to the overarching theme of Christ’s kingdom and demonstrates his superiority to angels, Moses, Joshua, and the Levitical priesthood. He provides helpful insights regarding the OT land promise and the sticky warning passages.<sup>50</sup>

Having understood the nature of biblical theology, how it relates to preaching, how Hebrews fits into biblical theology, and the relevant literature, we are poised to present a sermon series on the book of Hebrews from a biblical theological perspective.

### **A Proposed Sermon Series**

Preaching through the book of Hebrews is like panning for gold. The problem is not in finding gold but in carrying it all home. A preacher could spend years in the book of Hebrews and not exhaust its glorious truths. I preached through the book of Hebrews for the student ministry at Liberty Baptist Church during the spring of 2015 and then again to the church as a whole during the fall of 2015. Running the risk of leaving much gold behind, this sermon series only provided an overview of the message of Hebrews.

Table 1. Proposed sermon series in the book of Hebrews

	<i>Sermon Title</i>	<i>Passage</i>
1	Choose Jesus because he is better	1:1-4
2	How not to drift from God	1:5-2:4
3	Humbled for us	2:5-18
4	Only Jesus can fill the empty heart	3:1-4:13
5	A better priest	4:14-5:10; 7:1-28
6	It is finished	8:1-10:18
7	Walk by faith	11:1-12:17
8	A better destination	12:18-13:25

---

<sup>49</sup>Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, 585-611.

<sup>50</sup>Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 583-96.

These sermons are presented from a biblical theological perspective. First, each sermon connects to the unfolding story of God’s redemption. In this case, the author of Hebrews builds an intricate argument to demonstrate the superiority of the New Covenant over the old system of priesthood and sacrifices. A biblical theological sermon reflects the “bridge” nature of the book of Hebrews. Second, this preaching series highlights the unique themes of the author of Hebrews, which in a nutshell include his presentation of Christology, Soteriology, and the necessary response of faith. Third, and especially significant for the book of Hebrews, these sermons highlight the author’s use of the OT. Ultimately, each sermon supports the overarching theme of the book of Hebrews: *Because the person and work of Jesus has launched the New Covenant, believers should keep growing in the gospel.* Or put more simply: *Choose Jesus because he is better.*

### **Choose Jesus Because He Is Better (Heb 1:1-4)**

The first sermon provides introductory material for the book of Hebrews (including author, date, genre, and audience). Although we do not know who the author is, we do know that the book of Hebrews is a sermon written sometime between AD 60-70 to a house church in Rome. The original audience was tempted to revert back to the OT system of priests and sacrifices, drifting away from Jesus. In Hebrews 1:1-4, the author presents a majestic introduction to his sermon defending the superiority of Jesus as the climax of God’s revelation.<sup>51</sup> As the final act in God’s redemptive drama, Jesus launches a new age. The phrase, “in these last days,” marks a contrast between the old system of 1:1 and the final word of Jesus in 1:2. The coming of the Messiah marked “God’s

---

<sup>51</sup>Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, 585.

intervention to save his people, inaugurating a new era.”<sup>52</sup> Christ’s superiority is itemized: Jesus is ruler (1:2b), creator (1:2c), the image of God (1:3a), the sustainer (1:3b), the savior (1:3c), exalted (1:3d), and superior to angels (1:4). Once believers understand “their privileged eschatological position,” Thielman believes it will encourage them to “be faithful to the message of salvation they have heard.”<sup>53</sup> In other words, we must understand Christ’s superiority and our union with him so that we can respond in faith and obedience.

### **How Not to Drift from God (Heb 1:5-2:4)**

The temptation of the original audience to drift from Jesus was not unique to them, but is something toward which we are prone as well. The author of Hebrews believes that the best way to guard against drifting is to focus on the glory of Christ, just like the way to keep from drifting into oncoming traffic is to focus on the white line on the side of the road. To catch a glimpse of Christ’s glory, the author reminds us that Jesus is better than angels (1:5-14). His superiority is clear when we catch a glimpse of Jesus’s coronation day (1:5), celebration in heaven (1:6-7), continuous reign (1:8-12), and ultimate conquest (1:13-14). Then comes the necessary response (2:1-4): We must gaze at the glory of Christ to guard from drifting from God.

### **Humbled for Us (Heb 2:5-18)**

After demonstrating the superiority of Jesus over angels (1:5-14) and exhorting his audience to embrace the gospel (2:1-4), the author of Hebrews explains that in the incarnation Jesus was made lower than the angels. This might seem like an odd note for him to strike, especially considering his emphasis on the exaltation of Jesus. However, it is his suffering and death that qualified him to be exalted. The author of Hebrews outlines

---

<sup>52</sup>Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*, 30-31.

<sup>53</sup>Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, 585.

four reasons why Jesus humbled himself. First, Jesus humbled himself to rule for us, so one day we will rule with him (2:5-9). Second, Jesus humbled himself to suffer on our behalf, modeling for us the way to trust and rejoice in our own suffering (2:10-13). Third, Jesus humbled himself to save us (2:14-15) and, fourth, he humbled himself to help us (2:16-18). For those of us who keenly feel our failures, Jesus is the answer.

### **Only Jesus Can Fill the Empty Heart (Heb 3:1-4:13)**

The author of Hebrews advances his argument further by explaining that Jesus is superior to Moses (3:1-6) and Joshua (3:7-4:13). Jesus is a better leader over God's house who will lead God's people into the new Promised Land. The partial rest found in the land was a type that pointed to our final destination, the new heavens and earth, towards which Jesus is leading us. Just as this rest was available in part to the audience of Psalm 95, the invitation to enter God's rest is available to every generation of God's people. The way to enter God's house is not through Moses, but through Jesus. Joshua could only lead them to a partial experience of rest, but the ultimate fulfillment is to be found in Jesus. The author of Hebrews fears that his audience might miss the blessings for which they are searching by looking in the wrong places. If we doubt that Jesus is better, it will lead us to disobey God, which in turn will lead to our damnation. The solution is faith. We can enjoy this rest now through our relationship with Christ (4:3), but we also look forward to our final home when we will rest from our works (4:10).

### **A Better Priest (Heb 4:14-5:10; 7:1-28)**

A priest is a mediator or middle man between God and man, a position for which Jesus is uniquely qualified (5:1-10). However, Jesus is not from the tribe of Levi, but rather is a priest after the order of Melchizedek (7:1-28). Though tempted to shrink back to the familiarity of the Levitical priesthood, believers must confidently draw near to God's presence exclusively by means of Jesus, our great high priest. The priesthood of

Jesus is superior because his priesthood has no end (7:23-24), his salvation has no limit (7:25), and he is without sin (7:26-28). Since we have a better priest, how should we respond? First, we must hold fast (4:14). This is not the time to give up, but rather we must keep choosing Jesus because he is better. Second, we must draw near (4:15-16). Our feelings of guilt, sin, or condemnation may keep us at a distance from our Father, but the high priesthood of Jesus opens the door into his very presence.

### **It Is Finished (Heb 8:1-10:18)**

Not only is Jesus a superior high priest, but he is also a superior sacrifice (chaps. 8-10). The better sacrifice of Christ addresses our deepest need. First, we need a new heart with power to obey God, and the person and work of Jesus launches a better covenant that does exactly that (8:1-13). Second, we need full access to God's presence, something the OT priests could not provide, but now Jesus's better sacrifice grants us full access to God (9:1-28). Third, we need our sins taken care of once and for all, something the OT sacrifices were unable to provide, but now the perfect priest offers himself as the perfect sacrifice and triumphantly announces, "It is finished" (John 19:30). In Hebrews 8-10, the author provides one of the strongest reasons why we should choose Jesus, namely, because he is a better sacrifice.

### **Walk by Faith (Heb 11:1-12:17)**

Having established the superiority of Christ in Hebrews 1:1-10:18, the author now exhorts his audience to respond with faith and fortitude. Choosing Jesus is only possible by faith: "My righteous one shall live by faith" (10:38). Faith is living in light of the invisible world, and to illustrate this principle, the author marshals many examples of faith from the OT. These were men and women who demonstrated faith in the midst of the threat of death, impossible odds, their earthly pilgrimage, the future, and intense suffering. The hall of faith culminates in the greatest example of faith, Jesus Christ (12:1-

3), and believers are exhorted to follow Jesus by accepting God's discipline (12:4-11). Esau is presented as the ultimate example of not living by faith since he chose a bowl of soup over his birthright (12:12-17). There are two worlds between which we must choose—this visible world and the invisible better world. To make this decision, we must put on our faith glasses so that we can walk by faith.

### **A Better Destination (Heb 12:18-29)**

In the final sermon, we briefly review the book of Hebrews by exploring Jesus as our better leader who leads his family as pilgrims on a journey. Where is he taking us? Jesus is leading “many sons to glory” (2:10), that is, a better destination. In Hebrews 12, the author pictures our final home as Mt. Zion (12:18-24) and an unshakable kingdom (12:25-29). Since the old, visible world is fading away, we must choose Jesus because he will lead us to a better destination.

### **Conclusion**

The book of Hebrews is a bridge to a new world. Tempted as many are to revert to their old way of living, it is essential for believers to grasp the biblical theological message of Hebrews. The author warns believers that the old world is crumbling beneath their feet. The person and work of Jesus launched a new world open to anyone who will choose Jesus and cling to his gospel. Because the person and work of Jesus has launched the New Covenant, believers should keep growing in the gospel. The old is fading away; a new world awaits. Believers must jump into the correct world lest they remain caught between two worlds. The author of Hebrews admonishes us that it is time—it is time to make a decision. We must choose Jesus because he is better.

## CHAPTER 2

### CHOOSE JESUS BECAUSE HE IS BETTER: HEBREWS 1:1-4

Hawaii was his dream destination. He had saved for years to take his family on the ultimate vacation. He even had a postcard from Hawaii pinned to the inside of his office cubicle as a reminder of the trip to come. That postcard was a source of encouragement for him, especially when financial emergencies caused them to dip into their vacation savings. Through all the setbacks and frustrations, that well-worn postcard reminded him that Hawaii was coming. Finally the day came when his family boarded the airplane for their long-anticipated trip to Hawaii. As he settled into his overnight flight, he tucked the Hawaii postcard into his pocket. The plane landed, they collected their luggage, and they settled in at their beachfront hotel.

And then our man does something odd. He closes the curtains, sits on the edge of his hotel bed, and pulls out his tattered postcard of Hawaii. There he sits for hours gazing at the postcard. His children pull on his arms and legs, coaxing him to come outside with them. His wife even tries to snatch the postcard out of his hands. “We’re finally here,” she exclaims, “why are you still looking at that old postcard?” And she’s right. The postcard has served its purpose. It was fine for him to hang on to the postcard when it helped him anticipate the trip. But now he is in Hawaii. It is time to put the postcard away, open the curtains, get outside, and enjoy Hawaii. The postcard becomes obsolete once he can experience the real thing. Here is a good rule of thumb. Vacations are better than postcards.

The book of Hebrews is written to a group of believers struggling with a similar temptation. They love the “postcards” of the OT—the priests, sacrifices,

tabernacle, and Promised Land—but now that the “real thing” has arrived, the postcards are obsolete. The author of Hebrews writes to them saying, “Stop staring at the postcard. Go outside and enjoy Hawaii.” They need to choose Jesus because he is better.

### **Introduction to the Book of Hebrews**

As already mentioned in chapter 1, Peter O’Brien believes that “Hebrews is one of the most difficult New Testament books to understand.”<sup>1</sup> That may not be the best advertisement for a study in the book of Hebrews. The facts remain that this is a tough book. It will serve us well to begin by learning as much as possible about this wonderful book. We will begin by addressing a few issues: the author, date, genre, and audience of the book. “What does that matter?” you may ask. In fact, getting the answers to these questions correct is vital to understanding the message of the book of Hebrews. If we get these questions wrong, we will be on the wrong footing from the very outset, like the driver who, despite the fact that she was making great time, arrived in North Carolina when she was aiming for California. Before we hit the road, let us make sure that we are heading in the right direction.

First, who wrote the book of Hebrews? People have proposed numerous suggestions, including Paul, Luke, Barnabas, Apollos, and Priscilla. But the truth is that no one knows.<sup>2</sup> And that is okay. If God’s people needed to know whom the author was, then God would have revealed it. It is clear that the author of Hebrews was a pastor-theologian. He knew his OT well and he loved his people deeply. And he was willing to

---

<sup>1</sup>Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 1.

<sup>2</sup>Origen famously said, “Who wrote the epistle, in truth God knows” (O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 2). Although the authorship of Hebrews is unknown, it is unlikely that it is Paul (for reasoning, see O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 4-6) and equally unlikely that the author of Hebrews was dependent on the writings of Paul (O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 41-42). The masculine participle in 11:32 precludes a female author (see Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012], 2). For an extensive overview of the arguments for Paul, Barnabas, and Apollos, as well as a robust defense of Lukan authorship, see David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, NAC (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 29-61. See also David L. Allen, *Lukan Authorship of Hebrews*, NACSBT (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010).

“get in their grill,” so to speak (hence, the warning passages, Heb 2:1-4; 3:12-4:13; 5:11-6:12; 10:26-39; 12:25-29).

Second, when was the book of Hebrews written? The general consensus among commentators is that Hebrews was written before AD 70 (probably between AD 60-70)<sup>3</sup> to a house church in Rome.<sup>4</sup>

Third, what type of book is Hebrews? The book of Hebrews itself tells us that it is a “word of exhortation” (Heb 13:22). It is likely based on Acts 13:15 that the book of Hebrews was a “synagogue homily.”<sup>5</sup> The resultant book of Hebrews is most likely a manuscript sermon.<sup>6</sup> As such, its purpose is not just to provide information but rather to change lives. Like all good sermons, he focuses on application since “one cannot separate theological exposition from exhortation nor diminish one in favor of the other.”<sup>7</sup>

Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, to whom was Hebrews written? As mentioned in chapter 1, this group of believers was tempted to go back to their old way of living. They were most likely prone to drift back to the OT system of priests and sacrifices.<sup>8</sup> It was as if they were still infatuated with the “postcard of Hawaii” even

---

<sup>3</sup>So Thomas R. Schreiner, *Hebrews*, BTCP (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2015), 6; O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 15-20. Although many authors make much of the author’s failure to mention the temple, it does not appear to affect the dating of the book. The presence or absence of the physical temple would not have affected the author’s argument, which he is drawing primarily from the OT, not circumstantial current events. Rightly, Cockerill states, “The *irrelevance* of the earthly Temple’s destruction to the author’s argument eliminates the pastor’s failure to mention this event as a means of dating this sermon” (Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 40, emphasis in original).

<sup>4</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT, rev ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), xxiii-xxxv; George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 9-23; William L. Lane, *Hebrews*, WBC 47 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 1:lxxx-lx; O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 14-15; Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 40.

<sup>5</sup>O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 20. Hebrews is “an example of the kind of homily or sermon typical of the synagogue and thus used in early Christian worship” (Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 13).

<sup>6</sup>Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:1; Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 10. Hebrews was most likely intended to be “read aloud to a specific local congregation” (O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 9).

<sup>7</sup>Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 15.

<sup>8</sup>Contra Dahms who claims that they “were in danger, not of lapsing into Judaism, nor of merely being slack in their Christian devotion, but of embracing a version of Christianity characterized by serious error” (John V. Dahms, “The First Readers of Hebrews,” *JETS* 20, no. 4 [December 1977]: 365).

though the real thing was available to them. Why would they do this once Jesus had arrived on the scene? It is likely that they were being ostracized from Jewish society and perhaps even persecuted.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps their life was easier *before* they believed in Jesus—as is the case for many believers—and they are tempted to go back to the OT system, back to their old way of living.

How is our pastor-theologian going to encourage them to embrace the good news of Jesus? They need the same thing we do when we are tempted to go back to our old way of living. They—and we—must choose Jesus because he is better. The OT was a big arrow that pointed to Jesus. In fact, “all the promises of God find their Yes in him” (2 Cor 1:20). The things to which they are tempted to return were actually types that find their divinely intended fulfillment in Jesus.<sup>10</sup> Here is a good rule of thumb. The fulfillment is better than the type. To return to the type once the fulfillment has arrived is wrong. Returning to the OT priests and sacrifices once Jesus has arrived is as crazy as staring at a postcard when Hawaii awaits outside your hotel door.

So the author of Hebrews shouts, “Don’t go back.” This is not the time to go backwards. It is time to keep growing in Jesus. When you “turn your eyes upon Jesus” and “look full in His wonderful face,” then “the things of earth will grow strangely dim in

---

<sup>9</sup>Bruce concurs, “Very probably they were reluctant to sever their last ties with a religion which enjoyed the protection of Roman law and face the risks of irrevocable commitment to the Christian way” (Bruce, *Hebrews*, xxx). So Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 9, 28. Although not addressing this particular issue, N. T. Wright’s reminder is still valuable, “A Jew who converted might well be regarded as a national traitor” (N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992], 360).

<sup>10</sup>Typology (not to be confused with topology or typography, and definitely not with the outlandish allegorical interpretations of the likes of Origen) is the imagery building blocks of the Bible. The OT is chock-full of people, events, and institutions that point forward to their fulfillment in Jesus. As a general rule, types must have “historical correspondence and escalation” (E. Earle Ellis, foreword to *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, by Leonhard Goppelt [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], x). Typology is not the imaginative practice of reading *into* the text, but rather drawing out the divinely intended meaning. Put simply, “The OT is typological so that the institutions, events, and persons in the OT forecast what is to come” (Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 28). For a fascinating summary of typology, see James M. Hamilton, Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible’s Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 77-85.

the light of His glory and grace.”<sup>11</sup> To what are you tempted to go back? Jesus is better than your self-righteous legalism. Jesus is better than that bitterness to which you cling. Jesus is better than porn. Every time you sin, you are valuing your sin as better than Jesus. The majestic portrait the author paints of the person and work of Christ eclipses the tawdry temptations of this world. The superiority of Christ demands a response. The glory of Christ will change the way you live.

### **Overview of Hebrews**

Before diving into the introduction to this masterful sermon, it will be helpful to grasp an overview of the book as a whole (see figure 1). The author begins his sermon by expounding the superiority of Christ: Jesus is better than angels (Heb 1:5-2:4—and lower than angels, 2:5-18), better than Moses and Joshua (3:1-4:13), a better priest (4:14-7:28), and a better sacrifice (8:1-10:18). Hebrews 10:19 marks the major transition in the book: since Jesus is better, believers must choose him (10:19-13:25). Choose Jesus because he is better.

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>I. Proposition: Jesus Is Better (1:1-10:18)<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>A. Jesus is better than angels (1:5-2:18)</li><li>B. Jesus is better than Moses and Joshua (3:1-4:13)</li><li>C. Jesus is a better priest (4:14-7:28)</li><li>D. Jesus is a better sacrifice (8:1-10:18)</li></ul></li><li>II. Application: Choose Jesus (10:19-13:25)</li></ul> |
|---|

Figure 1. Brief overview of the book of Hebrews

---

<sup>11</sup>Helen H. Lemmel, “Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus” (No. 340), in *The Celebration Hymnal: Songs and Hymns for Worship*, ed. Tom Fettke (Nashville: Word Music, 1997).

Thus far, we have a sermon written by an anonymous pastor-theologian who urgently pleads with his beloved congregation to choose Jesus because he is better. He begins to unpack this theme in his magnificent introduction to the sermon.

### **Jesus Is the Final Chapter of God’s Story (1:1-4)**

The book of Hebrews opens in 1:1-4 with an introduction that is both beautiful and eloquent.<sup>12</sup> Every pastor works hard at writing good sermon introductions, but none compares to the masterful introduction to the sermon we know as Hebrews.

#### **Good News: God Speaks (1:1-2a)**

The main point of this introduction is that *God speaks*. And this is good news, for we can know nothing of God apart from his self-revelation.<sup>13</sup> God is not playing hide-and-seek with you. He wants you to know him. He communicates because he loves. God is telling his Big Story. It started with the promise of a serpent-crusher, followed by a dramatic rescue of his people through Noah. An international blessing was promised to his people through Abraham, and a perfect king was predicted to come through the Davidic dynasty. All throughout the OT, God was speaking, narrating the greatest story ever told.

This story is incomplete without Jesus. God’s communication in the OT was “partial.”<sup>14</sup> Without Jesus, the OT was insufficient—like a mathematical equation devoid

---

<sup>12</sup>The introduction to the book of Hebrews is “possibly the most refined and literary piece of theological argument in the whole of the NT” (David Alan Black, “Hebrews 1:1-4: A Study in Discourse Analysis,” *WTJ* 49, no. 1 [Spring 1987]: 175-76). For a survey of the syntactical and rhetorical elements of 1:1-4, see the entirety of Black’s article. For a treatment of the possible chiasm of 1:1-4, see O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 45-47.

<sup>13</sup>O’Brien agrees that the book of Hebrews begins with this note: “God has not remained silent but has taken the initiative and revealed himself” (Peter T. O’Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son: A Biblical Theology of Hebrews*, NSBT 39 [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016], 18).

<sup>14</sup>Translated as “at many times” by the ESV, the word πολυμερῶς, could also be translated “in many parts or pieces.” This would indicate that “God spoke to the ancestors in a piecemeal or fragmentary fashion” (O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 49).

of a solution, a joke minus the punch line, or a story without a dénouement. Without Jesus, you are left hanging. In God's story, Jesus is the final chapter that makes everything preceding it to make sense. Jesus is the culmination of God's communication. Another way to say this is that the entire Bible points to Jesus.

With the failure of the “moral majority” and the rapid de-Christianizing of Europe and North America, many believers fearfully conclude that they must be living in the “last days.” These same Christians are often surprised to learn that early Christians also believed themselves to be living in the “last days.” So how long have the “last days” been going on? Throughout the OT, God promised that the Messiah would deliver his people “in the latter days.” For example, God promises that his people will return to him and obey his voice “in the latter days” (Deut 4:30). The prophet Hosea made this glorious prediction: “The children of Israel shall return and seek Yahweh their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to Yahweh and to his goodness in the latter days” (Hos 3:5). It is “in the latter days” that the mountain of Yahweh's house will be established “and all nations shall flow to it” (Isa 2:2; see also Mic 4:1-4). Given the Jewish expectations based on the OT and Jewish literature, the audacity of the author of Hebrews' viewpoint is not the claim that there is the need for the “last days,” but rather the assertion that it has already arrived in the person and work of Jesus.<sup>15</sup> The author of Hebrews believes that they are living “in these last days” because Jesus has arrived (Heb 1:2).<sup>16</sup> He is not alone: “Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour” (1 John 2:18). So, yes, we are living in the last days. The period known as the “last days” began with the person and work of Jesus.

---

<sup>15</sup>For an extended treatment of the use of “the latter days” in the OT and Jewish literature, see G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 88-128.

<sup>16</sup>O'Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son*, 26.

The author of Hebrews has good news to share: God is telling a story, he wants you to be a part of his story, and Jesus is the final chapter of this story. To reread the first few chapters of your favorite novel but refuse to ever read the final chapter is ludicrous. It is tantamount to clutching a postcard of Hawaii when you are already in Hawaii. It is as foolish as choosing the OT system of sacrifices over Jesus. Or returning to our old way of living instead of Jesus. This might lead you to query, “What is so special about Jesus, anyway?” The author of Hebrews is glad you asked.

### **Good News: Jesus Is Better (1:2b-4)**

It is good news that God communicates with his people. It is even better news that he now “has spoken to us by his Son” (Heb 1:2). The final chapter not only wraps up all the loose ends, but is also the best chapter in the book, the kind of chapter that you hate to finish because the ending was so satisfying. In fact, God does not want us ever to move on from the good news of Jesus. His superiority is briefly outlined in 1:2-4 and is meant to grip us with the overwhelming glory of Christ.

It is significant that Jesus is referred to as “Son”<sup>17</sup> because Israel was referred to as God’s son (Exod 4:22) and David was called God’s son (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7<sup>18</sup>). The sad history of Israel recounts their respective failures at fulfilling the role of God’s son. So when Jesus is called the *Son*, it means that he is the true Israel and the new David.<sup>19</sup> The story God has been telling in the OT has built this anticipation: we need a true Israel; we need a new David. The author of Hebrews announces that this anticipation is fulfilled in Jesus. To demonstrate the superiority of Jesus, he presents seven attributes of Christ.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup>See also 1:5, 8; 3:6; 4:14; 5:8; 6:6; 7:28 where Jesus is referred to as the Son.

<sup>18</sup>Both of these OT passages—2 Sam 7:14 and Ps 2:7—will be cited in Heb 1:5. In fact, much of the material in 1:1-4 is supported by the OT quotations in 1:5-14. “The catena of OT quotations in Heb 1:5-13 is merely an elaboration of the argument made in 1:4: the exaltation gives Christ a status superior to angels” (Black, “Discourse Analysis,” 180; also O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 51n42).

<sup>19</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 54.

<sup>20</sup>See Meier’s fascinating articles where he proposes that these seven Christological

**Jesus is ruler.** “Whom he appointed the heir of all things” (Heb 1:2b). The first Christological designation expresses Christ’s exalted status as the heir of all things. Simply put, an heir is someone who receives an inheritance. For example, the heir apparent to the throne of the United Kingdom is Prince Charles (though most wish it were Prince William). When his mom, Elizabeth II, dies or abdicates, then her heir will receive a very special gift—the throne. Can you think of anyone in the Bible who was appointed to be an heir of a special gift? You might remember that Abraham was appointed as the father of many nations and then received a new name (Gen 17:5). Just as Abraham was going to inherit the land (world, Rom 4:13), Jesus has inherited all things.<sup>21</sup> And those who are united to Christ (the meek) will inherit the earth with him (Matt 5:5). If Jesus owns everything, he has dominion over everything. Schreiner summarizes this well when he says, “The Son’s heirship is tied to his kingship, to his rule over all.”<sup>22</sup>

The enthronement of Jesus as ruler of all things is supported by the OT quotations in 1:5-14, namely Psalm 2:7 (and by extension, 2 Sam 7:14). This connection is especially strong when one notices the following verse: “Ask of me, and I will make

---

designations follow the same general flow as the seven OT quotations in 1:5-14 (J. P. Meier, “Structure and Theology in Heb 1,1-14,” *Bib* 66, no. 2 [1985]: 168-89; “Symmetry and Theology in the Old Testament Citations of Heb 1,5-14,” *Bib* 66, no. 4 [1985]: 504-33). Although he admits that there are not one-for-one correlations, he sees a pattern that begins with *exaltation* (1:2b; Ps 2:7; 2 Sam 7:14; Deut 32:43), then moves back to *creation* (1:2c; Ps 104:4), and back further to Jesus’ pre-existent *relationship with the Father* (1:3a; Ps 45:6-7), then forward to Christ’s role as creator/sustainer (1:3b; Ps 102:25-27), and concluding with his superiority to angels (1:4; Ps 110:1; Heb 1:14) (see Meier, “Symmetry,” 523-24, for a helpful summary).

<sup>21</sup>O’Brien explains, “In Hebrews the Son is invested as the heir not simply of all the nations (as in Gen. 17:5 and Ps. 2:8) but of the whole universe (‘all things’), especially ‘the world to come’ (2:5)” (O’Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son*, 48).

<sup>22</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 55; see also John Webster, “One Who Is Son: Theological Reflections on the Exordium to the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 82. The question remains as to *when* Jesus was appointed as heir of all things. Webster argues that this was a status Jesus always had. As such, it is based on the eternal, pre-existent relationship between the Father and the Son (Webster, “One Who Is Son,” 82; see also David J. MacLeod, “The Finality of Christ: An Exposition of Hebrews 1:1-4,” *BS* 162, no. 646 [April-June 2005]: 216). More likely, he was appointed as heir “when he was exalted at the right hand, that is, after he made purification for sins” (O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 52; so Meier, “Structure,” 178-79). O’Brien also notes that his “royal inheritance” is inaugurated at this point but is consummated at the end of the age (O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 52).

the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession” (Ps 2:8).<sup>23</sup> The enthronement of Jesus includes his inheritance of all things, thereby making him the ruler over all things. The first characteristic about Jesus that makes him superior is that, as the heir of all things, he rules over all things.

**Jesus is creator.** “Through whom also he created the world” (Heb 1:2c). Jesus created everything, as John so clearly tells us, “All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:3; cf. 1 Cor 8:6). The word used here for *world* is not κόσμος, but αἰών, which according to F. F. Bruce includes “the whole created universe of space and time.”<sup>24</sup> Once again, the OT quotations of 1:5-14 back up the audacious claims of 1:1-4, in this case by appealing to Psalm 102: “You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands” (Heb 1:10). Christological designation number two: Jesus is creator.

**Jesus is the image of God.** “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (Heb 1:3a). Jesus shines forth God’s glory. It is “the face of Jesus Christ” that shines forth “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God” (2 Cor 4:6). This is how God communicates with us—through Jesus.<sup>25</sup> Just like in the first century they would put a stamp or engraving into soft metal or coins, Jesus is “the very stamp of his nature” (RSV).<sup>26</sup> Do you want to know God? Then look at Jesus.<sup>27</sup> He is the image of God.

---

<sup>23</sup>Though not quoted in Heb 1, this is most likely assumed by way of context (so O’Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son*, 48).

<sup>24</sup>Bruce, *Hebrews*, 4; see also MacLeod, “The Finality of Christ,” 217.

<sup>25</sup>Webster concurs, “As the effulgence of divine glory, the Son is God’s act of self-communication” (Webster, “One Who Is Son,” 86).

<sup>26</sup>“The Son is a perfect ‘imprint’ of the ‘very being’ of God” (Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 94).

<sup>27</sup>“The Son is the exact representation, the embodiment of God, as he really is. His being is made manifest in Christ, so that to see the Son is to see what the Father is like” (O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 55).

**Jesus is the sustainer.** “And he upholds the universe by the word of his power” (Heb 1:3b). Not only was Jesus the agent of creation, but he is also the sustainer of creation. Jesus has the whole world in his hands, or more precisely, in his *words*. What powerful words these are. God created the world by his word (ῥήμα, 11:3) and Jesus sustains the world by his word (ῥήμα, 1:3).<sup>28</sup> Not only does he hold everything together, but he also moves it forward.<sup>29</sup> He’s not just holding the world together in the vain hopes that we will figure out how to make life work on our end. Rather, God has a goal for everyone (to bring many sons to glory, 2:10) and Jesus is the one who takes us to that goal (the pioneer of our salvation, 2:10). You cannot reach God’s goal for you apart from Jesus. Although Moses was insufficient to direct God’s people to their destination (Num 11:14 uses φέρω in the LXX), Jesus will successfully guide us to our final home.<sup>30</sup> This is the fourth superior attribute about Jesus: he is the sustainer.

**Jesus is the savior.** “After making purification for sins” (Heb 1:3c). Here is a quick hint at Jesus’s priestly role (this will be dealt with in more detail in chapter 6 of this project). For now we can point out that sin makes us dirty, and we need Jesus to cleanse us.<sup>31</sup> Jesus takes care of our sin problem by taking our place. Jesus is our savior.

**Jesus is exalted.** “He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb 1:3d). After he made purification for our sins, he was seated at the place of honor—the

---

<sup>28</sup>This connection was brought to my attention by Peter O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 57.

<sup>29</sup> The word translated “upholds” (φέρω) can also communicate the idea of carrying something along to completion. Webster notes that this word “has here a double sense of ‘bearing up’ and ‘bearing along,’ upholding and perfecting . . . He is not merely a passive support of all things (Atlas!) but one who rules creaturely occurrence and so completes the creator’s purpose” (Webster, “One Who Is Son,” 89). So O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 56; Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 58; MacLeod, “The Finality of Christ,” 222-23; Meier, “Structure,” 182; Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 95.

<sup>30</sup> This connection was brought to my attention by MacLeod, “The Finality of Christ,” 222-23.

<sup>31</sup>O’Brien notes, “Sin is regarded as defilement that is to be purged” (O’Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son*, 50).

right hand of God. This is the verse Charles Wesley was thinking of when he penned the words,

His kingdom cannot fail;  
He rules o'er earth and heav'n.  
*When He had purged our stains,  
He took His seat above.*  
Lift up your heart; Lift up your voice!  
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!<sup>32</sup>

God promised this place of honor to the Messiah long ago: “Yahweh says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool’” (Ps 110:1, quoted in Heb 1:13). Jesus predicted at his trial that his enemies would “see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matt 26:64). Hebrews says the same thing: after Jesus ran the race and endured the cross, he was “seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (12:2; see also 8:1; 10:12). That is why Jesus can say that he “conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Rev 3:21). Jesus is exalted. Are you getting the picture that Jesus is awesome? But the author is not done yet. There is one more reason why Jesus is better and it has to do with angels.

**Jesus is superior to angels.** “Having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs” (Heb 1:4). The author mentions angels because they were the mediators of the Old Covenant. This transitions to his first point in 1:5-14. What is this name that Jesus is given? It is *Son*.<sup>33</sup> Abraham was promised a great name (Gen 12:2). David was promised a great name (2 Sam 7:9). Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of these predictions because he has the Name that is above all names. He is the Son. “God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name” (Phil 2:9).

---

<sup>32</sup>Charles Wesley, “Rejoice, the Lord Is King” (No. 370), in *The Celebration Hymnal*.

<sup>33</sup>Meier, “Structure,” 187; MacLeod, “The Finality of Christ,” 227; see Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 60-61, for argumentation.

Even this brief overview of the superiority of Christ is enough to convince us to choose Jesus because he is better. O'Brien notes that this majestic introduction presents Jesus as "the Son at the *origin* of all things with God, sustaining all things in the *present* and receiving all things at the *end*."<sup>34</sup> God is telling a story and Jesus is the final chapter. To choose the OT over Jesus is a bad move. To go back to our old way of living instead of choosing Jesus is equally dangerous.

### **Conclusion: Look to Jesus**

I do not want us to forget about our poor man who has barricaded himself in his hotel room. He needs help. He is choosing the postcard over the real thing. What is the solution for him? He needs to get off his bed, go to the window, and pull back the curtains. He needs to put down the postcard, get outside, and experience Hawaii. When he does, there is no way that the old postcard will ever be enough again. Whatever glory that postcard had will soon be eclipsed by the very thing to which it pointed—a vacation in Hawaii.

The same can be said of those who are tempted to go back to their old way of living—whether it is OT sacrifices or legalism or sin. How can you guard against going back? Look to Jesus. The glory of Christ will change your life. You can guard yourself from drifting back to your old way of living by gazing at the glory of Christ. True, sin is enticing and the world is attractive, but we can choose Jesus when we believe that he is better. And the only way to see that he is better is to "consider Jesus" (Heb 3:1; cf. 12:2-3). Pull back the curtains, and see that Jesus is better.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus  
Look full in his wonderful face  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim  
In the light of his glory and grace.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup>O'Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son*, 52 (italics in original).

<sup>35</sup>Helen H. Lemmel, "Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus" (No. 340), in *The Celebration Hymnal*.

## CHAPTER 3

### HOW NOT TO DRIFT FROM GOD: HEBREWS 1:5-2:4

There were several reasons why I should not have been driving that night. It was a curvy mountain road, it was beginning to get dark, and it was snowing. And worst of all, I grew up in South Carolina, where the most snow we saw in a year was less than an inch—and then we would shut the city down. These factors should have motivated me to stay off the roads, but there I was winding my way down the mountain. As I rounded a sharp curve, I was temporarily blinded by the headlights of oncoming traffic. I tried to turn—but my car did not. I was drifting. That changed my plans for the evening.

I also know what it feels like to drift from God. When I let go of the wheel of my life, I will naturally drift away from God. Here is the thing about drifting: we never notice when it is happening. We look up from our life and we are shocked to see how far we have drifted from God. Most people would avoid the danger of drifting on a snowy mountain road. They know to watch the white line when blinded by the headlights of oncoming traffic. However, many believers are currently drifting away from God and are completely unaware of the imminent danger.

The original readers of Hebrews were inclined to do exactly the same thing. They are tempted to drift backwards, back to their old way of living, back to the security of the OT system of priests and sacrifices. The book of Hebrews is a sermon written by a pastor-theologian who warns his readers not to “drift away from” the message they have heard (Heb 2:1). This passage is written to people like us who feel the tenacious tug of the world. It is written for those of us who wonder, “How can I keep from drifting away from God?” The author of Hebrews does not leave us without an answer. He uses OT

quotations as brushstrokes with which to paint a glorious image of the superiority of Christ (1:5-14) and concludes with an applicational punch to the gut (2:1-4). In short, his answer to our penchant for drifting is to gaze at the superiority of Christ.

### **The Superiority of Christ Guards against Drifting**

To choose Jesus over our sin necessitates that we believe that Jesus is actually better than our sin. “The main reason,” wrote Puritan Thomas Brooks, “why men dote upon the world, and damn their souls to get the world, is, because they are not acquainted with a greater glory.”<sup>1</sup> When we are distracted and tempted by the flashy things of this world, we need something greater and more glorious to keep us from drifting. Or we could put it this way: When we are blinded by the temptations of oncoming traffic, we need to keep our eyes on Jesus to avoid a head-on collision. What is this “greater glory,” to borrow Brooks’s words, with which we must be captivated? It is none other than Jesus. In order to keep from drifting, we must be dazzled with the supremacy and glory of Christ. That is why the author of Hebrews exhorts his drifting audience to “pay much closer attention” to the gospel (Heb 2:1) and to “consider Jesus” (3:1). We can keep from drifting by “looking to Jesus” (12:2). So the author presents a greater glory than our sin in the person and work of Christ. *Gazing at the glory of Christ guards us from drifting away from God.* But the book of Hebrews does not sound like a stuffy lecture on Christology; rather, he invites us to a coronation scene.

### **The Superiority of Christ Illustrated by a Coronation Scene**

When I visited the United Kingdom, I was intrigued by the markings on their mailboxes. Every mailbox reads, “E II R,” meaning, “Elizabeth II reigns.” And she has

---

<sup>1</sup>Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies against Satan’s Devices*, Puritan Paperbacks (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1997), 109.

done so for a very long time. Reigning as the queen of the United Kingdom since 1952, she is officially the longest reigning monarch in Britain's history. Her coronation all those years ago was an impressive event. Held in Westminster Abbey, attended by the Who's Who of the kingdom, and sparing no expense, her coronation is the moment when she received the crown. The coronation day is when the ruler receives the crown and scepter and, as a result, the power.

Jesus has always existed; he was never born. He has always been the Son of God.<sup>2</sup> But at one point in history, the Trinity conceived of a genius rescue plan to save the rebels that were fighting against him. Jesus would come as a human and live the perfect life we could not live and then receive the punishment for sins we had committed. The only problem was that it was a suicide mission. Jesus executed the plan flawlessly, and then he dies. He sacrifices himself. But it is not over. He becomes the King above all kings by rising from the dead and ascending into heaven. Jesus "was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom 1:4).

Imagine the scene as he returned to heaven. He returns as a conquering hero. Never before has a war hero returned to a greater celebration. That is the scene the author of Hebrews has in mind in 1:5-14, and he describes it using several key words: "son" (Heb 1:2, 5 [2x], 8), "begotten" (1:5), "firstborn" (1:6), and "anointed" (1:9). This is the coronation celebration.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>"Although Jesus was the pre-existent Son of God . . . he entered into a new dimension in the experience of sonship by virtue of his incarnation, his sacrificial death, and his subsequent exaltation" (William L. Lane, *Hebrews*, WBC 47 [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991], 1:26).

<sup>3</sup>See Kenneth L. Schenck, "A Celebration of the Enthroned Son: The Catena of Hebrews 1," *JBL* 120, no. 3 (2001): 469-85. Schenck argues convincingly that this "catena is a hymnic celebration of the now enthroned Christ, a poetic announcement of the accomplishment of salvation by way of Christ's exaltation to God's right hand" (Schenck, "A Celebration of the Enthroned Son," 484). Guthrie concurs that in 1:5-14, "the enthronement of the Son as Messiah, God's anointed king, is focal" (George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, NIVAC [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998], 67).

## The Superiority of Christ Demonstrated by OT Citations

A quick glance at Hebrews 1 informs us that it is full of OT quotations.<sup>4</sup> The author is doing more than “footnote padding” his sermon. It is vitally important that his readers understand that the whole Bible points to Jesus. Not too many years ago, I would have skimmed over these quotations when reading through the book of Hebrews. I would read an OT quotation in the NT and think, “Well, that was random.” But I am learning to pay very close attention to how the NT authors employ OT quotations and allusions. It is a pattern for how we should interpret the Bible.<sup>5</sup>

The original readers of the book of Hebrews thought that the OT was better. They were tempted to return to their old ways of doing things. In their minds, no one compared to David and Moses. So the author quotes David and Moses to prove that Jesus is better. They are tempted to go back to the OT, so he quotes from the OT to prove that Jesus is better. With these carefully chosen OT “brushstrokes,” the author of Hebrews masterfully paints the inauguration of Jesus as King. The author’s goal is that this coronation scene would keep us from drifting away from God by convincing us that Jesus is better than angels.

---

<sup>4</sup>The author of Hebrews considers each of these quotations to be spoken by God to Jesus. Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:32. It is often noted that the catena in 1:5-14 is intended to support the Christological designations of 1:1-4. See Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:22; David Alan Black, “Hebrews 1:1-4: A Study in Discourse Analysis,” *WTJ* 49, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 180; Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 64; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Hebrews*, BTCP (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2015), 63.

<sup>5</sup>See James M. Hamilton, Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible’s Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 21. Contra Longenecker, who contends that Christians, while committed to the NT teaching, are neither required nor expected to follow the exegetical methods of NT authors (Richard N. Longenecker, “Who Is the Prophet Talking About? Some Reflections on the New Testament’s Use of the Old,” in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994], 385). One may wonder whether the author’s use of OT quotations is merely, to borrow the words of Motyer, “an arbitrary plundering and re-assigning of texts” or a legitimate usage (Stephen Motyer, “The Psalm Quotations of Hebrews 1: A Hermeneutic-Free Zone?,” *TynBul* 50, no. 1 [1999]: 8). Particularly, the use of Deut 32 and Ps 102 seems to have been the author’s unique contribution to the Christology of the early church (Motyer, “The Psalm Quotations,” 14). Motyer rightly argues for the legitimacy of the author’s hermeneutic, explaining that the author of Hebrews is highlighting instances of “discrepancy between aspiration and historical reality which creates a typological projection into the future, making the text available (as word of God) for a rereading in relation to Jesus Christ” (Motyer, “The Psalm Quotations,” 20).

## **The Superiority of Christ over Angels (1:5-14)**

If we were to take a pop quiz and ask, “Who is better: Jesus or angels?” we would all get that right. So when the author takes the first chapter of Hebrews to convince us that Jesus is better than angels, it might seem unnecessary at first. As usual, the author of Hebrews knows exactly what he is doing. It was common belief that God communicated the old covenant through angels (see Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19; cf. Deut 33:2 LXX). The old “message was declared by angels” (Heb 2:2). To prove that Jesus is better, the author begins by targeting the means of communication. The OT was delivered through angels, but the gospel came through Jesus. If he can demonstrate that Jesus is better than angels, he is well on his way to proving that the new covenant is better than the old.<sup>6</sup> To prove that Jesus is better than angels, the author presents the glory of Christ’s coronation scene. He paints a picture of Jesus’s coronation day (1:5), celebration in heaven (1:6-7), continuous reign (1:8-12), and ultimate conquest (1:13).

**Jesus’s coronation day (1:5).** It is coronation day and the first two OT quotations (linked by the word *son*<sup>7</sup>) let us listen in on the speech God is making. Both of these verses are spoken to the Davidic king and the author of Hebrews interprets them as spoken to Jesus. God announces, “You are my Son” (Ps 2:7).<sup>8</sup> Psalm 2 relates how God sets up the Messiah as his king, clearly referring to Jesus (see Mark 1:11).<sup>9</sup> God did not

---

<sup>6</sup>Barnabas Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 38.

<sup>7</sup>Lane explains that “the occurrence of a key word in a messianic text could function like a magnet drawing to it other OT texts that contained the same word” (Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:25; see also Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 67).

<sup>8</sup>The author of Hebrews is demonstrating that angels were never called the Son of God in a coronation setting. The fact that angels are sometimes referred to as the “sons of God” (Gen 6:2, 4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7) does not negate the point the author is making here.

<sup>9</sup>Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms*, in vol. 5 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 65. Contra John Goldingay, *Psalms 1-41*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 104-5. While he admits that there are direct messianic prophecies in the OT, he argues that “psalms such as Ps. 2 are not such prophecies. They talk not about a coming king but about a present king” (Goldingay, *Psalms 1-41*, 72). Goldingay fails to read Ps 2 from the perspective of the NT authors (in spite of the fact that he

literally beget Jesus; rather, “today” is coronation day. This happened when Jesus was appointed as king at his resurrection and ascension.<sup>10</sup> Acts 13:33 makes this clear: “This he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you.’” The second quotation is drawn from 2 Samuel 7:14, another coronation context. Here God promises that David’s son will be king forever, and Jesus is seen as the fulfillment of the Davidic typology.<sup>11</sup>

**Jesus’s celebration in heaven (1:6-7).** The coronation is followed by celebration. These OT quotations (sharing the key word *angels*) give us a hint of the heavenly party that was thrown when Jesus returned “into the [heavenly] world” (Heb 1:6).<sup>12</sup> Jesus comes to this world on a suicide mission, and then defeats death by rising from the dead, thereby becoming the “firstborn from the dead” (Col 1:18; Rev 1:5). He ascends into heaven as a returning champion, causing the angels to worship him.<sup>13</sup> When God refers to Jesus as “the firstborn” (Heb 1:6), it does not mean that Jesus was born. Rather, “firstborn” is a title of honor and preeminence (see Ps 89:27). Israel is referred to

---

cites Acts 4:25-28; 13:32-33) and from the biblical theological perspective of David as a type of Christ and believers as recipients of such promises by virtue of our union with Christ.

<sup>10</sup>J. P. Meier, “Symmetry and Theology in the Old Testament Citations of Heb 1,5-14,” *Bib* 66, no. 4 (1985): 505; Peter T. O’Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son: A Biblical Theology of Hebrews*, NSBT 39 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016); Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:26; Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 64.

<sup>11</sup>O’Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son*, 54-55.

<sup>12</sup>The reference to *οικουμένη* here refers to the heavenly world (as in 2:5). For a spiritually encouraging defense of this position, see Ardel B. Caneday, “The Eschatological World Already Subjected to the Son: The *Οικουμένη* of Hebrews 1.6 and the Son’s Enthronement,” in *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in Its Ancient Contexts*, ed. Richard Bauckham et al. (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 28-39. “The Son’s present exaltation over the angels and his enthronement in the *οικουμένη* brings near the habitable world to come for God’s people. In his wake the Son has swept God’s people into ‘these last days’ . . . . The man Christ Jesus has made us ‘eschatological creatures’” (Caneday, “The Eschatological World Already Subjected to the Son,” 38). Meier agrees with this interpretation of *οικουμένη*, and points out that when Jesus enters the *heavenly world* to the praise of angels the word *οικουμένη* is used, whereas when Jesus enters the *earthly world* the word *κόσμος* is used (Meier, “Symmetry and Theology,” 507). See also Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 69. I believe that *πάλιν* is introducing the next quotation rather than referring to the parousia (so Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:21; O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 68).

<sup>13</sup>The same point is made by Schenck, “Enthroned Son,” 479.

as God's firstborn (Exod 4:22), highlighting the fact that Jesus succeeded where Israel failed. Jesus thus becomes the true firstborn of God, the true Son of God.<sup>14</sup>

To prove that angels worship Jesus at his exaltation, the author quotes Deuteronomy 32:43.<sup>15</sup> In this verse that commands heavenly beings to worship Yahweh, the author of Hebrews finds an exhortation to worship the exalted Christ.<sup>16</sup> He continues the discussion of Jesus's superiority over angels by citing Psalm 104:4. The point here is that angels are not worshipped; their place is to serve. The role of angels is to serve those who are saved, but only Jesus is the Savior.

**Jesus's continuous reign (1:8-12).** The celebration at the coronation of an earthly king or queen is short-lived—even if they rule as long as Elizabeth II. One day their reign will come to an end. Not so with King Jesus. Both of these passages emphasize the fact that Jesus is king forever. The first OT citation, Psalm 45:6-7, is taken from a song originally written to commemorate the wedding of one of the Davidic kings. At the same time, the poet is longing that this king might be the promised King. He alludes to 2 Samuel 7 by saying that the Davidic king will have a throne and kingdom forever. The coronation speech makes this clear, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever” (Heb 1:8). According to O'Brien, the authors of the OT considered “a prince of the house of David [to be] the vicegerent of Israel's God.”<sup>17</sup> Since the author of Hebrews believes that Jesus perfectly fulfilled man's role of exercising dominion (Psalm 8; Heb

---

<sup>14</sup>See John V. Dahms, “The First Readers of Hebrews,” *JETS* 20, no. 4 (December 1977): 368.

<sup>15</sup>For a detailed look at this OT citation, see Gareth Lee Cockerill, “Hebrews 1:6: Source and Significance,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 9 (1999): 51-64. Cockerill argues that, whereas the closest parallel would appear to be Ps 97:7, the Hebrews citation is based on the LXX of Deut 32:43 and 4QDeut32 (Cockerill, “Hebrews 1:6,” 51, 64). Contra Motyer who favors Ps 97:7 (Motyer, “Psalm Quotations,” 18-19).

<sup>16</sup>Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:28; O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 71.

<sup>17</sup>O'Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son*, 57.

2:5-18), it is natural for him to interpret these verses in Psalm 45 as ultimately fulfilled in King Jesus.<sup>18</sup>

What does Psalm 45 teach us about Jesus? First, Jesus is God.<sup>19</sup> He refers to the king as *Elohim*. Since this term was used of human judges or representatives on God's behalf (e.g., Exod 7:1), it does not imply that the earthly king was divine. Rather, this was the author's way of hoping for a coming King who would himself be God. This poem has an eye toward the future Davidic king who would truly be God and have an everlasting throne. Second, Jesus will be king forever. As Thomas Schreiner notes, Jesus "is greater than the angels because he enjoys eternal sovereignty."<sup>20</sup> Third, Jesus is a righteous king. This is the foundation of the Messiah's reign (see Isa 11:5). Fourth, Jesus is anointed as king, and thus he is superior to his "companions," probably referring to believers (Heb 3:14 uses the same word; see also 2:10).<sup>21</sup>

The second OT quotation in this pair is from Psalm 102:25-27, which demonstrates that Jesus is the eternal unchangeable Creator.<sup>22</sup> It is clear from the NT that Jesus is the Creator (see Heb 1:3; John 1:3; Col 1:16), but even his creation "will perish" and "wear out like a garment" (Heb 1:11). Clothes wear out. Before I know it, my new

---

<sup>18</sup>Dale F. Leschert, *Hermeneutical Foundations of Hebrews: A Study in the Validity of the Epistle's Interpretation of Some Core Citations from the Psalms*, NABPRDS 10 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1994), 77.

<sup>19</sup>Despite the fact that some have questioned whether a monotheistic Jewish psalm would really support the deity of Christ, the vocative interpretation (referring to Jesus as God) is most convincing. After examining alternative views (that *Elohim* is nominative or a second vocative), Leschert convincingly argues for a vocative interpretation (Leschert, *Hermeneutical Foundations*, 24-87).

<sup>20</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 72.

<sup>21</sup>So O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 74-75; Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 111. Contra Lane who, taking his cue from the context, believes the "companions" refer to angels (Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:30).

<sup>22</sup>Of all of the OT quotations employed by the author in Heb 1, this is one of the most challenging to interpret Christologically. Motyer claims that "there is no other evidence [that Ps 102] was read messianically by the first Christians" (Motyer, "Psalm Quotations," 14). For a helpful summary of the difference in meaning between the MT and LXX, see Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150: An Introduction & Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 362-63. Motyer believes that the author of Hebrews followed the LXX reading of Psalm 102:23ff. (Motyer, "Psalm Quotations," 19-20).

pair of jeans will have holes in them, and eventually I will have to roll them up and throw them away. One day, God will simply roll up this earth like an old garment. At the end of the world, God will roll up the skies like a scroll (Isa 34:4) and the sky will vanish “like a scroll that is being rolled up” (Rev 6:14). Rather than being consumed with how we look in our “old jeans,” we should look forward to the new heavens and earth. The point is, as Peter O’Brien notes, that “this present world is secondary and that they should set their hopes and ambitions on the realm above which is to come and to which they ultimately belong.”<sup>23</sup> We have never been more than battered tourists on our way to a new city (Heb 11:10), a new homeland (11:14), and a new country (13:16), namely, the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22). This earth is passing away, but Jesus remains. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (see 13:8).

**Jesus’s ultimate conquest (1:13-14).** Not only is the reign of King Jesus eternal, but also it is complete. Jesus was exalted as king at the resurrection and ascension, and he reigns as king today, but one day all of God’s enemies will be made into a footstool for Jesus. This is the point the author of Hebrews makes from Psalm 110, “Yahweh says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool’” (Ps 110:1).<sup>24</sup> When you have your feet propped up on the bad guys, it means you have won. Genesis 3:15 is ultimately fulfilled when Jesus crushes the serpent and the serpent’s seed.

What is the point of angels, then? Angels minister and serve (Heb 1:14). Jesus rules; angels serve. Angels serve those who will inherit salvation. This means that we already enjoy some of the blessings of salvation, but we have not yet experienced all of it.

---

<sup>23</sup>O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 77.

<sup>24</sup>The author of Hebrews quotes Ps 110 three times in his sermon. For an excellent treatment of the use of Ps 110 in the book of Hebrews, see Jared Compton, *Psalm 110 and the Logic of Hebrews*, LNTS 537 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015).

Something even better is coming. Jesus wins, and he will bring the new heavens and new earth, and then we will fully inherit our salvation.

None of this is true about angels. Jesus is the one who comes on the suicide mission, defeats death, rises again, ascends into heaven, and is crowned as the exalted king.

Up from the grave He arose,  
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes.  
He arose a victor from the dark domain,  
And He lives forever with His saints to reign.  
He arose! He arose!  
Hallelujah! Christ arose!<sup>25</sup>

With the help of these key OT quotations, the author of Hebrews draws our attention to the supremacy of Jesus Christ. Since Jesus is the “matchless King through all eternity,” he deserves to be crowned with many crowns as the one who “triumphed o’er the grave,” “rose victorious in the strife,” “died and rose on high,” and now “lives that death may die.”<sup>26</sup> And so we join with the angels in celebrating our matchless King. But the author of Hebrews wants us to do more than just sing; he wants the glory of Christ to guard us from drifting.

### **Response: Gaze at the Glory of Christ (2:1-4)**

Hebrews 1 has explored tremendous realities about Jesus, but how is it supposed to help us not drift? To encourage us to stay anchored to Christ, the author of Hebrews has invited us to a coronation scene. Christology without application is insufficient. That is why the first word in 2:1 is *therefore*. As we get into Hebrews 2, we see “the logical consequences . . . of the superiority of Christ.”<sup>27</sup> The fact that Jesus is

---

<sup>25</sup>Robert Lowry, “Christ Arose” (No. 357), in *The Celebration Hymnal: Songs and Hymns for Worship*, ed. Tom Fettke (Nashville: Word Music, 1997).

<sup>26</sup>Godfrey Thring, “Crown Him with Many Crowns” (No. 45), in *The Celebration Hymnal*.

<sup>27</sup>O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 81. See also Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:37.

better than angels gives us massive help when we are tempted to drift from God. Put negatively, the main reason we drift from God is because we have not been gripped by the glory of Jesus.

Drifting is dangerously easy, so he writes, “We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it” (Heb 2:1). A car driven by a southern boy during a snowstorm on a mountain road can result in dangerous drifting. Far more frightening is the potential to drift away from God. If we are honest with ourselves, we often relate to the poet who felt the danger of drifting:

O to grace how great a debtor  
Daily I'm constrained to be!  
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,  
Bind my wand'ring heart to Thee:  
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,  
Prone to leave the God I love;  
Here's my heart, O take and seal it;  
Seal it for Thy courts above.<sup>28</sup>

So how do we keep from drifting? The solution is to “pay attention” (προσέχειν, Heb 2:1) to Christ and his gospel. This word was sometimes used to speak of a ship sailing straight to its destination harbor rather than drifting off course.<sup>29</sup> “We must pay much closer attention” or we will drift away from God. It is only by “looking to Jesus” (12:2) as our exalted King (portrayed in 1:5-14) that we guard ourselves from drifting.

He finishes off this first application section with two additional reasons to choose Jesus over the OT system brought through angels. We should choose Jesus because the punishment for not doing so is worse than it was in the OT (Heb 2:2-3a) and because the signs and gifts of the Spirit prove the authenticity of the message (2:3b-4).

---

<sup>28</sup>Robert Robinson, “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing” (No. 11), in *The Celebration Hymnal*.

<sup>29</sup>Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:35, 37; Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 117.

First, choose Jesus because of the consequences for not doing so (Heb 2:3b-4). Drifting is not only dangerous but also deadly. The OT (which came through angels) was reliable, and if someone ignored it the punishment was harsh (2:2). The consequence for neglecting the gospel is even worse (2:3-4). Basically, the author of Hebrews says, “If you disobeyed Moses you were in big trouble. And you are trying to reject *Jesus*? You are going to be in even bigger trouble.” As Lane notes, God’s people not only enjoy a “greater degree of privilege” but also “greater responsibility and greater peril.”<sup>30</sup> If you will not choose Jesus because he is better, then choose him because the punishment for not doing so is worse.

Second, choose Jesus because of the signs and gifts of the Spirit (Heb 2:3a-4). The signs and wonders that God wrought in Jesus and his followers were reminiscent of the miracles performed by Moses and Elisha. These signs validated the word spoken through Jesus as authoritative and not to be neglected.<sup>31</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Drifting is dangerous and deadly. If you say you are a Christian, and then drift the rest of your life, you were never truly a Christian. Schreiner explains that “the NT nowhere teaches that an initial acceptance of the saving message is sufficient without perseverance in faith.”<sup>32</sup> If the pattern of your life is drifting, I would warn you with this passage to cling to Christ. Stop choosing your sin and your old way of making life work. We have seen how majestic King Jesus is in this passage. Now it is time to choose Jesus because he is better.

---

<sup>30</sup>Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:38.

<sup>31</sup>Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:39; O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 91.

<sup>32</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 84.

This passage speaks just as powerfully to believers in Christ. How do we keep from drifting? How do we continue to gaze at Christ when we feel blinded by the headlights of the world? Here are a few simple and practical ideas. First, we must spend time with Jesus. Any relationship will drift if we do not spend time with each other. Second, we must meditate on the gospel. It is God who rescued us. It is God who keeps us from falling. If we begin to think that it is *we* who will keep ourselves from drifting, then we have forgotten the gospel. Even while we are holding on to him, it is really Jesus who is holding on to us. It is not about our strength. It is about him. Third, we must pray. We must ask God to deliver us from temptation and evil (Matt 6:13). How often have we prayed that—not in a church service, but in the moment of temptation? Fourth, we must claim his promises. “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful” (Heb 10:23). What has he promised? Jesus has promised that he is the same forever (1:12) and that he will ultimately win (1:13). He will not leave his people behind. He will keep us from stumbling until we get to heaven (Jude 24). Until that day, we must gaze at the glory of Christ so that we do not drift away.

CHAPTER 4  
HUMBLED FOR US:  
HEBREWS 2:5-18

Most people do not feel appreciated by their boss. It does not take business experts to tell us that, but just in case we needed proof the *Harvard Business Review* conducted an online poll revealing that 63% of employees feel that their accomplishments are not recognized in the workplace.<sup>1</sup> Many employees would like to see their boss try their job for just one day. This explains the popularity of *Undercover Boss*, a TV show that first aired in 2010 where the boss works alongside his employees. Typically, the boss struggles to keep up or commits rookie mistakes, gaining a new appreciation for their employees in the process.

The incarnation of Jesus puts a twist on *Undercover Boss*. We struggle at the job God has given us here on this earth. In fact, we are failing to live up to God's expectations for us. We need someone who will not only come and do our job properly, but will do it on our behalf. We need an Undercover Boss who will humble himself to fulfill our responsibilities and designate them as completed by us. This is exactly what Jesus does for us. When God the Son becomes a human, far from struggling to keep up, he shows us how God intended humans to live all along. He lives the perfect life on our behalf. And then he dies the death we deserved.

---

<sup>1</sup>Lou Solomon, "The Top Complaints from Employees about their Leaders," *Harvard Business Review*, June 24, 2015, accessed May 14, 2016, <https://hbr.org/2015/06/the-top-complaints-from-employees-about-their-leaders>.

This is good news for those of us who have failed to meet God's expectations for us. There is one who humbled himself to help us. There is one who stooped to save us. This is beautifully presented by the band Downhere:

How many kings stepped down from their thrones?  
How many lords have abandoned their homes?  
How many greats have become the least for me?  
How many Gods have poured out their hearts  
To romance a world that has torn all apart?  
How many fathers gave up their sons for me?

The song concludes, "Only one did that for me. All for me. All for you."<sup>2</sup> Jesus left the glories of heaven to be born in a dirty barn. He came and lived just like us—sweating, working, suffering, tempted. And then he died. Jesus humbled himself for us.

This might seem like an odd note for the author of Hebrews to strike, especially considering his emphasis on the exaltation of Jesus (Heb 1:5-14). Yes, Jesus is the exalted king over "the world to come" (2:5) and has launched "these last days" (1:2).<sup>3</sup> Now he makes the point that Jesus was qualified to be exalted because of his suffering and death. The path to exaltation was a rocky road, one that led him to humble himself for us, one that led him to suffer on our behalf, and ultimately one on which his people must follow him.

The author of Hebrews outlines four reasons why Jesus humbled himself, unpacking the blessings that belong to his people. First, Jesus humbled himself to rule for us, so one day we will rule with him (Heb 2:5-9). Second, Jesus humbled himself to suffer on our behalf, modeling for us the way to trust and rejoice in our own suffering

---

<sup>2</sup>Downhere, "How Many Kings," *How Many Kings: Songs for Christmas*, Centricity Music, 2009, CD.

<sup>3</sup>Bruce provides a helpful description of the "world to come," which he says is "the new world-order inaugurated by the enthronement of Christ at the right hand of God, the world-order over which he reigns from that place of exaltation, the world of reality which replaces the preceding world of shadows" (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT, rev. ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 71).

(2:10-13). Third, Jesus humbled himself to save us (2:14-15) and, fourth, he humbled himself to help us (2:16-18).

### **Jesus Rules for Us (2:5-9)**

The first reason why Jesus became a human was to fulfill God's job description for humans by ruling on our behalf. This was Adam's original job—to rule over the Garden (see Gen 1:26-28). Exercising dominion over the world is man's job, not that of angels'.<sup>4</sup> God's job description for humans is iterated in Psalm 8. God's goal is for his glory to fill the whole world (see Hab 2:14), until his name is majestic in all the earth (Ps 8:1, 9). This will occur as man fulfills the expectation of crushing the enemy (Ps 8:2; see Gen 3:15) and obeys the command to exercise dominion over creation (Ps 8:6-8; see Gen 1:26-28). But Adam, and all humans after him, failed to do this properly. Adam did not exercise dominion over creeping things but let a snake infiltrate God's perfect kingdom.

We need another Man, one who can exercise dominion over creation and his enemies perfectly. Psalm 8 looks forward to a Man who will perfectly have dominion over all his enemies.<sup>5</sup> We need Jesus! Jesus is the second Adam (cf. 1 Cor 15:21-22, 45, 47) who does this perfectly.<sup>6</sup> God has an ideal plan for man, and we find in Hebrews 2

---

<sup>4</sup>O'Brien makes the case that the author of Hebrews is continuing his arguments for the superiority of Christ. Although the *present world* is administered by angels (cf. Deut 32:8; Dan 10:20-21; 12:21), the *world to come* has been subjected to Jesus (Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, PNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010], 93). This is the continuation of the last thing he was teaching in 1:13 (before the parenthetical application of 2:1-4). The author's last point was that Jesus wins. Based on Psalm 110, he concludes that all of Jesus' enemies will be under his feet. Now the author returns to that point, emphasizing that this is not true of angels. Only Jesus has inherited "the world to come" (2:5).

<sup>5</sup>Jesus is in control of everything even though it may not look like it now (2:8). There is a tension between the "already" and the "not yet." "We live in the overlap of the two ages," notes O'Brien, "the present age and the age to come" (O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 97; so also Dale Leschert, *Hermeneutical Foundations of Hebrews: A Study in the Validity of the Epistle's Interpretation of Some Core Citations from the Psalms*, NABPRDS 10 [Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1994], 111-12). Jesus is king, but his kingdom is not fully restored.

<sup>6</sup>"Jesus is the only one who could ever realize the high ideal of Ps 8 for himself, and it is only through him, as the perfect representative of the race, that what Adam lost in the fall can be redeemed and the dominion and glory that was originally granted at creation can be restored to all of mankind" (Leschert, *Hermeneutical Foundations of Hebrews*, 121).

that only Jesus fulfills God's vision for what man is supposed to do.<sup>7</sup> This means that Jesus is "the Man" of Psalm 8.<sup>8</sup> The use of the title "son of man" in Psalm 8 should remind us of Daniel 7:13 and "one like a son of man."<sup>9</sup> Brevard Childs noted, "If we read the Old Testament from the light of the New Testament in the context of Christian faith, we confess that in Jesus Christ true manhood has already appeared."<sup>10</sup> Jesus is the ideal man. He fulfills Psalm 8 by being made a little lower than the angels (incarnation) so he could be crowned with glory and honor (exaltation).

Even though we fail to rule well—to exercise dominion as God intended for us to do—we can put our trust in the one who fulfills Psalm 8. He humbled himself to become lower than angels so that he could rule as the perfect Man. If we are united to him, we also will reign with him (see Dan 7:18; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 20:6). Thomas Schreiner comments, "The role prescribed for human beings in Psalm 8 was fulfilled in him. Those who belong to him participate in the victory he won, and thus they too enjoy the reign intended for them from creation."<sup>11</sup> Because Jesus humbled himself, we can rule with him.

---

<sup>7</sup>Peter T. O'Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son: A Biblical Theology of Hebrews*, NSBT 39 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 61.

<sup>8</sup>O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 92.

<sup>9</sup>Contra Blomberg, who argues for an anthropological reading of Heb 2:5-8 and defends the translation of *υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου* as "human beings" (TNIV) (Craig L. Blomberg, "But We See Jesus": The Relationship between the Son of Man in Hebrews 2.6 and 2.9 and the Implications for English Translations," in *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in Its Ancient Contexts*, ed. Richard Bauckham et al. [London: T&T Clark, 2008], 88-99). For a helpful response, see Barry Joslin, "'Son of Man' or 'Human Beings'?" Hebrews 2:5-9 and a Response to Craig Blomberg" in *JBMW* 14, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 41-50. The title "son of man" in Ps 8 is an intentional pointer to Jesus. "It is hard to imagine," notes R. T. France, "that any Christian, particularly a Greek-speaking Christian, after the middle of the first century could have heard the phrase *υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου* without thinking of Jesus" (R. T. France, "The Writer of Hebrews as Biblical Expositor," *TynBul* 47, no. 2 [November 1996]: 262n29). For a helpful Christological interpretation, see George H. Guthrie and Russell D. Quinn, "A Discourse Analysis of the Use of Psalm 8:4-6 in Hebrews 2:5-9," *JETS* 49, no. 2 (June 2006): 235-46.

<sup>10</sup>Brevard S. Childs, "Psalm 8 in the Context of the Christian Canon," *Int* 23, no. 1 (January 1969): 30. Childs explains how Jesus' fulfillment of Psalm 8 benefits his people, "The New Testament writer points to the way of hope. Because of what Jesus as the 'pioneer of salvation' (2:10), has done in bringing into fulfillment the new world to come, the invitation is extended for man to enter into the full honor of his rightful estate as sons of God" (ibid.).

<sup>11</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *Hebrews*, BTCP (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2015), 92.

### Jesus Suffers for Us (2:10-13)

The second reason that Jesus humbled himself was to suffer for us. God wants to save his people, but he needs a leader to show the way. And the way to glory is through suffering. Jesus is the first to blaze the trail. He is the “the pioneer of their salvation” (Heb 2:10, NIV).<sup>12</sup> “A pioneer,” explains Gareth Lee Cockerill, “is one who, by entering a new land, enables others to follow.”<sup>13</sup> As our Pioneer, Jesus rips open the veil into the holy of holies (9:8-12), and he does so by means of his own suffering (since the veil is likened to his own body, 10:20). In this way, Jesus becomes the exemplary leader of God’s plan to bring many sons to glory. Jesus opens the way so we can follow him into perfection, that is, God’s presence and ultimate salvation.<sup>14</sup>

### We Must Follow Jesus in Suffering (2:10-11)

My wife and I were recently hiking in Colorado Springs, and there was more snow on the path than we had expected. My wife, with her tennis shoes, was having a hard time getting a good foothold to follow me up the mountain. I probably should have cancelled our hike and turned back. We obviously were not prepared. But, being the great

---

Compton similarly writes, “The author argues that Jesus’ enthronement through suffering fulfills the vision of human flourishing announced in Psalm 8” (Jared Compton, *Psalm 110 and the Logic of Hebrews*, LNTS 537 [London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015], 165).

<sup>12</sup>I favor translating ἀρχηγὸν as *pioneer* because it seems to fit best with the author’s flow of thought. So O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 106-7; Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 593; Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 137n60. Pace Lane, who translates this word as “champion” (William L. Lane, *Hebrews*, WBC 47 [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991], 1:61).

<sup>13</sup>Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 137.

<sup>14</sup>What does the author mean by *perfection*? The misconception that Christ had imperfections can be dismissed immediately. See Anthony A. Hoekema, “The Perfection of Christ in Hebrews,” *CTJ* 9, no. 1 (April 1974): 31. Lindars helpfully explains that the author “does not use the idea of perfection to denote the moral ideal” but to express the completion of God’s redemptive plan (Barnabas Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], 44. Jesus is the first to complete God’s redemptive goal, the Leader to enter into God’s eschatological future. In the words of Lindars, “Jesus is the ‘pioneer’ of our salvation, because he has completed the process first” (Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*, 45). Jesus blazed the trail to perfection so his people could follow in his steps. Although this perfection points to an eschatological fulfillment, there is a sense in which believers are positionally perfect now (see Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 469).

leader that I am, I decided we would forge ahead. I started stamping out footprints in the snow for her to follow. By placing her feet in my bigger footprints, she was able to get a solid footing and make it to our destination safely—and happily. This is what Jesus has done for us. “He is able,” remarks Frank Thielman, “to lead those who follow him faithfully to the eschatological destiny that God intended for humanity from the beginning.”<sup>15</sup> God’s plan is for his people to arrive safely in the new heavens and earth. Just as God led his people out of Egypt into the Promised Land, in the same way God will lead “many sons to glory” by way of a new exodus.<sup>16</sup> And he needs a leader to get us there, someone who will charge ahead and blaze the trail. Instead of Moses or Joshua, in this case our leader will be Jesus.<sup>17</sup>

If we are true Christ followers, then we must be willing to follow him in the valley as well as the green pastures. We must be willing to “follow the Lamb wherever he goes” (Rev 14:4). Jesus was “crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death” (Heb 2:9), and the case will be no different for Christ’s followers. The way to glory leads through suffering. The path to the crown is the cross.

But Jesus is not an insensitive leader who leaves us struggling far behind.<sup>18</sup> He calls us his brothers and sisters. We are in the same family, literally, “all of one” (Heb 2:11). Every family has that crazy uncle that we pretend is not part of our family, but Jesus is “not ashamed to call them brothers” and sisters (2:11).<sup>19</sup> And to help his family follow him, he has stamped out footprints in the snow for us to follow him.

---

<sup>15</sup>Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, 593.

<sup>16</sup>“For the author of Hebrews the typological significance of God leading his people out of Egypt is obvious” (O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 104).

<sup>17</sup>The author of Hebrews anticipates the contrast with Moses in 3:1-6 and Joshua in 4:8. Note the LXX usage of ἀρχηγὸν in Num 14:4.

<sup>18</sup>“He does not superintend their journey from a distance, but he ‘takes hold’ [referencing 2:16] of them and guides them by the hand” (Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 149).

<sup>19</sup>The fact that Jesus finds no shame in claiming them as his brothers and sister is deepened by the fact that they were experiencing rejection from society (see O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 109-

## **How to Follow Jesus in Suffering (2:12-13)**

The author of Hebrews gives two quotations from the OT that show how Jesus and we are connected.<sup>20</sup> He draws his citations from Psalm 22 and Isaiah 8, passages that share contexts of suffering and faith. Each of these quotations is quoted as if Jesus said them.<sup>21</sup> These OT citations are like footprints in the snow to help his brothers and sisters follow him. The two major “footprints” Jesus left us were his example of rejoicing and trusting in suffering.

**Follow Jesus by rejoicing in suffering (Psalm 22:22).** In the Psalm of the Cross, people make fun of a godly man and he begs God to deliver him (Ps 22:1-21). Not only is he mocked, but also his hands and feet are pierced, his bones are not broken, and his garments are divided. After he suffers, he joyfully thanks God (vv. 22-31). Even though Psalm 22 descends to the point of “death” (v. 15), God rescues David in a manner as dramatic as a resurrection (v. 21). The author of Hebrews applies this verse to the life of Jesus who suffers on the cross, but then is exalted and rejoices with his brothers and sisters. Now Jesus and his people can fulfill the role for which God made humans by reigning together, “for kingship belongs to Yahweh, and he rules over the nations” (v.

---

10).

<sup>20</sup>Our union with Jesus undergirds the author’s argument in this passage. J. Ross Wagner voices the consensus among commentators that the theme of Heb 2:10-18 is “the solidarity of the eternal Son of God with human beings” (J. Ross Wagner, “Faithfulness and Fear, Stumbling and Salvation: Receptions of LXX Isaiah 8:11-18 in the New Testament,” in *The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hays*, ed. J. Ross Wagner, C. Kavin Rowe, and A. Katherine Grieb [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008], 98). Jesus and his followers are inextricably linked. Jesus “is not ashamed to call them brothers” and sisters (Heb 2:11). They are in the same family (lit., “all of one,” Heb 2:11). For those who are united to Jesus, he becomes not only their leader but also their representative.

<sup>21</sup>This interpretational perspective of the NT authors is best explained by their understanding of the OT as patterns to be fulfilled in the eschatological people of God. They expected the lives of key OT individuals to prefigure the life and ministry of Christ, and on this basis their words could be applied to Christ. Modern interpreters should follow this methodology in exploring other OT figures whose speech may be applied to Christ. For an in depth explanation, see Brian Pate, “Who Is Speaking? The Use of Isaiah 8:17-18 in Hebrews 2:13 as a Case Study for Applying the Speech of Key OT Figures to Christ,” *JETS* 59, no. 4 (December 2016): 731-45.

28). Since believers are united to Christ, they too will emerge victorious from their suffering to rule and rejoice with him in the new heavens and earth. Jesus humbles himself so he can lead us through suffering to a glorious celebration.

If Jesus endured suffering “for the joy that was set before him” (Heb 12:2), then we also should demonstrate steadfastness in trials by considering it “all joy” (see Jam 1:2-4). As we follow Jesus on our way to our heavenly home, we can be assured that it is God’s will for us to “give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thess 5:18). Whether God gives or takes away, we can say, “Blessed by the name of Yahweh” (Job 1:21). Whether our life is characterized by a peaceful river or more like sorrowful waves, “whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, ‘It is well, it is well with my soul.’”<sup>22</sup> And so we follow Jesus’s example to rejoice even in the most painful suffering.

**Follow Jesus by trusting in suffering (Isaiah 8:17-18).** The second passage is Isaiah 8:17-18, furnishing the author of Hebrews with two quotations that he applies to Jesus. The context of Isaiah 8 is a dark day for God’s people. King Ahaz is paralyzed by fear as he hears that Israel and Syria have hatched a plot to dethrone him as the rightful Davidic king.<sup>23</sup> Personally, Isaiah is experiencing rejection by the people. In spite of all of this, Isaiah still expresses his hope in God as his sanctuary (Isa 8:14). Isaiah writes, “I will wait for Yahweh, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him” (v. 17). In the midst of these dark days, God gives Isaiah children as signals to the remnant people of God—signals of salvation and judgment. The lengthy name of one son, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, brings a message of judgment; his name means “quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil” and alerts the people that God will use the Assyrians to judge them (vv. 3-4). Another son, Shear-jashub, indicates a message of salvation since his

---

<sup>22</sup>Horatio G. Spafford, “It Is Well with My Soul” (No. 705), in *The Celebration Hymnal: Songs and Hymns for Worship*, ed. Tom Fettke (Nashville: Word Music, 1997).

<sup>23</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 102.

name means “a remnant shall return” (7:3). Isaiah is “a rallying point for faith,” as William Lane puts it.<sup>24</sup> Isaiah declares, “Behold, I and the children whom Yahweh has given me are signs and portents in Israel from Yahweh of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion” (8:18).

While he suffered here on earth, Jesus also trusted in God to raise him to life. Jesus also had children that God had given him (cf. John 17:6). This group of disciples would follow their leader through the valley of the shadow of death. Just as Isaiah’s faith was representative of the faithful remnant of his day, so also Jesus represents his brothers and sisters as he expresses faith in the midst of suffering. J. Ross Wagner summarizes the point of comparison, “As he stands in the assembly of his brothers and sisters praising God, Jesus embodies the attitude of the small remnant of the faithful in Isaiah 8, who in the midst of a hostile society resolve to fear and to trust in God alone.”<sup>25</sup>

Regardless of how dark the day gets politically, economically, or culturally, we can affirm with Isaiah and Jesus that God is our sanctuary. Even if it appears that God is hiding his face from us, we will wait for him. We can trust God in suffering because we are united to Christ, and thereby the pattern of suffering-then-exaltation will hold true in our lives as well. Our union with Christ is the foundation of our faith, for we can be assured that God loves us even as he loves Jesus (John 17:23). Through our connection to Jesus, we know that God will not ultimately hide his face from us (Ezek 39:29). And so we follow Jesus’s example to trust even in the darkest suffering.

These two OT passages are like footprints in the snow that Jesus left to help us follow him. He is leading us on a harrowing journey through suffering, but one that will

---

<sup>24</sup>Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:60. O’Brien expands on this thought, “They were the nucleus of the faithful remnant with whom others identified as they responded to the word of the Lord uttered through the prophet” (O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 113).

<sup>25</sup>Wagner, “Faithfulness and Fear,” 104.

ultimately lead to glory. Yes, there is a cross now, but there is a crown on the other side. Yes, there is pain now, but there is glory on the other side. Yes, there is suffering for the present time, but it is “not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rom 8:18). This glory will be ours because Jesus suffered in our place and set an example for how we should respond to suffering. Because Jesus humbled himself, we can follow him to glory even through suffering.

### **Jesus Saves Us (2:14-15)**

The suffering of Christ not only led to his own exaltation, but also provided the means for our salvation. Jesus took on “flesh and blood” (Heb 2:14) just like the children (believers) that God gave him (2:13). The author of Hebrews is referring to the incarnation when “the Word became flesh” (John 1:14). It was necessary for Jesus to become a human so he could save humans from death.

There is only one way to destroy the devil who has power of death, and that was by dying. This is why Jesus came: “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). And he accomplishes this through his death and resurrection (see John 12:31-32; 14:30-31).<sup>26</sup> I was reminded of this truth recently as I watched *The Incredibles* with my young son. In this animated movie, the big bad robot wreaking havoc can only be defeated by one thing. Its armor is so strong that it can only be penetrated by one thing—itsself. So Mr. Incredible shoots one of its own arms back at the robot and it is finally conquered. Similarly, the only thing that can kill death is death itself. Genesis 3:15 predicted this. Satan would nip at Jesus’s heel (pain) but Jesus would crush Satan’s head (victory). “Victory is gained only through injury;” says Sinclair Ferguson, “it is in being crushed that Christ crushes Satan. The Prince of Death is

---

<sup>26</sup>Compton notes, “There was, due to the Fall and, thus, sin and death, simply no other way back to Paradise. Jesus’ death—*messiah’s* death—was, paradoxically, the only way to defeat death and the devil and, therefore, to place both under his own and his brothers’ feet” (Compton, *Psalm 110 and the Logic of Hebrews*, 165).

defeated by means of Christ's 'defeat'.<sup>27</sup> Remember that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23), but now Jesus has died. The penalty is paid.

Even though Jesus has destroyed "the one who has the power of death" (Heb 2:14), death can still be a terrifying prospect. Instead of exercising dominion over the world as God expected in Genesis 1:26-28, men and women are instead slaves to the fear of death. But Jesus humbled himself to deliver us from the "fear of death" (2:15). If we fear death—or anything for that matter—it betrays the fact that we do not understand what Jesus did for us on the cross. The mother fearful that her children will stray from the Lord, the man paralyzed by fear that his business ventures will fail, or the teen afraid of not being accepted in a new school—none of them understands the gospel. As my pastor, Jeremy McMorris, often reminds me, "God has already taken care of your biggest problem." If Jesus humbled himself to save us, then what else do we have to fear (Matt 10:28)? He already paid the penalty for our sin and defeated death through dying. Because Jesus humbled himself, he "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim 1:10).

### **Jesus Helps Us (2:16-18)**

When Jesus humbled himself in the incarnation it provides one more benefit for his people. Just as God took hold of (ἐπιλαβομένου) his people to lead them out of Egypt (Jer 31:32), so also Jesus will lay hold of (ἐπιλαμβάνεται) his brothers and sisters to lead them to glory (Heb 2:16).<sup>28</sup> Put simply, Jesus humbled himself to help us.

---

<sup>27</sup>Sinclair B. Ferguson, "Christus Victor et Propitiator: The Death of Christ, Substitute and Conqueror," in *For the Fame of God's Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper*, ed. Sam Storms and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 181.

<sup>28</sup>O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 116-17. The author of Hebrews understood that God's story was being told in repeated patterns that would escalate and culminate in the eschatological people of God who are united to the Messiah. As such, it is no surprise that the author of Hebrews applies the story of the Exodus and quest for rest (see particularly Heb 3-4) to the NT people of God. This positions us currently as "strangers and exiles on the earth" (11:13) who are looking for "a kingdom that cannot be shaken" (12:28).

## Jesus Helps Us Because We Are the Offspring of Abraham (2:16)

Jesus did not humble himself to save and help angels, but rather “the seed of Abraham” (Heb 2:16, KJV). The pastor of Hebrews clearly views all believers (both Jew and Gentile) as the offspring of Abraham (as does Paul, Rom 4:9-12, 16-17; Gal 3:6-9, 28-29).<sup>29</sup> So the children’s song actually is theologically accurate, “Father Abraham had many sons. I am one of them and so are you.” But you don’t have to do the right arm, left arm part to know that this should cause us to “praise the Lord.” The promises given to Abraham are for everyone who is united with Christ by faith. As we are united to Christ, we become part of the people of God, the true Israel.<sup>30</sup> Through Jesus we enjoy the blessings of Abraham that were intended for the nations.<sup>31</sup>

God has already promised to help the offspring of Abraham:

But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; you whom I took (ἀντελαβόμεν) from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, “You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off”; fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand (Isa 41:8-10).

So when we read that passage in Isaiah 41, we might think, “What a wonderful promise, but does it really apply to me since I am not Jewish?” But Hebrews 2 tells us that we are the offspring of Abraham whom Jesus wants to help.

---

<sup>29</sup>This is the point of Gal 3:29, “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.” For an excellent explanation of how the OT predicted that the seed of Abraham would one day consist of “true Israel,” believing Jews and Gentiles from every nation, see Jason S. DeRouchie, “Counting Stars with Abraham and the Prophets: New Covenant Ecclesiology in OT Perspective,” *JETS* 58, no. 3 (September 2015): 445-85.

<sup>30</sup>NT believers are referred to as “the sons of Abraham” (Gal 3:7), “Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3:29), “the Israel of God” (Gal 6:16), and “the circumcision” (Phil 3:3). The NT often uses OT language to refer to the church (e.g., elect, called, sons of God, temple). See also Paul’s clear teaching in Rom 2:28-29; 4:11-12; and 9:6-8. So Christopher W. Cowan, “Context Is Everything: ‘The Israel of God’ in Galatians 6:16,” *SBJT* 14, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 78-85. Contra Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 39.

<sup>31</sup>“The promises made to Abraham are fulfilled for those who are Jesus’ brothers and sisters. Jesus took hold of them so that the dominion over the world originally promised to Adam would be realized in the children of Abraham” (Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 107).

## **Jesus Helps Us Because He Is a Priest Who Understands (2:17-18)**

He became a human so he could be a merciful and faithful priest (Heb 2:17). This way he understands and empathizes with what we go through. He was tempted “in every respect” like we are, “yet without sin” (4:15), thus qualifying him as our faithful high priest. God has promised, “I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind” (1 Sam 2:35), and his name is Jesus. But he is far more than a buddy who empathizes with us. He has the ability and power to help us (Heb 2:18). It is not that he will *try* to help; rather, he is going to succeed in helping us (see 1 Cor 1:7-8; Jude 24). He is a priest who not only sympathizes with our weakness but also empowers us to live our new life in Christ.

### **Conclusion**

Without Jesus, we are hopeless failures. We fail to care for God’s creation like he appointed us to do, so much so that we become slaves to the fear of death. But stepping in to save the day is our humble Savior. He humbled himself for us. And now we can sing,

I will sing the wondrous story  
Of the Christ who died for me.  
How He left His home in glory  
For the cross of Calvary.<sup>32</sup>

Whether we are failing in leading wisely or suffering well, Jesus is the answer. Whether we need to be saved from our sin or helped in the moment of temptation, Jesus is the answer. He humbled himself for us; now it is time for us to humble ourselves by turning from our sin and running to Jesus, our “very present help in trouble” (Ps 46:10).

---

<sup>32</sup>Francis H. Rowley, “I Will Sing the Wondrous Story” (No. 499), in *The Celebration Hymnal*.

## CHAPTER 5

### ONLY JESUS FILLS THE EMPTY HEART: HEBREWS 3:1-4:13

My wife and I were both on a mission, searching for our favorite food at the county fair. I wanted boiled peanuts. Alas, they had never heard of them. We were, on the other hand, able to find my wife's favorite fair food, cotton candy. Cotton candy is fine—once a year at the fair, that is. But if you want a nutritious meal, I would recommend something more substantial, something more satisfying, like boiled peanuts.

Our hearts are longing for something to satisfy us as well. We are empty, so we long for meaning. We are hungry, so we long for satisfaction. We are exhausted, so we long for rest. But too often we try to stuff our hearts full of things that cannot satisfy, like cotton candy. But in our case, it is addictions and friendships and sex and football and money. These things, according to A. W. Tozer, are “monstrous substitutes” that take the place of God.<sup>1</sup> And we wonder why we still feel so empty.

The good news is that Jesus fills our empty hearts. Jesus gives an invitation to empty, exhausted people like us when he says, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28). Augustine had it right, “You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”<sup>2</sup>

The theme of *rest* can be found throughout the Bible.<sup>3</sup> From the very beginning, God has invited his people to fill the longings of their empty heart by enjoying his

---

<sup>1</sup>A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1993), 22. The entire sentence reads, “God’s gifts now take the place of God, and the whole course of nature is upset by the monstrous substitution.”

<sup>2</sup>Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3.

<sup>3</sup>For an examination of the concept of rest in extra-biblical literature, including Philo,

presence by faith. Unfortunately, people have stuffed their weary souls full of spiritual cotton candy, exhausting themselves in their failed attempts to find rest for their souls. It is time to let go of the things we thought would bring us rest and to choose Jesus. It is time for us to stop stuffing ourselves with spiritual cotton candy and find our rest in Jesus. Only Jesus fills our empty hearts.

The author of Hebrews spends almost two chapters proving that the house established by Moses and the land conquered by Joshua actually point to Jesus. First, Jesus is better than Moses because Moses himself instructed the people to anticipate a coming prophet (Heb 3:1-6). Second, Jesus is better than Joshua because Joshua was only able to give God's people partial rest in the Promised Land, which finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus (3:7-4:13).<sup>4</sup>

### **Jesus Is Better than Moses (3:1-6)**

Reverting back to the OT system was the particular temptation of the recipients of the book of Hebrews. The heroes of their faith included men like Moses and Joshua. The author of Hebrews is building an eloquent argument for the superiority of the New Covenant that was launched in the person and work of Jesus Christ. He highlighted the glory of Jesus in 2:5-18 showing that Jesus humbled himself for us (so he could fulfill Psalm 8 as the ideal Man and lead us into glory). This allows us to “share in a heavenly calling” (Heb 3:1). Given the superiority of Christ, the only logical conclusion would be to “consider Jesus” (3:1). We should consider Jesus and be so dazzled by his glory that

---

Gnosticism, Rabbinic literature, 4 Ezra, and the Epistle of Barnabas, see Dale F. Leschert, *Hermeneutical Foundations of Hebrews: A Study in the Validity of the Epistle's Interpretation of Some Core Citations from the Psalms*, NABPRDS 10 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1994), 137-49.

<sup>4</sup>God led his people to the Promised Land, not as an end in itself, but as a picture of the relationship they could enjoy with him by faith and as a foretaste of the ultimate rest they would experience in the new heavens and earth. The land points to a new “Sabbath rest for the people of God” (Heb 4:9), “a better country, that is, a heavenly one” (11:16), “a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (12:28), “the city that is to come” (13:14). For a defense that the land of Canaan served as a type of the new creation, see Miguel Echevarria, Jr., “The Future Inheritance of Land in the Pauline Epistles” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014).

we respond with faith and fortitude. Put simply, we must choose Jesus because he is better.

To prove that Jesus is better, the author of Hebrews takes the heroes of their faith—Moses and Joshua—and demonstrates that they both pointed to Christ. Rather than being in competition, Moses actually points to Jesus.<sup>5</sup> How is Jesus better than Moses? First, Jesus is the ultimate “apostle” who is sent as the final chapter of God’s story (Heb 3:1; cf. 1:2).<sup>6</sup> Second, Jesus is a superior mediator for God’s people as the “high priest of our confession” (3:1).<sup>7</sup> Third, Jesus has more glory than Moses (3:3). Fourth, the house that Moses led points to the house that Jesus will lead, namely, the new people of God (3:3).<sup>8</sup> Moses was faithful in God’s house as a servant (3:5; cf. Num 12:7), but Jesus is faithful over God’s house as a son (3:6).<sup>9</sup> Finally, Moses testified “to the things that were to be spoken later,” namely Jesus (3:5; cf. 1 Pet 1:10-12). Moses said that someone greater than he was coming, “Yahweh your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen” (Deut 18:15; see also v. 18; cf. Acts 3:22-23).

---

<sup>5</sup>Moses is referred to as God’s faithful servant (Num 12:7), a context that demonstrates his exaltation above others (Thomas R. Schreiner, *Hebrews*, BTCP [Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2015], 117). “The author’s comparison does not imply any criticism of Moses or denigrate him in any way” (Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, PNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010], 132).

<sup>6</sup>Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 159-60; Peter T. O’Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son: A Biblical Theology of Hebrews*, NSBT 39 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 64.

<sup>7</sup>Barnabas Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 48; William L. Lane, *Hebrews*, WBC 47 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 1:74. Scott explains that “the limited access to God through a human mediator (only Moses was given face-to-face access to God) has been surpassed by the provision of direct access to God for all His people” (Brett R. Scott, “Jesus’ Superiority over Moses in Hebrews 3:1-6,” *BS* 155, no. 618 [April-June 1998]: 201).

<sup>8</sup>See Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 116; Scott, “Jesus’ Superiority over Moses,” 205-6; Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 163.

<sup>9</sup>O’Brien summarizes Heb 3:1-6 by saying that the author of Hebrews is challenging “his listeners to consider Jesus as the perfect model of faithfulness” (O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 137). This is significant since it is persevering faith that the author is urging his readership to exhibit. He holds up Jesus as the primary example believers should emulate and follow. For a thorough examination of the faithfulness of Christ in Hebrews see, Todd D. Still, “*Christos as Pistos: The Faithfulness of Jesus in the Epistle to the Hebrews*,” in *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in Its Ancient Contexts*, ed. Richard Bauckham et al. (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 40-50.

God's people are referred to as "God's house" (cf. 1 Tim 3:15), and like a faithful servant Moses was a good steward of God's people. Jesus is the Son of the house, and he also faithfully takes care of God's people. Here is the question for us: How can we be sure that we are part of God's family? The answer is to press on in faith. The author of Hebrews argues that if we want to be part of God's people, then we must choose Jesus and continue to have faith in him. "We are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope" (Heb 3:6; cf. Rom 8:9, 17; Col 1:22-23; 1 John 2:3).

If we are honest with ourselves, we all feel the gnawing emptiness of our hearts. We want a solution, and we want it to be quick. Our pursuit of "insta-rest" sends us on a frenetic race to find the next fix. We attend an over-priced seminar at an upscale hotel, but the notebooks from the seminar pile up in our attic, which drives us to read a book about de-cluttering, which helps us realize that we need to lose some weight so we adopt the newest workout routine, but now our muscles are sore so maybe the answer is essential oils. But wait, the answer is Jesus, right? So we go to church and come forward at the invitation and re-re-re-dedicate ourselves to Christ. But Monday morning we still feel empty; we are empty, tired, broke, and oily. The problem is that we are looking for a quick fix. But finding our rest in Jesus means that we will "hold fast" to the end (Heb 3:6). This is the mark of a true Christian and the pathway to true rest.

Rather than returning to the Mosaic institutions, the Hebrews should take Moses's advice by choosing Jesus and clinging to the gospel. They should not boast that they are "disciples of Moses," like the Jews of Jesus's day (John 9:28), but should praise the One who miraculously opened their eyes (John 9:30). Neither should we seek to fill the emptiness of our hearts with an instant solution. Only Jesus can fill our empty hearts.

### **Jesus Is Better than Joshua (3:7-4:13)**

Another significant OT hero was Joshua, whom God used to lead his people into the Promised Land. The good Jewish audience of the book of Hebrews found it difficult to imagine a better leader than Joshua or a better destination than the land God promised to Abraham. Yet, the author of Hebrews introduces us to a better leader and a better home.

### **A Brief Biblical Theology of Rest**

To understand how the audience of Hebrews was tempted to pin their hopes on the Promised Land, it will be helpful to review how the theme of rest unfolds throughout the Bible. It all started with God's Sabbath rest (Heb 4:4). This scene of Edenic rest (Gen 2:2) is mirrored by the new creation rest (Isa 11:6-9).<sup>10</sup> In between these bookends of perfect rest is all of world history where God invites his people to enjoy his presence by faith but instead we foolishly look to the things of this world to satisfy us. God wanted his people, Adam and Eve, to share in his rest with him. But they doubted his promises and disobeyed his commands. Consequently, they missed out on God's ideal rest.<sup>11</sup>

Although Adam forfeited the eternal experience of perfect rest in the garden of Eden, this did not prevent God from inviting subsequent generations to a partial experience of that rest. Indeed, God wanted to give the Promised Land as a place of rest to his people (Deut 12:9-10). They were to experience partial rest in the land (Deut 3:20;

---

<sup>10</sup>The OT prophets predicted that God's people would experience a future rest (Jer 46:27b) that would encompass the entire world (Isa 14:7; cf. 32:17-18; Jer 50:34). In the new creation rest, God says, "Behold I will extend peace to her like a river" (Isa 66:12). This rest is ultimately fulfilled in the new heavens and earth when God's people "may rest from their labors" (Rev 14:13) and they will ultimately be satisfied in Jesus alone (Rev 21-22).

<sup>11</sup>Beale proposes that if Adam had been faithful to God, he would have enjoyed unending rest in the presence of God: "It is plausible that Adam's decisive defeat of the evil force on the perimeter of the garden would have resulted in him experiencing unending eschatological 'rest'" (G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011], 39). See also Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1948), 140.

12:9-10; 25:19; Josh 1:13-15).<sup>12</sup> But they balked on the brink of blessing. Even though the “wilderness generation” had seen God’s wonderful works for forty years (Heb 3:9), they hardened their hearts (3:8) and squandered the opportunity to enter into God’s rest (see Num 13-14). They doubted his promises and disobeyed his commands. In response, God makes an angry oath, “They shall not enter my rest” (Heb 3:11).

Years later, David said that God was still inviting his people (i.e., the Psalm 95 generation) to experience his rest (Heb 4:7). But it did not stop there. The author of Hebrews applies the “today” of Psalm 95 to his audience as well (3:7, 15; 4:7), thus including a third generation in this invitation. Therefore, God’s rest is not limited to the Promised Land but points to a greater experience that is available to every generation of God’s people. Or to put it another way, “The issue of entering God’s rest must be faced by each generation.”<sup>13</sup> Indeed, “there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God” (4:9). Or as G. K. Beale puts it, “The time is still ‘Today.’”<sup>14</sup> How is it possible that this rest is still available?

After the partial and temporary enjoyment of God’s rest in the OT, King Jesus arrives on the scene and announces that God’s rest may be entered through him by announcing, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt 11:28-30).<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup>The Sabbath was also a picture of God’s ultimate rest. The commemoration of the Sabbath was a weekly reminder of the rest that God offered his people, but it was only “a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ” (Col 2:16-17).

<sup>13</sup>Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:104.

<sup>14</sup>Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 784. See also Andrew 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), 207; Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:104.

<sup>15</sup>Here Jesus adopts the words of Yahweh from the OT, “Thus says Yahweh, ‘Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. But they said, “We will not walk in it”’” (Jer 6:16). This not only proves that Jesus is Yahweh, but

So what is the point of the Promised Land? As explained in chapter 2, the author of Hebrews relies heavily on the interpretational method of typology. Here he relies on a typological connection between the partial rest experienced in the Promised Land and the rest offered believers in Christ.<sup>16</sup> The land serves as a typological picture of the rest every believer enjoys now in Christ and is a foretaste of the eternal rest they will one day experience in the new heavens and earth.<sup>17</sup> Simply put, the promise of rest in the land points to Jesus.<sup>18</sup>

The invitation—as well as the warning—is addressed to the readers of the book of Hebrews as a whole. These warnings have a dual purpose: that believers would heed the warnings and persevere in finding their rest in Jesus alone, and that fake Christians in their midst would examine themselves and come to Christ for salvation.<sup>19</sup> Every believer has entered that rest (Heb 4:3) but must also continually “strive to enter that rest” in deeper relationship with Christ (v. 11). It is sad but true that believers tend to drift from finding their satisfaction in Christ, so we must continue to choose Jesus

---

also that God’s offer of rest in the OT finds its culmination and fulfillment in Jesus.

<sup>16</sup>See Oren R. Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land: The Land Promise in God’s Redemptive Plan*, NSBT 34 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 165; Harold W. Attridge, “Let Us Strive to Enter that Rest’: The Logic of Hebrews 4:1-11,” *HTR* 73, nos. 1-2 (1980): 284; Lindars, *Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*, 49-50 (though Lindars bickers with the term *typology*, pp. 53-55).

<sup>17</sup>The rest is both present and future. This not only is supported by the “already, not yet” emphasis of the NT as a whole, but also coincides with the claim that people in this age “have tasted . . . the powers of the age to come” (Heb 6:5). Schreiner agrees, “The rest is fundamentally eschatological, and yet the eschaton has penetrated the present” (Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 137n190). So also George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 152; Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:99. For an exclusively futuristic interpretation, see David A. deSilva, “Entering God’s Rest: Eschatology and the Socio-Rhetorical Strategy of Hebrews,” *TJ* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 29-39; Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 205; O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 165-6. For a thorough defense of the futuristic interpretation of the inheritance throughout Scripture (though not interacting with Hebrews), see Echevarria, “The Future Inheritance of Land in the Pauline Epistles.”

<sup>18</sup>Martin writes, “The land and its blessings find their fulfillment in the new heaven and new earth won by Christ” (Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 17). See also Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 143. Lane delineates God’s creation rest as the “archetype,” the Promised Land as the “type,” and the Sabbath as the “antitype” that all point to “an eschatological understanding of God’s rest” (Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:104-5).

<sup>19</sup>This independent observation is supported by Guthrie, “He addresses them collectively as believers, but realizes that some in the group may manifest a different reality as time goes on” (Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 136).

because he is better. Even believers are tempted to doubt whether Jesus is truly better than football, lake homes, and Hollister. So we need to discern what went wrong with the “wilderness generation” and how to avoid it ourselves. The bottom line here is that the “wilderness generation” *doubted* which led to their *disobedience*. “Lack of trust,” notes Thomas Schreiner, “leads to failure to obey.”<sup>20</sup> They doubted God’s promises and then they disobeyed God’s commands. This leads to destruction and eternal damnation. To avoid this pernicious pattern, we need *faith*.

### **Doubt (3:12-15)**

We all have a disease that creeps into our hearts. It is called doubt or unbelief, essentially not believing God’s promises. Every time we choose to sin, it reveals that we doubt whether Jesus is really better than sin. And it is serious. If you have an “unbelieving heart” it will lead you to “fall away from the living God” (Heb 3:12). How do we keep from falling away from God? We hang on to Jesus—and encourage others to do the same (3:13). Our problem is that sin’s lies harden our hearts. Yes, sin lies to us. Sin specializes in sneaky sales pitches. Sin whispers, “Come unto *me*, all you who are weary, and you will find rest.” The deceitfulness of sin would lead us to believe that we will find rest in “spiritual cotton candy” like work, family, promotions, and the perfect vacation. But we combat the lies of the devil by believing the truth, namely, that Jesus is better. And we help each other by daily exhorting one another. We are not in the new heavens and earth yet, our final rest. So while it is still “today” it is important to keep believing, keep obeying, keep choosing Jesus, and keep exhorting one another. Today matters.

Many churchgoers today had an “original confidence” in Christ (Heb 3:14). They walked an aisle, signed a card, raised a hand, but sadly they have not continued.

---

<sup>20</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 126.

Even though they have not held their original confidence “firm to the end” (3:14), they believe they are safe since they said a prayer when they were six years old. But according to Hebrews 3:14, you are a Christian *if* you stick with Jesus to the end. In other words, true Christians keep believing and keep growing. Do not show me the date you wrote in your Veggie Tales Bible at VBS. Rather, show me that you are believing and growing today. How one is living today is a strong indication of whether their original profession was genuine or not. But here is the good news: It is still “today” (3:15). So we should not allow the disease of doubt to desensitize our hearts because, like the wilderness generation, doubt leads to disobedience.

### **Disobedience (3:16-19)**

The author of Hebrews provides a commentary on Psalm 95 in a Q-and-A format. Let us take a look at how the wilderness generation is described. First, they heard the words of God and experienced the exodus from Egypt, yet they still disobeyed (Heb 3:16). This is a warning for those of us who have heard the gospel and yet continue to sin. Second, God’s people had received the promise of the land, and yet they chose to die in the wilderness (3:17). If we continue to sin even though we have the good promises of God, it betrays the fact that we do not really believe them. Third, because the wilderness generation doubted his promise and disobeyed his command, they were barred from entering God’s rest (3:18). How tragic to have all of their hopes wrapped up in this land but to be stopped on the border because they did not have faith. What a light thing we think disobedience is. We do not take our sin seriously but sugarcoat its damning reality. We excuse our sins with inventive euphemisms like “mistakes” and “slip ups” until finally one day God will thunder at us, “You shall not enter my rest!” Disobedience kept them out of the land. If we likewise refuse to repent, our disobedience will keep us out of God’s presence for all eternity.

The conclusion is that “they were unable to enter because of unbelief” (Heb 3:19). Here is the real problem: They did not believe God. He promised he would lead them into the rest they so desperately wanted. But they doubted. Because they doubted, they disobeyed. And because they disobeyed, they were damned. Jesus says, “Come to me and I will give you rest.” But we doubt. Maybe we will find our satisfaction and rest somewhere else. We doubt that he is really better than all the other things in which we try to find satisfaction. We doubt and so we disobey. And if someone maintains a habit of disobedience, it is a strong indication that he will be damned. Or to put it more curtly, “Disobedience is fatal.”<sup>21</sup> So we must believe that Jesus is better. We must believe that only Jesus can fill our empty hearts. In the moment of temptation, we have two options: sin or Jesus. We are always going to choose the one that we believe is better.

#### **Faith (4:1-11)**

Despite the dire warnings, there is good news. The opportunity to enjoy rest is still available and genuine believers have already entered that rest by faith. But to the fake Christians in his readership, the author of Hebrews urges them to “fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach” God’s rest (Heb 4:1). Receiving good news does not ensure that it will benefit the recipient. For example, the Israelites received the good news that it was time to enter the Promised Land, but it did not benefit them because they did not embrace it in faith (4:2; whereas Caleb and Joshua both heard *and* believed). Perhaps the original readers of Hebrews thought they were safe because they were Jewish and lived in the Promised Land. Likewise, many churchgoers today have a false sense of security because they have heard the gospel their whole lives, taught Sunday School, or perhaps even led other people to the Lord. However, no one should assume that they are going to heaven because they belong to the “right” denomination, were baptized as a

---

<sup>21</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 146.

child, or are on the “cradle roll.” The question each individual must answer is if they have believed the gospel for themselves.

Through faith in Jesus, we can experience rest now (Heb 4:3). The rest available to us is the same rest that God entered on the seventh day (4:3, quoting Gen 2:2). This rest was offered to the wilderness generation (4:5-6) and to the Psalm 95 generation (4:7). It is true that Joshua gave the people rest in the land, but it was only a partial rest (4:8; see Josh 21:44). Since God is still talking about entering this rest, there must be something more, something better. “So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God” (4:9). We can enjoy this rest now through our relationship with Christ and one day we will finally rest from our works (4:10).<sup>22</sup> Guthrie captures both of these ideas when he writes, “True believers have already entered into God’s rest through belief, but they will experience the consummation of that rest only as they endure to the end.”<sup>23</sup> What a blessed day that will be when God’s people “rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them” (Rev 14:13).

In the meantime, we must fight to find our rest in Christ alone and “strive to enter that rest” (Heb 4:11). We cannot coast on our way to the kingdom. We must prove that our faith is genuine by continuing to choose Jesus and fighting off the junk substitutes that clamor for our affection. What does this striving look like? It means to spend time with Jesus in worship and prayer, to soak in his Word through reading, memorizing, and meditating, and to believe God’s promises in the face of temptation. For example, one day after an exhausting day of work that left me physically and emotionally drained, I just wanted to unwind. My first thought was watch an episode of one of my favorite TV shows (it was *Psych*, if you must know). While there is nothing wrong with

---

<sup>22</sup>This is most likely not referring to works salvation, but rather to our ceasing from work when we die. So Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 147; O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 172; Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 212.

<sup>23</sup>Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 165.

that necessarily, I felt the Spirit prompt me to spend time in his Word instead. And anyone can guess that I felt far more refreshed, far more satisfied, far more at rest, after spending an hour in the Word than if I had vegged out with a TV show. So when we feel empty, we must move toward Jesus rather than filling our emptiness with spiritual cotton candy. We must choose Jesus and repent of seeking rest in anything else, whether it is Psych or pornography or the Promised Land. Such a decision is possible only if we believe that Jesus actually is better, for it is by faith that we fight for the promised rest.

### **The Spirit's Scalpel (4:12-13)**

The author of Hebrews has just told the story of the wilderness generation failing to enter into God's rest. They doubted, they disobeyed, and God swears they will never enter his rest. Then they have a sudden change of heart and volunteer to go. But God says that they will "fall by the sword" (Num 14:43). And that is exactly what happened. Today, if we choose our sin over Jesus, we will not get our heads cut off by the sword of a Canaanite. But we will have the Word of God pierce through our hearts and judge us according to our thoughts and motives (Heb 4:12).<sup>24</sup> God's Word can penetrate our defenses to know what we are really thinking. God sees everything. Commenting on this verse, Robert Peterson writes, "God uses his Word to reveal unbelief and disobedience lurking in our hearts."<sup>25</sup> It is only through the Bible that we will cut out the cancer of unbelief in our hearts. Rather than letting it be a sword of judgment, we should allow God's Word to be a surgeon's scalpel, removing the tumor of unbelief.

---

<sup>24</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 147; O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 175; Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:102.

<sup>25</sup>Robert Peterson, study note on Heb 4:11-13, in *ESV Gospel Transformation Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 1661.

## Conclusion

My wife got her cotton candy when we spent a day at the county fair, but my craving for boiled peanuts went unanswered. It is almost impossible to find authentic boiled peanuts where I live and it makes me long for my home in South Carolina, where you can buy boiled peanuts on the side of a mountain road out of the back of an old pick-up truck. It reminds me that South Carolina will always be home for me. In the same way, our feelings of emptiness should remind us where our true home is, the new Promised Land toward which Jesus is leading his pilgrim people.<sup>26</sup> Nothing in this world will ever satisfy us, nor was it intended to. As Blaise Pascal famously wrote,

What does this greed and helplessness proclaim, except that there was once within us true happiness of which all that now remains is the outline and empty trace? Man tries unsuccessfully to fill this void with everything that surrounds him, seeking in absent things the help he cannot find in those that are present, but all are incapable of it. This infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite, immutable object, that is to say, God himself.<sup>27</sup>

Or as I would put it, only Jesus can fill our empty hearts.

---

<sup>26</sup>The book of Hebrews reminds us “that this world is not home to us but only the land through which we pass as pilgrims, seeking the home God has prepared for us,” namely, the “true promised land, ‘God’s rest’” (deSilva, “Entering God’s Rest,” 42). See also O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 128.

<sup>27</sup>Blaise Pascal, *Pensées and Other Writings*, trans. Honor Levi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 52.

## CHAPTER 6

### A BETTER PRIEST: HEBREWS 4:14-5:10; 7:1-28

My grandfather's office was always a place of mystery to me. Dimly lit with pipe smoke hanging in the air, it was an intriguing and forbidden place in my mind, an inner sanctum, if you will. The office was as interesting as the life my grandfather had led. There in the corner hung a football jacket, a reminder of his years as a high school football coach. On his massive desk were model ships, telling of his time in the Navy serving on a minesweeper. The Tom Clancy novels on the shelves were joined by plaques emblazoned with the word "THINK," a reminder of his successful career as an IBM salesman. The most interesting item in his office was the man who sat behind the desk, my grandfather. I don't know why, but I was afraid to enter his office, so I would nervously linger in the hallway, hoping someone else would walk in first, and then I would be able to follow in confidence. I wanted to know my grandfather better, to hear of his time in the Navy, and his winning seasons as a coach, and what the old mainframe computers were like, but I shrunk back in fear and insecurity.

The original readers of the book of Hebrews had a similar struggle. They felt they could not confidently draw near into the very presence of God, not without a Levitical priest, that is. Metaphorically, they were puttering around the Holy Place (Heb 9:8-9), ignoring the fact that Jesus had opened the way into the Holy of Holies (10:20). They did not realize that the person and work of Jesus had launched the New Covenant and rendered the Aaronic priests obsolete. So they shrunk back in doubt (10:37-39), lacking the confidence to draw near to God, not realizing that they had a better priest.

We also shrink back from God's presence because we doubt the gospel. Even though we theoretically know that God accepts us because of the priestly work of Jesus Christ, in practice it is another story. We beat ourselves up with feelings of self-condemnation, insecurity, and unworthiness. If we have sinned, we feel like we must do "Protestant penance" until God is willing to accept us back, like spend a day in fasting, read Leviticus for a few hours, or just mope around feeling dejected. We feel like we do not deserve to experience the joy of our salvation (see Ps 51:12) until we have groveled a little. These are anti-gospel thoughts, and they demonstrate that we, no less than the readership of Hebrews, fail to understand that we have a better priest.

For all of us, the author of Hebrews offers great news: Jesus is our great high priest (Heb 4:14). We should set aside our ineffective ways of drawing near to God—whether it is literal human priests, man-made rituals, or our own works. To understand the priesthood of Jesus, we will first explore the qualifications for a priest and ask whether Jesus measures up (5:1-10). Then we will investigate the elusive character Melchizedek, and show how he points to Jesus (7:1-28). Finally, we will ask how we should respond to the priesthood of Jesus (4:14-16).

### **What Is a Priest? (5:1-10)**

For those who grew up in Protestant or secular contexts, the priesthood can be a foreign concept. Put simply, a priest is a mediator, a middle man, between us and God, or as Harold Songer puts it, "it was the priesthood that provided access to deity."<sup>1</sup> A priest stands between the aggrieved party (God) and the offender (us), and offers sacrifices so we can be forgiven. Hebrews 5 begins to outline how Jesus qualifies as our better priest, but first we must understand why we need a priest in the first place.

---

<sup>1</sup>Harold S. Songer, "A Superior Priesthood: Hebrews 4:14-7:28," *RevExp* 82 (Summer 1985): 345.

## Why We Need a Priest

The way to God has been blocked ever since Adam sinned and God “placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life” (Gen 3:24). We need a priest because “[our] iniquities have made a separation between [us] and [our] God, and [our] sins have hidden his face from [us] so that he does not hear” (Isa 59:2). Since they needed a mediator, the people of God begged Moses to approach the mountain of God in their place (Exod 20:18-19; cf. Heb 12:18-21 which explains that it is not like this anymore). God’s people needed a way to interact with him, so he established the Aaronic priesthood (Exod 28-29). The OT priests were good for their time, but now they are obsolete.<sup>2</sup>

We still need someone who can intercede for us in God’s presence. We need someone who has already “passed through the heavens” (Heb 4:14) into God’s presence. In the OT, a veil separated the holy place from the holy of holies. The way to God’s presence was barred except for the Day of Atonement, the one day each year when the high priest would enter “inside the veil” to atone for his own sins and the sins of the people (Lev 16:12, 15). We need “a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain” (Heb 6:19). We need someone who will be a “forerunner on our behalf” (6:20) and blaze a trail “for us through the curtain” (10:20).<sup>3</sup> We need a better priest.

“From the dawn of human history,” writes J. Oswald Sanders, “man has craved a priest or mediator who would represent him to God. Among men there is a universal sense that there is a God who has been offended by man’s wrongdoing and who must be appeased.”<sup>4</sup> Even though we all sense our distance from the divine, we try inadequate

---

<sup>2</sup>Schreiner notes, “The author is not suggesting that the Levitical priesthood was contrary to God’s will or intention; he is simply emphasizing that it had a built-in obsolescence” (Thomas R. Schreiner, *Hebrews*, BTCP [Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2015], 229).

<sup>3</sup>The author of Hebrews draws a correlation between Jesus’s body and the veil that separated from God’s presence, which is a powerful observation since the tearing of Jesus’s body coincided with the tearing of the veil (Matt 27:51), forever opening the way to God.

<sup>4</sup>J. Oswald Sanders, *The Incomparable Christ* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 341.

methods to reach God. We try to approach him our own way, perhaps by being good enough, religious enough, or rational enough. There are a million ways to attempt to approach God, but only one of them works, and that is God’s appointed priest. Paul writes, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim 2:5-6). We now turn to the question of whether Jesus is really qualified as a priest, and to answer that question we turn to our passage in the book of Hebrews.

### **Jesus Is a Better Priest (5:1-10)**

The author of Hebrews believes that there are three things we need to know about priests, and so he asks three questions: what do they do, what are they like, and how do they become priests—that is, their function, character, and calling.<sup>5</sup> Then the author masterfully demonstrates that Jesus is qualified on each of these points to be our better priest. The author of Hebrews appears to present the qualifications of Jesus to be a priest by way of a chiasm, as represented in figure 2.<sup>6</sup>

Levitical priests (5:1-4) A: A priest mediates between God and man (5:1) B: A priest sympathizes (5:2-3) C: A priest is appointed (5:4)
Jesus, our great High Priest (5:5-10) C’: Jesus is appointed (5:5-6) B’: Jesus sympathizes (5:7-8) A’: Jesus mediates between God and man (5:9-10)

Figure 2. Chiastic Structure of Hebrews 5:1-10

---

<sup>5</sup>These outline headings are borrowed from Sinclair Ferguson, “The Priest We Need” (sermon at First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, SC, March 3, 2013), accessed March 29, 2015, <http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=3413846121>.

<sup>6</sup>William L. Lane, *Hebrews*, WBC 47 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 1:111. While acknowledging that 5:1-10 functions as a chiasm, O’Brien cautions against interpreting it rigidly as such (Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, PNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010], 188).

The first thing we need to know about priests is their function, that is, what they do (Heb 5:1). First and foremost, a priest is a mediator “to act on behalf of men in relation to God” (5:1). At the end of this section, the author of Hebrews explains that Jesus not only qualifies as a mediator between God and man, but also becomes “the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him” (5:9).

Second, the author of Hebrews asks what is the character of a priest. The answer is that a good priest should be *gentle* (Heb 5:2-3). He needs to be conscious of his own weakness so he is sympathetic as he ministers to others. Just like no one would want to work out with Superman, so also no one wants to confide in a priest who does not empathize with him or her. This should have been no problem for the OT priests since they had to make sacrifices for their own sins (Lev 9:7). The author of Hebrews explains how Jesus passes this requirement of priesthood with flying colors in Hebrews 5:7-8. Even though Jesus never sinned, he still understands what we are going through. He suffered and even cried, praying that God would “save him from death” (Heb 5:7), and God heard and answered that prayer by resurrecting him and exalting him (1:3; 13:20; cf. Ps 110:1).<sup>7</sup> God “brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus” (Heb 13:20). Jesus knows what temptation and suffering are like. “Sorrow and tears,” writes Thomas Schreiner, “were a regular experience for him.”<sup>8</sup> Jesus knows, and Jesus cares. He knows what it is

---

<sup>7</sup>Jesus’s prayer most likely refers to Golgotha. So Harold W. Attridge, “‘Heard Because of His Reverence’ (Heb 5:7),” *JBL* 98 (1979): 91; Peter T. O’Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son: A Biblical Theology of Hebrews*, NSBT 39 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 67-68; Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 164. For arguments that this refers to Christ’s prayer in the garden of Gethsemane in Matt 26:36-45, see Claire Clivaz, “Hebrews 5.7, Jesus’ Prayer on the Mount of Olives and Jewish Christianity: Hearing Early Christian Voices in Canonical and Apocryphal Texts,” in *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in Its Ancient Contexts*, ed. Richard Bauckham et al. (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 187-209; Barnabas Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 63; Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 244; Songer, “A Superior Priesthood,” 348.

<sup>8</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 163.

like to learn to obey God even in the face of suffering (5:8).<sup>9</sup> To know that Jesus did not use his position as the Son of God to opt out of suffering would have spoken volumes to the readership of Hebrews since they were in the midst of ongoing persecution. “He did not seek to escape by supernatural means,” writes O’Brien, “what was not available to them.”<sup>10</sup>

The third thing we need to know about priests is their calling, that is, how they became priests (Heb 5:4). A priest is *appointed*, that is, “no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was” (5:4; cf. Num 3:10; 18:1; Ps 105:26). We need a priest who is called by God, not just any random dude who is looking for a job. Jesus qualifies on this point as well because he was appointed by God (Heb 5:5). The author of Hebrews proves this with two OT quotations. First, he reiterates Psalm 2:7 (earlier quoted in 1:5) which refers to Jesus’s inauguration as king.<sup>11</sup> This leads into the second quotation, Psalm 110:4, which speaks of Melchizedek, a priest-king. Jesus is a priest “after the order of Melchizedek” (Heb 5:6), and he will not come and go, but will be with us forever (cf. 13:5).

At this point, the author of Hebrews jumps into the parenthetical warning of 5:11-6:20. We should notice that he says Jesus is a high priest like Melchizedek (Heb 5:10), and then gives an application section, and does not mention him again until 6:20, which leads him to begin chap. 7 with, “For this Melchizedek . . .” (7:1). So what kind of

---

<sup>9</sup>Obviously, this does not mean that Jesus used to disobey and then learned not to. Rather, he had to learn to obey as a human just like we must. The only difference is that he never sinned. Rightly O’Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son*, 68-69.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 69.

<sup>11</sup>The author includes Ps 2:7 (and links it with Ps 110:4) to emphasize that Christ’s resurrection, ascension, and exaltation (beautifully portrayed in Heb 1) is foundational to his role as high priest. It is the fact that Jesus passed through the heavens (4:14), was appointed the heir of all things (1:2), and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (1:3) that qualifies him as the better priest. See O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 196-97.

priest is Jesus? To answer this question, we need to find out more about this mysterious Melchizedek.

### Who Is Melchizedek? (7:1-28)

Melchizedek enters the stage of world history right after Abram rescued Lot on the heels of a failed revolt by five Mesopotamian kings (Gen 14:1-16). Up to this point in the book of Genesis, Abram is the hero of the story, but at this point Melchizedek steps in and steals the show.<sup>12</sup> Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem, walks in and does two actions that demonstrate he is superior to Abram: he blesses him and receives tithes from him.<sup>13</sup> Then he rides off into the sunset. The only other mention of Melchizedek in Scripture is in Psalm 110:4, a Psalm that is definitely about Jesus. Melchizedek was a human being<sup>14</sup> who served as a type of Christ.<sup>15</sup> The author of Hebrews says that he *resembled* the Son of God, not that he *was* the Son of God (Heb 7:3). The author of Hebrews knows his OT well, and he knows that the entire OT is about Jesus. To be honest, if I were reading Genesis 14 for the first time, I would not have interpreted it

---

<sup>12</sup>“Melchizedek literally interrupts the narrative flow, without any apparent cause or consequence. He must therefore be important in himself” (Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 20016], 176).

<sup>13</sup>Melchizedek was a Yahweh-worshipper, serving as a “priest of the Most High God” (Heb 7:1) (see Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:164). Contra M. Delcor, who argues that the biblical text conflates multiple Canaanite deities to square with Judaism’s system of monotheism, and then concludes that Gen 14 references “a Canaanite cult practised by a Canaanite priest” (M. Delcor, “Melchizedek from Genesis to the Qumran Texts and the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *JSJ* 2, no. 2 (December 1971): 117. Similarly, Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 188-89.

<sup>14</sup>Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 305.

<sup>15</sup>Dale F. Leschert, *Hermeneutical Foundations of Hebrews: A Study in the Validity of the Epistle’s Interpretation of Some Core Citations from the Psalms*, NABPRDS 10 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1994), 233. Leschert ably defends the validity of the typological interpretation of Melchizedek in Hebrews 7, stating that the author of Hebrews “did not arbitrarily lift Melchizedek out of obscurity or thrust upon him a leading role in the Epistle which he was unsuited to play. The connection that he saw between Melchizedek and Christ in his priestly office was not the product of his own fertile imagination; rather it was the natural result of reading Ps 110:4 through the eyes of Jesus and his apostles” (Leschert, *Hermeneutical Foundations of Hebrews*, 214). Cockerill likewise argues that the author’s interpretation is legitimate (Gareth Lee Cockerill, “Melchizedek without Speculation: Hebrews 7.1-25 and Genesis 14.17-24,” in *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in Its Ancient Contexts*, ed. Richard Buackham et al. (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 141-44.

Christologically, but the author of Hebrews teaches us that Melchizedek is a type of Christ.<sup>16</sup> That is why we need to learn how to read the Bible from the NT authors.

### **Melchizedek Points to Jesus (7:1-10)**

Let us learn from the interpretational method of the author of Hebrews and explore how Melchizedek points to Christ.<sup>17</sup> We are on the lookout for the smallest of clues, since, as Joseph Fitzmyer reminds us, “even the minor elements of the OT text are exploited to suggest that Christ, the new high priest . . . brings the messianic blessings of uprightness and peace.”<sup>18</sup> First, Melchizedek was the king of righteousness (Heb 7:2) and so is Jesus (see 1:8-9). Second, he was the king of peace (7:2) and so is Jesus (see Isa 9:6). Third, it appears that Melchizedek is eternal (Heb 7:3) and so is Jesus (see 1:10-12).<sup>19</sup> Fourth, Melchizedek was greater than Abram because he received tithes from and blessed Abram (7:6-7). Jesus also is greater than Abraham (John 8:53, 58). Fifth, Melchizedek is superior because Levi actually paid tithes, in a manner of speaking, to him through Abram (7:9-10). This demonstrates that the Melchizedekian priesthood is superior to the Aaronic priesthood.<sup>20</sup>

We need a priest who is better than the Aaronic priests. There was something lacking, something incomplete, in the Jewish priesthood. Psalm 110:1 makes it clear that Jesus is a priest, not after the order of Aaron, but after the order of Melchizedek. The readership of the book of Hebrews should not long for an Aaronic priest, but should look

---

<sup>16</sup>Songer, “A Superior Priesthood,” 355; O’Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son*, 70.

<sup>17</sup>Since Melchizedek is “resembling the Son of God” (Heb 7:3), it is clear that he points to Jesus, not the other way around. So Paul Ellingworth, “‘Like the Son of God’: Form and Content in Hebrews 7,1-10,” *Bib* 64 (1983): 257-58; O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 249).

<sup>18</sup>Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “‘Now This Melchizedek . . .’ (Heb 7,1),” *CBQ* 25 (1963): 314.

<sup>19</sup>Since the lineage of a priest was very important (see Neh 7:64-65), “Melchizedek stands out as a priest in that there is no genealogy relative to his priesthood” (Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 209).

<sup>20</sup>Ellingworth, “‘Like the Son of God,’” 262; Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:163.

for a superior priest after the order of Melchizedek. Jesus becomes our better priest by fulfilling the Melchizedekian priesthood.<sup>21</sup>

**We Need a Better Priest (7:11-28)**

The author of Hebrews takes Psalm 110:4 as his text, and expositis it line by line: “Yahweh has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.’” He interprets this verse, writes O’Brien, “in the light of its eschatological fulfillment,”<sup>22</sup> and thus finds four ways that Jesus fulfills the Melchizedekian priesthood and at the same time meets our desperate need for a better priest. The author of Hebrews expositis Psalm 110:4 line by line, explaining in turn the order of Melchizedek, the resurrection of the priest, the oath of God, and the permanence of the priesthood (see table 2).<sup>23</sup> As my friend Jamie Caldwell says, “Jesus trumps all other priests.”

Table 2. Exposition of Psalm 110:4 in Hebrews 7

<i>Hebrews 7</i>	<i>Psalm 110:4</i>
Jesus is better because of the order (7:11-14)	... after the order of Melchizedek.”
Jesus is better because of the resurrection (7:15-19)	“You are a priest forever . . .
Jesus is better because of the oath (7:20-22)	Yahweh has sworn and will not change his mind
Jesus is better because of the permanence (7:23-25)	“You are a priest forever . . .

---

<sup>21</sup>Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*, 76; Fitzmyer, “Now This Melchizedek,” 317.

<sup>22</sup>O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 264. Lane similarly notes that “Jesus is the eschatological priest of the new age” (Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:187).

<sup>23</sup>For this understanding of how Ps 110:4 shapes the structure of Heb 7, I am indebted to O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 255.

**Jesus is better because of the priestly order (7:11-14).** Jesus is not a Levitical priest, but rather is “after the order of Melchizedek” (Heb 7:11). If Psalm 110:4 predicted a Messianic priest who would be after a different order, then it implies the inherent weakness and temporary nature of the Levitical priesthood (7:11). The author of Hebrews admits that the law was changed (Exod 28:1-4) to allow Jesus to be a Melchizedekian priest (Heb 7:12-14), but insists that this is necessary for believers to be perfected. The old priests could not make us “perfect” (7:11), that is to say, they could not bring us into a perfectly right relationship with God so that we could boldly draw near to him.<sup>24</sup>

**Jesus is better because of the resurrection (7:15-19).** Jesus is the fulfillment of the Melchizedekian priesthood in the sense that they both lack the proper pedigree (Heb 7:16-17). Jesus is qualified to be priest not based on his genealogy but by virtue of his resurrection and exaltation, or as the author of Hebrews puts it, his “indestructible life” (7:16). This fulfills the line from Psalm 110:4 that predicted the coming one would be “a priest forever” (7:17). None of this is true of the Levitical priests who, as Schreiner reminds us, “did not bring people near to God. Instead, [they] reminded people that they were distant from him, that their sins were not atoned for fully and finally.”<sup>25</sup> Is Jesus qualified to be our better priest? He didn’t match the genealogical requirements but still passed the test with flying colors by defeating death at his resurrection and ascension. This is the priest we need.

---

<sup>24</sup>Koester describes the concept of *perfection* in the book of Hebrews as “the establishment of right relationship with God through the cleansing of the conscience and the consummation of this relationship in everlasting glory, rest, and celebration in God’s heavenly city” (Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible 36 [New York: Random House, 2001], 353).

<sup>25</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 227.

Whether it is Levitical priests, Roman Catholic priests, or our own homemade ways of earning God’s approval, none of them can bring us into a perfectly right relationship with God (Heb 7:18-19). Someone might object, “But I am a faithful member of my church. I am a really good person. I am a member of the Lion’s Club. And I volunteer at the homeless shelter every month. Certainly God is happy with me!” But the Bible says that all of the ways we try to draw near to God are weak and useless (7:18). Then there are these beautiful words: “But on the other hand” (7:19). On the one hand, we tried and failed to draw near to God through the OT priests—but on the other hand there is Jesus. On the one hand, we used to try to keep the law to draw near to God—but on the other hand there is Jesus. On the one hand, we have chased our sins and thought that would make us happy—but on the other hand there is Jesus. Although it is not appropriate to use exclamation marks in academic writing, it certainly seems that this is one time to bend the rules, because “on the other hand” there is our risen, indestructible, better priest! He is our “better hope” through whom “we draw near to God” (7:19).

**Jesus is better because of the oath (7:20-22).** The OT priests did not receive an oath, but Psalm 110:4 says that God “has sworn” that Jesus would be a Melchizedekian priest forever (Heb 7:21). This oath does not just benefit Jesus, but us as well, since we receive a priest forever who is the “guarantor of a better covenant” (7:22). The OT covenants were wonderful (Noahic, Abrahamic, Sinaitic, Davidic), but God promised a new covenant (see Heb 8). How do we know that it is not a scam? We can be confident because Jesus vouches for it. This is not like a shady “return policy” that refuses to honor their commitment. Rather, the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus guarantees that the new covenant is the real deal.<sup>26</sup> When the guilt of our sin weighs heavy on our conscience, it is to our great high priest that we must look.

---

<sup>26</sup>O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 272.

Before the throne of God above  
I have a strong and perfect plea.  
A great high Priest whose Name is Love  
Who ever lives and pleads for me.  
My name is graven on His hands,  
My name is written on His heart.  
I know that while in Heaven He stands  
No tongue can bid me thence depart.

When Satan tempts me to despair  
And tells me of the guilt within,  
Upward I look and see Him there  
Who made an end of all my sin.  
Because the sinless Savior died  
My sinful soul is counted free.  
For God the just is satisfied  
To look on Him and pardon me.<sup>27</sup>

Because of the oath God gave to Jesus, he becomes a better priest who completely takes care of our sin problem and brings us into a right relationship with God.

**Jesus is better because of the permanence (7:23-25).** The OT priests all died, every single one of them. As Schreiner tersely notes, “Dead priests can’t accomplish salvation.”<sup>28</sup> Jesus is the only priest who lives forever, and thereby can offer a salvation that has no limits (Heb 7:25). He is able to save your whole self for the whole of eternity.<sup>29</sup> This is why we can “draw near to God through him” (7:25). Jesus is the only priest who lives forever, and thereby he can serve as our priest constantly and continually. “He always lives to make intercession for them” (7:25). We can draw near to God because Jesus is already “at the right hand of God . . . interceding for us” (Rom 8:34). We can draw near to God because “Christ has entered . . . into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf” (Heb 9:24). My favorite hymn is based on Hebrews 7:25:

---

<sup>27</sup>Charitie Bancroft, “Before the Throne of God Above” (No. 14), in *Hymns Modern & Ancient*, ed. Fred R. Coleman (Milwaukee: Heart Publications, 2011).

<sup>28</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 232.

<sup>29</sup>The expression εἰς τὸ παντελές could mean “for all time” (NRSV) or “completely” (NIV). It is likely that both ideas are communicated here (so Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 233). “If Christ saves forever, this is precisely because his salvation is complete” (O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 274).

He ever lives above, for me to intercede;  
His all redeeming love, his precious blood to plead;  
His blood atoned for all our race,  
His blood atoned for all our race,  
And sprinkles now the throne of grace.

Five bleeding wounds he bears, received on Calvary;  
They pour effectual prayers, they strongly plead for me.  
“Forgive him, O forgive,” they cry,  
“Forgive him, O forgive,” they cry,  
“Nor let that ransomed sinner die!”<sup>30</sup>

**Summary (7:26-28).** After this majestic exposition of Psalm 110:4, the author of Hebrews offers some concluding thoughts. Unlike the OT priests who had to offer sacrifices for their own sins, Jesus is a better priest because he is sinless (Heb 7:26-27). Unlike the OT priests who had to offer sacrifices over and over again, Jesus is a better priest because he offers himself as a one-time sacrifice (7:27). “It is finished” (John 19:30). Jesus paid it all.

Jesus is qualified to be our better priest who brings “many sons to glory” (Heb 2:10) so that we can attain “perfection” (7:11) because he himself “has been made perfect forever” (7:28). Jesus paved the way into God’s presence by his successful mission of obedience and death, and now sits at God’s right hand as the perfect example of the path all of Jesus’s brothers and sisters will take (2:10; 5:9).<sup>31</sup> The OT system of priests and sacrifices was incapable of guiding us to perfection (7:11, 19; 9:9; 10:1), but Jesus, the “perfector of our faith” (12:2), has made it possible (10:14). As our better priest, he is currently interceding for us that we stay faithful to the end, persevering to the finish line,

---

<sup>30</sup>Charles Wesley, “Arise, My Soul, Arise,” (No. 305) in *Trinity Hymnal*, rev. ed. (Atlanta: Great Commission Publications, 1990).

<sup>31</sup>This understanding of the perfection of the Son is confirmed by O’Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son*, 75. Lane concurs, writing that the concept of *perfection* is “referring to the whole process by which Jesus was personally prepared and vocationally qualified for his continuing ministry in the presence of God” (Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:196).

until we join with “the spirits of the righteous made perfect” (12:23) in God’s presence for all eternity.<sup>32</sup>

### **Application (4:14-16)**

We finally make it back to the transition verses of Hebrews 4:14-16. By now a few things should be clear: We desperately need a priest to eradicate our sin problem so we can draw near to God, but we need a better mediator than the Aaronic priests or our homegrown methods of reaching God. We need a better priest, and his name is Jesus. Since he has provided access to God, how should we respond?

### **Hold Fast (4:14)**

To be sure, there is the very real danger that professing believers would miss out on God’s offer of rest and “fall by the same sort of disobedience” as the wilderness generation (Heb 4:11), but there is good news in the person and work of Jesus Christ. “We have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God” (4:14). This is what enables us to “hold our original confidence firm to the end” (3:14). When we are plagued by guilt and doubt, it is tempting to throw in the towel. How, we ask ourselves, can we approach God when we give in to the same temptations over and over again? Certainly he is sick of hearing us confess that sin for the billionth time. However, this is not the time to give up, and our better priest gives us the encouragement we need to press on. We must keep choosing Jesus because he is better.

### **Draw Near (4:15-16)**

Not only are we to press on, but we must also draw near to God’s presence, and we are able to draw near to God because our priest is both empathetic and sinless.

---

<sup>32</sup>It is Jesus’s priestly intercessions on behalf of his people that covers “anything that would prevent us from receiving the final salvation he has won for us at the cross” (O’Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son*, 74).

First, we are encouraged to draw near because Jesus is empathetic. One of the misconceptions that holds us back is feeling like Jesus does not understand what we are going through. We all know what it feels like to confide a personal struggle in a friend only for them to offer the trite words, “I know how you feel.” In our frustration, we want to retort, “You have no idea what I am going through.” After learning about the superiority of Christ, it would be natural to wonder the same about our high priest. Can he truly empathize with his people? To answer this question, the author of Hebrews emphasizes that we have a compassionate priest (Heb 4:15). “He is not a distant and aloof high priest,” writes Schreiner, “but is himself intimately acquainted with the human condition.”<sup>33</sup> That is the kind of priest we have. Second, we are emboldened to draw near to God because Jesus is sinless.<sup>34</sup> We do not need a buddy who understands but fails along with us; we need a priest who has conquered temptation and can empower us to do the same. Philip Hughes agrees, “What we, and they, needed was not a fellow loser but a winner; not one who shares our defeat but one who is able to lead us to victory; not a sinner but a savior.”<sup>35</sup>

Now that our leader has charged through the veil separating us from God and currently intercedes on our behalf by virtue of his substitutionary life and death, we have full authority to follow him into the throne room of God. We can enjoy our relationship with God through fellowship and prayer at any time and at any place. In fact, we can pray “with the same confidence as the Son of God himself,” says Charles Bridges. “For the

---

<sup>33</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 153.

<sup>34</sup>O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 184; Songer, “A Superior Priesthood,” 346. Contra Lindars, who limits this to any sin that would have “disqualified him for his God-given task of reconciling humanity and God” (Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*, 63n53).

<sup>35</sup>Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 177. Owen similarly remarks, “He was separate . . . from sin, in its nature, causes, and effects. HE had to be like this for our benefit. He became the middle person between God and sinners and had to be separate from those sinners in the thing he stood in their place for” (John Owen, *Hebrews* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998], 179).

Father is never weary of delighting in his dear Son, or in those who are one with him . . . You cannot want larger promises or a better plea. You come, not because you are worthy, but because you are bid, to come . . . Christ is your only way to God. Faith is the act and exercise of coming to Christ.”<sup>36</sup> The way to God is now open because of our better priest.

### **Conclusion**

When I was a child, I was afraid to enter my grandfather’s office, but I had no need to fear. I didn’t realize it at the time, but that old sailor behind the desk was kindly disposed toward me. He loved me, because I was his grandson. There was no need to cower in the hallway outside his office. Based on my relationship with him, I was authorized to run into his office and jump in his lap. All I needed to do was draw near.

Too often, our feelings of guilt and condemnation paralyze us from entering the presence of God. We feel unworthy, so we loiter outside, waiting for a sign of his pleasure with us. We have forgotten the great news that we have a better priest, a mediator, who is currently interceding for us. We have forgotten that our God is kindly disposed toward us in Christ and has adopted us as sons and daughters. To encourage us to draw near to God, A. W. Tozer writes,

Ransomed men no longer pause in fear to enter the Holy of Holies. God wills that we should push on into His presence and live our whole life there. . . . With the veil removed by the rending of Jesus’ flesh, with nothing on God’s side to prevent us from entering, why do we tarry without? Why do we consent to abide all our days just outside the Holy of Holies and never enter at all to look upon God?<sup>37</sup>

If the man behind the desk is my grandfather, then I should not hang out in the hallway, but rather walk in and get to know him. If the veil that separated you from God has been

---

<sup>36</sup>Charles Bridges, *An Exposition of Psalm 119* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1995), 457-58.

<sup>37</sup>A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1993), 34, 41, emphasis in original.

ripped in two, then you should not loiter outside, but draw near to him through Jesus, our great High Priest.

## CHAPTER 7

### IT IS FINISHED: HEBREWS 8:1-10:18

Every year blood flows in the streets as countless animals are sacrificed by Muslims around the world. During Eid al-Adha, or the “Festival of Sacrifice,” Muslims remember when Abraham was told to sacrifice his son (whom Muslims believe to be Ishmael). It is a time when every family is required to sacrifice a sheep because they realize that they need forgiveness for their sins, and Eid al-Adha is a way to get caught up on their sin problem once a year. Tim Keese describes the scene: “An imam, carrying a long, curved knife, acted as the priest, taking the scimitar to the jugular. The imam went quickly from one animal to another, leaving them with gaping throats and a sickening struggle. Blood flowed in the streets—fresh, red, brilliant blood.”<sup>1</sup> I have a friend who lives in Morocco, and she describes the Day of Sacrifice as wild and bloody. This year, one of her friends asked her if she had bought her sheep yet. “No, I have not bought my sheep,” she replied. “I don’t need to. My Sheep purchased me a long time ago with his blood.” Her friend was shocked. She felt the need for forgiveness, for cleansing, even for a substitute sacrifice, but she could not fathom that Jesus had offered himself as a one-time sacrifice on her behalf. As Keese writes, “There was some faint shadow here, some husk of truth—like a Christless Old Testament, only more blood and more death—but no life.”<sup>2</sup> Those who long for forgiveness in a bloody ritual like Eid al-Adha do not understand that “it is finished.”

---

<sup>1</sup>Tim Keese, *Dispatches from the Front: Stories of Gospel Advance in the World’s Difficult Places* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 135.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

We kill plenty of animals where I live in Texas, but never for a sacrifice, so it is hard to imagine that people around the world think they need to sacrifice an animal to be right with God. Nevertheless, we also struggle to believe that “it is finished.” We still work hard to earn God’s favor, thinking that God probably likes us more when we have had a “good day” but he is most likely upset with us when we have had a “bad day” (this leads us to pride on good days and depression on bad days). We are still tempted to think we have to behave so God will forgive us, as if it is not enough merely to accept his forgiveness. In fact, we may confess our sins over and over again, but still wrestle with guilt and self-condemnation. We struggle, just like those who celebrate Eid al-Adha, to believe that “it is finished,” and this brings us to the main point of the book of Hebrews.

The author of Hebrews has been driving at this point the entire time: “Now the point in what we are saying is this” (Heb 8:1).<sup>3</sup> His “point” (found in 8:1-10:18), simply put, is that “it is finished.” This section begins (8:1) and ends (10:12-13) by showing that Jesus is exalted as the priest-king (Ps 110:1), the better priest who has been exalted as the inaugurated king in the better tabernacle in heaven.<sup>4</sup> Now that Jesus has fulfilled his role as priest, we can have access to the presence of God in the “true tent” (Heb 8:2).<sup>5</sup> Jesus

---

<sup>3</sup>Barnabas Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 79. Compton explains that the entire discussion of the superior priesthood of Christ “was aimed to support the author’s argument for the necessity of better sacrifices” (Jared Compton, *Psalms 110 and the Logic of Hebrews*, LNTS 537 [London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015], 104).

<sup>4</sup>There is not a literal tabernacle in heaven; rather, the “true tent” represents the presence of God (so Thomas R. Schreiner, *Hebrews*, BTCP [Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2015], 243). This is simple enough, yet we are reminded of Balaam’s prediction that God’s people would continue to expand God’s tabernacle (his presence) throughout the world (see Num 24:5-6). Beale proposes that Heb 8:2 is the fulfillment of the “expanding end-time garden or temple” (G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 15 [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004], 123). Church agrees, “The tent pitched by the Lord [is] the eschatological dwelling place of God with his people, foreshadowed in Eden, seen by Balaam in his vision, and now come into the present with the exaltation of Jesus the High Priest to the right hand of God” (Philip A. F. Church, “The True Tent which the Lord Has Pitched’: Balaam’s Oracles in Second Temple Judaism and in Hebrews,” in *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in Its Ancient Contexts*, ed. Richard Bauckham et al. [London: T&T Clark, 2008], 157). See also Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 289.

<sup>5</sup>The earthly tent was a “shadow” of the real thing (Heb 8:5), since it was based on a heavenly pattern (Exod 25:40). The tabernacle/temple was always a type of a greater reality, namely, experiencing the presence of God. See Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 245.

has a better ministry, a better covenant, and better promises. “But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises” (8:6). What the ESV translates as “as it is” should really be translated as “now” (vov).<sup>6</sup> *Now* we can experience the better. We should not go back to *then*, to the inferior. The better is available to us now, so we should choose Jesus because he is better.

This passage, the heart of the letter to the Hebrews, addresses our deepest needs. First, if our many failures and mistakes have taught us anything it is that we need a new heart. The old covenant did not provide any inner impetus to obey God, so we need a better covenant (chap. 8). Second, we need full access to God’s presence, but the OT priests were only allowed to enter into the Holy of Holies once per year. We need a better sacrifice that grants us full access to God (chap. 9). Third, we need our sins taken care of once and for all, a one-time sacrifice, again something that the ever-repeating OT sacrifices were unable to provide (Heb 10:1-18). Although the OT sacrifices were good for a time,<sup>7</sup> they ultimately pointed to Jesus who came as the perfect priest to offer himself as the perfect sacrifice and triumphantly announce, “It is finished” (John 19:30).<sup>8</sup> These three words provide refreshing relief from the hamster wheel of sinning and sacrifices and, as Thomas Schreiner notes, “capture the theology of Hebrews.”<sup>9</sup> In Hebrews 8-10, the author provides one of the strongest reasons why we should choose Jesus, namely, because he is a better sacrifice.

---

<sup>6</sup>Contra Lane who views the vov as “logical rather than temporal” (William L. Lane, *Hebrews*, WBC 47 [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991], 1:201).

<sup>7</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 293. “The issue is not whether the blood of bulls and goats . . . has any power to effect cleansing, but whether it has the potency to effect a *decisive* cleansing” (Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:261-62, emphasis in original).

<sup>8</sup>Barry Joslin, “Christ Bore the Sins of Many: Substitution and the Atonement in Hebrews,” *SBTJ* 11, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 82.

<sup>9</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 1.

## **We Have a Better Covenant (8:1-12)**

It comes as no shock to learn that we do not naturally obey God. We need God's help to obey him, but the old covenant did not provide inner enablement for obedience. God remedies our situation by providing a new covenant that writes the law on our heart and gives us the power to obey. To understand the better covenant launched by the person and work of Christ, we need to ask several questions: what is a covenant, why do we need a new covenant, and how does the new covenant affect our lives.

First, what is a covenant? In the past when a king wanted to make an agreement with his people, he would make a "covenant" with them, a pact or contract, if you will. A marriage covenant is a helpful illustration since it is far more than a legal contract, but also entails a loving relationship. For our purposes, we can define a *covenant* as an agreement between two people so they can be in a good relationship. The good news for us is that God desires to be in a relationship with us, so he establishes covenants with his people. Every covenant includes a similar refrain, indicating God's desire to be in a right relationship with his people: "I will be your God and you will be my people." One day, this relationship will be fulfilled in the new heavens and earth (Rev 21:3).<sup>10</sup>

God established several covenants to help his people interact with him,<sup>11</sup> including the Sinaitic covenant (see Exod 19-24), which served its purpose for a time but left the door open for a better covenant. "For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second" (Heb 8:7). The people did not keep their end of the agreement, and consequently they did not have a good relationship

---

<sup>10</sup>Brian Vickers, *Justification by Grace through Faith: Finding Freedom from Legalism, Lawlessness, Pride, and Despair* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 21n8; O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 299. "The new covenant thus brings to its consummation the relationship between God and his people, which is at the heart of all covenant disclosure from Abraham onward" (Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:209).

<sup>11</sup>For a helpful perspective on how the covenants form the backbone of the Bible, see Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

with God. The problem was with the people: “For he finds fault *with them* when he says . . .” (8:8). It was they who “did not continue in my covenant” (8:9). The problem was also with the old covenant, for it could not help them obey.<sup>12</sup>

These failures help answer our second question: Why do we need a new covenant? We need God to perform radical heart surgery on us, that is, to give us a new heart. There is something wrong deep inside us that prevents us from keeping God’s covenant. Changing the outward system will not help. Getting a filter on our computer will not fix the heart problem of lust. Leaving the room or counting to ten when we are about to blow our top does not solve the heart problem of anger. We need to be changed from the inside. We need the law to be written on our hearts so we have the inner strength and enablement to obey God. We need our hearts to be circumcised (Deut 30:6). This is exactly what God promises in the new covenant: “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules” (Ezek 36:26-27). The old covenant could not provide this inner strength, but God promises a new covenant that will give us radical heart surgery and an inner enablement to obey him.

The new covenant is outlined beautifully in the book of Jeremiah 31:31-34, and quoted by the author of Hebrews:

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into

---

<sup>12</sup>O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 296. Contra Cockerill who posits that “it is not their inability to obey but their refusal to obey that demonstrates the insufficiency of the first covenant to adequately transform the human heart” (Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012], 366). The problem ultimately was with both the people and the old covenant, though here I believe the author of Hebrews is emphasizing the problem with the people (so Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 249).

their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more (Hebrews 8:8-12).

When will Jeremiah’s prophecy of the new covenant come to place? The prediction, “behold, days are coming,” is not a specific eschatological time marker, but rather refers to “an *indefinite* future.”<sup>13</sup> People waited and waited. They waited for six hundred years, wondering when God would fulfill this promise of a new covenant with his people. They were in exile in Jeremiah 30-33, but they knew that a better day was coming. The OT admitted that the old covenant was not sufficient, and predicted a future day with a new exodus and a new covenant. The author of Hebrews believes that these days are here now. The new covenant began when Jesus arrived on the scene to be our better priest and better sacrifice, “with the entrance of the eschatological high priest into the heavenly sanctuary.”<sup>14</sup> The trigger event was Jesus’s death and resurrection.<sup>15</sup>

With the launch of the new covenant, the old covenant became obsolete: “In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away” (Heb 8:13). The old types are no longer needed once the fulfillment has arrived.

Growing up in the 1990s, I vividly remember the day my family bought our first PC. The opportunities were endless: we could play Commander Keen, search Microsoft Encarta encyclopedia, check our Juno e-mail account . . . and that was about it. Each of our programs or games was conveniently stored on floppy disks that contained a whopping 1.44 MB of storage. Then came the advent of the USB flash drive holding up to 256 GB of storage, and with the new technology the old floppy disks soon became

---

<sup>13</sup>Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 495 (italics in original).

<sup>14</sup>Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:210.

<sup>15</sup>Peter T. O’Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son: A Biblical Theology of Hebrews*, NSBT 39 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 35.

obsolete. The old floppies served a purpose for their time, but today we would be hard pressed even to find a computer with a floppy disk drive. It would be foolish to stock up on floppy disks since they will not work with modern computers. In the same way, the OT system of priests and sacrifices, though serving their purpose for their time, are out of date. Rather than returning to the obsolete, we should press on to Christ and choose him because he is better.

Finally we come to our third question: How does the new covenant affect our lives? Our great need for a new heart can be met through Jesus as we become members of the new covenant. In fact, it is clear that all of the members of the new covenant will be regenerate, unlike the mixed multitude of the OT (Heb 8:11).<sup>16</sup> How do we respond when we feel like obeying God is too hard? “It is impossible,” we complain. “I cannot do it.” The reality of the new covenant responds, “Yes, you can.” We can obey God because he has changed our hearts, and he will give us the power we need to obey him. “The genius of the new covenant, then,” writes Schreiner, “is that the Spirit causes new covenant members to obey the will of God.”<sup>17</sup> The words often attributed to John Bunyan summarize well the power of the new covenant:

Run, John, run, the law commands  
But gives us neither feet nor hands,  
Far better news the gospel brings;  
It bids us fly and gives us wings.<sup>18</sup>

We can obey God today because Jesus became a better priest and thereby launched a better covenant.

---

<sup>16</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 248, 252. As opposed to times when God’s people did not know him (e.g., Judg 2:10; Hos 4:1, 6), in the new covenant each member will possess “a personal knowledge of [God]” (O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 300).

<sup>17</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 253.

<sup>18</sup>Attribution unknown. For bibliographical options, see Jason Meyer, *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 2n3.

### **We Have a Better Sacrifice (9:1-10:18)**

Not only does Jesus launch a better covenant, but he also becomes a better sacrifice on our behalf. We have learned from Hebrews 5 and 7 that Jesus is a better priest, but a priest must bring a sacrifice: “For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer” (Heb 8:3). In this case, Jesus offers himself. Jesus is our better sacrifice.

Although we are not accustomed to seeing sheep sacrificed in the streets, we intrinsically understand the need for a sacrifice. Our sense of justice tells us that the individual who does the crime must also do the time. We also know this from Scripture: “The wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23). When we sin, we must pay for it, and the payment is death. The OT sacrifices were substitutionary, a way for people to resolve their sin problem and live to tell the story.

Every sacrifice must have, among other things, two characteristics in order to be effective. Every sacrifice had to be perfect and bloody. The sacrifice had to be perfect because it could not have any sins or blemishes of its own, and the sacrifice had to be bloody because the high priest could not enter God’s presence “without taking blood” (Heb 9:7). In fact, “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin” (9:22). O’Brien summarizes, “Blood is the medium of approach to God.”<sup>19</sup> The author of Hebrews makes it clear that the death of Jesus qualifies as a sacrifice on both of these counts; he was “without sin” (4:15) and shed his own blood (9:14). This raises the question of what was lacking or deficient in the OT sacrifices that necessitated a better one. Many points could be made from this passage, but we will focus on two ways in which the sacrifice of Jesus is better. First, through Jesus we have full access to God (chap. 9). Second, through Jesus we have a complete sacrifice (10:1-18).

---

<sup>19</sup>O’Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son*, 79.

## **Jesus Provides Full Access to God (9:1-28)**

The first way in which the sacrifice of Jesus is better than the OT sacrifices is that it provides full access to God. God's goal has always been for his people to live in his place enjoying his presence. In the Garden of Eden, his people enjoyed unfettered access to his presence until they rebelled and the way to God was barred. Since then we have all longed for a touch of the transcendent, a glimpse of the divine. The author of Hebrews explains why this was not possible through the OT sacrifices (Heb 9:1-10) but is now made available through Jesus (9:11-28).

**The OT sacrifices failed to provide full access to God (9:1-10).** The ordinary OT believer could not venture into God's presence in the holy of holies, and even the high priest could only do so once a year on the Day of Atonement. For 364 days out of the year, the way to God was essentially barred. The author turns next to describing this old tabernacle. The holy place consisted of the lampstand, table, and bread of the presence (Heb 9:2) while the holy of holies was furnished with the golden altar of incense<sup>20</sup> and the ark of the covenant (9:3-5). This inner chamber represented the very presence of God, from which his people were separated.<sup>21</sup> The way to God was closed, allowing only the high priest into God's presence once a year on the Day of Atonement (9:7). This was God's way of saying that the way to God's presence would not be fully open until the arrival of the new covenant, when Jesus tears the veil in two (9:8-9).<sup>22</sup> "The access of the high priest to this realm," notes Peter O'Brien, "did not indicate its

---

<sup>20</sup>It seems that the author has included the altar of incense in conjunction with the holy of holies to combine the furniture that relates to access to God (Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 377; Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 260). For an exploration into the possibility that the altar was inside the holy of holies, see Compton, *Psalm 110 and the Logic of Hebrews*, 110. Contra Lindars who believes that the author "makes a mistake" (Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*, 86).

<sup>21</sup>See Compton, *Psalm 110 and the Logic of Hebrews*, 109; Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:221.

<sup>22</sup>Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 686.

openness, but was the exception that proves the rule.”<sup>23</sup> The way into God’s presence was “not yet opened” as long as the old covenant was still in effect (9:8). The old tabernacle (with its limited access to God) was an illustration (παραβολή) of how Jesus would lead us into the presence of God (9:9a).<sup>24</sup> Full access to God was never a possibility under the OT sacrifices: “According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper” (9:9). They could never bring perfection, that is, bring God’s people into a right relationship of full access to God and full forgiveness.<sup>25</sup> God’s people waited for “the time of reformation” (9:10) for a better sacrifice.

**Our better sacrifice provides full access to God (9:11-28).** In contrast to the deficiencies of the OT system, our better sacrifice provides full access to God (Heb 9:11-28). The author of Hebrews explains this in three thought units. First, Jesus gains access to God by his own blood (Heb 9:11-14). We need something better than the OT sacrifices. Here is the good news: Good things have come in Jesus (9:11). Jesus is our better priest that gains us access to God, or as Schreiner puts it, “In Christ the eschatological good things have dawned, but they are not yet completed until the arrival of the heavenly city.”<sup>26</sup> Jesus has blazed the trail right into the presence of God; “he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption” (9:12). Yes, every sacrifice must be bloody, but you can fill the streets of Morocco with the blood of lambs, and it will not bring forgiveness to a single person. “How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our

---

<sup>23</sup>O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 313.

<sup>24</sup>For a summary of views as to how this parable operates, see Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 383-84.

<sup>25</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 263; see also Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:224-25.

<sup>26</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 266.

conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (9:14). We now have a better sacrifice for we are ransomed “with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Pet 1:19). Jesus is our better sacrifice who offered himself “without blemish to God” (Heb 9:14). His perfect life of obedience qualified him not only, writes O’Brien, as our “sinless high priest [but] also the spotless victim.”<sup>27</sup>

Second, Jesus gives us the inheritance by his own death (Heb 9:15-22). If we are Christ followers, then God has called us and given us great promises, an eternal inheritance (9:15), just like he called Abraham and promised him that he would inherit the land (earth, Rom 4).<sup>28</sup> We are not given a depreciating piece of real estate, but rather an eternal inheritance (9:15), a Sabbath rest (4:9), a better country (11:16), a heavenly city (13:14). We enjoy the appetizer of it now, but the main course is still in the future. A covenant is a little bit like a “last will and testament.”<sup>29</sup> Just as a death must occur for an inheritance to be given to the beneficiaries, so also a death is required for the benefits of the old covenant to come to God’s people. Even the old covenant required the death (of an animal) and everything was sprinkled in blood (Exod 24:8). Likewise, the new covenant springs into effect with the bloody death of Jesus. We receive blessings now (and to come) because Jesus died for us.

Third, Jesus ensures our salvation through a one-time sacrifice (Heb 9:23-28). The repetitive nature of the OT sacrificial system can be seen in the fact that the Day of Atonement was celebrated every year: “The High Priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own” (9:25). Jesus did not offer himself repeatedly, “but as it is, he has

---

<sup>27</sup>O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 325.

<sup>28</sup>Schreiner notes that the inheritance of Abraham is offered to the offspring of Abraham, including all those united to Christ (Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 275). Cockerill connects our eternal redemption with the inheritance of the Promised Land (Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 403).

<sup>29</sup>Some commentators view διαθήκη as the broken Sinaitic covenant (O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 332; Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 405-7). Schreiner “slightly favor[s]” the interpretation of a will or testament, though he admits that “the meaning of the paragraph as a whole isn’t greatly affected whether one sees a reference to a covenant or a will here” (Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 277).

appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (9:26). Jesus launched the last days or “the end of the ages.”<sup>30</sup> Jesus takes care of our sin problem once and for all by means of a better substitutionary sacrifice.<sup>31</sup> People only die once, and the same is true with Jesus (9:27-28). Believers rejoice in the truth that, as O’Brien declares, “Christ’s self-offering is sufficient and final for all history—past, present, and future.”<sup>32</sup> It is finished.

We need full access to God. Since this was never possible in the old system, the readership of Hebrews should not be tempted to return to the old sacrifices. The old is obsolete, and so we must choose Jesus because he is better. His superior sacrifice gained him access “to appear in the presence of God on our behalf” (Heb 9:24), and by our union with him we too have access to God.

### **Jesus Provides a Complete Sacrifice (10:1-18)**

At the end of Hebrews 9, the author began to transition to another benefit of Christ’s sacrifice, namely, that it is a complete sacrifice. The OT sacrifices were insufficient in that they were never finished, always repeating. The death of Jesus was a one-time event, meeting our need of a complete sacrifice.

**The OT sacrifices were not complete (10:1-10).** The author of Hebrews makes it explicit that the old sacrifices were insufficient:

The law . . . can never (by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year) make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any

---

<sup>30</sup>Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Old Promise and the New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:31-34,” *JETS* 15, no. 1 (Winter 1972): 23; Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 286.

<sup>31</sup>The author of Hebrews makes this point by alluding to Isa 53:12 in Heb 9:28 (“having been offered once to bear the sins of many”). For a defense of this substitutionary interpretation, see Joslin, “Christ Bore the Sins of Many,” 88-91.

<sup>32</sup>O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 340.

consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin (Heb 10:1-4).

The insufficiency of the OT sacrifices is found in the fact that they had to be repeated. It was “like a merry-go-round that never stops.”<sup>33</sup> The good news is that there are “good things to come” in Jesus (Heb 10:1), specifically, a complete sacrifice that brings full forgiveness of sins. We should not leave the “good things” to return to the “shadows.”

All along, God’s plan was to do something better (Heb 10:5-10). The author of Hebrews utilizes Psalm 40 to make this point.<sup>34</sup> David knows that God wants more than sacrifices; God wants his entire life devoted to him. Since David is a type of Christ, his life is a pattern of the coming Messiah.<sup>35</sup> “Psalms about David,” writes Schreiner, “were read typologically and eschatologically and messianically. What was said about David anticipated the coming of the Christ.”<sup>36</sup> God did not want Jesus to give a sacrifice, but rather to offer his “body” as a sacrifice.<sup>37</sup> Just as David wanted to do God’s will (Heb 10:7), so also Jesus’s desire was to do his Father’s work (John 4:34). David is looking forward to the day when the OT sacrifices will be replaced with the obedient life of Jesus.<sup>38</sup> Jesus came into this world to offer his body as a sacrifice “once for all” (Heb 10:10), and thereby “he does away with the first in order to establish the second” (10:9).

---

<sup>33</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 291.

<sup>34</sup>On the author’s use of Ps 40, see Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 296-98.

<sup>35</sup>O’Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son*, 83. Cockerill concludes, “Thus David’s words of response in Ps 22:22 and Ps 40:6-8 find their truest significance as the Son’s response to the Father” (Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 434).

<sup>36</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 297; see also Compton, *Psalm 110 and the Logic of Hebrews*, 151-53.

<sup>37</sup>Psalm 40:6 reads, “but you have given me an open ear.” O’Brien notes that this paraphrase of the MT could be “an instance of a part standing for the whole” (O’Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son*, 83n136). Relying on the alternate translation of “body” rather than “ear” allowed the author of Hebrews to segue nicely to the better sacrifice of Jesus’s body (Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 436).

<sup>38</sup>Compton, *Psalm 110 and the Logic of Hebrews*, 149.

**Our better sacrifice is completed (10:11-18).** Now that the old sacrifices have been done away with, we must choose Jesus because he is better. The author of Hebrews lists a few points to emphasize that the completed sacrifice of Jesus is better. First, his sacrifice *works* (Heb 10:11-12). The OT priests stood because their job was never finished for they had to minister “daily” and offer sacrifices “repeatedly” (10:11), but the sacrifice of Jesus was once for all, and then he sat down (10:12).<sup>39</sup> The old sacrifices did not (permanently) work; they had to repeat them. But as the better sacrifice Jesus can announce, “It is finished.” Second, his sacrifice *wins* (10:13). The death of Jesus gives him the victory over his enemies, “waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet” (10:13). Referring to Psalm 110:1, the author of Hebrews tells us that after Jesus’s one-time sacrifice, he was exalted at God’s right hand. The author of Hebrews paints a picture “of the kingly Messiah as the enthroned priest.”<sup>40</sup> He is waiting for the time when he can prop his feet up on his enemies. Jesus has already won, but the final victory has not yet arrived. Third, his sacrifice *washes* (Heb 10:14-18). Only Jesus “perfects” us (10:14), meaning full forgiveness and access to the presence of God.<sup>41</sup> We have been perfected (now), but will one day be completely perfected (in the future). This is another demonstration of the already-not-yet paradigm. Because of Jesus, we are already perfect, already sanctified, already washed. Now our job is to live like it, so that our practice matches our position.

---

<sup>39</sup>O’Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son*, 85; Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:267.

<sup>40</sup>O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 355.

<sup>41</sup>I believe that the author of Hebrews uses the concept of *perfection* to communicate that Jesus has blazed the trail into God’s presence, procuring full forgiveness and access for all his brothers and sisters, and leading us to our eschatological goal. Cockerill similarly notes that “to ‘perfect’ something is to bring it to its intended goal” (Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 430) while Schreiner explains that “perfection in Hebrews has the idea that sins are cleansed and removed, so that the conscience is no longer defiled by guilt” (Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 305). See also O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 357.

The author of Hebrews concludes his “main point” (begun in Heb 8:1) by bookending it with another quotation of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31.<sup>42</sup> This covenant is not just “with them,” that is Israel (Heb 10:16), but “to us” (10:15), implying that the audience of Hebrews is the new Israel.<sup>43</sup> We, as the new people of God, need a better sacrifice that will provide us with full access to God and completed forgiveness. In the better sacrifice of Jesus he provides these and so “there is no longer any offering for sin” (10:18). It is finished.

### Conclusion

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to visit the heavily Catholic country of Peru. I was sharing the gospel with a Peruvian lady through an interpreter, and explaining to her that she did not need to do good works to earn salvation because “it is finished” because of Jesus’s death on the cross. Here she got hung up and asked, “I know he paid for my *past* sins, but what about my *future* sins? Don’t I need to work to pay them off?” So I showed her this verse: “Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin” (Heb 10:18). As soon as she read this verse in Spanish, she (and my interpreter) responded with, “Aha!” I thought maybe it was going to take more time to explain the verse, but she replied, “Got it. Makes sense!”

I think many of us need a similar “aha” moment. We need the finished work of Christ on the cross to click in our brains. Once we fully grasp this gospel truth, we will realize we do not have to offer atoning sacrifices anymore. We will realize that we have a new heart, and that because of our better covenant we have the inner strength to obey God. We will comprehend that we have a better sacrifice that provides us with full access

---

<sup>42</sup>O’Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son*, 35.

<sup>43</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 309. O’Brien writes, “The promises of the new covenant are for this community—and ultimately for other believers as well” (O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 358).

to God. And we will understand that the sacrifice of Jesus is complete. In response, we will cling to our better sacrifice. We will choose Jesus because he is better.

## CHAPTER 8

### WALK BY FAITH: HEBREWS 11:1-12:17

The big idea of the book of Hebrews is to choose Jesus because he is better. Thus far the author of Hebrews has eloquently demonstrated that Jesus is indeed better, but the question remains as to *how* we can choose Jesus. When we are making our daily choices, Jesus does not always appear to be better. This world looks cool, sin looks fun, and the easy way is, well, easier. Not only does the world appear to be better, but it also *appears*, that is, the things of this world are tangible. We can drive our cars, shoot our guns, and touch money. Jesus, on the other hand, is not visible. We cannot see heaven. We cannot see the blessings God has in store for us tomorrow. So how do we choose what we cannot see? The key to choosing Jesus in the mist of an attractive world is simple: “My righteous one shall live by faith” (Heb 10:38, quoting Hab 2:4). We will never choose Jesus if we do not believe he is actually better. Faith is the key.

#### **Definition of Faith (11:1-2)**

We must begin by understanding the essence of faith. The author of Hebrews provides a famous but succinct definition for us, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). Put simply, faith is choosing the better, invisible way.<sup>1</sup> Faith, writes Philip Hughes, “lays hold of what is promised and

---

<sup>1</sup>The contrast between visible/invisible and tangible/intangible is highlighted in Heb 12:18-29 where Mt. Sinai is described as “what may be touched.” See William L. Lane, *Hebrews*, WBC 47 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 2:461. Wenkel concurs, “The old covenant (Mount Sinai) is characterized by what is palpable, touchable, and apprehensible through the senses while the new covenant (Mount Zion) is characterized by what is ephemeral, untouchable, and unseen” (David H. Wenkel, “Sensory Experience and the Contrast between the Covenants in Hebrews 12,” *BS* 173, no. 690 [April-June 2016]: 222.

therefore hoped for, as something real and solid, though as yet unseen.”<sup>2</sup> To do this, we must believe that Jesus is better and choose him “though [we] have not seen him” (1 Pet 1:8). Essentially, faith is “looking unto Jesus” (Heb 12:2).

How dark the shadows can grow if all we see is the visible world, but how bright the future appears when seen through the eyes of faith. Only by faith can we “rejoice in the Lord” in the midst of suffering (Phil 4:4). Only by faith can we see that God is working “all things . . . together for good” (Rom 8:28). Only by faith will we believe that the last will be first in God’s kingdom (Matt 20:16). Only by faith can we confidently expect that all earthly kingdoms will be subjected to King Jesus “and he shall reign forever and ever” (Rev 11:1). John Owen reminds us that “faith alone . . . has been the only principle in the church of living to God, of obtaining the promises, of inheriting eternal life, and continues to be unto the consummation of all things.”<sup>3</sup> Faith is the key.

Growing up in Sunday School, I remember hearing often that faith is like sitting in a chair because I must believe that it will hold me up. With all due respect to my Sunday School teachers, I would propose that faith is more accurately likened to sitting in an *invisible* chair because I must believe that it *exists* and will support me. To collapse one’s full weight into an invisible chair, now that is faith. “We walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor 5:7).

A helpful way to understand this concept is to think of “faith glasses.” Without them, life looks normal, even cool and attractive. When a believer puts on the faith glasses, everything changes. He sees the world as it really is, the spiritual dimension that is invisible to the naked eye. Luke Timothy Johnson put it well when he said that Hebrews introduces us to a “world in which the unseen is more real, more powerful, and

---

<sup>2</sup>Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 439.

<sup>3</sup>John Owen, *Hebrews* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 217.

more attractive than that which can be seen and touched and counted.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, faith is *living in light of the invisible world*. Sinclair Ferguson agrees, “To live by faith is not to live by what we can see, feel, and touch—our sense-experience—but on the basis of what God has said and promised. . . . Faith is simply a matter of knowing what God says, trusting His Word because of who He is, and living in the light of it.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Examples of Faith (11:3-40)**

For the bulk of chap. 11, the author of Hebrews recounts historical examples of the faith of God’s people so that we will press on and imitate “those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Heb 6:12). He begins, however, with the faith he shares with the readers that God created the world by his words (11:3; see Ps 148:5). It takes faith to believe in creation since it is neither observable nor reproducible, and yet we believe God created the universe because the Bible says so (see Gen 1:1-2:1).

The author of Hebrews does not provide this tour of the hall of faith to draw attention to the individuals themselves, but to encourage us to “consider him” (Heb 12:3). In fact, it is likely that “the author considers *all* the persons and events within Hebrews 11 to be typological anticipations of Jesus’ perfect faith and finished work.”<sup>6</sup> All along,

---

<sup>4</sup>Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 2.

<sup>5</sup>Sinclair Ferguson, *In Christ Alone: Living the Gospel Centered Life* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2007), 139-40. Lindars similarly remarks, “Faith tests the unseen things by acting as though they were present and visible. It is a positive conviction expressed in action . . . . So faith is a frame of mind in which we confidently make trial of what is promised in the future” (Barnabas Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], 111). Schreiner connects this aspect of faith to the context of the original readers of Hebrews, “The readers saw that those who sided with Rome were rewarded, but the author encourages them to remember God’s promises, which in the nature of the case are future and not visible now” (Thomas R. Schreiner, *Hebrews*, BTCF [Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2015], 494).

<sup>6</sup>Christopher A. Richardson, *Pioneer and Perfecter of Faith: Jesus’ Faith as the Climax of Israel’s History in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, WUNT 2.338 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 7, emphasis in original. Hays similarly writes, “The exegetical strategy of Heb. 11 is typological; we are meant to read Israel’s whole story in a *figural* way as pointing forward to the reality embodied in Jesus” (Richard B. Hays, “‘Here We Have No Lasting City’: New Covenantalism in Hebrews,” in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham et al. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 163, emphasis in original).

the author of Hebrews has been interpreting the OT typologically, demonstrating that Jesus is the better son of man from Psalm 8 (Heb 2:5-9), the better Moses (3:1-6), the better Joshua who leads his people to a better country (3:7-4:13), and the better priest (4:14-7:28) who offers himself as a better sacrifice (8:1-10:18). Now he lays all his cards on the table and reveals that the entire OT points to Jesus, from Enoch to Rahab. They are typical of Jesus in that they make a faith choice that appears to be illogical given their visible surroundings, but which gains them an unseen reward (see table 3). They acted as if the invisible world were the real world, “even when there was no evidence that the promises would come to pass.”<sup>7</sup>

Table 3. Faith Choices and Unseen Rewards in Hebrews 11

<b>Example of Faith</b>	<b>Faith choice</b>	<b>Unseen reward</b>
Abel (Heb 11:4)	To bring a better sacrifice	Righteousness
Enoch (11:5-6)	To walk with God	Escaping death
Noah (11:7)	To build an ark	Saved from an unseen judgment
Abraham (11:8-10)	To leave family to go to an unknown land	Land, but especially the new heavens and new earth
Sarah (11:11-12)	To believe she would have children	Isaac
Patriarchs (11:13-16)	Not to feel “at home” anywhere	A better country
Abraham (11:17-19)	To sacrifice Isaac	Receiving Isaac back
Isaac and Jacob (11:20-21)	To pronounce blessings	The blessings coming true
Joseph (11:22)	To prophecy of the exodus	Exodus
Moses (11:23-28)	To reject Egypt	A greater reward
Israel (11:19-30)	To follow God’s crazy plans	Victory
Rahab (11:31)	To risk her life to align with God’s people	Salvation
Jesus (12:1-2)	To embrace the cross and despise the shame	Joy, i.e., being exalted at the right hand of the throne of God

---

<sup>7</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 339.

It seems that these heroes are grouped thematically by those who exercised faith in the midst of the threat of death (11:4-7), impossible odds (11:8-12), their pilgrimage (11:13-16), the future (11:17-22), and suffering (11:23-31). No situations are so easy that they rule out the need for faith; neither are there any situations too difficult that they impede the power of faith. Faith is always the key.

### **Faith in the Face of Death (11:4-7)**

Sometimes God's people will escape the edge of the sword (Heb 11:34), and other times they are killed by the sword (11:37), but faith will lead them through the valley of the shadow of death either way (Ps 23:4). The author of Hebrews recounts how faith operates at death's door: faith in the face of death (Abel), faith triumphing over death (Enoch), and faith liberating from judgment (Noah). He begins with Abel who brought an acceptable sacrifice to God (Heb 11:4; see Gen 4). It would not have been obvious to a bystander whose sacrifice was going to be accepted, but God rejected Cain's because he lacked faith and he accepted Abel's and counted him as righteous because of his faith. Our next hero of the faith is Enoch, who walked with God for three hundred years (Heb 11:5-6; see Gen 5) and God rewarded him by taking him so that he never died. These first two examples both exercised faith in the face of death: Abel had faith even though he died while Enoch had faith and never died.<sup>8</sup> The life of Enoch provides an early hint that all who live by faith will one day conquer death.<sup>9</sup> He also teaches us that we must have faith to please God (Heb 11:6). Faith is living in light of the invisible world, and in this case that means believing in the existence of an unseen God and unseen rewards. While Enoch lived as if there was a better world to come, Noah acted on the

---

<sup>8</sup>Cockerill continues the comparison and makes the application to all of God's people, "All, like Abel, will die without the fulness of what God has promised. All, like Enoch, are promised triumph over death" (Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012], 526).

<sup>9</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 345.

assurance that there was judgment to come (see Gen 6-9). Since he was “warned by God concerning events as yet unseen” (Heb 11:7), Noah built an ark to save his family. As a result of his act of faith, Noah “condemned the world,” that is, he stood in stark contrast to his contemporaries who acted only on what they could see.<sup>10</sup> He also received “the righteousness that comes by faith” (Heb 11:7) as a foreshadowing of all believers who would escape the coming flood of judgment by believing in God’s unconventional evacuation plan (see 1 Pet 3:20-21).

### **Faith in the Midst of Impossible Odds (11:8-12)**

The second category of OT examples consists of those who exercised faith in the midst of impossible odds (Heb 11:8-12). Abraham and Sarah must have appeared crazy to anyone who knew them. Abraham maintained a firm belief that he would be the owner of an inheritance that was nowhere in sight, and Sarah kept knitting baby clothes even though she was ninety years old. Was it merely wishful thinking? Were they living in a fantasy world? The reality is that they were exercising faith in the midst of impossible odds. God told Abraham to leave his home and go to a land that was as yet unknown (Heb 11:8-10; see Gen 12). By faith, he obeyed. In fact, faith always leads to obedience. As Thomas Schreiner puts it, “If obedience is lacking, then faith is a charade . . . Faith is the root and obedience is the fruit.”<sup>11</sup> How could Abraham continue to believe when he never owned the Promised Land but lived “as in a foreign land” (Heb 11:9)? He was able to do so because he knew he had a better city (11:10). Although the patriarchs were “living in tents” (11:9), which highlighted the transitory and temporary nature of their sojourning,<sup>12</sup> God was preparing for them “an immovable tent, whose

---

<sup>10</sup>Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 408; Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:340.

<sup>11</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 496.

<sup>12</sup>Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:350; Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 540.

stakes will never be plucked up” (Isa 33:20). Abraham knew that the land had been promised to him, but ultimately he was looking forward to the new Jerusalem (Rev 21).<sup>13</sup> Abraham did not know the land to which God was leading him, but he acted as if it really existed and it was his for the taking. We are in a similar situation: God has promised that we can enjoy eternal life now and that we are members of his kingdom now, but we are also looking forward to the new heavens and new earth (toward which the Promised Land pointed). In the mean time, we live as pilgrims.

Sarah was old and struggled with believing God’s laughable promises (Heb 11:11-12; see Gen 17-18). In spite of the fact that all physical evidence indicated that her childbearing years were over, she had faith that she and Abraham would have as many children as the stars (Gen 22:17). Her faith was not in herself but in the faithfulness of God, for “she considered him faithful who had promised” (Heb 11:11; cf. 10:23). When we are faced with impossible odds, Gareth Cockerill encourages us, “Faith is living as if God’s future promises are certain and his present sustaining power is real.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Faith as a Pilgrim (11:13-16)**

We have already discovered that people of faith must live as pilgrims on this earth, and now the author of Hebrews explains this concept further. The Patriarchs recognized that they were “strangers and exiles on the earth” (Heb 11:13) and were looking for a “better country” (12:16). They lived as nomads on this earth because they saw the unseen promises (11:13), and they were able to do that because they put on faith glasses. They could not see the home God had prepared for them, but they lived as if it were a reality. Similarly, God has prepared a city for us. The Promised Land was a type

---

<sup>13</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 351; O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 412; Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:351.

<sup>14</sup>Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 596.

of the heavenly inheritance to come.<sup>15</sup> Every believer should be able to sing with Isaac Watts,

We're marching to Zion,  
Beautiful, beautiful Zion;  
We're marching upward to Zion,  
The beautiful city of God.<sup>16</sup>

Unfortunately, we sometimes feel too at home here. We forget that this world is not our home and that we are just passing through. The other day I flew from Amarillo to Indianapolis, but my connecting flight took me through Dallas. I had a good time in the Dallas airport. I grabbed a bite to eat, got comfortable, talked to fellow travelers, and read a little in a book. But I didn't start unpacking my suitcase, because my final destination was Indianapolis. Too often we are making ourselves at home in the airport, forgetting that we are only here for a connecting flight. When we take off the faith glasses all we can see is little league, perfectly manicured lawns, American politics, and whether our car is cool enough. We forget that we have a better home, a better city, and a better country. We must keep moving. This world is not our final destination.

When we live as pilgrims, we will be able to endure a "hard struggle with sufferings" even to the point of prison (Heb 10:32-33) knowing we do not belong here anyway. With the eyes of faith we will be able to "joyfully accept the plundering of [our] property" since we know that we have better stuff (10:34). We will be able to serve as a career missionary on a field with no running water. We will be able to say goodbye to loved ones on this earth. We can endure business failures or the loss of our reputation. We will be free to release our hard-earned money for the sake of worldwide missions. We will be able to live simply so we can give generously. We will be empowered to walk

---

<sup>15</sup>For a defense that the land of Canaan served as a type of the new creation, see Miguel Echevarria, Jr., "The Future Inheritance of Land in the Pauline Epistles" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014).

<sup>16</sup>Isaac Watts and Robert Lowry, "We're Marching to Zion" (No. 416), in *The Celebration Hymnal: Songs and Hymns for Worship*, ed. Tom Fettke (Nashville: Word Music, 1997).

through Vanity Fair and not get distracted since we know we are heading to the Celestial City.

### **Faith Looking to the Future (11:17-22)**

By its very definition, faith is forward-looking. As Ferguson writes, “They looked *beyond the present* to things hoped for and *beyond the visible* to the invisible.”<sup>17</sup> Faith rises above its present circumstances and clings to the future as a very firm foundation for present obedience. The next paragraph in Hebrews 11 highlights the forward-looking nature of faith, returning to Abraham who was willing to offer Isaac even though it was through him that the promised seed was to come (Heb 11:17-19; see Gen 22). In the words of Schreiner, Abraham “did what God commanded, even though it contradicted what God had promised.”<sup>18</sup> Abraham thought that God would raise Isaac from the dead (Heb 11:19). As a type (*παραβολή*) of the resurrection, Isaac did come back from the dead in a manner of speaking.<sup>19</sup> God always fulfills his promises, even if it takes a miracle. Choosing Jesus is better, even if it requires a death and a resurrection.

While Abraham looked to the future in hopes of a resurrection, Isaac and Jacob pronounced forward-looking blessings. Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau (Heb 11:20; see Gen 27), while Jacob blessed his sons on his deathbed (Heb 11:21; see Gen 48). They would not be around to see if their blessings came true or not, but they still spoke of the future in certain terms. Joseph also prophesied of the future at the end of his life (Heb 11:22; see Gen 50). He had it made in Egypt, but he also knew that he was a pilgrim; he knew that he was just passing through. He could not see the Promised Land, but he acted

---

<sup>17</sup>Ferguson, *In Christ Alone*, 138, emphasis in original.

<sup>18</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 356.

<sup>19</sup>G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 320; O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 425; Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 557-58; Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:363.

as if the exodus were going to happen for sure and he wanted his final resting place to be in his true home. Like the other patriarchs, Joseph's faith helped him to live in a way that leaned into the future. We can obey God today by faith in God's promises for the future.<sup>20</sup>

### **Faith in the Midst of Suffering (11:23-31)**

Faith is most tested in the midst of suffering. It is one thing to follow God when it is the cool thing to do, but it is quite another to stand with Jesus when it means ridicule, imprisonment, or death. The author of Hebrews lists examples of men and women who demonstrated faith and fearlessness in the midst of opposition. At the top of the list are Moses's parents who "were not afraid of the king's edict" that their boy must be killed (Heb 11:23; see Exod 2). By faith, they chose to obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29) and protected their son. The time is already here when the American government makes edicts that are against the Bible. Christians must decide now whom they fear more—the government or God—so that they can stand unafraid in the midst of opposition. When he grew up, Moses rejected the fleeting pleasures of Egypt and risked the anger of Pharaoh (Heb 11:24-28; see Exod 2). He was faced with a mathematical equation: which is better, reproach or treasures (Heb 11:26)? The visible things in Moses's life were the (fleeting) pleasures of sin (11:25), the treasures of Egypt (11:26), and the anger of the king if he chose to align with God's people (11:27). But when he put on the faith glasses, Moses saw the invisible things, namely, a reward (11:26) and the Invisible One (11:27). The answer was clear—once he put on the faith glasses—and he realized that the reproach of Christ > the treasures of Egypt.<sup>21</sup> Living by faith does not

---

<sup>20</sup>For an excellent defense of this concept, see John Piper, *The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in Future Grace* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1995).

<sup>21</sup>How did Moses suffer the "reproach of Christ" (Heb 11:26)? O'Brien provides a helpful answer for us, "So in becoming one of the people of God who were suffering disgrace, Moses joins himself to a type of the future reproach of Christ" (O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 433). See also Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 572.

negate the reality of our fear. Moses also struggled with fear (Exod 2:14), but when he put on the faith glasses he saw “him who is invisible” (Heb 11:27) and that overpowered his fear of death. That is how the author of Hebrews can say that Moses was not afraid of the anger of the king.<sup>22</sup>

The people of Israel were not afraid to cross the Red Sea (Heb 11:29; see Exod 14) or to capture the city of Jericho (Heb 11:30; see Josh 6), providing us with two wonderful examples of obeying the commands of God even when they may not make sense. In contrast to the “disobedient” of Jericho and God’s people, the author mentions Rahab (Heb 11:31; see Josh 2, 6) who hid the Israeli spies. She did not just claim to believe in Yahweh; she proved it by her obedience. James also uses Rahab and Abraham as examples of faith that works, proving that “anyone is capable of acting on his or her own faith—whether a patriarch or a prostitute.”<sup>23</sup> Regardless of what we are up against—a Red Sea, an impregnable fortress, or the backlash of a community that we have gone against—faith helps us face suffering with fearlessness. By putting on the faith glasses, we can see through the fog of war, the smoke of the fire, and the pain of torture.

### **More Examples of Faith (11:32-40)**

At this point we might be thinking, “That is great for all of those Bible characters, but I do not live in Bible times. I am not a super saint like they were.” As if he anticipates our objection, the author of Hebrews lists Bible heroes with severe flaws (Heb 11:32-38),<sup>24</sup> like Gideon whose lack of faith caused him to put out a fleece and even led God’s people into idolatry (Judg 6-8), and Barak who wrestled with paralyzing fear (Judg 4), and Samson who struggled his whole life with sexual sin (Judg 13-16), and Jephthah

---

<sup>22</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 364.

<sup>23</sup>Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 143.

<sup>24</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 369-70.

who made a foolish vow (Judg 11), and David who committed adultery and murder (2 Sam 11), and Samuel who did not manage his own household well (1 Sam 8). Such a litany of flawed individuals should inspire us that God is not looking for perfection but perseverance.<sup>25</sup>

Despite our flaws, the results of walking by faith are astounding. The judges conquered kingdoms, the kings enforced justice, and men like David obtained promises. Leaders like David and Daniel stopped the mouths of lions while Daniel's friends quenched fire. Elijah and Elisha escaped the sword, men like Gideon were made strong out of weakness, and many of God's people were mighty in war and put armies to flight. By faith the dead were even brought back to life. For example, Elijah raised the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17) while Elisha raised the Shunammite's son from the dead (2 Kgs 4).

Many of those who walked by faith did so in the midst of intense persecution (Heb 11:35-38). With the naked eye, they saw torture and the very real possibility of death, but through the faith glasses they foresaw something better. They were tortured but did not compromise so that they might partake in the resurrection.<sup>26</sup> Prophets like Jeremiah experienced mocking and flogging (see Jer 20:2) while men like Hanani (2 Chr 16) and Micaiah (1 Kgs 22) were subject to chains and imprisonment. Others were stoned (Zechariah, 2 Chr 24) or sawn in two (Isaiah).<sup>27</sup>

We might be tempted to think that the life of faith will be different for North American Christians. We have bought into the myth that if our candidate wins we will

---

<sup>25</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 369.

<sup>26</sup>For example, Eleazar in 2 Macc 6 (see Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 371). Skarsaune likewise suggests that "the martyrs of the Maccabean uprising are probably included in the chain of witnesses to faith in God in Hebrews 11" (Oskar Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002], 25).

<sup>27</sup>For references in Jewish tradition, see Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:390.

escape persecution, or if we successfully lobby for family values then we will get a free pass. To put it bluntly, we think we deserve better. However, we must remember the basic pattern of the Bible: We follow Jesus, Jesus suffered, and therefore his people will suffer. Peter O'Brien agrees, "None evades suffering, not even God's own Son; his earthly children will not avoid it either."<sup>28</sup> Jesus promised us, "They will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake" (Matt 24:9). We too easily forget that "the people of God have always been a minority people, a pilgrim people, and often despised and forsaken."<sup>29</sup>

These OT saints kept believing even though they "did not receive what was promised" (Heb 11:39). We may not see the results in this life, but there is something better coming—a new heavens and new earth—and we must put on the faith glasses to see it. The OT saints could not be "made perfect" (11:40), that is, receive full forgiveness and access to God, until the new covenant was inaugurated through Jesus. In other words, the OT is incomplete without the NT. Another way to say it is that the OT believers need us NT believers to finish the story so we can all come to Mount Zion with an angelic party, have full access to God, enjoy fellowship with believers who are "made perfect," and finally see Jesus, our better priest and sacrifice (12:22-24).

There are two worlds between which we must choose: The here-and-now and the invisible world. We know that we have to put on the faith glasses in order to see the invisible world, and so now we are faced with a choice. In Hebrews 12:1 the author begins with "therefore," indicating that we must make a choice based on what we have just learned in Hebrews 11. "Faith in Christ is not just *assenting* to what God is for us,"

---

<sup>28</sup>O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 469.

<sup>29</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 373.

writes John Piper, “but also *embracing* all that he is for us in Christ.”<sup>30</sup> It is not enough to *know* that Jesus is better; we must *choose* him.

### **Object of Faith: Choose Jesus (12:1-17)**

Hebrews 11 was full of examples of faith, a great “cloud of witnesses” so to speak (Heb 12:1),<sup>31</sup> but the greatest example of faith is Jesus Christ.<sup>32</sup> William Lane explains, “Jesus [is] the perfect embodiment of faith, who exercised faith heroically. By bringing faith to complete expression, he enabled others to follow his example.”<sup>33</sup>

### **Choose Jesus over the Visible (12:1-3)**

The author continues his application by exhorting his readership to follow the greatest example of faith:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb 12:1-2).

A marathon runner wants to stay as light as possible even to the point of wearing those embarrassingly skimpy running shorts.<sup>34</sup> One never sees a long distance runner with a

---

<sup>30</sup>Piper, *Future Grace*, 161.

<sup>31</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 376; O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 450.

<sup>32</sup>Lindars states that “Jesus is the climax of the examples of faith, because it is he who alone inaugurated the fulfillment of God’s eschatological plan of salvation and also carried it through in his own person (Lindars, *The Theology of Hebrews*, 112). See also Todd D. Still, “*Christos as Pistos*: The Faith(fulness) of Jesus in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in Its Ancient Contexts*, ed. Richard Bauckham et al. (London: T&T Clark), 46. Contra Kasemann who writes, “The New Testament in general does not go to Jesus for the essence of faith. He is not a model for faith, but the Lord of the believers” (Ernst Kasemann, *Jesus Means Freedom*, trans. Frank Clarke (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1972), 105. Still argues that the presentation of the faithfulness of Christ is a unique contribution of the book of Hebrews: “The author of Hebrews is the only New Testament writer who *explicitly* explores and expounds upon the faith(fulness) of Christ in any degree of detail” (Still, “*Christos as Pistos*,” 48, emphasis in original).

<sup>33</sup>Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:412.

<sup>34</sup>Even the skimpy shorts are better than the way runners of the first century AD would strip naked for a race (Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:409).

backpack full of snacks, books, and games in case he gets bored. If we are going to faithfully follow Jesus on our pilgrimage, we also must discard the stuff that slows us down. We must eliminate the weights and sins. These “weights” may or may not be sin, but will slow us down as we try to make our way to the Celestial City.<sup>35</sup> In determining the appropriateness of an activity for one’s life, more helpful than the typical query, “Is it sin?” is the question, “Does it slow me down?” Perhaps we have fallen in love with the things of this world, and God is calling us to lay aside these weights so we can run—so we can run swift and unfettered toward God and the joy he has prepared for us.

We must set our sights on Jesus, the “founder” or pioneer or trail blazer of our faith.<sup>36</sup> By his faith, he charged into the presence of God and ripped open the veil so we could follow.<sup>37</sup> We must “consider him” (Heb 12:3) who is the “perfecter” of our faith, the one who completes it so that we have full forgiveness and access to God, the one who has promised to help us cross the finish line victoriously. Jesus is able “to keep [us] from stumbling and to present [us] blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy” (Jude 24). Believers in the middle of a long race should be encouraged by these words: “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). In the words of Barnabas Lindars, Jesus is the perfecter of our faith “because he enables those who hold fast to the Christian profession to reach the same goal.”<sup>38</sup> Jesus is the greatest example of exercising faith because he embraced the cross and despised

---

<sup>35</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 377. Lane agrees that these weights include “any encumbrance that would handicap a runner, and by analogy anything that would interfere with responsible commitment to Jesus Christ” (Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:409).

<sup>36</sup>Peter T. O’Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son: A Biblical Theology of Hebrews*, NSBT 39 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 91. Pace Lane who translates ἀρχηγός as “champion,” but nonetheless admits that the connotation is that of Jesus leading his people (Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:411).

<sup>37</sup>O’Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son*, 92.

<sup>38</sup>Lindars, *The Theology of Hebrews*, 45. Lane makes the case that the pattern of Jesus is “not merely exemplary” but also “determinative” (Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:412). In other words, he not only starts us on a journey of faith but also guarantees that we will finish the race.

the shame to obtain a joy he could not yet see. Jesus endured his race and received the prize, namely, the future joy of being exalted “at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2).<sup>39</sup> The endurance of Jesus inspires us not to “grow weary or fainthearted” (12:3) since he will help us finish the race and receive the prize.

### **Choose Jesus Over the Easy Way (12:4-11)**

Another way that believers should choose Jesus is by accepting God’s discipline. When we only see the visible (persecution, suffering, hardship), we may be tempted to quit, complaining that living by faith is too hard. However, when we put on the faith glasses, we understand that God is at work using the persecution of the world as strength training to make us stronger.<sup>40</sup> The discipline we squirm under now will actually result in unseen rewards: holiness (Heb 12:10) and righteous fruit (12:11). This is how God treats sons and daughters (12:7-8), and it is for our good (12:9-11). We can follow the heroes of faith, and most importantly the example of Jesus, by choosing God’s way even though it includes suffering and discipline so that we can obtain rewards as yet unseen.

### **Choose Jesus Over a Bowl of Soup (12:12-17)**

The author of Hebrews provides us with another reminder to run a good race (Heb 12:12-13). Isaiah had promised that Israel would return to Zion, but in the meantime they needed to “strengthen the weak hands, steady the shaking knees” (Isa 35:3). In the same way, we who are not home yet must keep running to Jesus. We must make “straight

---

<sup>39</sup>Pace Lane, whose mistranslation of ἀντί in Heb 12:2 leads him to interpret the “joy” as the easy way out that Jesus rejected in favor of death on a cross (Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:413).

<sup>40</sup>Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 616. Lane writes, “The sufferings of the community were actually disciplinary in character and expressed the love that God has for his children” (Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:419).

paths” (Prov 4:15) so we can walk on the highway “called the Way of Holiness” (Isa 35:8) that leads to the new Jerusalem. We must not get tripped up (“lame,” see Isa 35:6), we must not be distracted by the visible stuff of this world, and we must not venture off the path. Rather, God’s people will keep heading straight toward peace and holiness (Heb 12:14).

The final way in which we can choose Jesus is by not making bad trades (Heb 12:15-17). If we let a poisonous root spring up in our hearts, we will be unclean (see Deut 29:18-19). It is the same thing as quitting the race. It is apostasy. After an entire chapter of positive examples of faith—living in light of the invisible world—he now gives a negative example of unbelief—living only for the visible world.<sup>41</sup> Esau chose the visible (soup) and forfeited the invisible (birthright) (Gen 25). When Esau refused to put on the faith glasses, “he bartered the eternal” for an “unbelievably small amount.”<sup>42</sup> Here is a sober warning not to give up the invisible rewards for the temporary visible stuff. To trade one’s soul to gain the whole world is a very real possibility (Mark 8:36). We are making important trades every day—generosity or hoarding, self-sacrifice or self-preservation, people or things, walking in the Spirit or indulging the flesh—and we need to keep our faith glasses on at all times to make the right choice. How tragic to come to the end of one’s life surrounded by the pleasures of sin, the riches of Egypt, and that bowl of soup we wanted so very much at the time, and then wish we could do it over again and choose Jesus, but there is “no chance to repent” (Heb 12:17). It is possible to miss out on the grace of Jesus for the toys and trinkets of the world, and then it is too late.

---

<sup>41</sup>He also used the wilderness generation as an example of unbelief in chaps. 3-4. That Esau is the “foil” for the positive examples of Hebrews 11, see Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 633.

<sup>42</sup>Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 639.

## Conclusion

We have two worlds between which we must choose. On one hand, we have this world with the temporary pleasures of sin and bowls of soup. Of course if we follow Jesus then this world will include very real torture, pain, heartache, and suffering. On the other hand, we have the next world that appears fuzzy until we put on our faith glasses. Then we see that there is a new heavens and new earth awaiting us. Then we will see that living for Jesus is better than all this world has to offer. The power of the life of faith is beautifully expressed in a modern hymn based on Hebrews 11-12:

By faith our fathers roamed the earth,  
With the pow'r of His promise in their hearts,  
Of a holy city built by God's own hand,  
A place where peace and justice reign.

By faith the church was called to go  
In the pow'r of the Spirit to the lost,  
To deliver captives and to preach good news  
In ev'ry corner of the earth.

By faith this mountain shall be moved,  
And the pow'r of the gospel shall prevail;  
For we know in Christ all things are possible  
For all who call upon His name.

We will stand as children of the promise;  
We will fix our eyes on Him, our soul's reward;  
Till the race is finished and the work is done,  
We'll walk by faith and not by sight.<sup>43</sup>

By faith, we can live in light of the invisible world. By faith we can reject the bad trades of this world and choose Jesus because he is better.

---

<sup>43</sup>Keith Getty, Kristyn Getty, and Stuart Townend, "By Faith" (No. 21), in *Hymns Modern & Ancient*, ed. Fred R. Coleman (Milwaukee: Heart Publications, 2011).

## CHAPTER 9

### A BETTER DESTINATION: HEBREWS 12:18-29

As Arthur Dent fought to keep his house from being bulldozed to make way for a bypass, he was unaware that the entire earth was going to be destroyed in twelve minutes to make way for a hyperspace bypass. Luckily for him, he had a friend, Ford Prefect, to guide him to the new world, and luckier still, Ford was a contributor to *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Since his old world was passing away, Dent needed two things to help him on his journey: a book and a guide. Unfortunately for him, when the questions got serious, the answers were unhelpful. When they asked Deep Thought, the supercomputer, what the answer to “the ultimate question of life, the universe, and everything” was, the answer came back, “42.”<sup>1</sup> What he needed was a better guide.

#### **The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Unshakable Kingdom**

We are in a similar situation to Arthur Dent's. We are caught between two worlds. Getting smaller in the rearview mirror is the old world while looming large ahead is the new age that is launched by the person and work of Jesus. In the meantime we are hitchhikers, never at home, sometimes out of place, and always on the move. The author of Hebrews understands that NT believers are still exiles in this world who, because of what Jesus accomplished in the new exodus, are on a pilgrimage toward the new Promised Land. He envisions Jesus as a leader, like Moses and Joshua, who leads his brothers and sisters on a journey to the glory of the new heavens and new earth.

---

<sup>1</sup>Douglas Adams, *The Ultimate Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), 119-20.

## Jesus as Our Leader

The author of Hebrews portrays Jesus as our leader.<sup>2</sup> Jesus launches the new exodus by leading the way as “the founder (ἀρχηγὸν) of their salvation” who brings “many sons to glory” (Heb 2:10). Jesus is our salvation’s founder, or better yet our leader and pioneer.<sup>3</sup> Just as Moses appointed “heads” (ἀρχηγοὶ) of the people to enter the land first (Num 13:2-3), so also Jesus leads the way for us.<sup>4</sup> Jesus has ripped open the curtain separating us from God and “gone as a forerunner on our behalf” (Heb 6:20) into the very presence of God (9:24), and now he leads believers to the same goal. “He is able,” remarks Thielman, “to lead those who follow him faithfully to the eschatological destiny that God intended for humanity from the beginning.”<sup>5</sup>

The readers of the book of Hebrews would have venerated great leaders of the OT like Moses who led God’s people in the first exodus, and yet the author of Hebrews announces that “Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses” (Heb 3:3). Even Joshua, who led God’s people to the Promised Land, is eclipsed by Jesus who leads us to a better rest (4:8). Granted, in the days of Moses, God’s leaders/shepherds brought his people “out of the sea” (Isa 63:11), but now we follow “the great Shepherd of the sheep” (Heb 13:20) who will lead us to a better destination.<sup>6</sup>

Jesus is qualified to serve as our leader because he is the exalted Son of God who reigns forever and will ultimately conquer his enemies (Heb 1:5-13). He is perfect

---

<sup>2</sup>Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 608.

<sup>3</sup>I favor translating ἀρχηγὸν as *pioneer* because it seems to fit best with the author’s flow of thought. So Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 106-7; Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 137n60; Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, 593. Pace Lane who translates this word as “champion” (William L. Lane, *Hebrews*, WBC 47 [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991], 1:61).

<sup>4</sup>This connection was brought to my connection by Matthew Thiessen, “Hebrews and the End of the Exodus,” *NT 49*, no. 4 (2007): 366.

<sup>5</sup>Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, 593.

<sup>6</sup>This allusion was brought to my attention by G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 321.

for the job because he is the Son of Man who fulfills the role of exercising dominion in the world, the very role at which we failed (2:5-9).<sup>7</sup> He perfectly fulfills the OT by becoming our better priest (5:1-10; 7:1-28) and better sacrifice (9:1-10:18). Not only is he the leader who gets us started on our journey of faith, but he is also the “perfecter of our faith” (12:2), that is to say, he will make sure we make it across the finish line in one piece. Indeed, he is qualified to lead us to our final destination.

Jesus blazed the trail, and now our job is to follow in his steps. We make our way through our harrowing exile by keeping our eyes on Jesus (Heb 2:9; 12:2, 3), like following someone with a lantern through the fog. Because the person and work of Jesus begins the new exodus, we respond with faith and fortitude. Or to put it more simply, because faith convinces us that Jesus is better, we choose to follow him.

### **We as Jesus’s Family and Followers**

Jesus is leading a ragtag group of nomads to their final home, but what confidence do we have that we are included in that group? An important principle must be introduced at this point, namely, that we are connected to Jesus. In fancy terms, we are talking about our corporate solidarity with Christ. Our union with Christ essentially means that what happens to Jesus also happens to us. We “follow the Lamb wherever he goes” (Rev 14:4). He suffered in this life, and so will we (John 15:18). He died and rose from the dead, and so have we (Col 3:1, 3). He is exalted in glory, and so will we be (Col 3:4).<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 583.

<sup>8</sup>Fanning writes, “As for Jesus, so for Christians the pattern of their pilgrimage is suffering and then glory, humiliation and then honor ([Heb] 2:9; 12:2)” (Buist M. Fanning, “A Theology of Hebrews,” in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck [Chicago: Moody Press, 1994], 414).

Our connection to Jesus is the main point of Hebrews 2:10-18.<sup>9</sup> Jesus and his followers are inextricably linked. Jesus “is not ashamed to call them brothers” and sisters (Heb 2:11). We are in the same family (lit., “all of one,” 2:11). Our connection to Jesus is vitally important because he serves as our representative who succeeds where we have miserably failed. The author of Hebrews explains that man has failed at his job of exercising dominion (laid out in Psalm 8). “In his incarnation,” writes Dale Leschert, “Jesus, the God-man, became the true embodiment of humanity (Heb 2:14, 17), a perfect man (2:10; 4:15; 5:8), and thus the only hope to fulfill all the psalmist’s aspirations to which no human being before ever fully attained.”<sup>10</sup> Now that we are united with Christ, we can partially fulfill our role of exercising dominion today as we look forward to perfectly ruling and reigning with him forever (2:5-9).<sup>11</sup>

What does our connection with Jesus look like? The author of Hebrews uses two quotations from the OT to demonstrate our solidarity with Christ: Psalm 22:22 and Isaiah 8:17-18.<sup>12</sup> First, Psalm 22 tells the story of Jesus who, after his suffering on the cross, is exalted: “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you” (Ps 22:22). This points to the celebration that erupts when Jesus returns to heaven and “all God’s angels worship him” (Heb 1:6), and because of our union with Christ we too have been invited “to innumerable angels in festal gathering” (12:22). The

---

<sup>9</sup>J. Ross Wagner, “Faithfulness and Fear, Stumbling and Salvation: Receptions of LXX Isaiah 8:11-18 in the New Testament,” in *The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hays*, ed. J. Ross Wagner, C. Kavin Rowe, and A. Katherine Grieb (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 98.

<sup>10</sup>Dale F. Leschert, *Hermeneutical Foundations of Hebrews: A Study in the Validity of the Epistle’s Interpretation of Some Core Citations from the Psalms*, NABPRDS 10 (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1994), 118. See also Brevard S. Childs, “Psalm 8 in the Context of the Christian Canon,” *Int* 23, no. 1 (January 1969): 30.

<sup>11</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *Hebrews*, BTCP (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2015), 103.

<sup>12</sup>For more on how the author of Hebrews utilizes these OT passages to teach the corporate solidarity of the Messiah with his people, see Brian Pate, “Who Is Speaking? The Use of Isaiah 8:17-18 in Hebrews 2:13 as a Case Study for Applying the Speech of Key OT Figures to Christ,” *JETS* 59, no. 4 (December 2016): 733-35.

congregation (ἐκκλησίας) with which Jesus rejoices in heaven (2:12) is “the assembly (ἐκκλησίας) of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven” (12:23), namely those of us united with Christ. Not only can we follow the example of Jesus by rejoicing in the midst of suffering, we also can look forward to ruling the nations with Jesus “for kingship belongs to Yahweh, and he rules over the nations” (Ps 22:28). Second, the author of Hebrews utilizes Isaiah 8 to explain that Jesus and his people are typified by the relationship of Isaiah and his children: “Behold, I and the children whom Yahweh has given me are signs and portents in Israel from Yahweh of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion” (Isa 8:18). We are the children that God has given to Jesus (see John 17:6). Put simply, “we have come to share in (or share with, μέτοχοι) Christ” (Heb 3:14; cf. 3:1; 6:4; 12:8) and we now “share in the blessings he secured.”<sup>13</sup>

### **The Christian Life as a Journey**

Thus far we have discovered that Jesus is our leader and we are his family, but what are we to do next? Is this a static relationship or are we heading somewhere? The author of Hebrews visualizes believers as pilgrims on a journey, as travelers on “a pilgrimage toward an eschatological destination.”<sup>14</sup> The author of Hebrews likens believers to the people of Israel trekking through the wilderness. James Hamilton explains, “Christians are now passing through the wilderness, sojourning toward the Promised Land, the city that is to come.”<sup>15</sup> We are Christian nomads, like Abraham before us, heading out to receive our inheritance by faith (Heb 11:8). Our life here is transitory, as if we were “living in tents” (11:9), but we are looking forward to a “city that has foundations” (11:10). As a result, we recognize that we are “strangers and exiles

---

<sup>13</sup>Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:469.

<sup>14</sup>Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, 607.

<sup>15</sup>James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 517.

on the earth” (11:13; cf. 1 Pet 1:17; 2:11) looking for a better homeland (Heb 11:14), a better country (11:16), a better city (11:16), a better kingdom (12:28). We are living out of our suitcases, knowing that this is not our final destination.

The possibility of straying on the journey is a very real danger. Like a ship drifting off course (Heb 2:1), it is possible for professing believers to become “sluggish” (6:12) and fail to reach the final destination (4:1). To guard against this danger, the author of Hebrews urges us to “hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering” (10:23). “The negative example of Israel’s wilderness generation” is given to us, writes Thielman, “as a warning of what can happen to those who set out on a pilgrimage toward the presence of God but whose hearts become unbelieving and rebellious along the way.”<sup>16</sup> Instead, we will press forward on the path Jesus has marked out for us, not shrinking back because that would lead to eternal destruction (10:39). Turning back is apostasy.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, we “strive to enter that rest” (Heb 4:11) and press on to embrace Jesus by faith. “Christ has gone before,” writes Fanning, “and blazed a trail of obedience and faith in spite of temptation, and Christians are called to follow in His path.”<sup>18</sup> Turning back is not allowed; we must decide to follow Jesus. We “run with endurance the race that is set before us” and toss aside anything that will slow us down (12:1). We guard ourselves from slipping or tripping: “Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed” (12:12-13; cf. Isa 35:3-8; Prov 4:15).

Our journey will lead us through suffering (Heb 10:32-34), meaning that we will be called to join Jesus “outside the camp” to “bear the reproach he endured” (13:13).

---

<sup>16</sup>Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, 609.

<sup>17</sup>“Those who turn back from the path that the leader Jesus has cut through the heavens and into the presence of God (4:14) will, like Israel’s wilderness generation, face God’s judgment” (ibid., 611).

<sup>18</sup>Fanning, “A Theology of Hebrews,” 413.

We may have to visit fellow believers in prison or joyfully accept the stealing of our stuff, knowing that we have better stuff awaiting us (10:34). Yes, the journey is challenging, but we run with “faith and patience” (6:12). Races are long and hard, and so we “have need of endurance” (10:36). This is why the author of Hebrews provides so many examples of those who faithfully ran the race ahead of us (chap. 11). In fact, the example of Jesus should motivate us not to “grow weary or fainthearted” (12:3). We must “hold fast our confidence and our boast in our hope” (3:6) “to the end” (3:14). The main application section of the book urges us to “hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful” (10:23).

### **The New Heavens and Earth as Our Destination**

We are on a journey, running with endurance through this strange land, following Jesus as faithfully as we can, but this raises one more question. Where are we going? Are we going in circles, like the wilderness generation? Are we going to be disappointed, like kids who think they are going to Disney World but it rains and they end up playing board games in the motel all week? Far from it, for Jesus is leading us to the new heavens and new earth. The author of Hebrews employs several pictures to describe our final destination.<sup>19</sup>

First, our final destination is described as a better rest (Heb 3-4). Joshua led God’s people into rest when he conquered the Promised Land: “And the land had rest from war” (Josh 11:23; 14:15); however, the author of Hebrews reveals that it was only partial rest (Heb 4:8).<sup>20</sup> Stephen Dempster explains that “the land itself is positively viewed as a new Eden,”<sup>21</sup> or in other words, the land was a new creation in which God’s

---

<sup>19</sup>Adapted from Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, 607.

<sup>20</sup>For a helpful explanation, see Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 586.

<sup>21</sup>Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 127.

people could enjoy a right relationship with him. While the Promised Land looked back to the Garden of Eden, it also looked forward to the new heavens and new earth. The rest they experienced in the land was “an ‘earnest’ or ‘down payment’ on God’s final complete rest to come.”<sup>22</sup> Entering God’s rest, then, is an appropriate picture for our final destination, for Jesus is the new Joshua leading us into the new Promised Land. We can currently experience God’s rest (4:3), but there is more to come (4:11). The rest experienced by new creations in Christ is a foretaste of the eternal rest we will experience in God’s new creation. Jesus is leading his family to experience the full enjoyment of the rest he offers to all who come to him (see Matt 11:28-30).

The second way the author of Hebrews describes our final destination is as a better city. We are “looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God” (Heb 11:10). The truth is that “here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come” (13:14). This is the new Jerusalem, “the city of the living God” (12:22). This city is beautifully described in the book of Revelation:

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life. (Rev 21:22-27)

Regardless of how attractive Vanity Fair appears, regardless of our long the journey takes, we trudge on to the Celestial City knowing that God “has prepared for [us] a city” (11:16).

A third way of describing where we are heading is the very presence of God. As our leader, Jesus has already “passed through the heavens” (Heb 4:14) so that we can “with confidence draw near to the throne of grace” (4:16; cf. 7:19, 25; 10:22).<sup>23</sup> Our goal

---

<sup>22</sup>Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Promise Theme and the Theology of Rest,” *BibSac* 130, no. 518 (April 1973): 143.

<sup>23</sup>Our destination as the presence of God is made clear by the author’s repeated usage of the

is God himself, “the judge of all” (12:23). We endure the hardships of this earthly race for the day when our “eyes will behold the king in his beauty” (Isa 33:17). This expectation is, in the words of Thomas Schreiner, “the goal of all of redemptive history,”<sup>24</sup> because when we reach our final destination we “will see his face” (Rev 22:4).

Our final destination may also be described as a better country. We know that we do not feel at home here in this world, so we seek another homeland (Heb 11:14), we “desire a better country, that is a heavenly one” (11:16). While we are citizens of a country on this earth, there is another land that catches our eye and our heart, and that is Immanuel’s land.

The King there in His beauty  
Without a veil is seen;  
It were a well-spent journey  
Though sev’n deaths lay between:  
The Lamb with His fair army  
Doth on Mount Zion stand,  
And glory, glory dwelleth  
In Immanuel’s land.<sup>25</sup>

After this lengthy summary of the journey motif in the book of Hebrews, we finally come to Hebrews 12, where the author of Hebrews introduces two more images of our final destination: Mount Zion (Heb 12:18-24) and an unshakable kingdom (12:25-29). It is appropriate for us to conclude our study of the book of Hebrews by meditating on our better destination toward which Jesus is leading us.

---

term προσέρχομαι (4:16; 7:25; 10:1, 22; 11:6; 12:18, 22). Lane writes, “The foundational experience of the people of God under the old and the new covenants is described in terms of a coming into the divine presence” (Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:460).

<sup>24</sup>Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 629.

<sup>25</sup>Anne R. Cousin, “The Sands of Time Are Sinking” (No. 546), in *Trinity Hymnal*, rev. ed. (Atlanta: Great Commission Publications, 1990).

### Jesus Leads Us to a Better Mountain (12:18-24)

Where are we heading? We have seen that our final destination can be likened to a better rest, a better city, a better country, and the very presence of God. Now the author of Hebrews explains that Jesus is bringing us to Mt. Zion, a better fulfillment of Mt. Sinai to which Moses brought the people.<sup>26</sup> Mt. Zion, according to William Lane, represents “the result of the conclusion of the new covenant.”<sup>27</sup> This is our final destination.

Mt. Sinai stands for the old way, the old covenant with its old sacrifices. Sure, it is tangible (Heb 12:18), but it was frightening (12:18-19) and the way to God was barred (12:20). David Wenkel explains, “The Mosaic covenant is a ‘covenant of senses’ because Mount Sinai was unapproachable, all the while being perceivable.”<sup>28</sup> Consequently, they were in need of a mediator (12:19-20).

Jesus, by contrast, has led his people to a better destination represented by Mt. Zion.<sup>29</sup> Though not visible today, this mountain is approachable because of our leader, Jesus.<sup>30</sup> As believers, we are already citizens of this city even though it is invisible.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup>Thielman explains, “The author wants his audience to see a formal correspondence between this scene and the eschatological scene that comes at the end of the Christian pilgrimage.” Mt. Sinai is a type that points to a greater fulfillment in Mt. Zion, and in this case “the eschatological reality is far superior to its predecessor (12:22-29)” (Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, 604, 605).

<sup>27</sup>Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:465.

<sup>28</sup>David H. Wenkel, “Sensory Experience and the Contrast between the Covenants in Hebrews 12,” *BibSac* 173, no. 690 (April-June 2016): 220.

<sup>29</sup>Zion is shorthand for the new Jerusalem (so Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 398). This is “the city of our God” and he will “establish [it] forever” (Ps 48:8). It is the city that will come down from heaven (Rev 21).

<sup>30</sup>Wenkel explains, “The Mosaic covenant is a covenant of the senses because Mount Sinai was unapproachable yet perceivable by the senses. . . . The new covenant’s Mount Zion is superior because it is unperceivable by the five senses while being approachable” (Wenkel, “Sensory Experience,” 219).

<sup>31</sup>Believers “are already members of the city of God, of the heavenly Jerusalem. They are already participating in heavenly worship with the angels and are members of the heavenly and eschatological assembly of God” (Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 402). Lane concurs, “Christians enjoy the objective blessings of the new covenant already in his life” (Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:471). For the ways in which the author of Hebrews uses both the “already” and the “not yet” to motivate believers to press on, see Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 704.

“The new covenant people of God,” writes Lane, “[are] the eschatological community that has already arrived at the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem and . . . are only waiting for the revelation of the ‘unshakable kingdom’ (v 28) they are about to receive.”<sup>32</sup> We are citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, we can join in the angelic party, we are enrolled in the membership of heaven,<sup>33</sup> we have perfect access to God and full forgiveness, and (best of all) we have Jesus (Heb 12:22-24). We have Jesus who launched a better covenant to become our better priest who offered the better sacrifice of his blood, and his blood speaks a better word than Abel’s blood.<sup>34</sup> We do not have to approach God on the scary mountain of Mt. Sinai because Jesus bore the full brunt of God’s wrath on another scary mountain, Mt. Calvary.

### **Jesus Leads Us to a Better Kingdom (12:25-29)**

The final image of our home is that of a better, an unshakable kingdom.<sup>35</sup> Our logical response to such great news is to choose him by faith. The author of Hebrews admonishes us, “See that you do not refuse him who is speaking” (Heb 12:25). If we do not choose Jesus for the glories of the gospel, we should at least choose him for the severity of the consequences of not doing so. The judgment for rejecting the gospel will

---

<sup>32</sup>Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:466.

<sup>33</sup>The solidarity of the Messiah and his people is again seen in the fact that they are referred to as the “firstborn” (plural, Heb 12:23) (Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 654-55). Because of our union with Christ, the Firstborn, we too become an “assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven” (so O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 485). Cockerill contrasts our inclusion with the assembly of the firstborn with Esau’s faithless rejection of his status as firstborn “because he desired the things of this world and despised the promise of God” (Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 655).

<sup>34</sup>In what way does Christ’s blood speak better than Abel’s? Schreiner suggests that Abel’s blood testified to the fact that his faith was in the substitutionary sacrifices (Gen 4:4; Heb 11:4) while Jesus’s blood actually serves as our substitutionary sacrifice (Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 402). Cockerill adds that Abel’s blood cried out for vengeance while Christ’s cries out for forgiveness (Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 658-59). Lane offers that Abel’s blood was connected with a curse while Jesus’s blood brings a blessing (Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:473).

<sup>35</sup>Schreiner believes that the kingdom is “one of the central themes of Hebrews” (Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 586). While that might be overstating it a bit, the kingdom is definitely highlighted as one of the images of the final destination toward which our priest-king is leading us.

be worse than the consequences for rejecting the OT law (12:25; cf. 2:2-3). Not choosing Jesus is a big deal. How could we reject our leader who humbled himself for us, who lived a perfect life for us, who died on the cross for us, and who now intercedes before the throne of God for us? Let us not grow weary in the race, but rather pick up the pace and follow our leader who is leading us to an unshakable kingdom.

It is a good thing that Jesus is our tour guide to a better kingdom because the old world is fading away. God is going to shake up the old world just as he promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens” (Heb 12:26; quoting Hag 2:6). Just as Mt. Sinai shook with the voice of God, and Babylon will fall allowing for a second exodus, so Haggai predicts that God will shake the earth again.<sup>36</sup> This world will be rocked to its foundation, and then what is left will be the invisible, better kingdom (Heb 12:27). God is going to renovate our world into a new heavens and new earth. Not only should we choose Jesus because he is better, but also because everything else is fading away. Schreiner writes, “The readers should not sink their hopes into the present world, for the world will not continue as it is.”<sup>37</sup> Or as the Bible puts it, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him . . . . And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:15, 17).

The good news is that God’s kingdom will last forever (Heb 12:28-29). His kingdom is small now, but one day it will cover the whole heaven and earth. It is invisible now, but one day “the faith shall be sight.”<sup>38</sup> God’s kingdom may seem despised now, but it is the only kingdom that will last. Even though it is “not yet” established

---

<sup>36</sup>“This future shaking will be the means by which he will fill his temple with glory. He himself will rule over his people from that place” (Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:479).

<sup>37</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 406.

<sup>38</sup>Horatio G. Spafford, “It Is Well with My Soul” (No. 705), in *The Celebration Hymnal: Songs and Hymns for Worship*, ed. Tom Fettke (Nashville: Word Music, 1997).

perfectly, the kingdom is “already” a reality.<sup>39</sup> The day is coming when earthly kingdoms will totter, when God will speak and the earth will melt, but God’s city will never be moved (see Ps 46:4-6). We can enjoy Jesus and live under his kingship now, leading us to be grateful that we have an unshakable kingdom, and leading us to reverently worship God (12:28). Everyone should submit to King Jesus today since “our God is a consuming fire” (12:29; see Deut 4:24).

### Conclusion

“I saw a Man cloathed with rags, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a Book in hand, and a great Burden upon his back.”<sup>40</sup> Thus begins one of the best-selling books of all time, *Pilgrim’s Progress* by John Bunyan. The book in Christian’s hand was the Bible, and in it he read that his city was going to be destroyed. Perhaps he read a verse like Haggai 2:6 that foretold that the old heavens and earth would be shaken, but whatever he read motivated him to leave his city that would “be burned with fire from Heaven” and to trek toward the Celestial City.<sup>41</sup> The journey is anything but easy. He navigates the traps of the Slough of Despond, the seducements of Vanity Fair, and the attacks of Apollyon himself, all the while under the wise guidance of his friend, Evangelist. Things go badly for Christian when he ignores the advice of his tour guide, but in the end he keeps his eye on the prize and his feet on the path. When others turn “Back! Back!”, Christian presses on.<sup>42</sup> His guide, Evangelist, sounds similar to the exhortations of the author of Hebrews, “You are not yet out of the gunshot of the Devil: You have not resisted unto Blood, striving against Sin: Let the Kingdom be always

---

<sup>39</sup>Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:484.

<sup>40</sup>John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress: From This World to That Which Is to Come*, The Christian Library (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour and Company, n.d.), 1.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 65.

before you, and believe stedfastly concerning things that are invisible: Let nothing that is on this side of the other World get within you: . . . set your faces like a flint; you have all power in Heaven and Earth on your side.”<sup>43</sup> When Christian finally arrived at the borders of the Celestial City, he had to cross a river, and on the other side he was greeted with a heavenly host, and “all the bells in the City rang again for joy; and . . . it was said unto them, *Enter ye into the Joy of our Lord.*”<sup>44</sup>

Bunyan masterfully told his story, “From this world to that which is to come,” as the subtitle reads, and every believer knows that it is his story as well. Jesus is our better leader who is guiding us to a better Promised Land until we arrive at a better destination. We should choose Jesus since the world is going to fade away and the kingdom of Jesus will last forever. The book of Hebrews is our tour book to a better destination; perhaps we could call it *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Unshakable Kingdom*. The author warns us that the old world is crumbling beneath our feet. Jesus has opened the way to a new world for all who will choose him by faith. We, just like the original readers of the book of Hebrews and the people of Israel before them, are on the banks of the Promised Land,<sup>45</sup> and now it is time for us to make a choice between the visible and the invisible. The old is fading away; a new world awaits. The decision is ours—thousands of daily decisions—to choose Jesus because he is better. By faith, we can say with Mr. Valiant-for-truth as he made his own journey to the Celestial City,

---

<sup>43</sup>Bunyan, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, 96.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 187, emphasis in original.

<sup>45</sup>Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 407; Thiessen, “Hebrews and the End of the Exodus,” 367. Allen remarks, “[Hebrews] places readers at the threshold or climax of their travels—there is still journeying to come, but they stand on the verge of their goal, not at a distance” (David M. Allen, *Deuteronomy and Exhortation in Hebrews: A Study in Narrative Re-presentation*, WUNT 2.238 [Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008], 198).

Who would true Valour see,  
Let him come hither;  
One here will constant be,  
Come wind, come weather:  
There's no Discouragement  
Shall make him once relent,  
His first avow'd intent  
*To be a Pilgrim.*<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup>Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, 357, emphasis in original.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Douglas. *The Ultimate Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2002.
- Allen, David L. *Hebrews*. The New American Commentary. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Lukan Authorship of Hebrews*. The New American Commentary Studies in Biblical Theology. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010.
- Allen, David M. *Deuteronomy and Exhortation in Hebrews: A Study in Narrative Representation*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2.238. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008.
- Attridge, Harold W. "'Heard Because of His Reverence' (Heb 5:7)." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98, no. 1 (March 1979): 90-93.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "'Let Us Strive to Enter that Rest': The Logic of Hebrews 4:1-11." *Harvard Theological Review* 73, nos. 1-2 (January-April 1980): 279-88.
- Augustine. *Confessions*. Translated by Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Bateman, Herbert W., IV, ed. *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007.
- Beale, G. K. *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 15. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004.
- Black, David Alan. "Hebrews 1:1-4: A Study in Discourse Analysis." *Westminster Theological Journal* 49, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 175-94.
- Blaising, Craig A., and Darrell L. Bock. *Progressive Dispensationalism*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993.
- Blomberg, Craig L. "'But We See Jesus': The Relationship between the Son of Man in Hebrews 2.6 and 2.9 and the Implications for English Translations." In *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in Its Ancient Contexts*, edited by Richard

- Bauckham, Daniel Driver, Trevor Hart, and Nathan MacDonald, 88-99. London: T&T Clark, 2008.
- Bridges, Charles. *An Exposition of Psalm 119*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1995.
- Brooks, Thomas. *Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1997.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990.
- Bunyan, John. *The Pilgrim's Progress: From This World to That Which Is to Come*. The Christian Library. Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour and Company, n.d.
- Caneday, Ardel B. "The Eschatological World Already Subjected to the Son: The Οἰκουμένη of Hebrews 1.6 and the Son's Enthronement." In *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in its Ancient Contexts*, edited by Richard Bauckham, Daniel Driver, Trevor Hart, and Nathan MacDonald, 28-39. London: T&T Clark, 2008.
- Carson, D. A., Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.
- Childs, Brevard S. "Psalm 8 in the Context of the Christian Canon." *Interpretation* 23, no. 1 (January 1969): 20-31.
- Church, Philip A. F. "'The True Tent which the Lord Has Pitched': Balaam's Oracles in Second Temple Judaism and in Hebrews." In *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in its Ancient Contexts*, edited by Richard Bauckham, Daniel Driver, Trevor Hart, and Nathan MacDonald, 145-57. London: T&T Clark, 2008.
- Clivaz, Claire. "Hebrews 5.7, Jesus' Prayer on the Mount of Olives and Jewish Christianity: Hearing Early Christian Voices in Canonical and Apocryphal Texts." In *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in its Ancient Contexts*, edited by Richard Bauckham, Daniel Driver, Trevor Hart, and Nathan MacDonald, 187-209. London: T&T Clark, 2008.
- Cockerill, Gareth Lee. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Hebrews 1:6: Source and Significance." *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 9 (1999): 51-64.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Melchizedek without Speculation: Hebrews 7.1-25 and Genesis 14.17-24." In *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in its Ancient Contexts*, edited by Richard Bauckham, Daniel Driver, Trevor Hart, and Nathan MacDonald, 128-44. London: T&T Clark, 2008.
- Coleman, Fred R., ed. *Hymns Modern & Ancient*. Milwaukee: Heart Publications, 2011.
- Compton, Jared. *Psalm 110 and the Logic of Hebrews*. Library of New Testament Studies 537. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015.

- Cowan, Christopher W. "Context Is Everything: 'The Israel of God' in Galatians 6:16." *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 78-85.
- Dahms, John V. "The First Readers of Hebrews." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20, no. 4 (December 1977): 365-75.
- Delcor, M. "Melchizedek from Genesis to the Qumran Texts and the Epistle to the Hebrews." *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 2, no. 2 (December 1971): 115-35.
- Dempster, Stephen G. *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 15. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.
- DeRouchie, Jason S. "Counting Stars with Abraham and the Prophets: New Covenant Ecclesiology in OT Perspective." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58, no. 3 (September 2015): 445-85.
- deSilva, David A. "Entering God's Rest: Eschatology and the Socio-Rhetorical Strategy of Hebrews." *Trinity Journal* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 25-43.
- Downhere. "How Many Kings." *How Many Kings: Songs for Christmas*. Centricity Music, 2009. CD.
- Echevarria, Miguel Gustavo, Jr. "The Future Inheritance of Land in the Pauline Epistles." PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014.
- Ellingworth, Paul. "Hebrews." In *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, edited by T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy, 337-42. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "'Like the Son of God': Form and Content in Hebrews 7,1-10." *Biblica* 64, no. 2 (1983): 255-62.
- Ellis, E. Earle. Foreword to *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, by Leonhard Goppelt, ix-xx. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.
- Fanning, Buist M. "A Theology of Hebrews." In *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, edited by Roy B. Zuck, 369-415. Chicago: Moody Press, 1994.
- Ferguson, Sinclair B. "Christus Victor et Propitiator: The Death of Christ, Substitute and Conqueror." In *For the Fame of God's Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper*, edited by Sam Storms and Justin Taylor, 171-89. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *In Christ Alone: Living the Gospel Centered Life*. Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2007.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Priest We Need." Sermon, First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, SC, March 3, 2013. Accessed March 29, 2015. <http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=3413846121>.
- Fettke, Tom, ed. *The Celebration Hymnal: Songs and Hymns for Worship*. Nashville: Word Music, 1997.

- Fitzmyer, Joseph A. "Now This Melchizedek . . ." (Heb 7,1)." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (July 1963): 305-21.
- Foulkes, Francis. "The Acts of God: A Study of the Basis of Typology in the Old Testament." In *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Text? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, edited by G. K. Beale, 342-71. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994.
- France, R. T. "The Writer of Hebrews as Biblical Expositor." *Tyndale Bulletin* 47, no. 2 (November 1996): 245-76.
- Gentry, Peter J., and Stephen J. Wellum. *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.
- Goldingay, John. *Psalms 1-41*. Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.
- Grogan, Geoffrey W. "Christ and His People: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Hebrews 2:5-18." *Vox Evangelica* 6 (1969): 54-71.
- Guthrie, George H. *Hebrews*. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Hebrews." In *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, edited by G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, 919-95. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998.
- Guthrie, George H., and Russell D. Quinn. "A Discourse Analysis of the Use of Psalm 8:4-6 in Hebrews 2:5-9." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 2 (June 2006): 235-46.
- Hamilton, James M., Jr. *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *What Is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible's Story, Symbolism, and Patterns*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *With the Clouds of Heaven: The Book of Daniel in Biblical Theology*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 32. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014.
- Hays, Richard B. "'Here We Have No Lasting City': New Covenantalism in Hebrews." In *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, edited by Richard Bauckham, Daniel R. Driver, Trevor A. Hart, and Nathan MacDonald, 151-73. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.
- Hoekema, Anthony A. "The Perfection of Christ in Hebrews." *Calvin Theological Journal* 9, no. 1 (April 1974): 31-7.
- Hughes, Philip Edgcumbe. *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977.

- Johnson, Luke Timothy. *Hebrews: A Commentary*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.
- Joslin, Barry. "Christ Bore the Sins of Many: Substitution and the Atonement in Hebrews." *The Southern Baptist Theological Journal* 11, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 74-103.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "'Son of Man' or 'Human Beings'?" Hebrews 2:5-9 and a Response to Craig Blomberg." *The Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 14, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 41-50.
- Kaiser, Walter C., Jr. "The Old Promise and the New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:31-34." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 15, no. 1 (Winter 1972): 11-23.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Promise Theme and the Theology of Rest." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 130, no. 518 (April 1973): 135-150.
- Kapic, Kelly M. "Typology, the Messiah, and John Owen's Theological Reading of Hebrews." In *Christology, Hermeneutics, and Hebrews: Profiles from the History of Interpretation*, edited by Jon C. Laansma and Daniel J. Treier, 135-54. New York: T&T Clark, 2012.
- Hays, Richard B. "'Here We Have No Lasting City': New Covenantalism in Hebrews." In *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, edited by Richard Bauckham, Daniel R. Driver, Trevor A. Hart, and Nathan MacDonald, 151-73. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.
- Kasemann, Ernst. *Jesus Means Freedom*. Translated by Frank Clarke. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1972.
- Keesee, Tim. *Dispatches from the Front: Stories of Gospel Advance in the World's Difficult Places*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014.
- Kidner, Derek. *Psalms 73-150: An Introduction & Commentary*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973.
- Klink, Edward W., III, and Darian R. Lockett. *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.
- Koester, Craig R. *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. The Anchor Bible 36. New York: Random House, 2001.
- Lane, William L. *Hebrews*. Word Biblical Commentary 47. 2 vols. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991.
- Lawrence, Michael. *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church: A Guide for Ministry*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010.
- Leschert, Dale F. *Hermeneutical Foundations of Hebrews: A Study in the Validity of the Epistle's Interpretation of Some Core Citations from the Psalms*. The National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion Dissertation Series 10. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1994.

- Lewis, C. S. *The Chronicles of Narnia*. New York: HarperCollins, 2004.
- Lincoln, Andrew T. "Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament." In *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation*, edited by D. A. Carson, 196-220. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982.
- Lindars, Barnabas. *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Longenecker, Richard N. "Who Is the Prophet Talking About? Some Reflections on the New Testament's Use of the Old." In *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, edited by G. K. Beale, 375-86. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994.
- Longman, Tremper, III, and Raymond B. Dillard. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006.
- MacLeod, David J. "The Cleansing of the True Tabernacle." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152, no. 605 (January-March 1995): 60-71.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Finality of Christ: An Exposition of Hebrews 1:1-4." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162, no. 646 (April-June 2005): 210-30.
- Martin, Oren R. *Bound for the Promised Land: The Land Promise in God's Redemptive Plan*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 34. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015.
- McCruden, Kevin B. "The Concept of Perfection in the Epistle to the Hebrews." In *Reading the Epistle to the Hebrews: A Resource for Students*, edited by Eric F. Mason and Kevin B. McCruden, 209-29. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011.
- Meier, J. P. "Structure and Theology in Heb 1,1-14." *Biblica* 66, no. 2 (1985): 168-89.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Symmetry and Theology in the Old Testament Citations of Heb 1,5-14." *Biblica* 66, no. 4 (1985): 504-33.
- Meyer, Jason. *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009.
- Moo, Douglas J. *The Letter of James*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.
- Motyer, Stephen. "The Psalm Quotations of Hebrews 1: A Hermeneutic-Free Zone?" *Tyndale Bulletin* 50, no. 1 (1999): 3-22.
- O'Brien, Peter T. *God Has Spoken in His Son: A Biblical Theology of Hebrews*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 39. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Letter to the Hebrews*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010.

- Owen, John. *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*. 7 vols. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Hebrews*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998.
- Packer, J. I. Introduction to *Hebrews*, by John Owen, ix-x. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998.
- Pascal, Blaise. *Pensées and Other Writings*. Translated by Honor Levi. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Pate, Brian. "Who Is Speaking? The Use of Isaiah 8:17-18 in Hebrews 2:13 as a Case Study for Applying the Speech of Key OT Figures to Christ." *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 59, no. 4 (December 2016): 731-45.
- Peterson, Robert. Study notes on Hebrews. In *ESV Gospel Transformation Bible*, 1655-75. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.
- Piper, John. *The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in Future Grace*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1995.
- Richardson, Christopher. "The Passion: Reconsidering Hebrews 5.7-8." In *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in Its Ancient Contexts*, edited by Richard Bauckham, Daniel Driver, Trevor Hart, and Nathan MacDonald, 51-67. London: T&T Clark, 2008.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Pioneer and Perfecter of Faith: Jesus' Faith as the Climax of Israel's History in the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2.338. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012.
- Roberts, Vaughan. *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2002.
- Ryrie, Charles C. *Dispensationalism*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1995.
- Sanders, J. Oswald. *The Incomparable Christ*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009.
- Schenck, Kenneth L. "A Celebration of the Enthroned Son: The Catena of Hebrews 1." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120, no. 3 (2001): 469-85.
- Schreiner, Thomas R. *Hebrews*. Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation. Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2015.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Preaching and Biblical Theology." *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 20-29.
- Scott, Brett R. "Jesus' Superiority over Moses in Hebrews 3:1-6." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155, no. 618 (April-June 1998): 201-10.
- Silva, Moises. "Perfection and Eschatology in Hebrews." *Westminster Theological Journal* 39, no. 1 (Fall 1976): 60-71.

- Skarsaune, Oskar. *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002.
- Solomon, Lou. "The Top Complaints from Employees about their Leaders." *Harvard Business Review*. June 24, 2015. Accessed May 14, 2016.  
<https://hbr.org/2015/06/the-top-complaints-from-employees-about-their-leaders>.
- Still, Todd D. "Christos as Pistos: The Faith(fulness) of Jesus in the Epistle to the Hebrews." In *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in its Ancient Contexts*, edited by Richard Bauckham, Daniel Driver, Trevor Hart, and Nathan MacDonald, 40-50. London: T&T Clark, 2008.
- Songer, Harold S. "A Superior Priesthood: Hebrews 4:14-7:28." *Review & Expositor* 82, no. 3 (Summer 1985): 345-359.
- Thielman, Frank. *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.
- Thiessen, Matthew. "Hebrews and the End of the Exodus." *Novum Testamentum* 49, no. 4 (2007): 353-69.
- Trinity Hymnal*. Rev. ed. Atlanta: Great Commission Publications, 1990.
- Tozer, A. W. *The Pursuit of God*. Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1993.
- VanGemeren, Willem A. *Psalms*. In vol. 5 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Edited by Frank E. Gaebelin, 1-880. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991.
- Vickers, Brian. *Justification by Grace through Faith: Finding Freedom from Legalism, Lawlessness, Pride, and Despair*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013.
- Vos, Geerhardus. *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1948.
- Wagner, J. Ross. "Faithfulness and Fear, Stumbling and Salvation: Receptions of LXX Isaiah 8:11-18 in the New Testament." In *The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hays*, edited by J. Ross Wagner, C. Kavin Rowe, and A. Katherine Grieb, 76-106. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.
- Webster, John. "One Who Is Son: Theological Reflections on the Exordium to the Epistle to the Hebrews." In *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, edited by Richard Bauckham, Daniel R. Driver, Trevor A. Hart, and Nathan MacDonald, 69-94. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.
- Wenkel, David H. "Sensory Experience and the Contrast between the Covenants in Hebrews 12." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 173, no. 690 (April-June 2016): 219-34.
- Wright, N. T. *The New Testament and the People of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.

## ABSTRACT

### CHOOSE JESUS: A THEOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

Brian David Pate, D.Min.  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Miguel G. Echevarria, Jr.

The purpose of this project is to provide examples of sermons from the book of Hebrews based on a biblical theological perspective. The definition of biblical theology is explored first, along with an explanation of what a sermon from a biblical theological perspective would look like (chap. 1). The remainder of the project consists of eight sermons from key passages in the book of Hebrews. The person of Christ (Heb 1-4; chaps. 2-5) and the work of Christ (Heb 5-10; chaps. 6-7) prove convincingly that Jesus is better, and based on that truth believers must respond with faith and fortitude (Heb 10-13; chaps. 8-9). This project proposes that the theology of the book of Hebrews can be thus summarized: Choose Jesus because he is better.

## VITA

Brian David Pate

### EDUCATION

B.A., Bob Jones University, 2004  
M.A., Bob Jones University, 2005  
M.Div., Bob Jones University, 2010

### PUBLICATIONS

“Who Is Speaking? The Use of Isaiah 8:17-18 in Hebrews 2:13 as a Case Study for Applying the Speech of Key OT Figures to Christ.” *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 59, no. 4 (December 2016): 731-45.

### ORGANIZATIONS

The Evangelical Theological Society

### MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Associate Pastor, Liberty Baptist Church, Dalhart, Texas, 2012-